

Haridasas of Karnatak

## Shri Prasanna Venkat das: Life and works

- Prof. D.V. Potdar

### 1. Life:

Prasanna venkat das is one of the major figures in the daskoota movement. His works reveal him to be a scholar and a learned man. Hence many honours came to him in his lifetime.

He was born in Bagalkot (formerly Dist. Bijapur) at the end of the seventeenth century (circa 1680). His father's name was Kakhandki Narsappayya and his mother's Laxmibai. Those were the days of the Adilshahi in Bijapur. Narasappayya followed the priestly profession. The family residence can be seen in Bagalkot even today. The child was named Venkatesh. Soon he lost his parents and came under the care of his elder brother. His sister-in-law was a shrew, so instead of attending school, he had to go the forest to graze cattle. The brother was a devotee of lord Venkatesh, and regularly recited Venkatesh stotra and Venkatesh mahatmya. His spirit lighted the lamp of devotion in the young boy's mind. So along with his brother he also recited, and prayed. A time came when his prayer was answered.

One day the thirsty boy asked for a glass of buttermilk to drink, and instead of the drink he received abuse. He burst out, "Fie upon this house, where I cant get even something to drink. I'm leaving this moment. I don't care if I've to beg". He ran out and took the road to Tirupati.

In the Venkateshwara temple, at the sight of the Lord, he was thrilled and started praying. At that time a team of devotees, singing devotional songs, reached the place. Their equipment, their frenzy created in him a desire to join them. He had a dip in the lake and started composing and singing. The Lord was pleased and the boy had a glimpse of Him. He jotted the word Venkatesh on his tongue. That metamorphosed the boy. His past life flashed before him, and the doors of knowledge opened.

Words rushed from his tongue--

Oh, father Tiruvengalesh, faultless,  
Have you rushed to your imperfect son?

He accepted the nom de plume, Prasanna venkat, and stayed in the place for some time. But because of his spiritual progress, he was not left in peace even there. He started from Tirupati and went in search of a teacher. He met the famous scholar Mudgal Janardanacharya and was accepted by him. In about five or six years he had a thorough knowledge of the shastras. He has paid his tribute to his teacher in a poem. Then he composed many works praising dualism, and others based on the Indian religious classics. He narrated his mystical experiences in some of them. He made a pilgrimage to all the holy places.

In the course of his journey he came to Bagalkot, and met his brother and his wife. They were in a poor state, perhaps because of what they had done to him formerly. Now they repented and begged to be pardoned. They were quickly forgiven!

No details of the das's marriage and marital life are available, but it is learnt that he had a son called Venkatkrishnacharya.

As his fame spread, students flocked to accept his discipleship, and various officers came forward to honour him, and make grants of land and houses.

For Prasanna venkat das Purandar das was the inspiration, and he wrote many lyrics praising him.

During his tours he saw the idols of gods and goddesses in temples. While guiding the people, he himself grew spiritually. If we visit his place all the facilities for worship, and the idols can be seen in the house.

This pious, long life of the saint came to an end in the bright half of the month of Bhadrapada, eleventh day, Angiras samvat. On his deathbed he had a glimpse of the Lord. It is believed he spent his last days in Badami. A platform, built by his great grandson commemorates his memory.

The way to salvation is to sing the praise of the lord, that is the keynote of all his works. Hanuma, Bhima, and Madhwa he claims to be his kith and kin. The following lines indicate the strength of his faith—

Let there be a shower of stones,  
Or let the sky itself fall,  
Lotus-in-the-navel,  
I'll cling to your feet!

A boy who started in life as a cowherd, bloomed into a mystic is itself a great miracle!

## 2. Selected, abridged works:

### i) Devotional lyrics:

a)

Rolling in the dust, shouting His name,  
Will not please the Sleeper on the sea\*,  
but devotion.  
Sitting amidst five fires,  
Drawing up the five winds into the skull,  
standing on tiptoe in the forest, cursing,  
( all the while !)  
avail not, unless you worship the feet  
of Arjuna's kin\*!

Chewing leaves, subsisting on the air,  
To get rid of sins,  
Going on weary pilgrimages,  
Avail not, without the Lord's grace.

Our life's worthless, unless,  
We bathe in the Madhwa Lake,  
Or have a glimpse of the charming Krishna.  
Without Prasanna venkat's grace,  
Our existence is just living death.

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\* Mahavishnu, Krishna

b)

Have no fears, the lord of the three worlds,  
Keeps an eye on you, always.  
An embryo, He nourishes for nine months,  
Teaches you to walk, talk to sleep,  
Even He awakens,  
From morn to eve, stands behind you.  
To a wretched soul, He grants high birth,  
Makes him follow Madhwa's creed.  
To the dullard He gives wisdom.  
He makes the rains fall, the plants grow,

Feeds the birds, beasts in the wild,  
Our merciful Prasanna venkat,  
Not for a moment, does He forget  
His burden!

c)

This body, this mind,  
Are but a lamp in the wind.  
Nala, Pururava, Harishchandra,  
The great, the meritorious are no more.  
Pursuing unending wants,  
Only brings misery,  
So devote some time to the Lotus-eyed.

