

## 22. The screen within

IT has become a convention to address such a gathering as "Brothers and Sisters" though no speaker is prepared to live up to the ideal that such a form of address implies. Many such empty formalities have entered into daily conduct. For example, it was mentioned now, that today is a 'red letter day' in the history of Thirupathi. Red letter days or days which have to be recorded in letters of gold are becoming quite cheap nowadays. Only four days, remember, deserve that honour: the day on which *Bhakthas* (devotees) gather to sing the glow of God; the day when the hungry are fed; the day when one meets a great sage; and the day on which *viveka* dawns on the individual. This day certainly falls in the category and so the secretary's description is, for once, right.

I like the work on which this Committee is engaged in; and so, I hurried to this place from Bangalore, where yesterday there was an *Akhanda bhajana* (uninterrupted singing of devotional songs) by many devotees. I like Saint Thyaagaraaja. My affection for him is not a matter of today. It is centuries old. And Thyaagaraaja and Thirupathi are also attached to each other. He prayed here that the screen hiding the Light that was inside him might be moved aside by the Lord's Grace. This Committee has been trying heroically to erect a place of worship for the Saint and a hall to celebrate the Thyaagaraaja Festival and to encourage the study and practice of his songs. I was sorry when I heard their report and listened to the journeys these people have made to distant places and the dribblets of donations they have received so far.

### **The means for collecting donations must be pure**

Though the report is evidence of their devotion and sacrifice, it reveals the false sense of values which people are developing nowadays. '*Dabbu*' (money) must also circulate like '*blooddu*' (blood)! Otherwise, that too will cause ill-health. There is no better method of using '*dabbu*' than for promoting *Bhakthi*, for then the entire system, individual and social, will benefit by it. If money is stored and not circulated, it will cause social swellings and the swellings may become boils and burst.

I learn that the Secretaries in their despair have thought of running a lottery for completing this structure. I am very much against this plan. A lottery attracts money from persons who are moved by greed; it holds out the attraction of quick riches and tempts men from a wrong angle. It will be tainted money to sell lottery tickets and distribute prizes and use the balance. Though it is for a good purpose, the means must be pure. Every one who gives even a paisa must give it out of real devotion and knowing that the paisa will be used for the building which he wants to get built. Do not receive money given half-heartedly or with some other motive than devotion. Then only will the building be worthy of Thyaagaraaja, who spurned the *nidhi* (wealth) offered by the Raajas of Tanjore and preferred the '*Sannidhi*' (proximity) of the Lord to the favours bestowed by human donors.

It is when diseases are rampant that doctors are needed more; and now, when the standard of moral conduct has fallen very much, people must turn to doctors like Thyaagaraaja who dispense the drug of Raamanaama in their own sweet palatable versions. All have equal right to share in the health-giving properties of that drug. In every linguistic group we have great *vaidhyas* (doctors) who treat this *bhavaroga* (disease of worldly existence) successfully: Suurdhas in Hindhi, Raamalingaswaamy in Thamil, and Purandharadhaasa in Kannada---to give just one example in each language.

### **Thyaagaraaja's songs impart *Aanandha***

Thyaagaraaja is in a class by himself, not because he sang in Thelugu, but because his songs are marked by the rare excellences of sincerity of devotion, poetical beauty and musical melody. The *raaga* (tune) suited to the emotional tempo of the idea elucidated in the song; the *thaala* (marking of time) quite appropriate to the movement of the meaning; the words which automatically dictate the *thaala* and guide the musician along the notes and the entire structure of the song helping the arousal of the *yogic* urge in the singer---such spontaneous mastery of the science and art of both music and *saadhana* is seldom found in the history of any language or country. He sang unaware, out of the fullness of his realisation,

and so the songs have that strange communicative force imparting *aanandha* to the singer as well as the listener.

