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*Some articles use the masculine pronoun when referring to God, in keeping with convention and to avoid the clumsiness of constructions such as 'He or She' or 'Him or Her.'*

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# Sorrows of Life

Some people say, “For years, I have been visiting temples without fail, and yet, I am still poor and my sorrows have not left me. Sometimes, I even wonder why I should call out to God!”

Do we really rely on God? If we did, we would prosper both materially and spiritually. No *ma-hatma* (spiritually illumined soul) has ever starved to death. The life of one who has surrendered to God will never be sorrowful. People might ask if Kuchela<sup>1</sup> did not suffer from poverty. This is not totally correct. He had no time to grieve as he was always immersed in thoughts of God! His innocent love for God gave him the strength to remain joyful even in the midst of crippling poverty. His surrender released him from a fate of poverty and drew prosperity into his life.

None of us go to temples just for the sake of having the Lord’s darshan. Even when we stand before God, we tell Him only worldly things. Our devotion is not pure and selfless; we pray only to fulfil desires.

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<sup>1</sup> A poor devotee of Lord Krishna. As a result of the Lord’s blessings, he became fabulously wealthy.

## A true devotee never worries about hardships in life. Surrendered to God, she is like a child resting in her mother's lap.

Not that we should not have desires, but our love for God should surpass our interest in fulfilling the desires.

Once, Lord Krishna was sitting by the banks of the Yamuna with the *gopis* (milkmaids), who were listening in rapture to His sweet utterances. He asked them, "What do you do when you encounter sorrows and difficulties?"

One gopi said, "I will pray to you, O Lord, to remove my sorrows."

Another gopi said, "I will pray to you, O Lord, to be always by my side. Even if the summer heat is scorching, one will not feel its intensity if there is a cool breeze blowing. Likewise, when the Lord is with me, none of the hardships of life will affect me."

Yet another gopi said, "When sufferings come, I will

pray to the Lord for strength to overcome them."

Radha was listening silently to these responses. The Lord asked her, "O Radha, why are you silent? How will you face suffering?"

"I will meditate on the Lord within. I will remember Him in my heart."

"Don't you pray for anything?"

"When Your form shines brightly in my heart, where is there a place for sorrow? When light dawns, darkness is naturally dispelled. I have never found any need to pray for anything."

A true devotee never bothers about hardships in life. Completely surrendered to God, she remains without worry, like a child resting in her mother's lap.



# Sing Your Way to God

by swami amritageetananda puri

**L**ike Amma, Mirabai's<sup>1</sup> devotion to God was often misunderstood by her family, especially her husband. He gave Her poison, telling her that she had no right to live, as she had flouted social norms, customs and traditions. When she saw the blue colour of the poison in the golden bowl, Mirabai was reminded of her beloved

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<sup>1</sup> Mirabai was a 16th-century mystic and saint from Rajasthan, who is celebrated for her devotion to Lord Krishna.



Krishna. She fearlessly swallowed the poison. It did not harm her, so complete was her faith in the Lord. She had already merged into Him spiritually. The path she took to attain this spiritual union was devotional singing. In her ecstasy, she would also dance. Mirabai is a good role model for musicians and dancers, showing them the highest purpose of music and dance: to merge with God.

From the time I was a child until I came to Amma, I was associated with two spiritual organizations and a local temple. I heard many great musicians and saw many dance performances. But it seemed to me that many of the performers were just showing off their talents. There is nothing wrong with that, but a mere exhibition of talent is vain and a waste of time and energy. Also, there was such a competitive attitude among the performers, who even used to fight for a chance to perform.

This was both amusing and painful to see.

There ought to be greater purity of attitude behind music and dance or any other art form, for that matter. I felt that the performers were not using their gifts to gain access to God. Unfortunately, most of those who sing even devotional songs and perform classical dance fail to understand their ultimate purpose.

