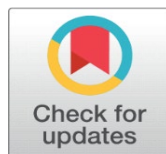
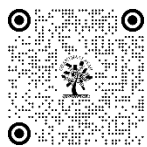


HARIDASA PARAMPARE IN MEDIEVAL KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

The Haridasa Parampare is a significant devotional and reformatory tradition in Karnataka, India, that flourished from the 12th to 17th centuries. Rooted in the Dvaita Vedanta philosophy of Madhvacharya, it emphasizes a dualistic relationship between the individual soul and the supreme deity, Lord Vishnu. The movement was spearheaded by the Haridasas, a group of saint-poets and composers, who contributed immensely to the development of Kannada literature and Carnatic music through their devotional compositions. Key figures such as Purandara Dasa, Kanaka Dasa, and others used their hymns and poetry, known as Devaranamas, to promote the values of devotion, humility, and social equality. Their works challenged rigid caste structures and ritualistic practices, advocating instead for a direct and personal connection with the divine. The Haridasa Parampare played a crucial role in democratizing spirituality, making it accessible to people from all social strata and contributing to the rich cultural and religious fabric of Karnataka. The tradition's emphasis on simplicity, devotion, and social justice has left a lasting legacy in regional music, literature, and religious practices, continuing to influence and inspire contemporary spiritual and cultural life.

Keywords: Features of Haridasa Parampare, Naraharirtha, Vyasaraya, Purandaradasa, Kanakadasa,

1. INTRODUCTION

Vachana Literature came from Veerashiva devotees. The masters who employed this form most effectively were also sometimes, like Basavanna, powerful social reformers. In the 15th and 16th centuries another tributary enriched Kannada Literature. This was Haridasa Sahitya. The expression 'Haridasa' means '*the servant of God*'. The Haridasas were willing vassals of the Lord. They regarded 'bhakti' (or devotion to God) as the way to self-realization and to salvation. Sri Madhwacharya (1238-1317) preached Dualism and gained considerable following. The Haridasas were followers of Madhwa (with the exception of Sri Vaikuntadasa and Sri Thimmappadasa). They stressed the importance of total surrender to God and of a pure life. Traditional Vedic religion had been shaken by the revolution launched by the Veerashiva reformers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, and the Hari-dasas deprecated the blind observance of ritual and stressed the importance of right conduct and humility.

The Haridasas were all of them crudit  men steeped in the scriptures. But they were not content with mastering this lore. They sought to carry their knowledge and vision to every hearth and home. The essence of the teaching of the scriptures was to be the inheritance of the illiterate and the ignorant. Religion was to be an illumination and not a dead weight. So

they married reflection and devotion to music and their songs in simple. Kannada carried their message to thousands of people. Easy to remember and sweet to sing and hear, the songs travelled fast from lip to lip.

2. FEATURES OF HARIDASA PARAMPARE

1. **BHAKTI (DEVOTION) MOVEMENT:** The Haridasa tradition is rooted in the philosophy of Dvaita Vedanta, as propounded by Madhvacharya. It emphasizes pure devotion to Vishnu (often referred to as Hari) and aims to bring spiritual teachings to the common people through music and poetry.
2. **DEVOTIONAL MUSIC (DEVARANAMAS):** The Haridasas composed Devaranamas (songs in praise of God), which conveyed philosophical, moral, and devotional themes in simple Kannada. These songs became central to devotional practices and also laid the foundation for Carnatic music. The compositions typically expressed themes of surrender, devotion, and the relationship between the soul and God, making them accessible to people from all walks of life.
3. **SAINTS AND POETS:** The tradition saw a rich lineage of saint-composers who contributed immensely to spirituality and literature. Prominent figures include:
 - **PURANDARA DASA (1484–1564):** Known as the "Father of Carnatic Music," he composed over 475,000 Devaranamas, simplifying musical structures and making music education accessible.
 - **KANAKA DASA (1509–1609):** A social reformer and poet-saint, his works emphasized equality and devotion. He belonged to a lower caste, and his songs often reflected the struggle for social justice.
 - **VIJAYA DASA, GOPALA DASA, AND JAGANNATHA DASA:** These later Haridasas continued the tradition, composing thousands of devotional works and upholding Dvaita philosophy.
4. **DVAITA VEDANTA PHILOSOPHY:** The Haridasa movement is closely associated with the Dvaita Vedanta school of philosophy, which emphasizes a dualistic relationship between God (Vishnu) and the individual soul. The Haridasas spread this philosophy through their compositions, focusing on personal devotion as the path to salvation.
5. **IMPACT ON KANNADA LITERATURE AND CULTURE:** The movement played a vital role in the development of Kannada literature. By using the local language in their compositions, the Haridasas made religious teachings more accessible to the common people. Their works enriched the cultural and spiritual landscape of Karnataka.
6. **SOCIAL REFORM:** Many Haridasa saints, especially Kanaka Dasa, preached against caste discrimination and social inequality. Their teachings promoted the idea that devotion and character, not birth or social status, determine one's closeness to God.
7. **INFLUENCE ON CARNATIC MUSIC:** The Haridasa tradition is foundational to Carnatic music. Purandara Dasa is credited with codifying the basics of Carnatic music, introducing systematic methods for teaching ragas (melodic scales) and talas (rhythmic cycles).
8. **VOCAL EMPHASIS IN BHAKTI:** Haridasa compositions, primarily meant for singing, brought a strong emphasis on vocal expression in worship. Congregational singing of these songs in temples and households became a common form of devotion in Karnataka.
9. **IMPACT ON SOCIETY:** The Haridasas played a key role in spreading the message of equality, devotion, and the importance of leading a righteous life. They addressed social issues like caste discrimination and emphasized the value of personal devotion over ritualistic worship.

