

Ramadasu, the seventeenth century Telugu poet, is acclaimed as a 'Parama Bhagavata' and his *kirtanas* have inspired composers like Tyagaraja, Thumu Narasimha Dasu, Varadasu etc.

Ramadasu sang the glory of Sri Rama. His *kirtanas* of solicitation of the Lord have a direct appeal for their lyrical content and simple patterns of traditional musical modes. Dealing with the miseries of mundane life, Ramadasu's lyrics are addressed to the Lord, praising him, his names, attributes and achievements in various incarnations. Most of them are regular dialogues of a destitute devotee with the absolute God, in whom the devotee's faith is boundless and unshaken.

B. Rajanikanta Rao (b. 1920), poet, playwright, musician, has received the Sahitya Akademi Award (1961) for his research work in Telugu, *Andhra Vaggeyakara Charitramu*.

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Ramadasu

B. Rajanikanta Rao



Makers of
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The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.

Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.



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Preface

At the very outset I express my sincere gratitude to the Sahitya Akademi for having invited me to write a monograph in English on Ramadasu. I accepted the offer with great relish since Ramadasu's verses and Kirtanas have been ringing in my ears ever since I was a tiny-tot. His 'Dasarathi Satakam' and a century of Kirtanas were popularised in Andhra in every township through 'Harikatha' presentation of 'Ramadasu Charitra'. The authors of different versions of 'Ramadasu Charitra' were Yadavadasu, of Bhadrachalam, Thirukkadaiyur Krishna Dasu and the joint authors Narasimhadasu and Vara Ramadasu. That one of these Ramadasu Charitras, published by R. Venkateswara & Co., Madras early in this century was prefaced by quite a long introductory essay in Telugu signed by Dr. Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan—means what an amount of admiration the scholar had for the saint. Besides these, the theme of Ramadasu was being presented on the stage by well-known troupes of actors through a stage drama written by the Late D.V. Gopalachary, with experienced actors like Ballari Raghava, Chittoor V. Nagaiah, Parvatareddy Rama Chandra Reddy, Rentachintala Satyanarayana, C.S.R. Anjaneyulu and Chandur Madhusudan Rao in the title role. By the stage I reached the higher classes, even our school theatricals used to stage this drama. I remember my role as Kabir rendered on the school stage with pleasant memories of singing Hindi *bhajans* of Sant Kabir.

The story of Ramadasu, propagated through Harikatha and stage drama was authenticated by adding some historical names and fixing chronological dates in Ramadasu's life through an article by well-known historian late Bhavaraju Venkata Krishna Rao published in *Bharati* in 1925. It was Bhavaraju who told us that there were two kings in Ramadasu's life ruling at Golconda one after another, Sultan Abdulla the sixth king at the time of induction of Ramadasu as Tehsildar, temple renovation and the arrest of Ramadasu in 1665, and Sultan Abul Hasan Tanasha, the

7th and the last king in 1677 at the time of Ramadasu's release from the jail.

My deep gratitude goes to Dr. S. Radhakrishnan for my drinking very deep from his Indian Philosophy for my first chapter of Path of Bhakti and the evolution of Rama worship. Learned articles and books of scholars like Prof. Nelaturi Venkata Ramaniah, Prof. E. Vasumathi, and K.V. Bhupala Rao, and Vedam Venkataraya Sastry helped me in my information on the Qutub Shahi history and references to Akkanna and Madanna, uncles of Gopanna. I offer my sincere thanks to these authors. I am also grateful to the heads of department of Telugu in Osmania University and Central University of Hyderabad, Prof. N. Krishna Kumari and Prof. G.V. Subrahmanyam for having allowed me access into the dissertation papers on Ramadasu kept with them.

B. Rajanikanta Rao

Background

Path of Bhakti

Song has invariably been the vehicle of expression for all the saint poets of India. It could influence people with its emotional melodic appeal. This is the Bhaktimarga—the path of devotion—for the adherent to be in tune with the infinite or the supreme deity.

The origin of the Bhaktimarga can be traced back to the epics *Mahabharata* and *Ramayana*. Dr. Radhakrishnan aptly writes: "We see in the epics the gradual modification of the old Vedic religion into modern Hinduism. The Sakta, the Pasupatha or the Saiva and Pancharatra (Vaishnava) systems, which belong to the Agama class and therefore non-Vedic, enter into the Hindu religion. We have also image worship in temples, pilgrimages to sacred places gradually introduced."

From Haridwar to Rameshwaram, on the banks of rivers, confluences and hilltops, were raised many a temple for Rama, along with thousands of Vishnu shrines of other incarnations. Many *sthalapuranas* or gazeteers about sacred shrines and *agamas* or methods of worship, rules of iconography and architecture of temples were added on to the Puranic literature that was revived.

The Saivite saints Nayanmars sang the praise of Lord Siva in the early centuries of the Christian era, while Alwars sang the praise of Lord Vishnu in the 7th and 8th centuries. Along with the advent of Srimad Ramanujacharya in the 12th century, Vaishnavism spread and laid deep roots in various temples constructed in the name of the ten incarnations of Maha Vishnu throughout India.

Just as the *Bhagawatapurana* had its impact on the lyrical excellence and devotional heights of the Alwars of South India, the effect of *Brahmavaivartapurana* brought out to the forefront, in the eastern India, the worshippers and bards of Radha and Krishna respectively representing mother nature and father the Almighty

These saints were led by Jayadeva, the Adiguru and the author of *Gitagovinda*, belonging to Orissa (12th century) followed by Chandidas of Bengal, Vidyapati of Mithila (15th century) and Chaitanya of Bengal (15th century).

In the same period, the Vedantic philosophy of ancient India and the path of Bhakti found their echo in the Sufi philosophy through the lyrics of some Muslim saints of Persian origin who appeared in the northern and western parts of India leading congregations of large masses of common people, singing in unison spiritual songs, called *qawalis* composed by saints like Khwaja Nizamuddin Chishti of Ajmer, Baba Fariduddin of Multan, and Khwaja Nizamuddin Auliya of Delhi with his disciple Amir Khusro, the court poet of the Khalji sultanate at Delhi. Large masses of common people belonging to both the major communities, Hindu and Muslim among others were attracted and gathered in the Dargas of these saints on the crest of the same "Bhakti" wave, in the same 14th and 15th centuries. The lute of oneness of all humanity and oneness of the universal God was heard sonorously through the soothing lyrics of saints like Swami Ramanand, Kabir, Guru Nanak and Anand Chidghan.

The most popular thoughts of the period as preached by those saints can be found embedded in the following couplets:

Bhaj man Ram, Rahim !
Bhaj man Krishna Karim !
(Kabir)

Ram kaho Rahman kaho kovo
Kanh kaho Mahadevari, Parasnath kaho
Kovo Brahma, sakala Brahma swayameswari
(Anand Chidghan)

Among the saintly bards of north India in the 16th century Vallabhacharya of Andhra origin illuminated the country between Brindavan and Dwaraka with his Sanskrit lyrics replete with devotion to Lord Krishna, and paved the way for the group of poets called 'Ashtachap' which included among others Surdas of Braj Bhoomi, and Meerabai of Rajasthan, sang hundreds of lyrics packed with the divine glory of Lord Krishna. Goswami Tulsidas of Braj Bhoomi sang in praise of Sri Ramachandra innumerable lyrics, besides his *magnum opus* ballad in Bhojpuri, the *Ramacharitmanas*.

Lifting the song from the form of popular pastime, Annamacharya (15th century), a devotee of Lord Venkateswara of Tirupathi made it worthy of presentation for the entertainment of both the elite and the common people, both in the royal and temple campus. There are more than thirty thousand lyrics in Telugu and Sanskrit to his credit. Throughout South India, he was acclaimed as the Sankirtanacharya, having originated the system of worshipping the Lord through songs of praise and dance whether at home or at the temple, either by an individual devotee or a congregation.

Annamacharya and his successors, all lyrical poets up to three to four generations, were patronised by the rulers of Vijayanagara Empire. With the fall of the Vijayanagara Empire in 1565, the continuity of the direct contribution of the successors of Annamacharya to the tradition of Sankirtana at Tirupathi suffered a setback.

Just before the completion of a century after this break that is in around 1650 Kancherla Gopanna, a young revenue officer in the employ of the Qutub Shahi Sultans of Golkonda kingdom came to be acclaimed as an ardent devotee of Sri Rama, the presiding deity at Bhadrachalam. Later he became well known as Ramadasu of Bhadrachalam, a unique composer of devotional lyrics and reviver of the tradition of Bhajan Goshthi.

Rama's Worship and Bhadrachalam

At this juncture, it is proper for the readers to know some facts of legend and historical researches about the origins of the Rama shrine and Rama worship on the hill of Bhadra.

The earliest mention about the noteworthiness of the pilgrim centre Bhadrachalam and the religious importance of the sacred shrine of Sri Rama presiding over the hill of Bhadra are found in the *Brahmandapurana*. This Purana must have been completed to a large extent in the present form by around the 9th century. In this period information was added on to each Purana, regarding fairs and festivals, places of pilgrimage, and the sacred chants or Mantras consisting of combinations of mystic letter symbols pertaining to the names of deities. Temples constructed on each river had to celebrate Pushkar, a Mela (fair) once in twelve years, according to the sign of the Zodiac in which the Planet Jupiter transits during the particular year. Festivals like birthdays of

Sri Rama and Krishna, and Vijayadasami, came to be observed throughout the country on the same day. Thus a systematised almanac of religious events must have also evolved during the same period.

Goutami Mahatmyam in the *Brahmandapurana* deals with legends pertaining to the origin and the course of river Godavari. One of the chapters in this deals with Bhadrachalam under the title "Bhadrachala-Kshetra Mahatmyam". The great narrator of Puranas, Soota Maharshi says to Saunaka and others: "In the middle of Dandakaranya (Deccan), on the banks of the Godavari, there is a sacred hill called Bhadra, on which Sri Rama, during his exile took rest for a considerable time, along with Sita and Lakshmana. To fulfil the pledge given to Bhadra, on that occasion, who in the guise of a local tribal prayed to God to make his association with him memorable. Sri Rama manifested himself on the hill of Bhadra, as a deity who sanctions salvation to all the pilgrims who visit and worship him after a circumambulatory stroll around the sacred hill." The township formed came to be called Bhadrachalam ever since. Near Bhadrachalam is a village called Parnasala which is reminiscent of the place where Sri Rama during his exile was given hospitality by Sabari, the Saora tribal woman.

Bhadrachalam, which is a part of the Khammam district of the present Andhra Pradesh, was a small political division under the rule of the Kakatiya Empire of the 12th and 13th centuries. After the fall of the empire, Bhadrachalam division appears to have been annexed by the Sultanate of Delhi, and later gifted to one Annappa Rahut Aswarao as a *jagir* in around 1424. Not noted for as much of architectural or sculptural beauty as the other Kakatiya temples and structures of Warangal, Ramappa and Alampuram, the Rama temple of Bhadrachalam must have had an unostentatious beginning perhaps during the reign of some humble Kakatiya chieftain or that of Annappa. After that, the temple is said to have remained submerged in forest growth, perhaps for two centuries.

In the 17th century a pious lady called Tammala Dammakka, is said to have had a revelation in a dream about the existence of the idols of Sri Rama, Sita Devi and Lakshmana covered under the forest growth. Sri Rama said to have appeared in her dream and asked her to arrange for the construction of a *pandal* and perform routine worship until the responsibilities would be devolved on a young pious officer around the middle of the century.

Tammala Dammakka and her daughter with the help of the elders of the village, retrieved the idols from beneath the forest growth, constructed a *mandapam* and took the responsibilities of conducting the daily routine of worship of the Lord until 1650, when Kancherla Gopanna took over as a Tehsildar of Bhadrachalam, under the administration of Qutub Shahis of Golkonda Empire. The same young officer, became well known later as Bhakta Ramadasu.

It is remarkable that the posture and description of the idols of the three deities exactly correspond with those as can be found in the "Dhyana Slokas" or meditation verses connected with the "Taraka Mantra" or "Rama Mantra" as stipulated in *Sri Sarada Tilakam*—the treatise on Mantra Sastra. "With one hand resting on the knee and the other in a posture indicating wisdom (Gnana Mudra), looking into the eyes of beloved Sita Devi, who is seated on his left thigh, having Lakshmana standing by with the arrow struck on the bow-string, Sri Rama, shedding blue rays of effulgence through his cloud-like mien, is seated on the pedestal in the sanctum." This shrine of Sri Rama is a monumental proof in the history of mankind for the solidification of all that is best in humanistic ideals, righteous conduct and achievement of success of godliness over demonic nature and activity, an individual human soul gradually raising himself to the stature of the universal soul—that is Almighty. In the estimate and faith of the people of His country through many generations, His name superseded most other names of God! Lord Siva of Kailash is said to have believed and preached to his own consort Gauri that the most efficacious of all the names of God is that of Rama, by chanting which any being (Human or Divine or Sub-human) could swim across the ocean of miseries of life. That is why it is called Taraka Mantra.

Ramadasu is said to have been initiated into the spiritual practice of this 'Taraka Mantra' before assuming charge as the Tehsildar.

Golkonda

It is interesting to note how Gopanna, a devotee of Rama, came to enter the revenue department of Qutub Shahis of Golkonda and became bold enough to raise a temple for Sri Rama.

Golkonda was one of the glorious cities of medieval Deccan. The glories of this city, which rose to prominence, soon after the

sudden decline of Gulbarga, the seat of Central Government of the Bahmani Empire, attracted many traders and traveller-chroniclers from the Middle East and Europe.

Famous for its rich mineral resources, particularly diamonds like the Kohinoor, Golkonda was always vulnerable and the object of envy and consequently was subjected to be the tribute and loot for the imperial Mughul forces led by Shahjahan and Aurangzeb—but not the spiritual riches of the people, nurtured through seven generations of benevolent rule of Qutub Shahi monarchs who were souls of understanding and humanism.