I heard real devotional singing for the first time when I came to Amma. After being in Her presence for a short time and seeing Her bhava darshans, I knew that at Her ashram, one could attain the ultimate goal of human life easily.

In the early '80s, the bhajans used to be held in the *kalari*.<sup>2</sup> Remembering my past encounters with competition in the arts scene, and having seen how many of those who

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<sup>2</sup> The old temple shrine where Amma used to give Devi and Krishna Bhava darshans.

sing bhajans stray from the path to God, I decided not to sit with the bhajan group but with other devotees on the ground outside the kalari. This continued for some time.

One day, the brahmacharis started singing, as Amma had not arrived yet. Suddenly, I felt somebody pulling me up by my collar. When I turned around, I saw that it was Amma! She hauled me into the kalari. That day, I sat in the kalari and sang with Amma.

The next day, I went back to sitting on the ground, having decided not to get too involved in any kind of singing. But the same thing happened again: Amma lifted me up by my collar and led me into the kalari. From that day onwards, I continued sitting in the kalari for bhajans.

In an ideal song, the singer becomes one with the song, and only the song remains. When a consummate dancer moves, there is only dance; the

dancer ceases to be. The best artistes become so absorbed in their art that they forget the audience. This inner absorption helps them transcend their physical and mental planes and to merge in God. We are all blessed to have seen Amma demonstrate this total absorption every time She sings.

Let us not forget that music, dance and even martial art forms are all divine gifts to help us use our body, mind and speech to turn to God and finally merge into the Supreme. India has been uniquely blessed with a lineage of saints who were also musicians. No doubt, this is why India is known as *ratna garba*, one who has given birth to many gems. These jewels include Mirabai, Kabir, T u k a r a m , T y a g a r a j a , Purandaradasa and, of course, Amma. These mystics elevated music to the realm of divine communion. May they all inspire us to purify our attitude towards the arts, and use it to turn Godward. 

# Blessed Gaze

by sridevi sheshadri, u.s.a.

What is Amma's mission in the world? Among other things, to alleviate the sorrows of mankind. Whatever ails devotees, She readily provides remedies. Whether in the form of advice, *sankalpa* (divine resolve), or the transference of diseases Her children are suffering to Herself, Amma gives of Herself tirelessly. As Guru, She chisels us like a sculptor would stone, and as Mother, She shields us from much of the pain and suffering that doggedly pursue us because of our past karma.

Can one adequately express Amma's greatness? Saint Kabirdas says:

The noble glory of the Guru cannot be described in words even if the whole earth be converted into a writing pad with all the seven oceans as the ink and with all the trees of all the forests as pen.

Most of the time, the roles Amma plays for the sake of uplifting the world conceal Her divine nature. Be it mother, administrator, teacher, mentor, counsellor or humanitarian, Amma plays each part so perfectly that it is easy to forget that She is much more. However, in rare moments, by Her grace, we glimpse Her divinity. Amma has relieved the suffering of countless people



who have sought Her help. But more often, She does so even without our asking. Amma knows intimately the destiny of each one of us and, in motherly compassion, acts swiftly to save us from dire suffering.

In 2001, during Amma's program in New York City, one of Amma's attendants came to me while I was doing *seva* (volunteer service) on stage late at night, towards the end of Devi Bhava darshan.

She said that Amma wanted the youth volunteers to usher devotees to Her, and added that Amma wanted me to include myself in this darshan line *seva*. I was the darshan line *seva* co-ordinator then and was thrilled that the youth volunteers, who had worked hard during Amma's Summer Tour, were going to be blessed with the opportunity to stand next to Her and do this much coveted *seva*. I immediately

started preparing a list of youth volunteers and then began contacting them to come to the stage at once. I also included myself on the list, in accordance with Amma's desire, but at the bottom, as I wanted the others to have a chance to stand near Amma first. I realized that this meant that I might not get that coveted chance to be next to Amma, as darshan was ending soon.