3. SAINTS AND POETS OF HARIDASA PARAMPARE

1. **NARAHARITHIRTHA:** The first of the Haridasas was probably Narahari- thirtha (14th century). Though none of his Kannada compositions has come down to us tradition has it that he composed some. So far as reliable evidence indicates, Sripadaraya (1406-1504) was the first of the Haridasas. He was the head of a Madhwa mutt (religious institution) in Sriranga in Tamil Nadu, from 1420. (He is said to have become a sanyasi at the age of seven). Subsequently he founded a mutt at Mulabagal, in Kolar District of Karnataka. He is credited with several miracles. It is said that Veera- narasimha of Vijayanagara worshipped him with diamonds and offered gold ornaments. His songs express the anguish of a devotee who has surrendered everything to God and forsaken wife and children for His sake, and yet has not been vouchsafed God's acceptance. The 'dasya' bhava (a willing servant's feeling) which characterizes

Dasa Sahitya first finds moving expression in these songs. His songs are allusive, and rich in references to mythology. This, in fact, is a characteristic of all Haridasa Songs. He has also composed a number of songs about the boyhood of Krishna. Some of them look at the Divine Child's doings through the eyes of the loving yet bewildered mother, Yashoda.

2. **VYASARAYA:** Ignoring strict chronology we may consider here the Haridasa tradition. The next great name in Dasa Sahitya is that of Sri Vyasaraya (1447-1539). He seems to have been a dynamic man, who helped the great Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara, and was honoured by him. A big tank, his gift to the people, to this day bears the name, Vyasasamudra'. 'A 6 great scholar and a brilliant man who led a great life - such was Vyasaraya. Only a few of his Kannada compositions seem to have been preserved. As poetry his songs centering around Krishna and the gopis are more valuable than those about Dwaitism. But, as critics have said, Vyasaraya's greatest contributions are Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa. The Kannada songs were sung as part of the worship of the Lord, and thus Kannada came into its own in a new way.

3. **PURANDARADASA:** With Purandaradasa (c. 1484-1564) and Kanakadasa (c. 1508-1606) the Haridasa movement reached its zenith. Like the Vachanakaras they employed Kannada for a variety of purposes - for exposition of philosophy in simple language, for reflection on life, for social criticism, for satire and for lyrical songs. Unlike the Vachanakaras they were consciously combining literary expression with the discipline of music. The plea of 'literature for the people' received further impetus from their practice. Because they married reflection or instruction to music they were able to reach a wide circle of people and their literary creations remembered easily and travelled from lip to lip,

Purandaradasa is a fascinating figure in the history of Kannada Literature. Many legends have grown around him, and much of what they tell us may be rejected as the contribution of devoted followers. But even the glimpses we get in his compositions, of his life before he became a Haridasa and of the trials of his devotion and purity later, make him an extraordinarily interesting man. There is little doubt that he was a very wealthy but miserly jeweller and that some traumatic experience, in which his wife played a significant role, led him to a willing acceptance of poverty and the service of the Lord. In all his songs there are references to his patron deity, Purandara Vittala. We are not certain when he was born and when he died. But he must have lived between 1465 and 1565.. He travelled extensively, and wherever he went he created a religious awakening. He himself was a radiant example of total surrender to the Lord and the joy of this surrender. He taught not only dedication to the Lord but a life of simplicity and purity. His compositions are said to number more than four lakh and even now we are not certain of the authenticity of several songs attributed to him. But he is acknowledged to be 'the father of Karnatak Music' (Karnataka Sangeeta Pitamaha).

Purandaradasa proclaimed the supremacy of Vishnu, but there is nothing derogatory to the dignity of Shiva in his songs. In fact he has praised Shiva, too. The universe bears testimony to the power of God. God is immanent in the world, and it obeys His will. It is for man to realize the true purpose of his life which is to attain salvation and not let the pleasures of the senses eclipse this. The Lord is merciful; He delights in the goodness and the greatness of His devotee. He responds gladly and eagerly to the appeal of a true devotee. Sincerity and right conduct are important. Purandaradasa does not insist on the renunciation of family life. He describes it as 'hesige samsara', that is, repulsive, but one has to swim and survive, stay in the family and conquer its temptations. 'Let me have the good fortune of a family', he says in one song, and let me be fortunate enough to remember the enemy the Kamsa (Krishna)'. He has called on people not just to repeat the name of the Lord but to do good deeds and to help others. He rejects caste. He calls on people to learn to love everyone even a foe. Some of his songs describe Lord Krishna's boyhood, and his passionate love of the Wonder Boy finds simple but joyous expression in them.