Their policy of benevolence towards their Hindu subjects consisted of two fundamental principles, as exemplified by Sultan Quli the founder of the dynasty, and more or less followed by most of his successors; one, tolerance in religious matters and second absence of discrimination in the exercise of political rights. Sultan Quli's successors went a step further and extended their patronage actively to Telugu culture, specially literature and music, so that their memory is still cherished by the Andhra people with gratitude and love.

Malik Ibrahim Qutub Shah, started holding frequent literary *darbars*, in which Telugu and Parsi poets of his own court and those of the courts of neighbouring princes and Zamindars enthusiastically participated. Addanki Gangadhara Kavi dedicated his poetical work in Telugu *Tapati Samvaranam* to Sultan Malik Ibrahim, who was affectionately addressed as Malkibha Rama. Ponnikanti Telaganna, who wrote *Yayati Charitram* in chaste Telugu also thrived in the court of Ibrahim Qutub Shah. The sons of the Sultan were made to learn Telugu, and we find in the Urdu poetry of Ibrahim's son Mohammed Quli, a good number of Telugu words. The famous poet Sarangu Tammayya, who wrote *Vaijayanti Vilasam*, declares proudly that Sultan Mohammed Qutub Shah would summon him every now and then to visit his palace to participate in literary gatherings. Telugu was accepted and honoured as one of the official languages of the Government for administration along with Persian and Urdu.

Ibrahim Qutub Shah's marriage with a Hindu lady Bhagirathi and his son Mohammed Quli's love affair and ultimate marriage with a Hindu courtesan Bhagmathi (Bhagyavathi) also brought together both the communities. A magnificent new city was constructed by Mohammed Quli at a distance of eight miles from

Golkonda called Bhagyanagar, in honour of his beloved Queen Bhagmathi. It later became the city Hyderabad.

A unique inscription of the sixth Sultan, Sultan Abdulla is available in a village on the banks of the river Krishna, declaring the gift of an entire village to a Brahmin Vedic scholar, to enable him to perform sacrifices and teach Vedas and Sastras to his students according to the Gurukula system.

One of the lyrics of Kshetrappa, the well-known composer of Telugu *padams* (lyrics) mentions that he was invited through messengers and gifts by Abdulla Qutub Shah, the sixth Sultan, to visit his court.

A Sanskrit work on rhetorics called *Sringara Manjari* was written during the reign of the seventh Sultan, Abul Hasan Tanasha, by a Muslim Sufi saint, Akbar Shah alias Bade Saheb, son of another Sufi saint called Shah Raju Quttal. Both the saints were preceptors to the seventh Sultan. Even during the reign of his uncle Abdullah, the prince Abul Hasan led a life of renunciation and had training in Sufi philosophy, in the hermitage of Shah Raju Quttal and Akbar Shah. That is why, he was affectionately called "Tanasha" i.e., the king who always enjoys bliss. In 1678 when Sultan Abul Hasan Tanasha was on tour of Krishna District along with his Prime Minister Mahamantri Madanna, he was pleased with the performance of *Parijatha Natakam* of the Bhagavatha Mela Troupe of Kuchipudi, and the Sultan issued a *firman* (Order) then and there donating the village of Kuchipudi and the lands around to be enjoyed by the Brahmin families of the troupes.

Qutub Shahi Sultans tolerated the practise of Hinduism, since they realised that it was expedient to allow a large measure of freedom to the Hindus, who formed the bulk of their subjects.

Akkanna and Madanna, sons of Bhanujayya Pantulu of Hanumakonda, and accomplished scholars in not only Sanskrit and Telugu, but also Persian, Arabic and Marathi and well versed in the Sastras, were taken into service as clerks in the Revenue department of Qutub Shahi kingdom at Golkonda, by Mirjumla (Revenue Minister) Mohammed Sayyad, during the reign of the sixth king, King Abdullah. When Mirjumla rebelled against the Sultan, Akkanna and Madanna remained faithful to the Sultanate. Mirjumla amassed a huge wealth and raised his own army and became a general in the Mughul service under Aurangzeb.

Kancherla Gopanna, a nephew (sister's son) of Madanna, was appointed as Tehsildar at Bhadrachalam at the instance of Mirjumla, as in the case of Gopanna's uncles. Since, when Sultan Abdulla was defeated by the Mughul Imperial forces led by Aurangzeb, Golkonda kingdom lost its freedom, having got to appease the Mughul Prince with large amounts of tribute, precious stones, etc. and conceding to the continuous demands from Delhi, demanding not to befriend Maharattas and Bijapuris, Akkanna and Madanna were portrayed by some pro-Mughul historians as betrayers of their immediate bosses, when actually they were not co-operating with the fulminating Muslim courtiers who were their immediate bosses, but throughout faithfully supporting the freedom of Golkonda Empire and the welfare of the Sultan of Golkonda. This policy, brought them to important positions when they helped the last of Qutub Shahis, Abul Hasan to strengthen himself against the intrigues of his courtiers like Sayyad Mazaffer and Moosa. Sultan Abul Hasan removed the intriguing courtiers from service and made Madanna Prime Minister and Akkanna the Commander of the Golkonda Army.

During his twelve years rule as the Prime Minister of Golkonda, Madanna kept the Mughuls at bay, received and honoured Chatrapathi Sivaji at Golkonda and incurred the wrath of Aurangzeb. Sultan Abul Hasan had high respect for his advice. Being a Sunni fundamentalist, Aurangzeb did not relish the idea of a Shia Muslim Sultanate encouraging Hindus in high office. Through intrigues with the disgruntled Muslim courtiers and the Sultan's harem relatives Aurangzeb got Akkanna and Madanna assassinated in the streets of Golkonda.

After the assassination of Akkanna and Madanna, it was only a couple of years, by which time, Aurangzeb had the sadistic satisfaction of subduing Golkonda fort and taking the last of the kings Sultan Abul Hasan as a prisoner. According to his last wish, the Sultan's body was laid to rest near the tomb of his own Guru Shah Raju Quttal, the Sufi saint.

Builder of Temple and Moulder of Absolute Faith

... The Story of Ramadasu

Nelakondapalli was an unassuming, average Telangana village in the Bhadrachalam Taluq in the Khammam District of Andhra Pradesh. Kancherla Linganna Mantri was a moderately well to do Brahmin of scholarship in both Sanskrit and Telugu. He married Kamamma, daughter of Pingali Bhanujayya Pantulu belonging to Warangal, but working as a Revenue Inspector at Hanumakonda in the service of Golkonda Kingdom. Kamamma's brothers Akkanna and Madanna, accomplished and talented in martial and peaceful arts, also entered the service of Golkonda in around 1640.

Linganna Mantri and Kamamma had only one son, Gopanna, born around the year 1630. Possessing a spiritual bent of mind from his childhood, he learnt languages like, Sanskrit, Telugu, Kannada, Parsi and Urdu. According to the family tradition, Gopanna was initiated into the Ashtakshari Mantra (the chant in praise of God Narayana according to Vaishnavism) by one Raghunatha Bhattar although the former belonged to the Niyogi Community of Brahmins.

Having been initiated to meditate on the 'Narayana Mantra', along with the 'Gayatri Japam', Gopanna was performing 'Narayana Japam' also. He considered himself to be a 'Narayanadasa', a devotee dedicated to the service of Narayana or Mahavishnu. When he had lessons in Bala Ramayana, and attended the sessions of Pauranikas (recitals of Puranas) and Ramayana, he came to understand the oneness of Sri Rama, the hero of Ramayana, with the Supreme Lord. Ramadasu's tryst with Sri Rama has been revealed to us in one of the earliest lyrics of Ramadasu composed when he was around 10 years of age (Takkuvadi Manaku—in Raga Saurashtra).

"Is there any want unfulfilled, when Rama is on our side." The last stanza mentions 'Narayanadasulu', whereas it should be

'Ramadasu' as in all the rest of the lyrics! Listening to *Ramayana* also inspired him to compose a long sentimental ballad-like song in the same period ('Asa Puttenc'—in Raga Ananda Bhairavi). In the middle of the ballad, his avowal to Rama came out, as an unconscious reference to himself as Ramadasu, "the security guard for Sri Rama". These facts will be discussed in a little more detail, elsewhere in this monograph.

According to the Yakshaganas on Ramadasu, Kabirdas, a Muslim Fakir of Kabir Panth, came down to the residence of Gopanna, perhaps along with or as any other pilgrim or Sadhu, or Lord's devotee visiting the village would invariably visit this favourite haunt well known for hospitality and initiated Ramadasu into the Taraka Mantra. Later Ramadasu may have gone to Rama's shrine at Bhadrachalam for darshan, after his initiation into the 'Taraka Mantram'. Only the author of the Telugu Stage Drama written early in this century made Gopanna intervene in the verbal duel between the temple priests and Kabirdas on the former taking objection to the latter's entry into the temple.

Now, there was a complete change in the daily routine of Gopanna's life. He started the penance of 'Ramakoti' or writing the Lord's name one crore times, and all the other austerities stipulated for the same, besides an increase in the hospitality to devotees, pilgrims and mendicants.

Gopanna's parents died sometime between his 15th and 20th year. With the help and advice of the elders of the village, Gopanna married Kamala and begot a son. But, whatever heritage that was left by his parents, could not sustain him and his family for a long time, due to his charitable activities to mendicants, pilgrims and devotees. He started going in the village with a Tambura in one hand and a sack of cloth on the other to gather rice and other articles of food, voluntarily offered by well meaning and generous villagers who appreciated his devotional lyrics and dedicated service to his God Sri Rama.

When spring was forthcoming, his desire to celebrate the ensuing birthday of Sri Rama at Bhadrachalam, became uncontrollable. But how could he go there, in his present state of poverty? He wanted to secure a job. He remembered his maternal uncles Akkanna and Madanna were then working in the Revenue Department of Golkonda, stationed at Hyderabad. Neighbours helped him to go to Hyderabad.

"We won't forget, won't forget, Sri Rama's name!
We are not afraid, not afraid, of the God of Death—Yama!
We shall always be serving, always be serving Govinda!
We shall always remember, always remember, the God
Supreme!

"We won't give up, won't give up, service to Sita's beloved!
We shall keep quiet, shall keep quiet from any other digression!
We shall go to see, shall go to see, the Lord of Bhadrachalam
We shall remain, shall remain, in security and peace!!"

With this prayer song in the heart, Gopanna reached Hyderabad and sent word to his uncles who were holding office.

According to Yakshaganas entitled *Ramadasu Charitra* and other works which followed when Gopanna met Akkanna and Madanna they were, in their capacity as ministers, closeted with the Emperor Tanisha. However, historically it is not correct.

Tanisha means benevolent king, or a king who was always found in 'bliss', i.e. in tune with the infinite or the Supreme! This petname was held by Abul Hasan Tanasha who was the seventh or the last of the monarchs of Qutub Shahi line of Golkonda, to come to the throne in 1672 after the death of his father-in-law and predecessor Sultan Abdulla Qutub Shah who was reigning over the Kingdom of Golkonda between 1626 and 1672 when Gopanna came to Hyderabad in 1650. Besides, Madanna and Akkanna who were appointed in the revenue department were still in the lower rungs of the same department, under the Prime Ministership of Mirjumla, Mirza Mohammed Sayyad. It is possible that Gopanna met Akkanna and Madanna when they were closeted in their advisory capacity with Mirjumla, the Prime Minister. The Mirjumla, who was appreciative of the works and talents of Akkanna and Madanna must have very affectionately interviewed their nephew Gopanna. The latter would not have hesitated to compose a few extempore poems in praise of the benefactor and employer of his uncles must have impressed the Mirjumla enough to appoint him as Tehsildar of Bhadrachalam and Palavanacha. In 1652, i.e. just within two years after Gopanna's appointment as Tehsildar, Akkanna and Madanna and the Mirjumla Mohammed Sayyad recommended to the emperor Abdulla the good work of Gopanna and his earnest request for the sanction of Sultan's annual grants for the maintenance of the regular routine of worship etc. for the shrine of Sri Rama

at Bhadrachalam! Sultan Abdulla's *firman* (order) declaring Bhadrachalam and Rekapalli as *jagirs* to Sri Rama's shrine for maintaining regular service to the Lord had been inscribed on a stone-slab and ever since kept in the temple.

One of Ramadasu's Kirtanas, well-known and often heard in Sankirtana Goshthis is Idigo Bhadradi Gautami Adigo Chudandi (Raga—Varali)

"Here is Bhadra hill, and lo flows there the Godavari.
It is there where the Lord of Raghu's clan resides,
Along with Sita and Lakshmana on either side!!!
It is verily the Vaikuntha of the Kali era!
Raise your hands in devotion!
Most beautiful with floral trees, creepers and bowers. It is the
habitat of the Lord who protects Ramadasu with all prosperity."

He is supposed to have sung this hymn while on his way to Bhadrachalam to take over as Tehsildar. Hundreds of devotees of the Lord is believed to have joined in the chorus.

Gopanna as Tehsildar, soon acquired a good name among the people around him and also won the admiration of the higher-ups as an able administrator.

But the Lord of his dreams Sri Rama, was occupying his mind to such an extent that all the good works sanctioned and got done by the Sultan's administration were appearing to him as Rama's handiwork. During a festivity, Gopanna organised a feast for Vedic scholars as a part of the austerities. When Gopanna and his wife were engaged in the hospitality, their son, a tiny tot, accidentally fell into the hot gruel and became unconscious. Gopanna was reminded of a Brahmin with the deadbody of his child approaching Lord Sri Ramachandra when he was reigning over Ayodhya, and got him back to life due to the Lord's Grace. Gopanna took the boy to the sanctum of Rama and prayed to the Lord with all sincerity and earnestness ("Kodanda Rama")

"O archer Rama, O archer Rama, O archer Rama!
Your arm is our prop, don't go anywhere,
Why any argument, pray don't be indifferent!
Lift us by your hand, come for our protection,
and restore our health!

