

Guru Prasthuti in the compositions of Sri Tyagaraja

- T. Chandrabhanu

Acharya devo bhava! We believe that guru is the manifestation of God himself. Our scriptures too proclaim that guru is the 'Parabrahmam.' To attain knowledge of any kind, whether spiritual, literary or artistic, one always requires the guidance of a guru.

Sri Tyagaraja, one of the brightest stars in the firmament of carnatic music, reached such great heights with the guidance of gurus. Tyagaraja was initiated into music by his mother who taught him songs of Purandaradasa, and it is understood that he considered him as Adiguru. Later he was under the tutelage of Sri Sonti Venkataramanayya, who exhausted what all he could teach, within a short span of one year. He recognized Tyagaraja as a prodigy, who required no guru at all. Tyagaraja was one of those minstrels of God, who is believed to have inherited the '*vakpatuthvam*' of Valmiki and the '*music*' of Narada.

It is said that Narada himself presented him with a book '*Swarnavam*.' Tyagaraja regarded Narada, the first and foremost Bhagavata-musician, as his greatest guru. He glorifies this Prince of teachers in his songs, '*Sri Naradamuni guru raya*' in Bhairavi, '*Narada guru swami*' in Darbar, '*Sri Narada nada*' in Kanada, and '*Vara Narada*' in Vijayasri.

In the song '*Sri Narada muni Guru raya*', Tyagaraja says that he is fortunate and blessed to have darshan of Sri Narada, and probably this is the effect of his tapas in previous births. He also says that as a result of his '*Guru seva*' he is rid of the bondage of samsara. He reiterates that Narada is the destroyer of ignorance and he is the sadguru who saved him.

Tyagaraja acknowledges the absolute need of a guru in his composition '*Guru leka etuvanti guniki teliyagabodu*' in Gowrimanohari. He says that without

the guidance of a sadguru, it is not possible to cut through the forest of mental illness or to acquire knowledge. A guru alone can protect a person by administering, with love, the medicine of spiritual initiation and enlightenment to keep the mind from attachments.

In another composition, '*Nee chithamu nischalamu*' in Dhanyasi, Tyagaraja elaborates on how a true guru purifies the mind of his disciple just as the '*sallaki*' seed cleanses the water from impurities. He also compares the guru with the Sun, in dispelling the mist of ignorance, and further says that the guru is the embodiment of auspiciousness, and is himself the highest to be attained. Tyagaraja concludes by proclaiming that he takes God himself as the guru in this world who protects the devotee.

Tyagaraja found a guide and guru in Hanuman, not only in Rama bhakti but also in music. This is evident from his well known composition '*Gitardhamu*' in Surati.

Sri Tyagaraja's guru bhakti was so intense and pure that he wished his samadhi to be built next to that of his guru, Sri Sonti Venkataramanayya.

It is imperative that all of us should strive to continue the '*Guru-sishya parampara*' in order to acquire knowledge and enlighten ourselves.

