LYRICAL SANSKRIT IN THE RELIGIOUS LITERATURE OF SRI NARAYANA TEERTHA

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Lyrical Sanskrit

Saints and sages are born on this earth in an age and a clime but they are for all and for all time.

Lyrical Sanskrit has been the most potent inspiring and unifying force in this hoary country, the glory that has been India and she continues to be so even today in spirituality. Song and lyric have always been the favourites of the lay and the learned anywhere in the world. Sanskrit the most scholarly language also is the sweetest of tongues and the lay and the poorest of the poor are not afraid of it when it comes to a spiritually oriented composition, lyric, song or poem and the villagers in the remote corners offer the proof.

Sage, Saint, and Ascetic

Sage, saint, ascetic, renunciate are all names given to the great aspirants and saadhakas of diverse distinctions. Yati and avadhoota are similar names that great saadhkaas got. Teertha is unique in that it is a suffix to the name of a saintly person. This is the suffix the Guru adds to the ascetic’s new name he gives. This is done only after the Guru is convinced that his disciple has successfully subjected all his passions and become a jitendriya, one who subdues all his sense organs and keeps them under strict control and becomes a devotee in the highest sense.

Narayana Teertha

Narayana Teertha of the 16th Century goes down in the history of divine composers of extremely poetic musical compositions singing the praise of Sree Krishna, the Great Lover. The name of this saintly person prior to his being ordained Teertha was Govinda Sastry, born into the family of great Sanskrit scholar Neelakantha Sastry of the village Kaaja, in Guntur District of the present Andhra Pradesh.

Temperamentally traditional, devout and scholarship loving, Narayana took to Sanskrit as a duck takes to water. After becoming an ascetic, he composed joyously devout and sweetly poetic songs in the traditional bhajana sampradaya in Sanskrit.

Sanskrit in the Life of the Elite and the Common People

It is a point worth noting that all the devout poetic composers were themselves singers of great repute and their knowledge of Sanskrit was part of their devotion to God.
Sanskrit is called geervaaNa bhaasha and dEva bhaasha. The kings in that era knew and appreciated Sanskrit, which was part of their own education.

Though now considered only as the language of the ‘exclusivist’ elite, the use of Sanskrit in rituals and devotional discourses and scriptures was always common. Faith led to devotion and devotion-intensified faith. The epics went deep into the psyche of even the lay. In fact the scriptures are more venerated by the rural folk in their innate simplicity. Set to delectable music and sung melodiously with devotional fervour, keertans were favorites of the lay as much as they are of the learned.

**Popular Religiosity and Keertan**

*Keertan* is a song of praise in devotion. They spread from mouth to mouth and went deep into the devout people irrespective of social level or ‘educational’ accomplishment. They were easy to remember with their lilting rhythm and sweetness of imagination. Even today women sing the *keertans* not only in their devotional daily chores but also for their innate devotional spirit.

**A Distinct Characteristic Devotional Lyrics in South Indian Languages**

Lyrics composed on devotional themes in South India are more than mere lyrics. For, invariably they are set to music and sung either in a single voice or as *bhajans* in a chorus to the accompaniment of various musical instruments. In some cases as in *yakshagaanaas* they are performed all along a night in temple compounds and such public places. The lilt, the tune, the rhythm and the intricate meandering of *swaraas* is not only enchanting but also inspiring devotion in the devout in a memorable way.

Even to this day the lyrics and their rendition by talented exemplars are preserved with religious zeal and cultural verve. All these lyrics are great tributes to the supreme being with intense yearning to reach the sublime and be in harmony with ‘OM’ the praNava navaada, one of the attributes of the divine.

**Exponents of Lyrics**

The language component in a rendition is something like an easy, accessible springboard to many, prosaically you may call it a stepping stone to inspired, transcendental consciousness, the intense awareness of the Absolute reality. These lyrics are called variously as *padams*, *keertans*, *ahsthapadis*, *tarangams* and *kritis* by their various exponents.