He is quite innocent, this child is in utter fatigue!
Make him rise and mix with people,
Nullify adversity and show us your grace!!
It is you who makes us take birth, it is you who protects us,
it is you who makes us fruitful. You are verily our fortune!
You don a smile, and there is the goddess of well-being!
You save those who serve you, your abode is Bhadra hill!
O Rama the victor, the abode of Tulasi, the sacred name,
Rama of Bhadra hill !!!

At the end of the prayer, the baby boy rose as if from sleep. Perhaps ever since then Gopanna came to be called as Ramadasu, by one and all. Till now he was affectionately called only by his admirers among devotees. This miracle out of an accident or an accident of a miracle had increased the urge in Ramadasu's mind, to get one of his childhood dreams fulfilled, in which, Rama appeared and told him that one day he would be raising a temple for him at Bhadrachalam.

But how did Ramadasu, in spite of a wholly adverse atmosphere and unfavourable historical circumstances which were an antithesis to his purely idealist approach, implement his pet dream project, and raise a historic and monumental edifice for the hero of Valmiki, sublimated as the Absolute One!

In the eastern Europe of the 8th and 9th centuries and England of the 17th century, there was a movement against the use of images in religious worship. Followers of it were called 'iconoclasts'. Later, those who attacked popular beliefs or established customs also came to be called 'iconoclasts'.

In the later half of the 16th century, in the Deccan and South India we come across both the types of iconoclasts joining hands, in the combined onslaught of the provincial potentates of the Bahmani Kingdom on the Hindu Empire of Vijayanagar, at the Battle of Rakshas Tangadi (Talikota) in 1565. They brought down fortresses, palaces and temples of Vijayanagar (and Hampi) to ruins.

In spite of the incessantly threatening posture of the Mughul Imperial Eagle from Delhi, and Daulatabad in Deccan, through the political intrigues of the Mughul governor, and later Emperor Aurangzeb, the Qutub Shahi Sultans could bring in all the Telugu speaking districts of Telangana, coastal Andhra and Rayalaseema

under one umbrella. Their benevolent policies of making Telugu one of the languages of administration along with Persian and Urdu, their encouragement of the Hindu community by offering them jobs of importance in the government service, and their non-interference in religion gave a new hope to the people.

But in 1657, the Mirjumla Mirza Mohammed Sayyad, joined the intriguers of the Mughul court against the King of Golkonda. He was just feeling proud and floating on the wave of his victory over Udayagiri, in the coastal area and Gandikota and adjoining regions in (Rayalaseema) Karnataka, having broken several idols and plundered temples and converted the bronze and copper obtained from the temple images into canons. Akkanna and Madanna and even some loyal Muslim officers of Golkonda having not supported him in 1658 the Mirjumla left Golkonda and defected to the Mughul court with large amounts of loot to please the fundamentalist fanatic, the iconoclast incarnate of the age, Emperor Aurangzeb.

Meanwhile Gopanna, whom the people around him started calling affectionately 'Ramadasu', and all the devotees of the Lord among the agriculturist landlords of the area were getting impatient to get a temple constructed to shelter their God Sri Rama of Bhadrachalam, with towers, a compound wall and a pond. Appeals of Ramadasu were readily accepted by the leaders of the people among the landlords and ryots and agricultural workers and artisans, most of whom offered their services for various parts and acts of construction of the temple structures. By the time temples for the main deities and the sub-deities, and the retinue deities (Pradhana devatas Upadevatas and Parivara devatas) were completed, the funds proffered by Ramadasu and leaders of the people were exhausted, and the sacred function of sanctification according to the Vedic stipulations and the decoration of the main deities with fitting jewellery as ordained in the Sastras remained to be fulfilled. One night, Ramadasu, who had completed the accounts of his exchequer as Tehsildar had a dream in which, the Lord appeared before them and encouraged him to spend the six lakhs of *varahas* accrued during his tax-collection in the area of his jurisdiction, for the rest of the functions and celebrations of the temple. Ramadasu followed the advice of the Lord, and utilised the six lakhs of Government money for completing the renovation, reconstruction and *Samprokshana* (sanctified installation) of the main deities.

Ramadasu built a temple of the Lord of his childhood dreams in the heart of the Qutub Shahi Kingdom, when on the periphery of the empire, the gun-thirsty generals were laying temples waste and breaking idols and plundering the treasures. Ramadasu re installed Lord Sri Rama along with his consort Sitadevi and his retinue, in the newly raised temple in the heart of the Deccan spreading the charms of the Taraka Mantram, the chant which helps people cross the ocean of miseries of life, and breathed a new lease of life to the ancient faith of India, the Sanatana Dharma, enwrapped in the comfortable shawl of 'co-existence'.

But due to what Ramadasu did in spending the Government money without the proper authority excepting the advice of the Lord as appeared in his dream he had to suffer imprisonment under the orders of the Sultan, and his uncles too could not help him, in this predicament, wherein, he could not practically justify his impulsive action, which he did in all his earnestness, hope, sincere devotion and unflinching faith in the Absolute Lord of his dreams, Sri Rama. The latter by his impractical advice, tendered to his faithful devotee, put to test, the insufferable patience of the devotee, who was made a target of incarceration and solitary confinement for twelve years (1665 to 1677).

As soon as Ramadasu was imprisoned, his cry of misery addressed to Sri Rama from within the jail, was contained in the following song :

Etubotivo Rama (in Raga Ananda Bhairavi)

Where have you gone O Rama, where have you gone?
Where have you gone, while I am crying for your grace
Alas, when I want to see you with my eyes!!

Where have you . . .

Won't you remove the stigma of my imprisonment
in a dungeon of darkness!! I bow down to you!!

Where have you . . .

You are the master who removes all sins,
I prayed for you, for protecting me,
lifting me from my adversity!!

Where have you . . .

Tanisha will come for an enquiry
and pass judgement;

Send the indebted money soon
 and why don't you get my release?
 Where have you . . .

I realised my crime, praised you profusely
 and prayed for you
 Why don't you come, ignoring all my past sins?
 Where have you . . .

Debtors are torturing me, have you hidden yourself
 lest you may be caught for abetting my crime?
 You are the Lord of Bhadrachalam, O Rama,
 the Lord of the universe, who will save Ramadasu!!
 Where have you . . .

The Tanisha referred to in the above lyric who was being expected by Ramadasu to come for an enquiry could only be 'Tanasha', Prince Abul Hasan, who was taking interest in certain matters of administration and justice, as the heir apparent representing his father-in-law Sultan Abdulla Qutub Shah, ever since his wedding with the Sultan's daughter in 1660.

Later, Ramadasu was praying to Rama in his agitated mind!

'Rakshimpahvidiyemo Rachakaryamu Putte'

You don't save me—what is this critical political affair?
 If you don't save me, who else is there! O Ramachandra!
 Debtors corner me, Lord Rama, I cannot say anything!
 I thought I had the hold of the Supreme! and none would dare
 question me.

My Lord, I have become lower than the lowest,
 O Ramachandra!

I thought I had none to be afraid of, since, I am the servant
 of Rama. Please eliminate my fear, O Lord of Bhadradi!

Gopanna was brought to the court where Tanasha, the Sultan's heir apparent was present to adjudge the alleged crime of the officer known for his sincerity, honesty, sense of responsibility and efficiency.

Tanasha—Don't you know that wealth of the all powerful government cannot be spent without proper authority taken in advance?

Gopanna—I thought Sri Rama is more powerful than all and whatever I spent, I spent for him; this would get you too a good name if you accept this.

Tanasha—If you don't pay the money within one week you are going to be placed in jail.

Since all the answers of Ramadasu to the queries of Tanasha were sounding either arrogant or megalomaniacal, he was left to the officers of enforcement of law without further review. He was subjected to various types of punishment like flogging, fear, starvation, etc. But throughout the incarcerations Ramadasu never gave up calling Rama, and singing several lyrics about Rama.

In one of the lyrics he composed in jail, Ramadasu gave an account of some items of expenditure that he incurred for the constructions and ornament for the deities.

Ikshvakukula Tilaka Ikanaina Palukave

O illustrious scion of Ikshvaku, why don't you answer my
 call yet?

If you don't save me now, who else will be my saviour?
 O Ramachandra!

I constructed winding compound wall so beautifully,
 that compound wall cost me ten thousand Varahas!
 Constructed temple towers and pavilions so majestically
 Don't look at me as towards a person not known to you!
 A medallion of emeralds was made for Bharata,
 That medallion cost me ten thousand Varahas!
 A waist-belt was made for Satrugna,
 That waist-belt cost me ten thousand Mohars!
 A pearl medallion was made for Lakshmana
 That medallion cost me ten thousand Varahas!
 I got prepared for mother Sita a medallion like the tamarind
 leaf!

That medallion cost me ten thousand Varahas!
 I got constructed a fleet of a variety of cars for you;
 In return I got iron chains for my feet, O charmer of the
 world!

A beautiful crown piece, I got made for you,
 Don't you gloat about in pride, after all whose father's
 bequeathal is it, O Rama!

The absolute faith of Ramadasu in Sri Rama, for all what he did for Rama or spent for Rama, made him believe that Rama would himself arrange to pay back and solve the crisis. In spite of continuous frustration and disappointment, the most amazing thing was, that there was not any dent in his absolute faith and hope. But these continuous auras of optimism used to be interspersed by momentary moods of frustration and bouts of arguments with Rama.

Rama Neechetemi Kaduga

O Rama, you are not capable of doing any thing!
 But, could you not tell your wife Sita?
 Ordinary people are subjecting me to all sorts of torture
 You don't listen to me, nor show me your face!
 Has your valour got drowned in the ocean?
 When your devotee is being tortured for money,
 where has your courage gone?
 You hold the conch and the discuss, but why don't you save
 your devotees?
 O lotus eyed one! Rif-rafs are sending me into gitters
 You don't shower your grace on me?
 I thought you were my household deity, and believed there
 was none else!
 When I request you to get my debts paid back,
 You have not turned up to be with me!

Now and then Ramadasu goes on with his lyrical dialogues with mother Sita.

Janaka Tanaya

O daughter of King Janaka, here is my prayer, pray pass it
 on to the father of the universe!
 I have born with patience all the tortures possible on the
 earth,
 Day and night since twelve years, all through my adversity!
 In many ways I prayed and praised you, but you would not
 see me!
 Why delay, let the money be brought, to retrieve my debts,
 I cannot stand this agony I shall give up my life and join you!

During the last week of his twelve-year jail term, in one of his lyrics composed in jail, Ramadasu says

Muchchataina Adavemira

Why don't you talk intimately with me? O master archer,
 It is twelve years, since I entered this prison;
 The whole body is getting squeezed by bugs and mosquitoes!
 The heat of April and May—cannot be assessed in words:
 For budgeting my tax collections, nobody offers me any
 surety!
 Tanisha is coming to inspect in person my collections and
 expenditure;
 Pray send the cash that I spent, and gracefully get me
 released!

Since this lyric was composed in 1677, the 'Tanasha' referred to in this lyric is the last monarch, Sultan Abul Hasan Tanasha, who was helped to succeed his father-in-law in the battle for succession by Madanna and Akkanna and rewarded them with promotion, as the Prime Minister and his secretary respectively.

It is during the last few weeks of Ramadasu's jail term that the above lyric was composed, and here, we have documentary evidence, from the testimony of Ramadasu's reference to the mental disposition of Sultan 'Tanasha' who was getting acquainted with all pending cases, in the empire, in various departments including that of Gopanna, through the able advice and guidance of his Prime Minister Madanna. The Sultan's disposition was quite favourable for revision and adjudication of Ramadasu's case.

Arudra and Vedam Venkatarayasastri in their writings about Ramadasu, opined that Prime Minister Madanna intervened on behalf of his nephew and appealed to the Sultan, that, Ramadasu might be pardoned as he spent the money for a religious project of public utility and released from prison with exoneration. That is a 'rationalist' point of view, about how Ramadasu was released from his imprisonment.

Hawart and Martin, two writers belonging to the Dutch East India Company wrote in the seventeenth century as follows:

"Government had appointed him as Tehsildar of Bhadrachalam. He was a great devotee of Lord Sri Ramachandra. He spent huge amounts from the Government treasury, constructed a

fine temple for his God. He also spent heavy amounts on valuable ornaments of gold and precious stones for Lord Sri Rama, his consort and his brothers. Government imprisoned and tortured him for the misappropriation of public funds without prior permission. Lord Sri Rama paid the money and got Gopanna released from the prison."

Hawart and Martin who never spared any opportunity to denigrate Madanna, did not have a word to say anything about the intervention of the Prime Minister to save his nephew, but unequivocally described the case of release of Gopanna as a case of Divine intervention.

All the traditional Andhra writers supported the version depicted in the testimony given by the foreign writers, and in their turn, all the Yakshagana writers wrote that Rama and Lakshmana disguised themselves as the servants of Ramadasu and paid the six lakhs of Government money to Tanasha the King in his palace chamber and got the release of Ramadasu with a receipt obtained from Tanasha containing his Mohar (a stamp of the signet ring).

After his release, in 1677 Ramadasu got Bhadrachalam and Rekapalli as *jagirs* for the Lord, Sri Rama, on a permanent basis, and the *firman* (order) issued earlier in 1652 for the regular maintenance of routine worship was made to be reissued.

But this happy co-existence lasted only for a decade, throughout which period there were intrigues, bribery, and defections of some Muslim officers of foreign origin in the Golkonda service, purposefully and continuously organised by the fundamentalist Mughul imperialist Aurangzeb, who did not relish the continuance of a Qutub Shahi Sultan Abul Hasan, a Shia, and a Sufi, and a king having been in highly good terms with his Hindu subjects, guided ably by his Hindu Prime Minister Madanna. In 1686 Aurangzeb got Akkanna and Madanna brutally assassinated and in the following year ravaged the Golkonda Fort and captured Sultan Abul Hasan Tanasha as a prisoner and established his upper hand as Alamghir.

