

NAAMASANKEERTHANAM FESTIVAL IN SRI KRISHNAGANA SABHA

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*Dhyaayan krudhe yajan yagnai: Threthayaam Dhwaparersayan
Yathaapnothi thathaapnothi Kalau Sangeerthya kesavam*

Says Bhagavatha Purana about the importance of Naamasangeerthanam in Kaliyuga. "Tapas" in Thretha Yugam, Yagnyam in Dhwapara Yugam and Sangeerthanam in Kaliyugam are kept as yuga dharma to attain mukthi.

Sri Chaithanya, Sants Thukaram, Namadev, Gnaneswar, Muktha Bai, Ekanathar, Kabir Das, Thulsi Das, Soor Das and Meera Bai propagated bhakthi in northern part of Bharath through Naama Sangeerthanam. Sri Chaithanya propagated Sri Geetha Govindam (Ashtapathi) of Sri Jayadeva Swamy across the country.

Dasa Kutas in Karnataka, Azhwars and Nayanmars in Tamilnadu, Talapaka Annamacharya in Andhra propagated bhakthi through Sangeerthanam.

Sri Bodhendra Saraswathi Swamigal, Thiruvissainallur Sri Sridhara Ayyaval and Marudhanallur Sathguruswamy are considered as the trinity of Dakshina Bharatha Sampradaya Naama Sangeerthanam. They lived in Cauvery delta near Kumbakonam in 17-18 centuries.

Sri Bodhendra Saraswathi Swamigal is the 58th pontiff of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam and he authored many books like Ramanaama rasodhayam and Rama Naama Rasaayanam to propagate Raamanaama Sidhdhaantham. He attained Jeeva Samaadhi at a place called Govindapuram near Kumbakonam. He is the contemporary of Sri Sadasiva Bruhmendra.

Sri Sridhara Ayyaval is an ardent Siva Bhaktha. To test his Bhakthi Lord Shiva appeared before him on a ceremony day in "Chandaala Roopa" asking food. Sri Ayyaval without even a second thought, offered food cooked for ceremony. When Brahmin priests insisted that Sri Ayyaval should take a bath at Holy River Ganges, water started over flowing from the well! Every year the anniversary is celebrated at Thiruvissainallur on Karthiga - Amavasa day.

Sri Marudhanallur Sathguru Swamigal is considered to be the father of Dakshina Bharatha Sampradhaaya Naamasangeerthanam in its present form. He undertook a pilgrimage to Varanaasi. There it is believed that he met Talapaka Annamacharya at Tadepalligudem in Andhra. There he got the

inspiration to collect keerthanaas/bhajans of various bhakthas in various languages and created a "paddhathi" or Dakshina Bharatha Bhajana Sampradhayam.

The Sampradhayam has absorbed all languages in it and hence integrates entire nation under one roof - Bhakthi.

Sampradhayam starts with Namaavali and Dhyana slokas. Next comes Thodaya Mangalam. "Thodayam" means "First Song". (Thirunelveli Saiva Sidhdhantha Noorpathippu Kazhagam Tamil-Tamil dictionary says Thodayam - Nadakathirku mun Paadum Paattu. It does not have any connection with Thotakacharya as a few people say. Even today traditional nataka melas like one at Melattur, Natakam starts with Thodaya Mangalam). Thodaya Mangalam is a set of five songs in telugu sung by Talapaka Annamacharya and Vijayagopala Swamy.

Thodaya Mangalam is followed by songs of Bhajan trinity and Guru mahima. Next comes Jayadeva's Geetha Govindam or Ashtapathi which is considered as the heart of entire sampradayam. Ashtapathi is followed by Narayana Theerthar's Tharangam, Bhadrachalam Ramadass krithis, Purandara dass krithis, Sadasiva Bruhmendral krithis, Abhangs and keerthanaas by other gurus. Swamigal also prepared the sampradhayam for Divyanaamam, Deepa prtakshinam, Radha kalyaanam, Seetha kalyaanam, Vasanthotsavam etc., which is followed by Bhagavathas across South India.

Sri Sathguru Swamigal's mutt is in a village called Marudhanallur near Kumbakonam. The tradition built by Sri Sathguru Swamigal is still followed with the same spirit by the descendants of Sri Swamigal. Sri Kothanda Rama Swamigal is the 6th generation in the parampara of Sri Sath Guru Swamigal. Margazhi is celebrated with daily Bhajans singing one Ashtapathi every day. Radha kalyanam is celebrated on 24th day of Margazhi every year strictly following the tradition initiated by Shri Sathguru Swamigal. This year is the 200th year anniversary of the mutt.

Kanchi Mahaswamigal, Tapovanam Gnanananda Giri Swamigal and Sri Krishna Premi Swamigal have revered bhajana sampradayam as the only way to attain God in this Kaliyuga.