Kshetrayya’s compositions are *padams*: Jayadeva’s are *Ashthapadis* and Saint Tyagaraja’s are *kritis* and Annamacharya’s are *keertans*. There are subtle special shades of difference in the attitude of the composer and the dominant mood of the composition. The categories are very important in musicology. *Keeratan* is a song of praise.
Tarangam is the name Sree Narayana Teertha gave to his compositions in Sree Krishna Leela Tarangini which contains gadya (Prose) and slokas too. The whole composition is envisioned as waves flowing from Sree Krishna’s glory in the different periods of his life described in the tenth canto of Sradbhagavatham.

Magnum Opus of Sree Narayana Teertha

Sreekrishnaleelatarangini is Sree Narayana Teertha’s magnum opus. This is in Sanskrit, exquisite poetry, set to music and cast in the form of an Yakshagana (literally singing of the demi-gods, dance-drama). It is about Lord Krishna’s divine pranks based on the tale from his birth to his wedding with Rukmini in the Dasama skandha of the Srimadbhagavata. This work is considered the most sublime in many ways.

In the twelve Tarangams or ‘waves’ making up the ocean of the sport of Sree Krishna, besides prose encomiums and slokas, there are 159 lyrics. The saint's mastery over music, philosophy and Sanskrit are brought into play to invest the Tarangini with its distinctive devotional fervour. It reflects with transporting felicity in bhajana/sankirtana tradition – repetition of the Lord’s name in many ways and offering adoration in song and dance -- of which the Teertha is a distinguished exponent.

Supreme ascetic, Narayana Teertha elevated the song to mystic joy, to heights approximating to brahmananda. The Upanishad speaks of manushynanda, gandharvaananda and brahmananda. The devotee reaches this ultimate in the state of bliss, say, as Meerabai or many a blissful devotee. This work is in sharp contrast with Jayadeva’s Geetagovindam, another composition in Sanskrit, describing the erotic love of the divine lord.

Some Samples of Sree Narayana Teertha’s Lyrics

Here are a few samples of the saint’s fine poetic, imaginative sensibility and the mastery of language besides his inspiring and inspired devotion to Sree Krishna. My rough and ready renderings may not be ‘translations’ even in a loose strict sense.

1. sharanam bhava karuNaa mayi kuru deena dayaLO
   karuNaarasa varuNaalaya kariraajakrupaaLO
   athunaa khalu vidhinaamayi sudiyaasura bharitam
   madusoodana madhusoodana hara maamaka duritam

Surrender (I),
To You full of mercy,
O! The one who showed infinite compassion to the elephant king
The killer of the demon Madhu!
Pray, destroy right now my sins!

paranoopuradhara sundara kara shobhita valayaa
surabhoosura bhaya vaaraka dharaneedhara krupayaay
warayaa hara bhara meeshwara suravarya madeeyam
madusoodana madhusoodana hara maamaka duritam
  sharanam bhava karuNaa mayi kuru deena dayaLO

O! The Absolute Supreme! Anklet and bracelet wearing,
Destroyer of fear in angels and the good,
The compassionate one bearing the earth!
Quickly absolve my sins! O, My Lord of Deities!
Surrender I to You!
The killer of the demon Madhu!
Pray, destroy right now my sins!
Surrender (I),
To You full of mercy,
O! The one who showed infinite compassion to the elephant king
The killer of the demon Madhu!

ghraNimanaDala maNikunDala phani manDala Shayanaa
aNimaadi suguNabhooshaNa maNimanta sadanaa
vinataasuta ghanavahana munimaanaasa bhavanaa
madhusoodana madhusoodana hara maamaka duritam
  sharanam bhava karuNaa mayi kuru deena dayaLO

O! Supreme Being!
with the great circle of sunshine,
Wearing diamond ear studs, lying under the snake canopy!
The one having great Garuda as mount!
The one living in the heart-mind-intellect of saints and sages!
Surrender I to You!
The killer of the demon Madhu!
Pray, destroy right now my sins!
Surrender (I),
To You full of mercy,
O! The one who showed infinite compassion to the elephant king
The killer of the demon Madhu!

aribheekara halisodara paripoorNa sukhaabdhE
narakaantaka narapaalaka paripaalita jaladhE
hari sevaka shivanaaraayaNateertha paraatman
madhusoodana madhusoodana hara maamaka duritam.
sharanam bhava karuNaa mayi kuru deena dayaLO

Terror of the Demons!
Brother of the wielder of the plough (Balarama)
Ocean of joy and comfort!
Killer of the demon Naraka! Ruler of all oceans!
Surrender I to You!
The killer of the demon Madhu!
Pray, destroy right now my sins!
Surrender (I),
To You full of mercy,
O! The one who showed infinite compassion to the elephant king
The killer of the demon Madhu!