After the fulfilment of a childhood dream in the construction of a temple for his Lord, and for whatever reason and also the same 'cause' having suffered for 12 years finally coming out exonerated and reinstated, Ramadasu, could as well aspire for reaching the Lord's abode as the Pauranikas would depict under the changing environment in and around Golkonda.

Just about a century after the exit of Ramadasu and the Qutub Shahis, i.e. in 1760 when, Bhadrachalam became part of the Hyderabad state under the reign of the Nizams of Asafjahi dynasty. Sri Rama's shrine was threatened to be plundered by one adventurer Ibrahim Khan alias Dhansa in 1766, against the wishes of the ruling Nizam. But the priests of the temple carried away the images and kept the Lord in exile for 5 years in Polavaram Taluk, in the village Santamamilla on the banks of the Godavari. Ibrahim Khan appears to have visited Bhadrachalam and could only deface the inscription on a stone-slab containing the original sanction of Tanasha for Sri Rama's temple!

It must not be forgotten that this adventurer Ibrahim Khan had been duly punished for his maraudery and the Nizam had sanctioned Rs. 40,000 for the renovation and restoration of the day-to-day routine of worship of Sri Rama, when the images were restored to Bhadrachalam.

In around 1832, Raja Thumu Narasimhadasu of Guntur and Varada Ramadasu of Kanchi, visited Bhadrachalam and their approaches made through Chandulal, an adviser of the Nizam to Nasaruddaula the Nizam, got the original edict of Sultan Abul Hasan Tanasha of 1677 re-inscribed and reissued.

It was the privilege of the Nizam Government ever since, to send a platter of pearls for the 'Kalyanam' festival of Lord Sri Rama and Sita Devi every year which privilege has since been devolved on the State Government of Andhra Pradesh.

"Here, faith is not for its own sake, but a faith that is agreeable to heart, and to all faiths is seen in the story of Ramadasu and the structures raised by him at Bhadrachalam." Here, Ramadasu or Gopanna was initiated into the chant of 'Rama Taraka', by a Muslim saint 'Kabirdas'. The song of Ramadasu describing this incident is the result of a great event. Through this event, this pilgrim centre Bhadrachalam, in the words of the late Dr. Radhakrishnan "Is the sacred place which has established faith in the absolute as the universal faith, leading to oneness of all humanity, which is verily the manifestation of one Supreme God!"

People's Poet and Lyricist

Ramadasu, even as Gopanna, at the age of five years, was depicted by the authors of the Yakshaganas as a versatile boy-prodigee. Ever since, it appears that poetry and lyric-composing were serving him as hand-maids to his main love, his unswerving devotion to and absolute faith in his Lord—Sri Rama ! Opportunities might not be wanting for Ramadasu for imbibing, mastering, and excelling himself in wielding a variety of literary forms, but only two have survived—Satakamu, or a century of spontaneous stray verses, praises, solicitations and exclusive appeals to Dasarathi, and Lyrics, a couple of hundreds, also of the same content, and description. Lines and stanzas from his Dasarathi Satakam and those from his lyrics, made him one of the most popular poets, like Potana and Vemana, whose Muse electrified the thoughts and speech of Telugu people of all walks of life in their day to day life through several generations. That is why he has been acclaimed as one of the most popular lyricists and a people's poet.

The form of Satakam is taken up by upcoming poets as "a preliminary exercise in versification", or by senior poets as "an expiatory invocation to God" for remission of sins or to express sincere devotion and surrender to their favourite deity. Usually, each of these verses is independent of the others, having its own context. They are the subjective expression of the poet's feelings, of his own experiences, in society and life around him, his dedication to his deity and the praise of the deity or didactic sayings on human conduct. Satakams are treated as belonging to subjective category of poetry. Some Satakams contain a variety of metrical forms. Others like Dasarathi Satakam contain only one or two varieties of metres like Utpalamala and Champakamala. Usually Satakams contain 100 to 108 verses. Once in a way, a Satakam like Bhartruhari's *Subhashitam* (written in Sanskrit and translated into Telugu) may contain several hundreds, each hundred dealing with one single theme called Paddhati-like Sajjana Paddhati,

Durjana Paddhati, etc. Some Satakams like Dasarathi Satakam can be divided into sections called Dasakas, each containing 10 verses and pertaining to a single theme.

Gopanna's *Dasarathi Satakam*, gets its name from the *makuta* (nom-de-plume) Dasarathi, name of the deity to whom each verse is addressed, as a subjective conversation of the poet with his deity. This Satakam depicts the sincere devotion and complete surrender of the author 'Ramadasu' to the dedicatee, the Lord. These hundred odd verses can roughly be divided into various sections like:

1. The Namavali—stringing together the Lord's names and attributes in vocative case
2. The spiritual truths about the relation of the individual soul (the devotee) with the Supreme Soul (the deity)
3. Glorificatory—praising the various achievements and acts of grace of the Lord in various incarnations
4. Ethical—moral sayings intended for the consumption of the common householders
5. Penitential—verses dealing with the devotee's own experience and past sins—and repenting for them
6. Satirical—verses dealing with whatever outwardly sound reproachful acts of the Lord, narrated by the devotee, but, intended to praise Him.

The characteristic features of Gopanna's poetry in the *Dasarathi Satakam* can be found in his own terms describing the sweetness of the name of the Lord, and the elegance of his sublime form in the following verses:

Chakkera Lappakun

Those who get passionately addicted
to sugar candy pink leaf-like lips
of a youthful maiden, and honey fresh from the comb,
are, alas, unable to find that the extent of sweetness
of the name of Rama is far beyond the greatness
of all other forms of sweetness, O Dasarathi,
the ocean of graciousness !

Chikkani Palapai

Like messing with sugar,
the layer of cream from above thick hot milk,
I place on the platter of my life,
the nectar of the beauty of your elegant form
take it with my serviceability converted into
the cupfuls of my pair of palms
and sip it with great relish, O Dasarathi
the ocean of graciousness !

The reference to the fact that he composed verses in the past praising some undesirable humans as can be noted in the following two verses, indicate, that he might have composed verses in praise of some dignitary in the Golkonda hierarchy of administration, in his capacity as a subordinate officer:

Masa Goni Regu Pandlakunu

Like paying a heavy price of pearls for a measure of cheap fruits,
due to a worst temptation (in the past), I offered my muse to
an evil-minded person and got cheated;
(Now) please dance out of joy on the dais of my poesy,
so that virtuousness is easily restored to my tongue,
and verbal nectar is sprinkled
O Dasarathi, the ocean of graciousness!

The dignitary mentioned in the above verse could be none else, than the Mirjumla, Mirza Mohammad Sayyad, the Prime Minister who got Gopanna inducted into the post of the Tehsildar. And the historical event which subsequently happened in the rebellion of the same person against the Sultan of Golkonda and his final defection to the Mughul Court are found confirmed by Gopanna's reference to getting cheated.

The same mood is found in another verse too :

Chesiti Ghora Krityamulu

I have committed horrible deeds,
shown discourtesies to God's devotees,
associated myself with those who serve outlandish Gods;
counting on my crimes, don't put me into difficult knots

I am your pageboy, O Dasarathi
ocean of graciousness.

The horrible deeds mentioned in the above verse might be a reference to some of his inevitable actions compelled to take as a Government official, which were perhaps not agreeable to his basic temperament and breed: and his association with the colleagues and superiors belonging to an altogether different set of personal habits and avowals, sometime or other clashing with those of his own is also referred to in the verse. He makes a confession of penitence for possible defects in himself on these counts and solicits the Lord's grace for saving him from any consequent difficulties befalling on him.

Here is a verse depicting his miserable reaction to the Government and people of Golkonda calling him guilty of misappropriation.

Itadu Duratmudanchu Janulemmaga

Having been annoyed at people adjudging me as evil-minded,
I wantonly dubbed myself a destitute;
when you are the deliverer of destitutes, I didn't want
to solicit others:
may you grant me well-being either in this life, or in
the life beyond!
I serve you with eternal faith in the sweet pair of letters
bearing your unique name, in my heart, O Dasarathi, ocean
of compassion.

Another poem contains references to events pertaining to important personages connected with the career of Ramadasu in the Golkonda Kingdom, confirming the historicity of the characters and proving that Ramadasu was alive till all those events took place.

Dorasina Kayamul Mudimi Tochina Joochi

Having seen the grown up human bodies reaching old age;
sovereignities and riches fading out like sparks of lightning;
companions in life, just vanishing before-hand,
not knowing the possible sudden snapping of longevity,
if one does not free himself from the wrappings of allurements,

whence will he get relief, O Dasarathi, the ocean of
compassion!

References are there in this verse to himself becoming old, to the devastation and defeat of Golkonda Kingdom due to the onslaught of Mughul imperialism; and to the assassination of Akkanna, Madanna, and Rustum Rao (Gopanna's cousin) and finally the death of the benevolent King Tanasha in Mughul prison.

Gopanna's devotion is pure. He glorifies whole-heartedly his experience of Rama's greatness. He described the ten *avatars* of Vishnu in ten different verses. He never attempts to show off his scholarship. Figures of speech like metaphor and simile, figures of sound like alliteration, etc. occur in his poems having entered without any effort on his part.

"In clarity, sweetness, easiness of comprehension, and loftiness of devotion, no other Sataka could match Dasarathi Sataka. The immense popularity all over Andhra which this Sataka enjoys is attributable to the above qualities only."

Although Ramadasu was a people's poet, and lyricist, basically he was an absolute devotee of the Lord, in his incarnation of Sri Rama. He was born in the same 17th century which was noted as the Golden Age of Song and Drama in Deccan and South India, and in which were born two other great saint composers, Narayanateertha, an ascetic and Kshetrayya, a romantic lyricist.

Siddhendra Yogi of Kuchipudi, whom Sri P.S.R. Appa Rao placed in the last quarter of the 15th century had a lyric to his credit with the first line, 'Madvati Bhadradi Ramu' in his dance-drama entitled *Bhamakalapam*. In the 15th century, when Bhadrachalam was being enjoyed as a *jagir* bestowed by the Delhi Sultanate, on one Annappa Rahuth, Sri Rama's temple must have come to limelight and entered into the lyrics of a visiting Siddhendra Yogi. Narayanateertha visited many pilgrim centres and mentioned the some names along with the deities in some of his lyrics in *Krishna Leela Tarangini*, but Bhadrachalam was not in his itinerary.

However, Kshetrayya visited both Golkonda court and Bhadrachalam temple in around the year 1650, just when, Ramadasu was inducted into the post of Tehsildar of Bhadrachalam.

Both Mirjumla Mirza Mohammad Sayyad, and Tupakula Krishna Bhupati who left Chenji and Tanjavur and joined Qutub Shahi service being instrumental in inviting Kshetrayya to Golkonda, were still in good terms with Sultan Abdulla. No wonder, Kshetrayya was received with temple honours by the new and young Tehsildar Ramadasu at the temple of Sri Rama in Bhadrachalam. Kshetrayya—on having the *darshan* of Sri Rama at this place, which is very near a village called Parnasala, where Sri Rama is said to have lived with Sita and Lakshmana, during his exile—was reminded of Ravana abducting Sita from the same Parnasala, as indicated in his lyric.

Rama Rama Pranasakhi Nedabasi Ramudu Etuvale Taleno

Alas, having got separated from his beloved, how could Rama endure the pangs? Would he, also, not have pined away, in the same predicament like me in unbearable grief?

The mould of lyrics of Ramadasu is quite different from that of his predecessors and contemporaries. Siddhendra Yogi having been finally placed by research scholars in the last quarter of the 15th century, would be a junior contemporary to Tallapaka Annamacharya of Tirupati, along with whom he would also deserve to share the honour of having lifted the Telugu song from the many forms of Desi or folk entertainment, to a literary status acceptable to scholars and elite of society on one side and the masses of common people on the other! To popularise mythological themes dealing with the theme of God-love, presented in Nayika-Nayaka Bhava, Annamacharya composed thousands of lyrics not only on the theme of God-love but also many spiritual songs called Adhyatma Sankirtanalu, with which, he started the tradition of Sankirtana Goshthis, presenting congregations of community singing of devotional songs, both in every household and every temple yard.

These singing congregations have spread far and wide in the Deccan and Southern India. Swami Narayanateertha had taken up the two trends set by Annamacharya, combined into one, that is Bhajana Nataka Paddhati in his Maha Yakshagana entitled *Krishna Leela Tarangini*. In this type of drama presentation, which had been very popular until the beginning of this century, all the actors portraying different *dramatis personae* be it a Rama theme or a Krishna or Vishnu theme, participate in group singing and revelry

in devotion, wherein the Lord's names are repeated in song in the beginning or end of every episode in the drama. This is very much the same as the Nautanki or Ramlila of the North.

Original texts of Ramadasu's lyrics got completely mixed with the songs of the authors who compered the story of Ramadasu under the title *Ramadasu Charitra*, in the form of Yakshagana or Harikatha. Four such compilations were available in 1950, each compiled by a different author like, Narasimhadasu or Singaridasu, Yadavadasu, Thirukkadaiyur Krishnadasu and Adiraju Veerabhadra Rao. Now only one book, by Narasimhadasu and Vara Ramadasu is in circulation. In the course of the narrative of each Harikatha or Yakshagana, the compiler interpolates his own songs, in addition to many Kirtanas of Ramadasu. We can often recognise such interpolated lyrics through the dedicatory reference or the 'Mudra' in the last stanza. Songs of Ramadasu contain invariably references either to Ramadasu the composer or Bhadrachala Rama, the dedicatee-deity. Other composers' lyrics, with these Mudras having been interpolated and passed off as those of Ramadasu is also not ruled out.

One song which has invariably been passed off and accepted by everyone during the last fifty years or more as definitely a Kirtan of Ramadasu but does not have either of the Mudras as mentioned above is the one with the first line "Takkurvedi Manaku Ramudu Okkadundu Varaku". The last line in this Kirtana says "Narayana-dasula Gachedi Srimannarayanuneda Nammiyundaga" (When we lay our faith in Sriman Narayana who protects the devotees of Narayana—Is there any want unfulfilled, since Rama is on our side.)

