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The Valmiki spell

SVK



Portraits of Vyasa and Valmiki were unveiled at the guru puja held at Kalabharati to commemorate Vyasa (Guru) Purnima. The function was jointly organised by Susarla International Trust Academy and Sri Viswanatha Sahitya Peetham.

A study of Tyagaraja's songs show that he took the cue from the Ramayana.

Sri Krishna Gana Sabha has launched a special thematic monthly programme "Sadguru-Rasanubhava" meant to educate the rasikas on the lofty contents in Tyagaraja's compositions. Performing musicians, I am told, have been requested to give a gist of the message in the compositions before singing there.

The greatness of Tyagaraja is the link he establishes with Valmiki. His ideal expressed in the songs is not to present himself as a xerox image of Valmiki, though it is commonly accepted that he is Valmiki avatara. This he makes explicit in the piece “E-Paniko-Jenminchitinani” (Asaveri). In the Charanam he says:

Valmikadi-Monulu-Narulu-Ninnu Varninchina-Naayaasa-Theeruna” (If Valmiki, rishis and others have described Rama in their works, will it satisfy my heart desires...)

Tyagaraja loves to enjoy Valmiki in his own poetic way. The golden thread of the subtle influence of Valmiki running through his songs reveals his admiration for the Adikavi.

Why did Tyagaraja choose the sangita marga? Not because it is generally proclaimed that music is the easiest means to reach God. Valmiki’s Ramayana slokas are in *Paada-Baddaha-Akshara-Samaha-Thanthri-Laya-Samanvitaha* (composed with words, with tala, laya)

So Tyagaraja, in Valmiki’s footsteps, preferred that his songs too should be tightly clothed in superb sahitya, bathed in sublime music brimming with spirituality. It was perhaps the saint’s expectation that his songs, held in esteem as the Upanishad) would be heard and enjoyed by all like the Ramayana.

After this general observation let us look at the way Valmiki cast his spell on Tyagaraja. Though it is commonly called Ramayana, Valmiki himself proclaims:

Kaavyam-Ramayanam-Kritsnam Sitaayaas-Charitham-Mahat (The great story of Sita). Tyagaraja took this hint to compose the Khambodi kirtana, “Maa-Janaki.” Tyagaraja expatiates on this theme.

“*Ravanaariyani-Raajillu-Keertiya Maa-Janaki-Chetta-Battaga*” (your great fame as the destroyer of Ravana and the status of chakravarti rests on the good fortune you married Janaki.)

On the face of it this may appear to be impertinent. But Tyagaraja is quite aware of how Valmiki has delineated Sita’s greatness. In the ‘Sundara Kanda,’ Sita, rejecting the overtures of an infatuated Ravana in the Asokavana, says this in utter contempt:

Asandesaattu-Ramasya Thapasascha-Anupaalanaathna-Twaam-Kurmi-Dasagriva Bhasma-Bhasmaarha-Tejasa

(Because I do not have Rama’s approval and my own pursuit of the path of penance, I am not turning you into ashes).

And to speak of Maricha’s advice to Ravana:

“*Ravana Aprameyam-hi-Thaat-Tejaha*

Yasya-Saa-Janakaatmaja”

(Immense is Rama's prowess whose wife is Janaki, don't contemplate abduction). All these sentiments in Valmiki Ramayana are poetically compressed by Tyagaraja in the Khambodi song. In one of the charanas of Moraalakimpa Vemi, Tyagaraja recalls the Vibhishana episode (the first charanam is Sugriva episode) in these words.

Oka-Nisicharudu-Annsa-Maata

Oruvaka-Charananagaa

Suka-Vachanamulo-Naadu

Palukulanni-Vibheeshanamaa.

(When Vibhishana surrendered seeking your protection, You gladly complied with his plea. Are his words honeyed while my words above appear to be fearful? (with pun on the word Vibhishana).

This composition also is in the same tenor as the previous one smacking of sacrilege. The sarcastic usage "Sukavachanamulo (sweet as honey) is the way Tyagaraja humorously dwells on Valmiki's account.

In the Ramayana, Valmiki states:

Sarvaloka-Saranyaaya

Raghavaaya-Mahatmane

Nivedaya-Maam-Kshipram

Vibhishanam-Upastitham.