(prathama tarangam sreekrishna praadurbhaavam)
*First Tarangam, the Birth of Sreekrishna*

2. Mangalaalayaa maamava deva – pankajaasanaa bhaavita bhaava
   Mangalaalayaa …

Home of the all-auspicious!
Theme of contemplation of the Lotus-seated divine!

devakee vasudeva tanooja
divya kireeta dalita bhava beeja
sarvayogi vichintya paadaabja
sangataakhila saadhu samaajaa ..
   Mangalaalayaa …

Offspring of Devaki and Vasudeva,
divine crown and the crusher of the seeds of the mundane,
whose feet are the object of the contemplation of sages,
companion of the gentle and devout,
home of the all-auspicious!

aparimitaananda bOdhaswaroopa
ati karuNaakara karadhruta chaapaa
kapaTa daityaharaa – khandita paapaa
kanakaambaradhara kalita kalaapa.
   Mangalaalayaa

Form of the realization of limitless joy,
The most compassionate bow-wielder
Killer of the guileful demon and the breaker of sin!
Wearer of fabulous gold-raiment, Home of the all-auspicious!

makara kunDala kEyooraa vibhooshaa
manasija shatakOTi manjula vesha
vikacha kamalasannibha vipulaaksha
vimalahridaya gOpaalaka rakshaa
   Mangalaalayaa …
Adorned with ear studs and armlets
Wearer of infinite forms of Love God
The blossomed-lotus-petal eyed
Pristine-hearted, Protector of cowherds
Home of the all-auspicious

kalita shree kaustubha kamaneeya kanTha
karuNa rasabhara milita vaikunThaa
parapaalaya bhuvi bhaagyay vitarana
guru bhakia narayaNa teertha sharaNa
   MangaLaalaya …

Wearer of the kaustubha jewel on the neck
Heavenly-one filled with compassion and grace
ruler of the distribution of earth’s fortunes
The refuge of the guru-devoted Narayana Teertha
Home of the all-auspicious!

(prathama tarangam sreekrishna praadurbhaavam)
First Tarangam, the Birth of Sreekrishna

3. krishNam kalaya sakhi sundaram baala krishNam
   krishNam kalaya sakhi sundaram baala krishNam
   krishNam gata vishaya trishNam jagatprabhu vishNum
   suraarigaNa jishNum sadaabaala krishNam

Sakhi! Look at the most charming Krishna
Krishna, who won the thirst of the senses, the lord of the universe
Slayer and victor over demons,
ever the little boy Krishna!

nrityanta miha muhuratyanta maparimita
bhrutyasanukoola makhila satyam sadaa baalakrishNam
baala krishNam kalaya sakhi sundaram

He dances here with exceeding and limitless joy
ever merciful and in favour of devotees,
ever He the little boy Krishna!

dheeram bhava jaladhi saaram sakalavEda saaram
samasta yogi taaram sadaa baala krishNam
Bold, essence of this universe
substance of all Vedas
help of all the Yogis to cross the ocean of life
ever the little boy Krishna!
Sakhi! Look at the most charming Krishna
Replete with love erotic, music and letters
Playing in the waves of that flowing Ganges

raamENa jagadadhi raamENa balabhadra raamENa
savaapta kaamENa sadaya krishnam kalaya sakhi sundaram

The most endearing, the most loveable lord! He is with Balarama
Wishing the best for all,
Sakhi! Look at the most charming Krishna

raadhaaarunaadhara sudhaapam
satchtiaananda roopam jagatriya bhoopam sadaa balakrishNam
krishNam kalaya sakhi sundaram

The redness of delectable lips surpassing all
The form of the Supreme Being, true, calm and blissful,
ever the little boy Krishna!
Sakhi! Look at the most charming Krishna!