This reference to 'Narayana' and 'Narayanadasulu' in the last line of the song suggests that the mind of the composer, at the time was oriented to the 'Ashtakshari' Mantra or the Narayana Mantra, to which Gopanna was initiated very early in his boyhood by one Vaishnavite Guru Raghunatha Bhattar. In one of the verses of Ramadasu in the century of verses on Dasarathi (Dasarathi Satakam) we find reference to this initiation. We must not forget that this boy composer Gopanna's mind had already had his "Tryst with Sri Rama" and his first love with the Supreme's names even as a child could as well be with that of 'Sri Rama' as even this particular song starts only with that name Takkurvedi Manaku Ramudu Okkadundu Varaku, although, the weight of the Ashtakshari (Narayana Mantra) asserts itself in the last line.

The longest of Kirtanas of Ramadasu starting with the line "Asa Puttene, Sri Ramulato Aha Neputtanaitine" has been included in every Yakshagana or Harikatha on Ramadasu and was introduced as one of his boyhood compositions which emanated under the inspiration and infatuation he got for Sri Rama, in one of the sessions of listening to Bala Ramayana, the story of Sri Rama, in Sanskrit, with commentary in Telugu, rendered most effectively by a Pauranika, in the temple of his native town Nelakondapalli. This pretty, long, ballad-like song, one of the boyhood compositions of Ramadasu (or Gopanna), runs into nearly sixty lines and narrates the whole story of Ramayana in seriatum describing Gopanna's agony for not being a participant in each of those incidents of Ramayana. The English rendering of the starting stanza and another stanza making a reference to Rama of Bhadradi are given here :

Asa Puttene Sri Ramulato Aha Neputtanaitine

What a desire has gripped me
that I was not born along with Sri Rama!
I was not born in Rama's life time,
and had not the privilege of serving him in person!!
What a desire!!

* * *

When Rama and his brothers were
born as king Dasaratha's children
When he was playing in Ayodhya
with the boys of his age,
that I did not serve him
with all my devotion and love!!

* * *

What a desire!!

When Lakshmana's elder brother
would bring the armies of apes to Lanka,
and when the army would besiege Lanka,
I, as the security guard of Sri Rama of Bhadradi
would myself kill Ravana
Call my sacred mother and offer her to my Lord!!

What a desire!!

Perhaps, this song establishes not only the earliest link of the heart of Ramadasu not only with Sri Rama as the hero of Ramayana, but also, as the diety of Bhadrachalam—to which Supreme Lord—Gopanna the boy-prodigee started imagining himself

to be the security guard. This spontaneous composition of the budding devotee unwittingly laid the Mudra not in the last stanza of the lyric but in one of the intervening stanzas. The unwitting reference to Mudra can be found in the words "I as the security guard of Sri Rama of Bhadradi." ("*Rakshinchu Bhadradi Ramadasudanai Ranamulo Ravanuni Druntunu*")

The earlier stages of his dedication to the Lord, are indicated in his *Dasarathi Satakam*. And he must have had a further acceleration in composing and singing lyrics on Sri Rama of Bhadrachalam ever since he visited the unrenovated and uncovered shrine on the hill and got initiated into the Taraka Mantram by the Muslim Fakir of Kabir Panth. The song which spontaneously came out of Ramadasu on this memorable occasion could be almost his earliest acceptable lyric.

Tarakamantram Korina Dorakenu (in Raga Dhanyasi)

I craved for it, and having acquired became blessed, O my
brother
the chant that lifts you from the miseries of life!!
And if only one believes that this is the death-knell
for the sentinels of death over-reaching their limits!!

I craved for it. . .

Don't be enamoured of illusive outlandish sermons!
Of what worth are the visits to the one hundred and eight
sacred places of pilgrimage?
Need you take a dip in the seven sacred rivers?
that one can save oneself from sinking
in a whirlpool on an auspicious day!!

I craved for it. . .

Take as many births and see, there is only one God, Narayana!
If you hearken to the story of this Supreme Being,
you will know that all beings are His manifestation!
Sins committed in a series of past births will vanish
in this one last birth, and certainly there will be no more!!

I craved for it. . .

That one should aim at continuous bliss, and
maintain a pure conscience always,
and be able to keep the self detached from actions
laying the faith in the Lord of Bhadradi and
unflinching adherence to duty,

and should go without any break to the prayer hall
of Ramadasu, who knows this secret!!

I craved for it. . .

Ramadasu is believed to have composed several hundred devotional songs. They are known as Kirtanas. The Kirtanas of Purandaradas of Karnataka, who preceded Ramadasu nearly by a century are called Devaranama or Padagalu in Kannada. 'Devaranama' means a string of God's names or his attributes and achievements. Some of the Kirtanas of Ramadasu also are strings of attributes of Rama. Research scholars could locate just recently only nearly two hundred Kirtanas of Ramadasu. These Kirtanas are divided into three distinct groups :

1. Those composed before going to jail
2. those composed in jail, and
3. those composed after his release from jail.

Atleast some scores of these Kirtanas became most popular not only throughout Andhra Desa, but in Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala as well wherever the Sankirtana Goshthi, the tradition started by the Sankirtanacharya Annamayya of Tirupati, spread—in temple-yards, on river-banks and village fairs and festivals. They became the vehicle for congregations of community-singing. In Andhra, these parties have not less than 20 to 30 participants, each, holding wooden Karatalas and having a tree of lights made of metal 'samyas' hundreds of them. The devotees turn round around the 'samya' tree singing Kirtanas of Ramadasu. It is said, practically there is no village in Andhra in which there is not a single humble Rama temple, let alone, the well-known temples and places of pilgrimage. Parties from every village with their Samyas, reach Bhadrachalam or the nearest well known place of pilgrimage.

Kirtanas of Ramadasu inspired many composers of successive generations including Thumu Narasimha Dasu of Guntur, Varada Ramadasu of Kanchi, Alluru Venkatadriswamy of Nellore, and last but not the least the Great Tyagaraja—one of the 'Trinity' or the Trimurthis of Karnataka music.

But Kirtanas of Ramadasu were not replete with so much literary and romantic sophistication, as those of Annamacharya. There were some Kirtanas of Ramadasu in Sanskrit also, but not composed as part of a dramatic story like those of Narayana-

teertha Swamy's *Krishna Leela Tarangini*. Ramadasu did not compose for dance and Abhinaya like Kshetranya and also he did not travel as widely as the former—in fact, he did not go beyond Golkonda, Hyderabad and Bhadrachalam. Tyagaraja composed his Divyanama Sankirtanas, and Utsavasampradaya Kirtanas, having the literary structure and traditional musical structure of Kirtanas of Ramadasu as model. But when we come to the stage of 'Kriti' in the evolution of Karnataka music, with all its sophistication and expertise in 'Sastriya Sangita' Ramadasu appears to be centuries away from that stage.

But, even to this day, rarely one can find a Telugu person not repeating or humming to himself at least the first lines of half a dozen Kirtanas of Ramadasu—whether he be a scholar, a politician or the most common man in the street. No wonder, to find, an international scholar and politician, Ex-President Dr. Radhakrishnan could be found humming to himself some Kirtanas of Ramadasu. It is the same case with any labourer, a shopkeeper, or any common householder.

Why are they so popular? Because they deal with the mundane miseries of life, not only those, as experienced by the composer during his life, but also such as may occur to any one of us. Some of the Kirtanas are in vocative case (Sambodhana), addressed to the Lord, praising him, his names and attributes and achievements in various incarnations. Some of them are didactic sermons, consisting of sublime truths connecting life and the universe, connecting the individual soul to the Supreme, as found in the song on the Taraka Mantram quoted in full in this chapter. Most of other lyrics of Ramadasu are regular dialogues of a destitute devotee with the Absolute God, in whom the devotee's faith is boundless!

(1) *Paluke Bangara Mayena*

Is your word so dear, O master archer,
Why don't you respond to my call?
I won't forget meditating on your name
even in my dreams

(2) *O Rama Nee Nama Memi Ruchira*

How sweet is your name; the sweetness which saved the
elephant, Prahlada, Sugriva and Vibhishana is unsurpassed O
Rama!

(3) *Sitarama Swami Ne Chesina Nerambemi*

O Lord Sita Rama, why don't you fix my crime?
In meditating upon the pair of your lotus feet
and propagating its glory, was there any indiscretion on my
part?

(4) *Adugodati Kadalanivvanu*

I shall not let you move a step further,
I shall not leave you before promising protection
having roamed about seeking shelter and got tired.

Ramadasu did not discard 'Sringara' or the Romantic element in some of his lyrics composed even during his adversity, although, he does not adhere to the Nayika-Nayaka Bhava of composers like Annamacharya and Kshetranya. Since he is a suffering destitute in the dungeons of Qutub Shahi jail in Golkonda, when he felt that his incessant solicitations were not reaching the Lord, or that the Lord was not taking proper heed of them, he thought it fit to make appeals to mother Sita. Mother Sita is none other than Mother Universe to Ramadasu:

Nanu Brovamani Cheppave

Having joined you on the couch,
pressing you on the cheek,
when the Lord finds absolute bliss,
Pray implore on Sri Rama to save me,
O dear mother Sita!
When the Lord whose heart is the universe
is alone with you, the goddess of prosperity
and well-being on the same couch,
Pray implore on Sri Rama to save me,
O dear mother Sita!

Ramachandrulu Napai Chalamuchecinamma

Ramachandra is obstinate with me;
Mother Sita, please tell him!
Alas, he would not listen, what shall I do,
The stone-like heart does not get melted;
I do not know the repercussions of my past deeds,
You will be praiseworthy of justifiable intervention!

Mudras of the name of Ramadasu as well as that of the dedicatee deity Rama of Bhadrachalam, and is taken from the *Ramadasu Charitra* of Narasimhadasu and Vara Ramadasu.

Not only the above mentioned lyric, but a few more believed to be compositions of Ramadasu might be the masterly creations of the duo of devotees and admirers of Ramadasu, the creators of the only version of *Ramadasu Charitra* that is available with us now, namely Narasimhadasu (or Singaridasu?) and Vara (Varada) Ramadasu. As one of the verses in the 'Charitra' in the closing sequences reveals, Vara Ramadasu should deserve the credit for actual creativity and Narasimhadasu for his constant companionship, thoughtful guidance and very effective propagation through Sankirtana Goshthis.

One of the most familiar songs, 'Etu Botivo Rama' (where have you gone Rama) one of the earliest songs of Ramadasu, assumed to have been, composed in jail, contains a reference to Tanisha's visit. There is one more song towards the end of the twelve-year jail terms—'Muchchataina Adavemira Rama' (why don't you have an intimate chat with me O Rama). This song also contains a reference to Tanisha's expected visit for an enquiry. The events of the first song refer to those happening in 1665, and 'Tanisha' referred therein has been identified in an earlier chapter (IV) to be Abul Hasan Tanasha, the heir apparent and son-in-law of King Abdulla Qutub Shah. The second song belongs to the period 1677, when Ramadasu was about to be released and 'Tanisha' mentioned in the song is undoubtedly the 7th monarch of Golkonda—Sultan Abul Hasan Tanasha. The subsequent kind acts of this pious and benevolent Sufi Sultan Tanasha—in the release, exoneration and restoration of Ramadasu with all honours, and sanctioning *jagirs* for the continuance of worship and other routine at Sri Rama's shrine in Bhadrachalam, with special honours on festive occasions, have immortalised the name of 'Tanasha' along with that of Ramadasu, and endeared him to all god-minded people, for ever.

One must admire the awareness of the authors of *Ramadasu Charitra* with all the above aspects. It may be recalled that Raja Thumu Narasimhadasu met Tyagaraja the saint composer, at Madras, where he was staying at his disciple Vina Kuppayyar's house, in around 1830. Varada or Vara Ramadasu a friend of Narasimhadasu might have accompanied the latter to Madras or joined

him later at Nellore on their way to Bhadrachalam. Both of them might already have had some information about Ramadasu and subsequently gathered more from what Tyagaraja and other saintly elders of the South, could convey them from the Kirtanas and *Ramadasu Charitras* propagated till then by the works of Yadavadasu of Bhadrachalam and Thirukkadaiyur Krishnadasu of Chittoor. The Kirtanas of Ramadasu must have already been in circulation throughout the South, through the tradition of Sankirtana Goshthis.

The pilgrimage of Narasimhadasu and Vara Ramadasu took place around the year 1832, as mentioned in the *Narasimhadasu Charitra*. Then they must have been gripped with a great urge, somehow, to propagate and perpetrate the memory of the saintly devotee Ramadasu, about whom they must have heard such great encomiums from the like of Tyagaraja.

When they sat down to writing their *Ramadasu Charitra*, culled out, from the admiration and high estimate of Ramadasu gathered from the saintly elders of the south, they seemed to have been possessed by the spirit and soul of Ramadasu to such a great extent, that whatever they wrote came out right like the very same thoughts and words of Ramadasu.

Just fifteen to twenty years after Thumu Narasimhadasu and party of devotees met Tyagaraja, and departed for Bhadrachalam (in 1847) we find the saint Tyagaraja himself getting a revelation in a dream, from his personal deity, who is again Sri Rama of Bhadrachalam—described in his song in Raga Sahana, 'Giripai Nelakonna Ramudu' that he would save the saint after ten days:

Pulakankitudai Anandasuvulanimpuchu
 Mataladavalenani Kalavarincha Gani
 Padi Pootala Pai Kachedanenu Tyagarajavinutuni
 Giripai Nelakonna Ramuni Guritappaka Ganti!!
 (Having had goose pimples all over the body,
 Shedding tears of joy, when I was fumbling in my dream
 how to talk to Him, He promised to save me after ten days,
 I've seen Rama without missing the aim,
 the one, who manifested himself on the top of the (Bhadra)
 hill!)