(Please inform quickly, Vibhishana has come seeking Raghava's protection). Rama consults Sugriva and others and setting aside their objection to entertain Vibhishana in their ranks, firmly makes the profound assurance (not only to Vibhishana but to all of us).

Mithrabhaavena-Sampraaptam

Na-Thyajeyam-Kathanchana

(He comes in all sincere friendliness I shall not let him down)

On Rama's quality of recognising Mithrabhaavam, Sita, advising Ravana, refers to this fact of Rama's glory. She says;

Mitram-Aupayikam-Kartum

Rama-Sthanam-Pareepsata

Vadamcha-Anichchaya-Goram

Twayaasow-Purusharsabaha

(If you want to save your life Ravana, extend your hand of friendship to Rama)

If may appear Tyagaraja invokes Sugriva and Vibhishana to impress on Rama how he is favourably responsive to the former and indifferent to him. He also relies on presenting Prahlada and Dhuruva to soften Rama's mind. (In the famous kalyani kirtana "Enduko-Nee-Manasu-Karagadu) he expresses his disappointment.)

In the song in Gurjari

Varaalandu-Kommani-Naayandu

Vanchana-Seyuda-Nyaayama

(When my mind deeply desires your bhakti alone, it is not proper for you to offer worldly boons).

It is in this context that he pleads with Rama that he is as great a devotee as Prahlada and Dhruva to whom Rama immediately showered his grace.

It is in the great Thodi song "Emani-Maatlaaditivo" that his mind lovingly dwells on Valmiki's description of Rama with the epithets "Mridubhashe." Without recording each and every occasion mentioned by Valmiki, Tyagaraja has summed up his exhilaration with the words, "Maya-Bhayamuga-Mudduga/ Evari-Manasuku-Evidami-Telisi/ Emani-Maatlaaditivo."

(With softness and firmness, reading the minds of everyone, how did you, Rama, converse with all - father, mother, brothers, kings, rishis, monkeys, etc., to bring them to your way.

Let's compare some situations as presented by Valmiki and Tyagaraja:

To begin with, Rama meets Kaikeyi, who is uncertain as to how to break the shocking news of sending him to the forest. Here and in other instances we see the force of Tyagaraja's phrase, "Evvari-Manasuku Evidamo."

Rama tells Kaikeyi:

Thath-Broohi-Vachanam-Devi

Raagnyo-Yat-Abhikaangshitam

Karishye-Partijane

Ramo-Dwir-Naabhi-Bhaashate.

Viddhi-Maam_Rishibihi-Tulyam

Kevalam-Dharmam-Aarsritam

(Tell me what Dasaratha wishes. I shall discharge it, I promise. Rama never double speaks. Take me for certain, like the rishis, I revere Dharmam!

Next he meets Kausalya. Rama convinces her to allow him to go to the forest.

Mayaa-Chaiva-Bhavatyaa-Cha

Kartavyam-Vachanam-Pituhu

(You and I have to abide by Dasarata's dictates) That settles the matter.

How sweetly he faces Sabari. He is all admiration for her holy status and gently addressing her "Tapodane" and "Charu-Bhashini" asks:

Kaschit-Niyamaaha-Praaptaaha

Kaschit-Manasas-Sukham

Kaschit Guru-Sushroosha

Sapalaa-Chaaruu Bhashini

(Have you gained peace? Have you received the fruits of service to your guru?)

These are a few instances of Naya approach. As for the 'bhalega' aspect Rama is angry at Sugriva's lethargy in ordering the search for Sita. He sends stern words to Sugriva through Lakshmana:

Nacha-Sankuchita-Pantaa

Yena-Vali-Hato_Gataha

Samaye-Thishta-Sugriva

Maa-Vali-Patham-Anva Gaaha

(Remind him that the door through which Vali went is still open. Ask him to discharge his commitment and not follow his brother).

Now we can visualise how these words in Valmiki Ramayana provoked Tyagaraja to exclaim “Evari-Manasuku-Evidamo-Telisi-Naya-Bhaya-Mudduga...”

Sri Tyagaraja’s Sahitya wealth bowing to Valmiki’s depiction of Rama cannot be fully appreciated and enjoyed unless one is well acquainted with Valmiki’s moola Ramayana. The bard’s is so over powering that there is little desire to savour the spiritual sentiments in his songs. Hope Sri Krishna Gana Sabha’s effort in this direction will at least touch the fringe of Tyagaraja’s Sahitya excellence.

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