damOdaramakhila kaamam param
ghanasyaamakriti masura bheemam
sadaa baala krishNam kalaya sakhi sundaram

Bears He the universe entire in His belly
The form of thick black, the killer of demons,
ever the little boy Krishna!
Sakhi! Look at the most charming Krishna!

ardham sidhileekritaanardham sree naarayaNa teertham
parama purushaardham
sadaa baala krishNam kalaya sakhi sundaram

The essence that destroys all evil and inauspicious
Sung by Sree Narayana teertha
ever the little boy Krishna!
Sakhi! Look at the most charming Krishna!

(dwiteeya tarangam, )

4. kalaya yashOdE tava baalam vraja baalaka khelana lOlam
apahruta bahutara navaneetam
anupama leelaa naTanakritam
kapaTa maamusha baalaka charitam
kanaka kanduka khelana niratam
kalaya yashOdE tavabaalam

Look! Yahoda! Your boy!
engrossed in play with the Gopikas!
stealing the thick cream,
dancing in a great prank
guileful is the tale of this little human
Engaged in playing the golden ball
Look! Yahoda! Your boy!

pathi pathi lunitita dadhi bhaanDam
paapa timira shata maarthaanDam
adhika balOdhruta jagadanDam
ananda bodharasa makhanDam
kalaya yashOdE tavabaalam

Pots of curds stolen on the way from house to house
the sun that drives away darkness of a hundred sins
the strongest stick of power over the universe
limitless stream of teaching rasa of bliss, is He
Look! Yahoda! Your boy!

mallabaalaka khElana chaturam
mansijakOti laavanya dharam
kalyaaNa guNa nava maNi nikaram
kama neeya kausthubha mani shEkharam
kalaya yashOdE tavabaalam

Skilled in playing with wrestler boys
wearer of the exquisite delicacy of a million Manmadhas
effulgence of diamonds of auspiciousness
wearing the crown of the most lovely kausthubha diamond
Look! Yahoda! Your boy!

navaneeta chOrabaalaka charitam
nandaadi vrama puNyataru phalitam
dhruvapada phala mEtadati lailitam
bhui naarayaNa teetha yati phanitam
kalaya yashOdE tavabaalam

Tale of the stealer of cream
fruit of the meritorious trees like Nanda and other cowherds
sure salvation exceedingly delicate
on the earth sung by Narayana Teertha Yati
Look! Yahoda! Your boy!  

5. parama purusha manuyaama vayam sakhi parama purusha manuyaama
suruchirahaasam sundara naasam tarunaaruNa kiraNaadhara sarasam
parama purusha manuyaama

Sakhi! (Dear friend) Let us all follow the Supreme Being (Krishna)
One with brilliant smile, lovely nose,
lips juicy, the red of the young sun,
Let us all follow the Supreme Being

nanda kumaaram nagavara dheeram bridaavana bhuvi vividha vihaaram
brindaaraaka gaNa vandita charanaaravinda miLita maNi madhukara nikaram,
parama purusha manuyaama

Son of Nanda, bold as the mighty mountain,
promenader in the regions of Vrindavan
light from the hair jewels lighting,
feet worshipped by all in Vrindavan,
Let us all follow the Supreme Being

bhaavuka charanam bhava santaraNam bhavya sEvakajana
bhagya vitaraNam avyaya vimala vibhooti
vijrumbhita divya maNi rachita vividhaabharaNam
parama purusha manuyaama

Feet of the great imaginative one
capable of making devotees cross the ocean of the world
giving away affluence and prosperity
with limitless pure radiance
adorned with divine diamond-studded ornaments,
Let us all follow the Supreme Being

paramOdaaram paapa vidooram smara saayaka samaanamudaaram
virachita muraLee geetarasaaamruta bharita ghaNamghaNa kausthubha haaram
parama purusha manuyaama

The most generous, sin absolving,
making with grace a mere thought a millionfold
making nectarine music of divine flute
Necklace dangling musically the kausthuba diamond
Let us all follow the Supreme Being
The songs of the Gopikas extremely sweet and exquisitely delicate;
glory of innate imaginative poetic lyrics
written by Sivanarayana Teertha
compounded wit the compassion of Sree Gopala
Let us all follow the Supreme Being. (shashtha tarangam)

