

Haridasas of Karnataka

Shri Vijaya Das : Life and Works (Part I)

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1. Life (1682-1755):

The pioneers of dasa sahitya – Shri Shripad raj, Vyasarayya and the major contributors to it- Purandar, Kanaka, and Vadiraja all flourished during the days of the Vijayanagara empire. With its fall, the movement also declined. Vijaya dasa, blessed by these pioneers revived it by his own, and his disciples' (both men and women) efforts. Noting the part he played, this age has been named after him, and the tradition has been continued by the successors even today.

Shripad raj installed an idol of Narasimha at Cheeklparvi (Dist.Raichur) during his tour, and made it a place of pilgrimage. A poor couple Shrinivappa and Kusamma worshipped the idol daily. They had three sons, and the eldest was named Dasappa. Even though a bright child, nobody took notice of him. After upanayna, he was educated in the traditional manner, and married. But circumstances conspired and made him run away from home. Robbed of his belongings, he joined a group of mendicants and reached Benares. He stayed there for some time, and on his return journey to Rameshwar, reached his native place. Rich in worldly experience, he was a changed man now, and could face life boldly. He became a village accountant, and for sometime lived in peace. But he failed to keep accounts properly, and had to shell out cash. Insulted, poor, and discouraged he once more took the road to Benares.

He had a dip in the Ganges and went to Gaya to offer riceballs (pinda) to his manes. Returning, he regularly bathed in the river and meditated. Good company, good conduct, devotion to elders and teachers made Mukhyaprana take notice of him. He had a dream-- Purandar das led him to Vyasakashi to meet the sage Vyasa. He blessed him and through Purandar gave him the ankita Vijaya vithal, a tanpura and anklebells. Dasppa was now brimming with confidence, and free from worries. In a poem he describes his revelation and glimpse of godhead. Because of his father's death the family's burden fell on his shoulders, and he did not neglect it. He had a large following, and could live a life free from wants. He knew this was all due to god's grace, and he expresses his gratitude to him.

His three discoveries whom he ordained later are Mohan das, Venugopala das and Gopal das.

Acharya Madhwa's philosophy was studied and discussed by Sanskrit scholars. They frequently gave discourses to reach it to the people. Since Purandar das's time this work was done in Kannada. But the scholars had a superiority complex, and often made fun of the daskoota, being jealous of its fame. Now the time had come to prove that the mystics were as knowledgeable as the scholars. So Vijaya dasa humbled two such scholars, who became his well known disciples, Vyasa vithala and Jagannath das.

Malige Shrnivascharya worshipped an idol of Vijaya vithala daily. Due to old age he wanted to hand it over to Vijaydas, who accepted it with all humbleness.

At Chippageri, an idol of Gopal Krishna was lying at the bottom of a well, in a field. Vijaya das had it taken out, and installed it under a tree. For this he was given a grant of money and lands by a shepherd (the owner of the field).

After a visit to Tirupati he passéd away on the tenth day, in the bright half of the month of Kartika. A platform, built on the place of cremation, at Chippageri, stands as a memorial to him.

His disciples believe him to be the avatar of Bhrgu mahrishi , and some think he was Madhwapati vithal, the son of Purandar das, reborn. Any way he is as popular as the former saint.

Six volumes of his works have been published. They can be classified as a&b) Lyrics-devotional and prose, c) Descriptions of pilgrimages, d) Confessional poems, e) Tenets of dualism, f) Miscellaneous.

2. Works: Devotional lyrics (Selected, Abridged):

1.

Vijaya vithala reya,
Your devotees lead and you follow.

Like,
In a flood a raft thrown,
moves from bank to bank,
and reaches with oars in front.

In a procession the drummers,
horn blowers are in the front,
but the king follows behind.

During a festival,
your devotees sing, dance, lead
while You seated in the car follow,
like the cow the calf.

2.

Hari's devotees fear nothing.

Kali cleans their backyard,
heavy down pours stop, snakes turn into garlands,

weary roads become footpaths,
hunger, thirst affect them not,
diseases keep away from them,
all by the grace of Vijaya vithala.

3.

Why this guise of a damsel,
Vijaya vithala?*

Is it to remind us that,
when the demons harassed the gods,
you appeared in this form,
brought them together,
fed the gods with nectar, and saved them?
or, when Vriksura chased Shiva,
to lay his hand on His head,**
you appeared in the same form,
lured the demon to dance,
and reduced him to ashes?

* mohini roopa **to test the boon

4.

Though your devotee,
my mind leads me astray.

Seated on a decorated elephant,
an umbrella held over my head,
I wish to jump down,
and ride a donkey, rolling in the dust!

Offered, nectar to drink,
and a swing seat to relax,
I wish to climb a tree, and jump down
head first!

Vijaya vithal reya,
avoiding your glorious feet,
I prefer a dark street,
(on this earth)

5.

Offer a small gift to the Lord

with devotion,
and receive a bumper!

When Durvasa and his disciples
met Pandavas, asked for food,
Draupadi called the Lord*, gave
him a morsel,
the result--sage and disciples rolled
on the ground,
bellies bursting!

The Lord told Vidura, "I'm hungry",
and given a jug of milk drank it,
and lo, the street overflo'd (with milk)!

* the kitchen being closed!

6.

My mind is a dry leaf,
passions like strong winds blow it far
far away,
Keep your lotus feet on it,
hold it down, Vijay vithala reya.