Reject the righteous path,  
take up the unrighteous,  
And you but move away from  
our Prasanna venkat.

d)

Sages prefer--

A wife who cooperates,  
A son who goes their way  
To have money, to be gifted to the righteous,  
To have a home, to feed guests at lunch time  
Devotion sans show,  
Non-attachment to worldly things,  
Intellect to be used for a good cause,  
A firm mind to fight evils,  
To eat food, offered to Prasanna venkat,  
freeing them from the sorrows of birth and death.

e)

Deserting Vaikuntha,  
You dwelt in an humble cottage, Great one.  
Discarding silk clothes,  
you donned bark garments,  
wandered in the forests.  
Born a human, you behaved like a human,  
Lord of the three worlds  
Prasanna venkat.

f)

When young, acquire knowledge,  
Be devoted, unattached,  
You will please the Lord,  
For once grown old, wishes  
remain unfulfilled.

When cash flows, invite the deserving,  
Honour them, feed them,

And give your all to them,  
In god's name.  
When your pockets are empty,  
Wishes remain unfulfilled.

When holding a post,  
Gift money to the well-versed in  
Madhwa shastra, be happy.  
Your post lost,  
your wishes remain unfulfilled.

As a householder you have a good chance to touch  
the dust on Hari's feet  
Have doubts, and your wishes  
remain unfulfilled.

For free souls, knowledge is wealth,  
Non-attachment luck, success,  
But when devotion to Prasanna venkat  
disappears, 'tis sheer misery.

g)

Rush to my rescue, Ranga,  
Lost in the thick forest of worldly life.

Wild elephants surround me on all sides,  
Fires rage around,  
Trees uprooted by strong winds,  
crash.  
A tiger roars, wolves scowl,  
A monkey jeers,  
and a bear is ready to attack.  
Wrapped round by a python,  
I cant even call your name,  
Listen to my lament, rush,  
Prasnavenkat.

h)

Yama ordered his flunkeys--  
Bring me fools, the wicked,  
Slanderers, who dishonour  
men and women singing His praise.  
The greedy, the harsh speakers  
who feed not His servants.  
The sinful, who pretend  
to listen to His story,  
but have their eyes, on other men's wives  
Those who argue with elders,  
infatuated with wives,  
The arrogant, who worship the Lotus-eyed,  
Just for show,  
The despisers of good, pretending to be wise  
Enemies of Prasanna venkat.

ii) Narrative poetry:

a) Once, the cowherds ran to Krishna and cried,  
“We are famished, oh brave one,  
please feed us”.  
The merciful Lord replied, “See, in yonder hall,  
A sacrifice being performed,  
Go ask for some food”.  
Thus directed by Yajupati (!),  
The boys went, made their humble request  
to the officiating priests—  
their eyes, turned heavenwards,  
but now red— they roared, “ Not now, go”.

To the boys returning with long faces,  
Hari said, “ Go to the women, better luck”.  
Listening to Krishna’s mandate,  
the dames overjoyed,  
--they would be meeting Him--  
Filled pots, pans with sweets, milk, salads,  
And ran to Him.  
( the men were left behind!)  
The Lord and his companions had their fill,  
Sated more by love than by food!  
To the wise women was granted highest bliss.  
One prevented by her husband  
died, with His name on her lips.  
The women, reluctant to go back,  
The Lord persuaded with sweet words and sent,

The men heard the story.

“Oh, our folly, fie upon us”, they said,  
“And the wisdom of our women”.  
But now humbled, repentant ,  
they received Prasanna venkat’s blessings!

b)

In the month of hemanth\*,  
The cowgirls daily bathed in the Yamuna,  
And worshipped the wife of the Moon-crest+.

On the bank, a sand linga# ,  
They decked with flowers,  
Offered fruits and food, waved lamps,  
and prayed, “Let the son of Nanda be our husband”

The lord of the yogis, knew their mind,  
Went to the bank, and picked up  
their garments strewn,  
Smiling, climbed a tree.  
To the bathing beauties he shouted,  
“Dont shiver in the cold, come collect your garments,  
Nakedness and vows go not together”

Shame-faced, excited they replied, “ See us trembling,  
With cold, you had your fun, drop down our clothes.”  
Told to come out, and stand under the tree,  
the maidens obeyed,  
With their middles covered with both palms!  
The lord said, “Deer-eyed dames,  
To be forgiven, put up both hands ,  
Pray to Parvati,  
Her you have offended”.  
They, seeing no way out, did his command.  
Fully clothed they touched his feet.  
Their devotion rewarded,  
the moon-faced women returned,  
And lived with Prasanna venkat  
happily, ever after!