What happened at Tiruvaiyaru, on the tenth day after Tyagaraja composed the above mentioned song was the latter reaching the

characterises the particular type of depiction, like, Santa Bhakti (Peaceful devotion), Dasya Bhakti (Devotion depicted as complete surrender presenting the devotee in the position of a slave) Sakhya Bhakti (Devotee depicted as treating the deity as his friend and equal), Vatsalya Bhakti (Devotion depicted as the sentiment of parent to a child, or that of a child to its parent), and Vaira Bhakti (Devotion depicted in the manner of a verbal peroration of the devotee, in which, every achievement or attribute of the Lord is sarcastically criticised by the devotee, in his mood of frustration, due to there being no positive response from his Lord for his continuous solicitations).

We also find in the Kirtanas of Ramadasu various phases of depiction of his devotion like, Autsukya (ardent desire), Nirveda (despondency), Dainya (miserability), Atmanigarhana (self-criticism), Amarsha or Rosha (impatience), Vitarka (doubtfulness about the existence of the deity), Sraddha-Viswasa (absolute faith), Narmam (intimate chat with the Lord as with a friend), Swayogyata (self-appraisal), Sodhana (search), Bodhana (spelling out maxims about one's own experiences in life), Mangalasanana (Blessing the Lord) Kritajnata (expressing gratitude to the Lord), etc.

Examples of various categories of Bhakti

- Santa Bhakti** Enough if one goes on meditating on Rama's divine name ("Sriramula Divyanama Smarana Cheyunchunna Chalu")
- Dasya Bhakti** Since a long time, I claim myself now to be a servant at the feet of Lord of Bhadrachalam ("Buhukalamunaku Bhadrachalaswami")
- Sakhya Bhakti** I shall not let you move a step further ("Adugu Dati Kadalanivvanu")
- Vatsalya Bhakti** Shall I go and call the old witch O baby Krishna ("Buchivani Piluvaboduna Gopalakrishna")
- Vaira Bhakti** You are incapable of achieving anything, O Rama ("Rama, Nichetemi Kaduga")
- Nama Mahima** Rama's name is life ("Ramanamame Jivanamu")
We won't forget, won't forget Rama's name
("Sriramanamam maruvam maruvam")

Beyond words, O Rama is the sweetness of your
name

("Sri Ram Ni Nama Memi Ruchira")

Personal Solicitations

O archer Rama come to protect us ("Kodanda Rama Adukona
Rammu")

O illustrious scion of Ikshvakus, why don't you respond
to my call ("Ikshvaku Kula Tilaka Ikananina Palukava")

O dear Rama, what is my crime ("Emira Rama Navalla
Neramu")

Pray excuse all my indiscretions ("Na Tappulanni
Kshamimpumu")

Where have you gone Rama? ("Etu Botivo Rama")
How can I bear with patience ("Elagu Taludu")

Arguing with the Lord

How did Parvati meditate upon a name of one who was
discourteous!

("Adarana Leni Namamantra Pathana Adrija Yemani Chesenu")

Why don't you have an intimate chat with me O master-
bowman?

("Muchchataina Adavemira Kodandapani")

I was cheated not knowing earlier ("Teliyaka Ne Mosapoti")

Philosophical songs with a didactic air

The detached attitude is very well suited
("Bhalira Vairagya Mento Bagai Yunnadi")

Whatever past deeds ("Ekkadi Karmamulu")

However many past births ("Ennennijanmamulu")

O mind, don't forget ("Manasama Neevu Maruvakumi")

All is pervaded by Rama ("Anta Ramanayam")

Description of many manifestations of Vishnu in various incarnations as depicted in the Bhagavatam can be found in a long lyrical ballad called 'Dandakam'—starting with 'Pahi Ramaprabho'. It is a 'Gadya Prabandham' of Sangita Sastra, belonging to the particular variety, to be sung in Khanda Gati or the Tala with five beats. There is another Gadya Prabandham of Ramadasu called Choornika, to be sung without any *tala* and the twenty-four sacred names of the Lord are found therein.

Music of Ramadasu

It is earnestly hoped that the readers will kindly bear with, if the author of this monograph suddenly chooses in this chapter, to divert to First person.

I had the privilege of listening to the Kirtanas of Ramadasu, a little more than half a century ago, when I was a tiny tot, through a paternal uncle of mine, my (maternal) grandmother, my maternal cousin a week-end visiting reciter of traditional devotional lyrics, a Unani Doctor neighbour who was a muslim and an all-round actor who could do the roles of Ramadasu, Kabir and Tanisha on the stage on different occasions. Besides these people, mendicants and folk-singers called 'Dasaris' carrying a lampstand, a tambura and a pair of castenuts in hand to keep rhythm were frequent performers of Ramadasu's Kirtanas. Any seasonal festival, besides the annual birthday and wedding celebrations of Rama, taking place in our Zamindari township in the coastal districts of Andhra must have not less than two to three groups singing parties doing Bhajana Goshthi of the Kirtanas with straps of jingling bells tied to the feet of the singers while dancing round and round, each party consisting of not less than 10 to 15 members. These singers belong particularly to those communities engaged in agricultural labour and various types of artisans of the social structure of those days.

The most popular songs of Ramadasu, heard in those recitals could be counted up to two or three dozens.

The first lines of some of them and the Ragas are :

1. "Garudagamana Rara": Kalyani
2. "Paluke Bangaramayena": Ananda Bhairavi
3. "Takkurvedi Manaku": Sowrashttra
4. "Tarakamantram": Dhanyasi
5. "Eeterugananu Daya Choochedavo": Nadanamakriya
6. "Srirama Ni Nama Memi Ruchira": Pantuvarali

Nearly half a dozen publications, each called *Ramadasu Charitra*, but written by six different authors used to be in circulation and they used to contain the songs of Ramadasu, linked up into musical narratives in the form of a Yakshagana or a Harikatha. The authors were Yadavadasu, Singaridasu or Thirukkadaiyur Krishnadasu, Ayyagari Veerabhadra Rao, Balaji Dasu, and Pentapati Sarveswara Rao. The last two authors called their works *Bhadrachala Ramadasu* and *Bhakta Ramadasu* respectively.

It always happened that Ramadasu's songs got mixed with the compositions of each author of the Yakshagana or Harikatha, out of which, those songs with the *nom de-plume* of the author 'Ramadasu' or the 'Mudra' of the dedicatee deity 'Rama' in the last stanza invariably and any other stanza once in a way. So, it proved a difficult task for research scholars, if any, for collecting the genuine compositions of Ramadasu.

"Ennaganu Ramabhajana" the Kirtana in the Raga Pantuvarali is the only Kirtana that was exclusively included in the concerts of Karnataka music. Excepting in the Sankirtana Goshthis conducted either in the temple campus or near the household-deity, the bulk of Ramadasu's Kirtanas used to be kept away from Karnataka music concerts until recently. The reason perhaps for this might be the paucity of opportunities in the traditional rendition of those Kirtanas for showing off the classicism and scholarship of the concert singer. Their setting in uncomplicated rhythmic patterns and straight appeal of devotion was suited more for the congregational rendering of Bhajans. But, they too have a respectable place in the concerts as well, like the Utsava Sampradaya Kirtanas and the Divya Nama Sankirtanas of the composers like Tyagaraja. In fact, the latter-mentioned compositions of Tyagaraja were the outcome of inspiration he got from the compositions of Ramadasu.

I could locate 100 to 108 songs of Ramadasu from the Yakshaganas. My friend Manchala Jagannatha Rao could locate and collect notations for 137 songs of Ramadasu. T.V. Nagarajani, a research scholar of M. Phil in the Central University of Hyderabad extended her recognition to nearly 190 and odd; although, her very precise and justifiable analysis of all Ramadasu's lyrics into three groups namely those composed before going to the jail (37), those composed during the jail life (64) and those composed after release from the jail (31) all told, bring the total only to 132.

"Paluke Bangara Mayena" in Ananda Bhairavi and "Emayya

Rama" in Kambhoji have been popularised by Vidwans like Bala Muralikrishna and Chinna Satyanarayana and Nedunuri Krishnamurthy respectively during recent decades.

At the time of my writing 'Vaggeyakara Charitram' I could locate about 20 traditional Ragas of Karnataka Music and about half a dozen Ragas of Hindustani influence or import (as associated with Kirtanas of Ramadasu) :

<i>Karnataka</i>		<i>Hindustani</i>
1. Ananda Bhairavi	11. Kalyani	1. Kapi
2. Ahiri	12. Sankarabharanam	2. Kamas
3. Varali	13. Punnagavarali	3. Kanada
4. Dhanyasi	14. Pantuvarali	4. Darbaru
5. Sowrashttra	15. Gaulipantu	5. Begada
6. Yadukula Kambhoji	16. Bilahari	6. Yamunakalyani
7. Kambhoji	17. Mukhari	
8. Saindhavi	18. Saveri	
9. Surati	19. Asaveri	
10. Nadanamakriya	20. Navroju	
	21. Nilambari	

Manchala Jagannatha Rao could acquire and edit notations for 137 songs of Ramadasu.

Most of his lyrics, like his verses, were subjective dialogues of his entered into with his deity.

The musical structure of a Kirtana is to bring out the emotional content of the subjective feelings of the devotee depicted in the song. Prof. P. Sambamurthy says that "Ramadasu is a link between the Kirtana composers of the earlier period like Annamacharya, Narayanateertha and the Kriti composers of the later period." He further states that "the soul-stirring nature of his song, the depth of feeling, underlying theme, their sweet and melodious music and the human touch, have all an irresistible appeal."

Ramadasu never intended exposition of the idea of the Raga in the musical structure of his Kirtanas. To Tyagaraja music or melody itself was Rama—but to Ramadasu, Rama himself was music. Tyagaraja composed for the concert halls, while Ramadasu composed as it were for the Bhajana Goshthis (congregational singing) in the temple yards and popular fairs and festivals. His songs actually made the participants forget themselves in devotion and self abandon while participating in the Goshthis.

Annamacharya's Sankirtanas excel all others in lyrical and poetical brilliance. His erotic songs containing philosophy and philosophic songs containing erotic symbolism make him unique—they are the models for all Sankirtanas. Kshetraraya's Padams were not subjective but, portrayals of love-talk, romantic dialogues in various dramatic situations. But Ramadasu's Kirtanas were spontaneous dialogues of a destitute devotee with his Supreme Lord. He never intended his creations to illustrate rules of rhetoric. Music and song were only to serve as means to make his heart reach his deity along with those who gather around him. Sincerity, simplicity, and sharing the joy of devotional communion with the masses were the main tones of his music. Many Kirtanas of Ramadasu have dramatic dialogue form in them, which is quite distinct from the known forms of Yakshagana Daruvus, specifically being subjective dialogues of a devotee in actual misery addressing his deity.

More than half a dozen Kirtanas of Ramadasu are set in the Raga Ananda Bhairavi which appears to be the composer's favourite Raga.

Yadavadasu, the earliest of biographers of Ramadasu, a native of Bhadrachalam of the 18th century was the author of another well-known medieval Yakshagana entitled 'Gerudachala Yakshaganam' depicting the love story of Lord Narasimha and Chenchulakshmi, the latter being the daughter of a tribal chief. This work was dedicated to Sri Rama of Bhadrachalam. Whatever original Kirtanas of Ramadasu could be identified as such, do not have any semblance to the usual Daruvus of Yakshaganas like, Tripata, Artha Chandrika, Jampe, Kandartha but they have the combined form of the Bhajan Kirtana and the dramatic dialogue as mentioned above. Choornika and Dandakam forms of Gadya Prabandhamis which fell under the category of temple music, also are found among the devotional lyrical compositions, since they carry the Mudras of 'Ramadasu' and Bhadrachala Rama. Choornika is recited in the style of Alapti without Laya, but with Ghana and Naya styles of singing depending upon the heavy Sanskritic or the light Desi type of literary passages in the solicitation to the Lord. Dandakam is recited in the same manner but to the accompaniment of percussion instruments.

The only version of 'Ramadasu Charitra' that is available with me, from which I am able to locate nearly 108 songs of Ramadasu is that of Narasimha Dasu. On close scrutiny one of the 'Tohara'

metres containing linking narratives in between the lyrics of 'Ramadasu' towards the end of the 'Ramadasu Charitra' it is mentioned that it was compiled or compered by Vara Ramadasu and propagated by Narasimhadasu. I take it that this pair of the devoted biographers of Ramadasu were influenced by the Yakshagana of Yadavadasu and they prepared their own script taking the bulk of lyrics, assumed to be those of Ramadasu.

There being more than half a dozen Sanskrit Kirtanas with the Mudras of Ramadasu and Bhadradi, and these Kirtanas in verbal style as well as in the possibilities of musical structures have a likeness to the lyrical and musical styles of Narayanateertha's *Krishna Leela Tarangini* the presentation of the Yakshagana of Ramadasu Charitra must have a similarity with that of Narayanateertha's *Krishna Leela Tarangini*, i.e. the Bhajana Nataka Paddhati, wherein the *dramatis personae* get themselves engaged in group singing at the end of every episode.

Influence of Ramadasu on Later Composers

Yadavadasu of Bhadrachalam, the earliest of the biographers of Ramadasu among the authors of the Yakshaganas on Ramadasu, must be the nearest later composer influenced by him.

Perhaps Yadavadasu created his Garudachala Yakshaganam in his young age, while, he would have completed the Yakshaganam on Ramadasu in the later part of his own life. The Yakshagana of Yadavadasu, spread to all parts of South India the story and message of Ramadasu as a messenger of the Lord, who built a temple for him and taught the people, the message of faith in the absolute Lord! Another half century later, i.e. by the end of the 18th century, the call of this message was taken up by one Thirukkadaiyur Krishnadas of Chittoor district and a pair of admirers in Raja Thumu Narasimhadasu of Guntur and Vara Ramadasu of Kanchi, both householders and engaged in daily Sankirtana Goshthis in their respective native places, and going on pilgrimage to sacred shrines of repute to pay their homage.

