

## Ardent devotee of Tyagaraja

Pushpa Srivatsan worships Saint Tyagaraja and she expresses her devotion through prose and poetry in chaste Sanskrit. SUDHAKSHINA RANGASWAMY in conversation with this unique personality.



IT IS difficult to speak about the experience of meeting with a versatile composer of Sanskrit devotional works without sounding cliched. Ms.

Pushpa Srivatsan personifies the oft-quoted maxim in the spiritual tradition, "He who chooses the Divine has already been chosen by Him." Otherwise, she could easily pass off as your neighbour next door. Beneath the self-effacing facade lies an inspired mystic who is in tune with her Guru, Saint Tyagaraja. She reveres him as her Ishtadevata as well.

Ms. Pushpa's name first figured in the review columns of newspapers and religious journals way back in 1994 when her maiden devotional offering, the 'Sadguru Sri Tyagabrahma Pushpanjali', was published by the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams and released by the then President, Dr. Shankar Dayal Sharma, at Tirupati.

It won critical acclaim from Sanskrit scholars like the late Seva Srinivasaraghavachariar Swami, Dr. N. Veezhinathan, Dr. C. L. Ramakrishnan, Swami Dayananda Saraswathi, Swami Paramarthananda and Swami Tarananda, Acharya of Swami Dayananda.

Her spiritual journey since then has unfolded a veritable saga in chaste Sanskrit poetry and prose. The well of creativity has not dried up and she continues to compose in her moments of inspiration. Her other works which are awaiting publication include the 'Himalaya Gadyam' in 550 verses which depicts her experiences of the saint when she meditated in the mountain's sylvan ranges, 'Ganga Sahasram' in 1,200 verses, 'Gangaroganivarana stotra', 'Gangaraga Pushpavali', 'Tyagarama Pushpavali' consisting of 'Tyagabrahma Bhujangaprayata' stotra in the meter by the same name, 'Saranagati stotra' and 'Guru Ashtakam' in Totaka meter, 'Sadguru Mangalashtakam' in Anushtubh meter, 'Sri Rama stotra' in 127 verses outlining the Ramayana,

`Sri Rama Sahasranama Pushpavali' and the `Sri Rama Mangalashatakam'. She has also composed devotional hymns in Tamil.

The raison d'etre of her endeavour is purely ``Svanubhutiparivaha" - a spontaneous and irresistible urge to express her devotion to Tyagabrahmam, she reiterates and adds, ``It is my Guru who spurs me on in my quest to fathom the infinite and I am only an instrument in his hands."

Reticent about her personal experiences at first, Ms. Pushpa's enthusiasm caught on once she started speaking about her source of inspiration, Saint Tyagaraja.

Can you recall how you were inspired to compose hymns in Sanskrit?

Tyagabrahmam is my Guru, God and fount of inspiration. Though I had training in Carnatic music under Vidwan Rangaramanuja Iyengar, my approach to the saint's compositions has been more of devotion and I shy away from public concert performances. I am a mathematics post-graduate and had no formal training in Sanskrit. I have picked up the nuances of the language only after I started composing.

My inspiration in this direction came from my daughter Gayatri who used to sit with me while I performed puja to the idol of Tyagaraja Swami given to me with blessings by Swami Haridoss Giri soon after the Mahasamadhi of Swami Gnanananda Giri of Tapovanam. I used to recite the Ashtotram on the saint composed by Bangalore Nagaratnamma. One day in 1989 Gayatri prodded me onto compose a hymn of my own for performing puja. As though by Providence, from that time, I started composing verses in Sanskrit spontaneously.

I become emotional at the very thought of my Guru and hence there is no question of laboured effort on my part to compose hymns. In fact, the verses always flow at random and I note them down as and when they occur. I consider them as my intense, personal, spiritual experiences of my Guru and I never wanted the glare of publicity on them. But it was the Guru's will that they were eventually published. Both Swami Haridoss and Dayananda categorically said that I must not keep the hymns to myself and prevailed on me to publish them.

What are the literary features of your devotional work?

The published work, `Sadguru Sri Tyagabrahma Pushpanjali', is a collection of six independent hymns on the saint, the first four being Namavalis - Ashttorasata, Trisati, Panchasati and Sahasranamavali. Then follows the `Sadguru Saranagati Gadyam' and finally the `Mangalashatakam'. As the name suggests, the Namavalis embody 108, 324, 540 and 1080 names respectively. Each Namavali is preceded by a Gayatri epitomising its contents.

The Trisati consists of three Ashttotra satams, the Panchasati, five, and the Sahasranamavali, ten, and not just the names. So there is a specific theme underlying each work and also within sections of each work. The 540th Nama in the Sahasranamavali, for instance, relates to the esoteric significance of the Ramayana. The Namavalis together form a continuous whole.

Gadya, a poetic prose literary style unique to Sanskrit, has been employed in the 'Saranagati Gadyam' which describes total surrender to my Guru. In the last hymn, 'Mangalashatakam', each of the eight verses starts with the successive notes of the music scale.

The portrait of Tyagaraja Swami in the book was painted by Radhika, another daughter, on the basis of my visualisation of my Guru and the cover illustrations have been executed by Gayatri which is symbolic of the primordial Omkara, Nadabrahman, emerging as sound - Rama nama which was the life breath of the saint.

I have rendered all these hymns into Tamil and English to facilitate easy understanding. I offered the hymns at the Samadhi of the saint at Tiruvaiyaru before undertaking this publication and offered a copy of the book there and also at his residence in Thirumanajanavidhi, another at his birthplace in Tiruvarur and also to his puja idol kept at a home in Thanjavur. Rendering the hymns in these places was an unforgettable experience.

(The book, 'Sadguru Sri Tyagabrahma Pushpanjali', priced at Rs. 250 is available with T.T. Devasthanams and with the author, H- 34, S-1 (Second floor), Seashore Apartments, Tiruvalluvar Nagar, Tiruvanmiyur, Chennai-600041. Tel: 4421176, E-mail: vathsan@netcracker.com)

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