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\* autumn + Shiva # image

c)

To serve the Lord in a novel way,  
the divine sage\* descended to the earth,  
put on the guise of a gypsy, and entered  
Bhishmaka's\*\* park.  
Donning gorgeous garments ,  
she outshone the others in her company.  
Ornaments sparkled in her ears, on her nose  
and round her neck.  
As she walked on the royal road,  
like the royal elephant,  
Her anklets tinkled,  
And on both sides, the townsmen stood,  
gazed,motionless!

She entered the Brahmin Street, asking after the Lord,  
Shouting, “Mothers, grandmothers give me alms”.  
Seeing her at the palace gate,  
the maids ran to Kantu's+ mother,  
Greeted her and said, “A gypsy is moving about,  
Let's question her about Prasanna venkat's arrival”

Where is the princess, where is she?  
I know her mind, let her come forth.  
In the meanwhile bring me all the five delicacies,  
not just leftovers.  
Treat me with full respect,  
For my forecasts never fail,  
The kidnapper's+++ fate I correctly guessed,  
And I foresee your brother's# sad plight,  
at the hands of Prasanna venkat Krishna.

Tirumale Tiruvengala, Pundalika varada,  
Vaddi Jagannath, the Kolhapur damsel##,  
And a lot of others,  
stand behind me, to make my words come true!  
So I have wandered in the country,

And now come to you, golden girl  
So happy to see you, put forth your palm.

“Ah! The messenger you sent with the letter,  
Has met Yaduraya,  
He will board his chariot and rush,  
No more sighs or sad faces,  
Auspicious maid,  
Prasanna venkat, lord of the three worlds,  
Will sure come!  
Rukmini listened to the words,  
of the gypsy and was happy.

He heard Rukmini’s call,  
and is sure to hear ours.  
Victory, victory to Prasanna venkat!

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\* Narada \*\* Rukmini’s father + Kama ++ Ravana # Rukma  
##Mahalaxmi

d)

Moon-face, it’s I Govinda,  
Wake up, open the door.  
Govinda is it, then go back to your cows!  
It’s I who killed Somakhala,  
Brought up the Vedas  
In the Fish form,  
Fish, please go back to the sea!  
I favored and helped the gods,  
while churning the ocean,  
As a charming tortoise,  
Oh tortoise, go back,  
buoy up the Mandara!  
Diving in the flood waters,  
I tore up the demon, with my tusks,  
A charming boar,  
Boar are you, then go and sport with Ila!  
When the demon kicked the pillar,  
I the Man-lion, killed him,  
and made a garland of his guts,  
Oh Man-lion, go and play with the kid!  
It’s I, who crushed the pride of the king ,  
who kept on performing sacrifices  
Vaman , the ruler,  
Ruler, go back to rule!  
It’s I, who lessened the load of the earth  
and favored the Brahmins,  
Bhargava, the warrior.  
Bhargava, go back, and threaten Bhishma!  
For Sita I killed Ravana,  
Was worshipped by the son of Vayu,  
I’m Rama, open,  
Rama go back, build bridges!  
I’m Gopalkrishna, lord of  
sixteen thousand Gopis

Gopalkrishna, go and sport with Gopis!  
I'm Buddha, the charming,  
who seduced dames performing vows,  
Oh Buddha, go back, start lying!  
Oh fragrant-bodied,  
I've come to make love,  
Kalki, riding a horse,  
Oh rider on horseback, go to battle!

(At last!)

Satyabhama fell at the feet of Prasanna venkat  
And said, "Don't I know you, handsome one!".

e) Samastnama manigana: ( abridged)

Ekrat, Ektarak, Dwayaniyamika\*, Dwayabhayaghna+,  
(The supreme being, Sole granter of release, Controller of two,  
Destroyer of two fears)

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Note: \* Laxmi and Brahma +Life and death.

Trivigraha, Tripathapita, Chaturbhujanchita, Chaturvarnashraya,  
(Having three forms, father of Ganga, worshipped by Brahma,  
protector of four varnas)

Panchapandavaprana, Panchasharapita, Shatshastrapriya,  
Shadgunetar  
(Soul of the five pandavas, father of Kama, fond of the six shastras,  
free from the six qualities( gunas)

Sapta... Not available.

Ashtabhutida, Ashtabhujdhar, Navasuratnabharanyuk, Navakoti amar poojita,  
(Granter of eight kinds of wealth, having eight arms, wearing ornaments studded  
with nine kinds of gems, worshipped by nine crore gods)

Dashavaruthaja, Dashashatanana, Madhwavallabha, Madhwahridguha,  
(Son of Dasharatha, having a thousand faces, Lord of Madhwa, residing  
in Madhwa's heart)

Prasanna gunanidhe,  
(storehouse of auspicious qualities)  
Prasannavenkat, I bow to you.

OM TAT SAT

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