We need not here consider Purandaradasa's contribution to music, which is invaluable. There is no doubt that he was born with a poet's sensitiveness and vision. In some songs Krishna the enchanting lad before our eyes. We see the lovely boy bedecked by his doting mother; we see the very movement and smile and gesture of the boy. Purandaradasa satire is pungent in a song like 'Udaravairagyavidu (This is renunciation for the sake of the belly). He draws a satirical picture of the worshipper who looks like a seller of bronze wear, so many idols he has; he has lighted many lamps; but his worship is all hypocritical. He is critical of the man who is not generous and the woman who shuts the door in the face of the needy. His heart goes out to the young widow shedding silent tears as she slaves for others.

The range of experience that go into these compositions and of the saint's responses makes his creative literature a treasure. It must, however, be conceded that religious tenet or philosophical exposition or direct preaching sometimes overrides other poetic element. (It must also be remembered that to the Dasas poetry and music were means to an end). The expression is at times simple but bald and prosaic. But with all these limitations and the limitations imposed on him by the tradition which he willingly accepted, impassioned plea and vivid imagery and unembroidered expression often blend to give us genuine poetry. He can use telling images 'Do ants converge on burning red hot coal'? 'Like a hungry cat; eating cotton; Like a calf seeking milk from a stone cow') He can charge simple everyday Kannada with deep reflection. Indeed it is surprising to how many purposes he is able to harness the spoken idiom of everyday life. Philosophy, the values of right conduct, the devotion of a saint, the vision of an Immanent and kindly Power, the delights of motherhood, verbal portraiture of grace of movement and the joy of music, music itself-there is so much to delight the reader in Purandaradasa's compositions.

4. **KANAKADASA:** Kanakadasa is as interesting as Purandaradasa. If the latter was a rich jeweller who renounced wealth the former was a chieftain who probably belonged to the Kuruba caste. If tradition is to be believed he was no mean warrior. But he tasted crushing defeat once and was himself mortally wounded. He came to believe that only divine grace had saved his life and became a Haridasa. Thus, because of the community into which he was born, he did not have the opportunities that the other Haridasas had to study the scriptures or acquire knowledge. And yet he is one of the greatest Haridasas. Petty men seem to have ill-treated him because of his supposed low birth, and there is a story of his having been humiliated in Udipi and of the Lord Himself having miraculously revealed his worth.

Kanakadasa's total surrender to the Lord has found expression in some moving songs like Bagilanu Theredu Thanu Ninnadu Jeevana Ninnadu and Thoredu Jeevisabahude. The poet declares that his body, his life and the joys and sorrows of everyday life belong to the Lord. He cannot live without thinking of the feet of the Lord. In a popular song Kanakadasa points out that God takes care of the worms in the rocks, the animals and the fowl of the forest; he asks his mind not to worry about the future. God takes care of all created beings like a mother. There is trenchant social criticism in the songs of Kanakadasa songs like Kula Kula Kulavennuthiharu. Philosophy acquires the radiance of poetry in some of his songs. Apart from his songs Kanakadasa also composed poems; the longest of these is Mohana Tarangini which narrates the story of the defeat of Banasura at the hands of Sri Krishna. Descriptions are prominent in this poem and they give pictures of the life of the people under the great king Krishna-devaraya of Vijayanagara. This poem is meant to be recited or sung. The story of Nala and Damayanthi is narrated in Nalacharithre; the poet uses the 'shatpadi' here. Description is skilfully woven into the narration in this poem, and the story moves swiftly. Ramadhanya Charitre is an interesting poem which indicates the importance of ragi, the black grain which serves as the poor man's staple food; the story is placed in the times of Sri Rama, and is entirely the invention of Kanakadasa. The poem has been variously interpreted as the expression of God's love for the poor and the humble, as a satire on mere show, and as the first expression of class conflict. His Haribhakthisara is the very epitome of implicit faith in God's wisdom and mercy; it does not narrate any one story but is rich in allusions. But the emphasis on a clean life and the practice of religious precepts is significant.

4. CONCLUSION

The Haridasa Parampare in Karnataka marks a profound spiritual and cultural movement that blended devotion, music, and social reform. Rooted in Dvaita Vedanta, it emphasized Bhakti (devotion) to Lord Vishnu and used Devaranamas (devotional songs) to spread this message among people from all walks of life. Saints like Purandara Dasa and Kanaka Dasa played key roles in democratizing spiritual teachings and advocating for social equality, often challenging the prevailing caste system.

Their contributions to Kannada literature, Carnatic music, and ethical living continue to inspire religious and cultural practices in Karnataka. The Haridasa tradition not only enriched the region's spiritual life but also promoted values of simplicity, humility, and universal brotherhood, leaving a lasting legacy that endures in both religious devotion and cultural expressions in modern-day Karnataka.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None

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None

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