7.

When we weigh gold or silver,
it's weights in the dish first,
Vijaya vithal reya, when we visit,
it's your devotee first and you next!

8.

Hari grazes cattle,
Cows and calves he takes to tender grass,
pampers them, makes them eat,
he plays on his flute, wipes their backs
with his garment,
gold, silver chains hang round their necks,
he milks the cows, feeds the calves,
thanks to his care, the one month olds look
like one year olds,
and the cows like elephants!

9.

'Tis strange, you fell in love with
this monkey chief, Bharati!

Born to a blind woman,
he abandoned you, lived a celibate,
searching for fruit ravaged a garden.
and invited to dinner, gathered dirty plates!

Descendent of an incestuous clan,
he wed a harpy, at dead of night,
became a cook, and went
a begging for food.

A shave head he toured the earth,
(and now) lives under a tree*, sings the praise of
Vijaya vithala.**

*Badarikashrama ** Hanuma, Bhima, Madhwa

10.

Ganga, mother of Bhishma,
why did you descend to this sinful earth?

Is it,

to tour the country, and cool the
hot bones dumped?*

to hear the fame of your devotees,
and get rid of the til and water flung?*

to purify us sinners, and the river Krishna
in this Kali age?

Or may be,
it's just to watch the gods perform daily rituals,
and give me a chance to have a dip,
and get yourself a good name ?

*after funeral rites (til - sesamum)

11.

Friends with lightning,
why fear mountains?

A diver in the sea,
why fear a marsh?
Meditating on Vijaya vithala,
why fear calamities ?

12.

Holding my stomach,
I touch the feet of a fellow being,
grin, and beg for a measure of corn,
like a dog lingering before a butcher's shop.
Should you make me suffer so,
Vijaya vithal reya?

13.

To earn a living--
a soldier twirls his moustache,
a prostitute bares her breasts,
a midwife handles the birth and the after birth,
a juggler plays with monkeys, snakes.

I'm no better, Vijaya vithal reya,
for I pretend to be a devotee
to fool the people!

14.

People ask "How many calves has a cow?"
but never "How many mothers has a calf?"
Vijaya vithala, greedy devotees like me are many,
but you are our only lord, protector.

15.

Shripati,
Let me be in good company,
and serve you.

When you sit down I'll be the seat,
and your sandals when you stand up,

I'll be the tub for your bath,
and the sandalwood paste for your feet,

I'll survive on your leftovers,

and be the support for your coral cot,

I'll be the flower bed for you to rest,
and the gentle light while you sleep.

16.

Cut the branches, the roots remain,
but cut the roots, the branches wither,
so root out your ego,
(a wild elephant , entering a house,
bringing it down),
all your sins'll vanish.

Let me touch your feet Vijaya vithal,
and get rid of my ego.

17.

Why a gold coop for hens?
Why the company of a housewife for
a low woman?
Why a string of flowers for a widow?
Why water babool trees?
Why worship you, Vijaya vithal,
when my future is a blank?

18.

Worship not paltry gods,
if you hope to be free.

For it's like,
giving a purse to a man,
who cant jump the gutter,
and telling him "Take me across the sea".

Or, giving a sword and a horse to a guy,
fearing the dark,
and telling him "Go fight the enemies"

19.

Venkatesh,
why should your devotee, though a sinner,
fear death?

Why should the woman,
who walks the streets,
while the husband doesn't mind,
fear the relatives?

Why should the thief,
who shares his loot with the king ,
fear being caught?

Why should the maid,
favoured by the master,
fear the mistress?

20.

Krishna--
My queen, my life, fair damsel,
lift your face, I'll dab your
glorious cheeks,
with turmeric paste.

Rukmini--
You ate the leftovers of the cowboys,
you slew your uncle,
you trickster, you stole butter, curds,
made love to the cowgirls, dined with a
menial's son*
Put up your face, I'll put a tika on
your forehead!

* Vidura (from urutune padu)

21.

Listen to the stone's story,
worship it* to be free!

A stone was a churn, when nectar was born,
A stone held up was a roof, (for the people under)
a waterproof.,
Touched by our lord's feet, a stone turned
into a woman neat,
Stones dropped in the sea, formed a bridge
for an army,
A stone temple for Ishwar, and before it a

stone pillar,
be cautious, for (some) stones are precious.

So don't be stony hearted,
contemplate Vijaya vithala reya,
so you'll not be on the rocks!*

* references (linewise) idol, Mandara, Govardhana (mountains), Ahalya, Ramayana.

22.

To be a good devotee,
you have to pass thro' fire,
utter nonsense, be robbed of your wealth,
starve, be cheated, suffer,
and be jeered at by the wicked,
then only Vijaya vithal reya'll
shower his grace on you.

23.

You enjoy a five course dinner,
feel happy, content,
but before you rise swallow a fly,
and throw up your food,
in like manner harsh words spoken,
leak your merit.

So be soft spoken, polite.

24.

Gauri ramana,
how can I worship you?

You carry the Ganges in your locks,
how can I shower you?
you sport the half moon on your crest,
how can I offer you a flower,
the sun, the moon are your eyes,
how can I wave camphor lights?
You control minds,
how can I speak my wishes?
You are the ascetic supreme,
so how can I offer you anything?

Om Tat Sat