Devaki gave birth to Krishna but the child was brought up by Yashodha in Brindhaavana. Yashodha had all the delight which the child could give. So too, the Tamil devotees of music have adopted Thyaagaraaja and have practised his songs more than the Telugu speaking people. They are the Yashodha of Thyaagaraaja. The Tamils specialise in *Raaga* and *Thaala* and they sing with scrupulous adherence to these. However, since they do not grasp the full meaning of the text, distortions painful to the Telugu ear often occur. More and more Telugu devotees have to learn to sing Thyaagaraaja *krithis* so that the nuances of the Telugu language in the songs may not be missed. After all, the *raaga*, *thaala* and the notations are to help in the more easy assimilation of the message contained in the song and in the transmission to the singer and the listener of the live emotion out of which the song arose in the first instance. This can happen only if the meaning is clear.

### ***Bhakthi* is the reservoir for all the temples**

Music as a vehicle of peace is universally popular; men, women and children of all lands are amenable to its subtle influence. Even animals and plants are susceptible to music. The Lord has said: *madbhakthaah yathra gaayantho, thathra thishthaami, Naaradha--*

"Where My devotees sing, there I seat Myself." So, the songs of Thyaagaraaja sung well and with the full realisation of the context and the meaning are excellent media for the spread of *Bhakthi*. That is why I came today, to encourage and bless this Committee which is celebrating Thyaagaraaja *Uthsavam* (festival). Three things combined to bring Me here: *iccha*, *shraddha* and *anukoolam*---their yearning, faith and conjunction of convenience!

The Thirumalai Thirupathi Devasthanam must foster the nurseries of *Bhakthi* wherever they are found. For, it is through *Bhakthi* that pilgrims flock to the Hill and pray before Venkateshwara; if the springs of *Bhakthi* dry up, with what are the minds of men to be watered? That is the reservoir for all the

temples of this land. So, the Devasthaanam can well come to the rescue of this Committee. It is doing the work of the Devasthaanam, by promoting the *krithis* (musical compositions) of Thyaagaraaja, which develop the spirit of devotion. He was Vaalmeeki himself come to the south of India to sing the glow of Raama and spread the *Raama thaaraka manthra*. He had always the welfare of the individual as well as the world in view. He had the experience of the constant presence of the Lord, so that Raama had to give him *dharshan* (audience) and come to his help a number of times. His *Bhakthi* made him ever at peace and joyful.

### **India is on the threshold of a new era**

Prayer and contrition are the two disciplines by which the mind can be cleansed of egoism and hatred; Thyaagaraaja is a fine example of how this can be done. He was ever engaged in the process of examining his words and deeds and evaluating them on the touchstone of *Bhakthi*. As the bee in search of honey wanders in search of the flowers, as the creeper clings fast and fondly to the tree lest it fall, as the rill runs to the river and the river rushes to the sea, Thyaagaraaja pined for Raama; his songs are pure fragrant blossoms of *Bhakthi* and therefore, immortal.

Every man seeks rest, but the dust of sense-craving accumulates on the mind, producing rust and threatening to 'burst' it; so he has to test it, off and on, keep it in perfect trim. To remove that rust, the music of Thyaagaraaja's *krithis* will be useful. Lay aside your cynicism for a while and listen to the captivating tunes and imbibe the sense. The science of spiritual culture and of the control of the mind has been developed and practised in this country for thousands of years; and that is why Indian civilisation has stood the shock of ages and the fury of typhoons that swept whole peoples off their feet. India is still green and fresh, on the threshold of a new era, under the leadership of her own ancient ideals.

The taste for good music has also gone nowadays with the coming of catchy lilts and croonings from the cinemas and the craze has spread for imitating them even in *bhajan*s! Sing the *krithis* of Thyaagaraaja in the classical *raagas* and I am sure they will have

great appeal. They are not mere *paatalu* (songs), they are *mootalu* (bundles) of precious stones; they take you along the *baatalu* (roads) to God. If Thyaagaraaja gets neglected, this Holy Hill will lose height, for the Hill stands so high because it rests on the pedestal of *Bhakthi*. Neglect of Thyaagaraaja can happen only when the people of this land become desperately worldly, deaf to the whisper of the God within.

*Thirupathi, Thyaagabrahma Uthsava, 11- 7-1957*