

The Show Sans Sanctity Sri Thyagaraja Aradhana at Tiruvaiyaru

S.V.K.

Along the Tirumanjana Veedhi in Tiruvaiyaru walked a "parama bhagavata" on his Unchavritti rounds daily singing the praise of Sri Rama just over 150 years ago. His devotion compelled the prince of Ayodhya to come to his modest house to give darshan and steel his mind to steer his life's journey to divinity.

As one entered Thyagaraja's house - the mind was so conditioned on the aradhana day - one honestly felt how palaces and mansions were tinsels to the saintly soul. Equally, the enacted replay of Thyagaraja's Unchavritti gave the devotees gathered there anguish as to what music was to Thyagaraja and what it is today.

The mind of listeners following the Unchavritti turned on the eventful crises in Thyagaraja's life. Shorn today of all the pangs and poignancy through which the saint passed his years with only his songs to indicate his rock-like faith in Sri Rama, our being got so charged with emotion as to feel in every pulse his life's teaching that in all places and at all times we are in the hands of God.

The purpose of Thyagaraja's life was to educate posterity on the perception of the divine through music. He lived to proclaim that it is the heart that gives divinity to music. A visit to Tiruvaiyaru on the aradhana day confers two benefits - pleasure and enlightenment.

One comes closer to the atmosphere replete with Thyagaraja's works. To the

perceptive it deepens his insight into Carnatic music. A devoted musician - rare to be seen this year - can capture the flavour of Thyagaraja's time and hear the echoes of the sahyas of the Saint.

The very vitality of Tiruvaiyaru this year particularly - the 150th aradhana year - seemed to spring from its association with Thyagaraja. In fact, every house front along the narrow road leading to the *samadhi* was decorated with a picture of Thyagaraja in rangoli.

The Cauvery, full this year, flowed gently as in Thyagaraja's days. The spire of the temple was as inspiring as in his days. But the culture Sri Thyagaraja left to the world through his songs has disappeared as one witnessed the Unchavritti and goshti ganam. A walk down Tirumanjana Veedhi conjured up images of Thyagaraja's daily routine. The large gathering of devotees anxiously looked forward to vidwans singing in Thyagaraja fashion. But to their utter disappointment not a single vidwan or vidushi who later participated in the goshti ganam in the pandal, found it a part of homage to do the Unchavritti.

As one disgusted rasika sarcastically remarked the musicians thought that it was beneath their dignity as toprankers to sing on the road without proper TV coverage as at the pandal in the glare before the video cameras. The idol of saint composer was taken in procession with only emotionally surcharged music lovers covering the

distance from the saint's house to the samadhi.

The spiritual atmosphere prevailing in the pandal made each listener inhale it to reach the recesses of his heart. Nothing gross had a place in peoples thinking gathered to hear the vidwans render the pancharatnas in chorus. Many phenomena we consider sublime - the vault of heaven, the vast sea with breaking waves, the snow-capped Himalayas and Time to which there is no beginning and no end. These are God's gifts. But there is one human gift transcending all these and that is Sri Thyagaraja's Pancharatnas. In fact, Thyagaraja's stage is the minds of people. But how was this gift repaid with gratitude by the vidwans who sat in all external piety before the mikes?

The programme had a start with a nagaswaram recital with no alignment with sruti. As for the chorus of pancharatnas, less said the better. The poor mike arrangement added to the lustre-less singing. It was a picture of contrast. On the one side was the large concourse inside the pandal and overflowing on all sides brimming with deep devotion to satiate their thirst for the divine Pancharatnas and on the other the select vidwans in their prestigious enclosure literally paying lip-homage to Sri Thyagaraja.

Even at the best of times the Pancharatna session used to be an hour of discordant voices. And this year's was no exception. At the end disappointment was writ large on the faces of the over-expectant listeners.

The common comment of rasikas was that Thyagaraja is useful to vidwans to earn money here and abroad throughout the year, but not worthy of humble homage even on the aradhana day. Coming from them as it did deeply hurt by the musicians' palpable indifference in the pancharatna session and in many of the 10-15 minute concerts, it was really the voice of the listening devotees in agony. Thyagaraja reigns supreme only in the hearts of the truly devoted music-lovers and no matter how the vidwans conduct themselves, they would throng Tiruvaiyaru every year on the aradhana day.

The redeeming feature was the Veda parayanam and homam conducted in the house of Thyagaraja and in the premises next to it.

The Vedic chants, floral anjali and the very simplicity of the Vedic scholars taking part in the midst of deeply absorbed rasikas served to open our eyes as to why we cherish him as Thyaga Brahmam.

Courtesy: The Hindu