Sometime between 1820 and 1830 Narasimhadasu was on a pilgrimage to famous shrines of South India, during which he met Saint Tyagaraja in Madras. Vara Ramadasu of Kanchi joined him (Narasimhadasu) when both continued their pilgrimage upto Bhadrachalam. They must have got the inspiration through the Yakshaganas of Yadavadasu of Bhadrachalam and Thirukkadaiyur Krishnadasu of Chittoor District and reached the place where Ramadasu built a temple. They stayed there for some months conducting Sankirtana Goshthis, and worshipping Sri Rama. From there they went to Golkonda and Hyderabad, to get the original order of Tanasha reissued.

Vara Ramadasu of Kanchi appears to be a remarkable composer, that imbibed exactly the same style of Ramadasu and perhaps would have completed his *Ramadasu Charitra* during his stay at Bhadrachalam, along with Narasimhadasu and for ages, his songs

and music got mixed with those of Ramadasu. His companion (Thumu) Narasimhadasu later became well-known in the coastal Andhra districts, as a composer of Sankirtanas. Being a well-to-do man and a retired Divisional officer, he was most popular as a very pious organiser of Bhajan Goshthi. A number of Kirtanas of Thumu Narasimhadasu in currency among the Goshthi, having the same first line as those of Ramadasu and music, but with different verbal structure of the stanzas.

It has been stated in an earlier chapter that Lord Sadasiva's initiation to his consort Parvati in the meditation of 'Tarakamantra' was followed by his narration to her the story of Ramayana in the form of an allegory with a spiritual import to the characters. This became the 'Adhyatma Ramayana' the authorship of which was accredited to sage Vasishtha. This depiction roused the Prince of Ayodhya's name to the highest position of the Absolute God. Ramadasu's story and the propagation of this philosophy through Bhajana Goshthi throughout South India lead in the 18th century to the origin of 'Adhyatma Ramayana' in a chain of narrative Kirtanas in Telugu in flowery and lilting language and sublime forms of Kirtanas in a fresh and new trend based on the traditional Ragas and Talas. The author of this work Munipalle Subrahmanya Kavi was patronised by the Zamindars of Kalahasti in Chittoor District. This narrative form of Kirtana is quite distinct from that of the Kirtanas of Ramadasu. The former is sophisticated in the structures of both music and lyric while Ramadasu's Kirtanas are simple and straight extempore expression.

By the end of the 18th century when Tyagaraja was in his thirties, he must have got acquainted with the story and the Kirtanas of Ramadasu through Yakshagana/Harikatha compilations of Yadavadasu and Thirukkadaiyur Krishnadasu. When Tyagaraja reached his middle age, in 1825-30 he was paid a visit by Thumu Narasimhadasu and perhaps Vara Ramadasu at Vina Kuppayyar's house in Madras. It was only later in 1832, when, they visited Bhadrachalam and for some months propagated the Sankirtana Goshthi and 'Ramanama'—when they might have compiled their version of *Ramadasu Charitra*.

But, nobody can underestimate the great influence of Ramadasu on Tyagaraja in the structure of Utsava Sampradaya and Divya Nama Sankirtanas of the latter, let alone the highest regard he had for the former for his absolute devotion.

Just like the Kirtanas of Ramadasu, most of Tyagaraja's Kritis and Kirtanas are his subjective dialogues with Lord Sri Rama.

In the well-known Kirti 'Ksheerasagara Sayana' in Raga Devagandhari, Tyagaraja tells Rama that he had heard about the release of courageous Ramadasu from imprisonment by the grace of the Lord.

("Dhirudau Ramadasu Bandhamu Tirchinadi Vinnanu Rama")

In the 'Saranga Raga', in his Kirti, 'Emidova Balkuma' (what is the way out, tell me,) Tyagaraja says 'If I act like Ramadasu (by spending unauthorised wealth for raising a temple, etc.) mother Sita (who is verily the goddess of wealth and well-being, Lakshmi) would chide me.' ("Ramadasuvale Naite Sitabhama Mandalinchu")

In 'Kaligiyunte' his Kirti in Raga Kiravani, Tyagaraja esteems Ramadasu along with the mythological pantheon of devotees and godmen like Narada, Prahlada, etc. ("Bhagavatagresarulagu Narada, Prahlada, Parasara Ramadasulu Baguga Sri Raghu Ramuni Padamulu Bhakti Chesina Recti").

In 'Todi Raga' in his Kirti 'Brindavana Lola' Tyagaraja terms himself as 'Ramadasa dasa'. "Praised by Tyagaraja who is the page of Ramadasu."

The way Tyagaraja paid special homage to Ramadasu in a separate verse in his opera 'Prahlada Bhakti Vijayamu' speaks for itself.

Kaliyugamuna Vara Bhadra Chalamuna Nelakonna Rama
Chandruni Pada Bhaktulanella Varudanandagi
Velasina Sri Ramadasu Vinutintu Madini!

I praise in my mind Ramadasu, who is the best of all the devotees seeking the sacred feet of Ramachandra revealing himself in the choicest Bhadrachalam in the Kali Age.'

If we take the musical structure of the three or four Kirtanas of Tyagaraja set in the same Sahana Raga, 'Vandanamu Raghu Nandana' is in the simple soul-stirring traditional pattern of Divya Nama Sankirtana while each of the remaining Kritis like 'Eevasudha' and 'Giripai Nelakonna' are set in more ornamental and sophisticated pattern of the same 'Sahana'. That is why we find the

model for the 'Sahana' setting of 'Vandanamu' in one of Ramadasu's Kirtanas containing his solicitation to mother Sita from the prison, starting with the words 'Janaka Tanaya'—partly quoted with translation in an earlier chapter.

Some involuntary and some conscious echoes of Ramadasu's songs can be found in Tyagaraja's Kritis as sampled below: (Verbal echoes)

"Why don't you listen to my solicitation?"

Ramadasu: Namoralakimpavemayya (Arabhi)

Tyagaraja: Namoralakimpavemi (Devagandhari)

Ramadasu: Naraharini Nammaka Narulanu Nammeti

Narajanma Mideruna? (Janjhooti)

(Having no faith in the Lord, if one lays faith in humans, will human life be fulfilled?)

Tyagaraja: Nalinalochana Nivugaka Anyula Namma

Narajanma Mideruna? (Madhyamavati)

(O lotus eyed one, if one lays faith in anyone else other than you, will human life be fulfilled?)

Ramadasu: Grahagatulaku Veruva Bomu, Makugaladu

Daivanugraha Balamu (Yadukula Kombhoji)

(We are not afraid of the transits of planets—

We are blessed with the strength of God's grace!)

Tyagaraja: Grahabalamemi Sri Ramanugraha Balame Balamu!

(Revagupti)

(Of what strength are the planets

Our strength is derived from Sri Rama's grace!)

Although, it is not chronological, we may now recall a lyric composer of different type (Erotic God Love) or (Madhura Bhakti) Kshetrappa, who was a predecessor to Tyagaraja by a century and odd years, but very much a senior contemporary of Ramadasu! He visited both Golkonda and Bhadrachalam around the years 1650-55, when Ramadasu was just a young Tehsildar at Bhadrachalam. It is quite possible that Kshetrappa might have been received with temple honours at the sanctum of Sri Rama in Bhadrachalam, and Gopanna would have been the local Qutub Shahi Government official receiving him, since Kshetrappa had just won a contest for composing lyrics in the court of King Abdulla, and was visiting

Bhadrachalam for thanksgiving with an aura of the success and the honours bestowed by the Sultan. It may not be out of place here, to recall from my former writings on Kshetrappa, that Tupakula Venkata Krishna, the Chief of Chengi and a political adventurer of the period, a friend and admirer of Kshetrappa, had left his former friends, the Nayak kings of Madura and Tanjavur and joined the Qutub Shahi service under the hegemony of the Mirjumla Mohammad Sayyad and got Kshetrappa invited to Sultan Abdulla's court. It is the same Mirjumla who inducted Gopanna as Tehsildar.

Since Bhadrachalam happens to be near Parnasala on the river Godavari where Rama's consort Sita was abducted when they were in exile, Kshetrappa who himself was experiencing pangs of separation from his beloved, was reminded of Rama's pangs of love.

Rama Rama Pranasakhi

(Raga Ahiri or Bhairavi)

'Blessed be Rama having been separated from his beloved wife how could he endure?

Thinking of the lotus-eyed one, my heart gets torn, with grief; what am I to say alas! Blessed

* * *

When his gem of a woman was away

Were not his eyes filled with tears?

With a vicious type of love would he have

Put up with courage and will?

My chum, who beckoned me with passion

Calling me Muvvagopala, had hood-winked me,

Alas! what am I to do?

Sarangapani, a composer of the 18th century and a Vidya-dhikari in the Kalahasti Zamindari ruled by the Velama Kings of Damerla family in Chittoor District, was a prolific composer of both the categories of Ramadasu and Kshetrappa combined into one individual type! He composed pure devotional lyrics like Ramadasu and erotic lyrics like Kshetrappa. He was a devotee of Venugopala.

We have here, a couple of examples of echoes of Ramadasu's type in the lyrics of Sarangapani:

- Ramadasu:* Ramuni Namam Maruvam Maruvam
(We won't forget, won't forget Rama's name.)
- Sarangapani:* Venugopaluni Viduvamu-mari
Verokani Peru Nuduvamu.
(We won't give up Venugopala and
would not utter any other God's name.)
- Ramadasu:* Manasama Nivu Maravakuma
(O mind you don't forget)
- Sarangapani:* Manasa Chapalamu Manava
(O mind don't you give up fickleness.)

Ramadasu lived a life of a dedicated devotee of Lord Sri Rama, which dedicated life had some fundamental habits or routine acts of life full of austerities, which he was always maintaining even prior to his entering Government service. These were meditation of the Lord's name, in the manner of a chant and penance; writing the Lord's name (Ramakoti) at least one million times, of course not at a stretch, doing the Sankirtana Seva at home and conducting community congregations in the temple-yards; arranging feasts for the Vedic Brahmins and poor people and mendicants; performing Nagara Sankirtana along with Lord's devotees in which food materials etc. are collected in a sack of cloth (Uncha Vritti), simple living and high thinking and composing lyrics and verses on the deity.

We know from the biographies of some of the saint composers, mentioned above like Sarangapani, Tyagaraja, Alluri Venkataradri Swami, Parankusadasu, Thumu Narasimhadasu, Vara Ramadasu and a host of others that they followed the pattern of life as set by Ramadasu. We know from the life of Tyagaraja that he completed ninety crores of Ramakoti. He as well as Sarangapani performed Uncha Vritti and the latter went on depicting the do's and don'ts to be observed by a devotee while going on Uncha Vritti.

The Finale

(*Tarli Podamu Chala Daya Unchandi*
Ika Mallijanmalaku Ramu Madilo Unchandi)
(Punnagavarali)

We shall be marching ahead
We shall be marching ahead,
We won't be returning for any further life;
Pray retain your grace
of remembrance for ever!!

We shall. . . .

As devotees on either side
go on singing Bhajans;
Soon knowing the mystic path
where the three rivers meet;
As it were the 'sword' in hand
—at once revealing the truth
that "the Absolute is I"—
Cutting the ropes of passion
of mundane life at the root!!

We shall. . . .

* * *

By the grace of Rama of Bhadradi
with the name of Ramadasu gaining preferment,
We shall be marching ahead
We shall be marching ahead
We won't be returning for any further life;
Pray retain your grace
of remembrance for ever!!

The above exit song, is depicted to have been sung by Ramadasu on the day he was marching ahead to heaven, with a chosen band of devotees flanking on either side. It contains the

Lord, leaving his mortal coil, amidst, rows of devotees, sonorously praising the Lord, in a Sankirtana Goshthi. According to Prof. Sambamurti, Thumu Narasimhadasu of Guntur was also present among the admirers and devotees who were present on the fifth day of dark fortnight of Pushya, at Tiruvaiyar.

We find Tyagaraja, throughout his life was having an attitude of complete surrender to Lord Sri Rama saying 'Tava Dasoham Dasarathe' (O Dasarathi, I am your servant). The same attitude of complete surrender was maintained by Ramadasu also. In the middle of his life, Tyagaraja's prevarication between 'Dwaitam' (Dualism) and 'Adwaitam' was indicated in his Kriti Dwaitamu Sukhama, Adwaitamu Sukhama' (Where do you find solace—in dualism or monism). The saint answers in the Anupallavi "Chaitanyama, Vinu Sarvasakshi Vistaramuganu Telpumunato" (O all pervading pure consciousness tell me vividly). When the Lord in his capacity as pure consciousness pervades into everything and everywhere Tyagaraja would perhaps like us to have the answer in modified monism—Visishta Adwaita.

That is why, we find in the 'exit' song of Ramadasu also mentioned in the beginning of this chapter the maxim 'Soham' (the absolute is I) describing the attitude of Saint Ramadasu in the last phase of his life.

We come to know from the narrative link up in the *Ramadasu Charitra*, that Ramadasu reached the peak of the hill of Bhadra, singing the exit song, when heavenly beings came on an air-borne vehicle and took Ramadasu to the Lord's abode.

Perhaps the same incident as above, depicted by the Yakshagana biographers was interpreted by a rationalist historian, to be suicide committed by the saint, by falling into the river Godavari, right from the top of the hill. The heart of the river or the top of the hill may not be far from the heaven, for an individual elevated soul wanting to get lost in the infinity.

Thumu Narasimhadasu Charitra, the biography of one of the duo-devotees mentioned above, depicts the end of the life of the devotee, by getting wantonly drowned in the flood of the river Godavari, when his boat (was allowed to have) capsized along with several admirers and disciples, engaged blissfully in singing the praise of Lord Sri Rama.

It is not out of place to recall here, about the end of the incarnation of the Superman Sri Rama, the King of Ayodhya, by

walking into the floods of the river Sarayu, when an air-borne vehicle from Vaikuntha came and carried Sri Rama, to Vaikuntha where he turned into the Supreme God Vishnu.