6. pooraya mama kaamam gopaalaa pooraya mama kaamam
vaaram vaaram vandanamastutE vaarija daLa nayanaa
pooraya mama kaamam gopaalaa pooraya mama kaamam

Fulfil my yearning, Gopala, fulfil my yearning!
Lotus-eyed one!
I pay obeisance to you every day
Fulfil my yearning, Gopala, fulfil my yearning!

manyetwaamiha maadhava daivam maayaasweekruta maanushabhaavam
dhanyeiraadhruta tatwa swabhaavam daataaram jagataamati vibhavam
pooraya mama kaamam gopaalaa pooraya mama kaamam

Here I worship You, God, You have assumed the illusory form of a human
You are of the nature of the Absolute Supreme, You are the maker of the worldly illusion
Fulfil my yearning, Gopala, fulfil my yearning!

brindaavanachara barhaavatansa baddha gunjaavana bahuLa vilaasa
saandraananda samudgeerNa haasa sangata kEyoora sara madana gOpaala
matsya koormaad dasha mahitaavataara madanugrahi tava madana gOpaala
vaatsalya paalita varayOgi brundaa vara naraayaNa teertha vardhitamOda
pooraya mama kaamam gopaalaa pooraya mama kaamam

Inhabitant of Vrindavan wearing a peacock feather crest,
showing all glory staying in the flower bowers
Smile glowing in concentrated bliss!
wear the effulgent armlet, Madanagopala
One who manifested as Matsya, Koorma among the ten divine forms
Show me Your grace, the one ruling with a father’s affection, Madanagopala!
Fulfil my yearning Gopala, fulfil my yearning!
Fulfil my yearning Gopala, fulfil my yearning!

(shashtha tarangam)

7. rE rE maanasa gOpaalam bhaja doorE parihara bhoopaalam
aaraadantara tara makhilaatmaka bOdhaananda ghanam baalam
O Gopala in my mind-heart and intellect, *manas*!
The one permeating the entire! The little boy adept at teaching bliss
My prayer and worship to You, destroy my sins, oh, lord!
O Gopala in my mind-heart-intellect, *manas*!

O! The pristine large-hearted lotus!
The form of Vedas, wisdom incarnate!
The daintiest essence of compassion,
Heart replete with the idea of absolute equality of all!
O my mind, worship Gopala and abandon all rulers of the land!

Valiant one moving in the Vedas from the Saaman to Upanishads
the beatific vision I followed
Ocean of bliss of equanimity limitless, everlasting,
O my mind, worship Gopala and abandon all rulers of the land!

Prop and base of the universe! The supremely effulgent!
Self-radiant like the Vedas
The innumerable-virtued lord of all speech and sound
Wearer of the true form of the essence of the Vedas
O my mind, worship Gopala and abandon all rulers of the land!

Oh, the one liberated from the bonds of every thing mundane sprung from desire
Your entire body blessing the entire universe with auspiciousness
The preceptor of all the devout exponents
The Supreme Being pervading the ever fresh firmament of bliss
O my mind, worship Gopala and abandon all rulers of the land!

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Lyrical Sanskrit and Narayana Theertha

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nanda tanaya makhilaanandam sharadindu vadana miha gOvindam
rE rE maanasa gOpaalam bhaja doorE parihara bhoopaalam

The holy musi of the most enchanting flute,
Feet ever being contemplated of groups of sages and seers
Son on Nanda, the joy supreme, the spring moon-faced!
O my mind, worship Gopala and abandon all rulers of the land!

brindaavanahita gObhindam dhruta mandara makhila nigamakandam
nanda sunandaadi vandy mananyaga naarayaNa teertha yati vardam
rE rE maanasa gOpaalam bhaja doorE parihara bhoopaalam

The well-wisher of Vrindavan herds of cows,
Undoubtedly the mountain of all Vedas
One worshipped right from Nanda, Sunanda to the renunciate Narayana Teertha
O my mind, worship Gopala and abandon all rulers of the land!

(dwaadasha tarangam)

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