In 20th century so may Bhagavathas followed the path shown by Sri Sathguru Swamigal lead a spiritual life. Some of them are Sri Subbu Swamigal of Perambur, Sri Puthukkottai Gopala Krishna Bhagavathar (appa), his son Sanjeevi Bhagavathar, Kumbakonam Balu Bhagavathar, Thiruvaidaimarudhur

Venkatrama Bhagavathar, Mayuram Krishnamurthi Bhagavathar, Thiruchendurai Krishnamurthy Bhagavathar etc.

Srivanjiyam Ramachandra Bhagavathar, E.K. Srinivasa Bhagavathar, E.K. Jayarama Bhagavathar, Sethalapathi Soundararaja Bhagavathar, A.L. Krishnamurthy Bhagavathar, Vittaladass Jayakrishna Deekshithar, Nallur Venkatrama Bhagavathar, Thinniyam Mahadeva Bhagavathar, Kovai Jayarama Bhagavathar, Udayalur Kalyanarama Bhagavathar, O.S. Sundar Bhagavathar, Erode Rajamani Bhagavathar, A.V.K. Rajasimha Bhagavathar, Kadayanallur Ganapathi Thukaram Bhagavathar, etc are some of the Bhagavathas of current era who have taken Namaprachaaram by Naama Sangeerthanam as lifetime commitment.

Poojyasri Haridoss Giri Swamigal revolutionized the entire music world by his Bhajans. It is only after his efforts, Sampradhaya Bhajans became an integral part of December Music festival. His work is continued by his sishya Sri Namanandagiri Swamigal (Namaji) and Bhagavatha Sammelana Samajam.

Srivanjiyam Ramachandra Bhagavathar marked a new era in the Sampradhaya Bhajans. When TV and Radio were not so widely used, Weekly Sampradhaya Bhajans apart from inculcating bhakthi into the hearts of people but also served as the major entertainment to the people in the agrahaarams of villages. In fact Bhajans played equal role as Nageswaram in educating the public with ragas and talas. Srivanjiyam, as he was affectionately called, conquered the hearts of thousands through his charisma, voice and creativity. He introduced many dance dramas which became integral part of Divyanaamas Bhajanais. "Srivanjiyam" pulled 100s of people from 10 mile radius for even a small ekadasi bhajanais in any remote village. You wont even believe! He even modeled for products like ARR seeval those days!! His fame reached even Rashtrapathi Bhavan! He was invited to perform before President Radhakrishnan. Now he has become too old to give performances.

To propagate the richness and divinity of the Naamasankeerthanam tradition, Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, in association with Integrated Academy for Performing Arts, is organizing a lot of Naamasankeerthanam concerts and all leading bhagavathas are giving concerts regularly in sabha with devotion and bhava. It has won the hearts of rasikas which is evident from the "house-full" auditorium for all bhajan programmes. Since last year Sabha is conducting annual Naamasankeerthanam festival and it has found an important place in the Madras December Music Season.

Integrated Academy of Performing Arts and Sri Krishna Gana Sabha organized a week long festival of Sampradhaya Bhajans "Naamasankeerthanam - 2002" at Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, T. Nagar, Chennai - 17 between November 29 and December 8, 2002.

Eminent Bhagavathas and Bhajan Mandalis rendered Sampradaya Bhajan concerts on all the ten days. Shri E.K. Srinivasa Bhagavathar was awarded the title "Sangeerthana Kalanithi" on a function held on December 8, 2002 by Sri Ahobilamutt Jeer Swamigal.

In Commemoration of Peetarohana Swarna Jayanthi of HH Kanchi Kamakoti Peetadhipathi Sri Jayendra Saraswathi Swamigal and Sri Rama Navami a fourday Naamasankeerthanam festival was conducted between Friday 28 March 2003 and Monday 31 March 2003. HH Kanchi Acharyals inaugurated a series of 50 bhajan concerts most of which were conducted in the sabha during the Gokulashtami music festival.

This year the Naamasankeerthanam festival was organized from 29th November Sunday to 11th December Thursday at Dr. Nalli Gana Vihar, Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, T. Nagar. Various performing Naamasankeerthanam artistes from various parts of the country participate in this function and another special feature this year is each day was dedicated to the memory of Bhagavathas of yester years who had sacrificed their lives for the cause of naamasankeerthanam.

Sri Krishna Gana Sabha is in the forefront of supporting Naamasankeerthanam and Purana Upanyasams right from the days of inception. All great pouranikas from legendary Bruhmasri Sengalipuram Anantharama Deekshithar to Bruhmasri Sundarkumar, Purana Pravachanam has been a integral part of sabha's annual event. It is only after Poojyasri Haridossgeri Swamigal started his Margazhi Sangeetha Upanyasams in Sri Krishna Gana Sabha, Naama Sankeerthanam's true power reached the masses! Now Vittaldas Jayakrishna Deekshithar is continuing the Margazhi Sangeetha Upanyasams with the same tempo.

I am sure that the almighty Sri Krishna Paramatma will bless the sabha for it's contribution to the Naamasankeerthanam and Upanyasams which inculcates bhakthi and thus sowing the seeds for our salvation!