It appears to be a time-honoured custom, in societies, for 'reaching the absolute' or 'facing the 'finale' of life' in such odd procedures, in respect of certain high-minded souls, after the fulfilment of their life's mission

The end and the beginning meet in the infinity, when the 'Absolute' in the 'I' reaches the 'Absolute' on the 'high'.

The absolute truth as revealed in the last song of Saint Tyagaraja composed on the last day of his life's journey (quoted partly below) is the same as that revealed in the most popular song of Saint Ramadasu, 'Anta Ramamayam'—All is radiant with Rama (the last but one song presented in the last chapter).

Paramatmudu Velige Muchchata . . . (In Raga Vagadhiswari)

In Hari, in Hara, in angels and the best of human beings,
In the myriads of the galactic egglike universes,
The way the supreme soul radiates Himself,
May you experience and understand well!

English Rendering of Select Verses from Dasarathi Satakam

1. *Gurutaramaina Kavyarasa Gumbhana*
Can the evil-minded people enjoy
even after amazement at the poetic content
heavy with aesthetic structural nuances?
Moonstones get melted at the beams of moonlight,
but, the hard rocks of the Vindhya cannot be moved to
slide, O Dasarathi, the ocean of compassion!
2. *Daruna Patakabdhiki Sadu Badabagni*
The eternal volcanic fire
that scorches the sea of severe sins;
the rain of heavenly nectar
that extinguishes the extensive forest-fire of life's miseries;
the sharp-edged axe that cuts
the terrific wilderness of endless discredited faiths and
customs;
is your "Tarakamantram", the chosen name,
the ferry navigating to the shores of salvation
O Dasarathi, the ocean of compassion!
3. *Sri Rama Sita Gaga*
While Lakshmi comes down as Sita,
Your retinue of Vaikuntha takes the place of the Vaishnava
priests.
Viraja flows as the Godavari,
and the spirit of Vaikuntha pervades the Bhadra Hill,
You are there as Vishnu, the giver of new lease of life,
O Dasarathi, the ocean of compassion!
4. *'RA' Kalushambulella*
"Ra" pushes off all the pollutions;

"Ma" acts as the gateway that is immediately closed;
 in fact, people with wisdom don't find a way
 to take those two letters with all devotion,
 otherwise, how would a series of calamities
 attack the people of the world,
 O Dasarathi, the ocean of compassion!

5. *Gaddari Yogi Hrit Kamala Gandha*

O Passionate youthful bee
 enjoying the lotus-like hearts of mature saints,
 O Pretty parrot, showing off coquettish pranks
 in the cage of embrace of Sita, the daughter of Mother Earth,
 O treasure-trove of salvation, O Rama,
 Why don't you come today,
 O Dasarathi, the ocean of compassion!

6. *Kaliyuga Martya Koti*

Is it your way of abstaining yourself
 from being seen by the crores of humans of the Kali era;
 don't you carry on the vow for saving your devotees?
 Why don't you respond to my call,
 extended, when I am about to sink
 in the ocean of terrific calamity;
 is it your forgetfulness?
 may be, humans cannot comment,
 but don't you remember the solitary confinement of Sita,
 O Dasarathi, the ocean of compassion!

7. *Paoamulondiveela*

When one is to face the fruits of sins,
 in adversity caused by war, snakes, fear of ghosts, fever and
 pestilence,
 you and your brother flank on either side,
 nullify the grief of calamity,
 and save those who stick on to your apron strings,
 O Dasarathi, the ocean of compassion!

8. *Vonakari Chikke Mainasaku*

The wild elephant got maddened
 by the perfume of his own body;

the fish got spoiled owing to
 his own greed to swallow;
 the snake became enchanted
 by his own desire to hear;
 the deer got eyesore;
 the bee got suffocated
 having overstayed in fragrance;
 is it within anybody's power
 to win over the five senses;
 it is for you to discover five weapons
 O Dasarathi, the ocean of compassion!

9. *Varija Patramandidina Vari Vidhambuna*

If a man acts like water placed on a lotus leaf,
 lives in day-today life, like a sod which moves in mud
 without carrying a bit of it;
 and goes about discerning good;
 Could he not attain the absolute,
 O Dasarathi, the ocean of compassion!

10. *Pattithi Bhattararya Guru Padamulu*

I have acquired the sacred pair of feet
 Of my preceptor, Bhattararya;
 donned the vertical lines of chalk and saffron;
 bagged the most powerful esoteric chant (Taraka)
 could show the way out to the sentinels of Death;
 could push out all the series of sins
 having concentrated thoughts on your sacred
 pair of Lotus feet, O Dasarathi, the ocean of compassion!

English Rendering of Select Kirtanas of Ramadasu

Etiruga Namu Daya Chuchedavo (in Raga Nadanamakriya)

How do you propose to favour me with your grace

O Rama!

the most illustrious son of the solar line!

Would it be within my reach to swim across

the ocean of human life, O Rama, of lotus like looks!

The joy of Raghu's clan, beloved of Sita,

the protector of those who take refuge in you!

Rama, the abode of mercy, the darling son of a praise-worthy
mother!

It is a long time since I declared with fondness

that you were my Lord, keep me your chosen subject!

Due to my ignorance, I committed many cruel deeds,

Rama, do not count my crimes!

Remove my abject poverty, the doyen of all Gods O Rama!

The teachers and their teachings have declared that you are

the teacher

and the God of my heart, O Rama,

I've become so cruel roaming about that I unlearned their

teachings O Rama!

In cosmic dance, you are revealed as the Lord of the cosmic egg

consisting of myriads of universes,

While struggling with adversity, when one praises you,

he is blessed with Supreme Bliss!

Heavenly beings like Indra and Brahma,

Stand before you with folded hands,

Most effulgent one, with sublime attributes

O Rama, the Lord of the Bhadra Hill!

the most praised one, by Indra of heaven, as patron of your

devotees

O Prince of Ayodhya, Son of Dasaratha, worshipped by the
humble,
Promise freedom from fear. O Rama, Son of Dasaratha and
descendant of Raghu!!

Takkuvemi Manaku Ramudu Okkadunda Varuku
(in Raga Sowrashttra)

Is there any want unfulfilled
since Rama is on our side;
When the Lord is standing by us,
so near, in front of us, raising the discuss!
Is there any want. . .

When one who killed Somaka, the plagiarist of the Vedas—
is our partisan, in the incarnation of the fish!
Is there any want. . .

When ours is the grace of the great tortoise
who raised the Manthara hill to help the heavenly hoards!
Is there any want. . .

When our protector is the incarnation of
the wild boar who killed the evil-minded Hiranyaksha!
Is there any want. . .

When there is the Lion-Man standing by us,
having seared away Hiranyakasipu into two halves!
Is there any want. . .

When the pigmy priestly boy is our Lord
who measured the earth and heaven infact!
Is there any want. . .

When on our side is the angry Brahmin
Parasurama who punished the Kshatriyas!
Is there any want. . .

When ours is the grace of Rama, the son of Dasaratha,
who punished the ten-headed Ravana!
Is there any want. . .

When our support is the mighty Balarama,
born on the earth in the Yadu's clan!
Is there any want. . .

When the graciousness is bestowed on us
that of Krishna who killed the tyrant Kamsa!
Is there any want. . .

When there is Kalki protecting us
the God who comes down in the Kali age,
When we remain with faith in the Lord Narayana
who protects ever his ardent devotees!

Is there any want. . .

Garudagamana Rara (in Raga Kalyani)

O Commuter on the eagle, come and save me with your grace!
Bereft of any shelter, I anchored on you,
Don't discriminate me, O Supreme Being!!

O Commuter. . .

Come soon as I call you, and protect me as I reflect on you!
That you are my prosperity and strength,
I have been dreaming aloud throughout my life!!

O Commuter. . .

Having your couch in the milky ocean,
O lotus-eyed one, the pet child of Dasaratha,
May you submerge me in milk or water,
I have fallen to your lot, may you not bide time any longer!!

O Commuter. . .

Why don't you come my Lord, why don't you save me?
I lay my faith in you as my sovereign, why don't you come
generous one!

Why are you so obstinate, the merciful Lord of Bhadra Hill,
Eliminating miseries, being the Lord of my heart of hearts,
Save Ramadasu!!

O Commuter. . .

Ennaganu Rama Bhajana (in Raga Pantuvarali)

Is there a greater thing to choose than to sing in praise of
Rama (with the masses)?
Meditate on Ramachandra and sing in his praise, O Mind!!

Is there. . .

Having tended a pet parrot
While training him with love, the art of speech,
When a young woman went on saying Rama, Rama, Rama,
Did not Lord Rama of Bhadradri
Fulfill her desires and bestow her with salvation

Is there. . .

I won't forget meditating on your name
even while dreaming, my darling father!!

Is your word. . .

I lay my faith in you my father
having heard of your compassion and commendation
for the devoted services rendered by
a squirrel rolling himself in sand!!

Is your word. . .

Having heard of your greatness on earth
of having turned a stone into a woman,
I lay my faith, with all my love,
in you, my darling father!!

Is your word. . .

What a length of time, I've extended my prayers to you
but your grace is not comparable even to a grain of sand!

Is your word. . .

Can I be obstinate with you, my father,
is not my status too low?

Is it not your benign title, the saviour of refugees,
show your mercy, the benefactor of Ramadasu of Bhadrachalam

Is your word. . .

Adaranaleni Nana Mantra Pathana Adrija Yemani
Chesera (in Raga Kalyani)

How did Parvati meditate on a name of one who was
discourteous?

If you really mean to be gladly gracious to me,
prove the same, speaking to me!!

How did. . .

How did Prahlada mistake your treacherous nature
to be that of a deliverer of destitutes?

How can a villain who sent away the most virtuous woman
to forest, be at all compassionate?

How did. . .

How could Brahma the Creator believe you to be the Almighty
and praise you?

How did Lakshmi appreciate your affair with other people's
consorts?

How did. . .

Were you not an adulterer, who chose

to eat from Sabari's foretasted fruit?

You can't be believed; you can't be called a God,
Whatever I say is true, Rama!!

How did. . .

I called you discourteous and spoke abusive words about
you,

Take it to be lispings words of your pet—child
but not as my petulance!

How did. . .

Show me your charming face
and save me, the Lord of Bhadra Hill,
Don't entertain enmity towards
Ramadasu, pray govern me with grace!

How did. . .

Adugudati Kadalaniiyyanu (in Raga Varali)

I shall not let you move a step further; and
leave you before you promise me protection
I roamed about seeking shelter and got tired!!
If the deadline passes off I may commit worst crimes

I shall not. . .

I shall not allow you to sit quiet
I won't be afraid, even if you are angered;
If you keep this in mind why should you hesitate?
I shall bind your delicate pair of feet
inside my heart's Lotus!!

I shall not. . .

If you go on putting off to another day
I am not going to stand in the way,
Please retrieve me off my sins, since
I served you as my only prop, and
if you keep yourself often away from me, I can't bear!!

I shall not. . .

Are you not having a title as the purifier of destitutes?
Can't you govern me as your own,
My Lord, even if I offer prayers to you as the ruler of the
world,

do you think I shall leave you even if your courtiers
come and solicit your audience?

I shall not. . .

O killer of demons, Lord of Sita, Lotus-eyed one,
jewel of devotees, if you don't bestow salvation upon
my poor self, I shall parade witness today and
win you over through an austere penance!!

I shall not. . .

O resident of Bhadrachalam, reclining on the serpentine
couch, and patron of devotees, if at all I give up
my affection for you, you can call me by any name
other than Ramadasu of Bhadrachalam!!

I shall not. . .

Emayya Rama Brahmendradulakunaina
(in Raga Kambhoji)

Is it possible, even for such divine beings
like Brahma and Indra to assess your enchantment?
You are praised by Siva, who could control his desires,
You are the abode of all that is good,
Your body is of blue hue like a lily,
O Rama, my dear father!!!

Is it possible. . .

Dasaratha thought you were his son
Sugriva took you for a friend,
The apes thought that you were a superman,
all the kings of the earth, served you as king of kings,
but they did not realise that you were
the deliverer of destitutes!!!

Is it possible. . .

The Pandavas treated you as a playmate,
Jarasandha and his group maintained enmity with you,
Kuchela knew you only as a man of riches,
O Lotus-eyed one, they could not serve you properly!!

Is it possible. . .

People thought you were an ordinary man,
Yadavas took you for their chief,
the cowherd women viewed you as their lover,
O saviour of the elephant, resident of Bhadrachalam
none of them could place you to be
the supreme soul of Ramadasu!!

Is it possible. . .

Anta Ramamayam—Ee Jugam
(in Raga Varali)

All is radiant with Rama, all this world is radiant with Rama!!
Inside the heart, there is the soul that is Rama,
he works all wonders in endless forms!!

All is. . .

The sun and the moon, the angels and the stars,
the oceans and the masses of the people of the earth!!

All is. . .

The eggs that lay eggs, the embryos that divide
themselves and multiply,
the galactic universes and the pivotal creative forces,
the rivers, wildernesses and various species of animal life
all known acts of austerity and scriptures and sciences!!

All is. . .

The eight directions, and the primordial python,
the eight "vasus", and the six internal enemies,
The "Tarakanama" that fulfils the desires of
Courageous Ramadasu of Bhadrachalam!!

All is. . .

Ramajogi Mandu Konare
(in Raga Kamas)

Why don't you buy the medicine of Rama's mendicant,
O you unenlightened people?

Why don't. . .

Why don't you mess with relish,
the medicine of Rama's mendicant
The medicine which banishes
all desires and angers out of bounds

Why don't. . .

The medicine that keeps under the spell of a word
passion, malice and greed,
the medicine that looks away from
the accrued undesirable actions

Why don't. . .

The medicine that pushes off the past deeds
that piled up like mountains of darkness,
the medicine that makes the unsurpassed devotees

meditate ever upon the name of the Lord

Why don't...

The medicine that makes one

attain salvation on the hill of Bhadra

the medicine that is cherished by

the kind-hearted Ramadasu with sincere devotion

Why don't...

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