Ten minutes later, Amma's attendant nudged me again and said, "Amma asked me to remind you that She wants you to be on the list." I felt touched that Amma wanted to give me that grace as badly as I wanted the others to receive it. However, I felt duty bound to ensure that no one would lose their place on my account. I also wondered what my fellow volunteers would think if I, as seva co-ordinator, put myself before them. For these reasons, I left my name at the bottom of the list and hoped fervently

that darshan would not end so soon.

Another 15 minutes passed. Darshan was ending. My heart sank as I realized that those of us who had not received a turn near Amma would not get an opportunity now. There were barely any devotees left in the darshan line.

Just then, the irate attendant came to where I was: "Amma wants to know why you haven't come for seva. She wants you to come right now!"

Amma's message jolted me. Feeling gratitude and puzzlement at Amma's insistence, I ran to the stage. All thoughts of the list flew out of my mind. The moment I reached Amma, She began staring intensely at me. She did not even spare a glance for the last few devotees coming for darshan. Neither did She look at the bhajan singers. She did not look left or right at the volunteers or devotees sitting around Her. Those of us who have seen

Amma give darshan know how unusual this is. Although Amma is engaged in a buzz of activity during darshans, She never fails to give a quick glance or a fleeting smile in the direction of the devotees around Her or at the bhajan group every so often. But at that time, Amma kept Her gaze steadily on me.

Not accustomed to so much attention, I squirmed under Amma's scrutiny. It was a struggle to carry on with the seva of ushering devotees into Amma's embrace while maintaining eye contact with Amma. Soon, I abandoned the seva altogether and gazed back at Amma, hopelessly drawn to Her beautiful countenance. I stood rooted to the spot and simply basked in the love I felt emanating from Her. Amma continued to look at me for 20 precious minutes, during which She did not take Her eyes away from me even once.

I could not understand why Amma had called me just to

look at me but I accepted it as a blessing.

As soon as darshan ended, I left the stage, still feeling amazed at my good fortune. It was early in the morning. We packed up and loaded the car. In those days, my friends and I travelled from city to city in a car owned by a devotee who had kindly and generously agreed to drive us.

I was the last to reach the car and load my belongings in the boot. As I was getting into the backseat, the driver thought that I was already in the car and suddenly sped off from the kerb without any warning. I was flung out of the car. Somehow, I landed parallel to the vehicle, sandwiched between the car and the kerb. The back tyre of the moving car rolled over my big toe, and my ear was inches from being flattened by the front tyre. As the car sped away with the door swung open, I lay on the ground, shocked by how close I had

come to being run over completely. I was miraculously unhurt, and had sustained only minor bruises.

At that moment, I remembered how Amma had gazed at me the night before. After this incident, I saw Her insistence that I stand beside Her differently. I believe She had foreseen that I would get run over by the car and had intervened in a timely fashion to save me. It cannot have been coincidental. I have no doubt that Amma removed some karma from me that night when She gazed at me for such a long time.

We are often ignorant of how much Amma protects us. Many of us wonder how Amma can possibly look after all Her children when She has so many around the world. I am humbled when I recall how Amma kept calling for me that night, even though She was busy giving darshan.

The glory of a master like Amma, who is ever established in the eternal, absolute consciousness, is beyond what our limited intellect can ever hope to conceive. She has come to protect, guide and uplift us. We can only bow down humbly in reverence to Her. ❧

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*(continued from page 18)*

continue the previous day's work after a night's sleep. The *samskaras* (mental impressions) acquired in previous lives influence the next life. The Lord guarantees that the destiny of one who has done good deeds will not be sorrowful. Therefore, no good deed

we have done is ever in vain. We can resume doing it until it attains fruition.

Let us trust this great truth and do our duty: to strive incessantly to fulfil this human birth. ❧

*(to be continued)*



## Chapter 6: Yoga of Meditation

by Prof. V. Muraleedhara Menon, India

**I**n the previous chapter, we saw that *sadhana* (spiritual practice) becomes complete when the trio of karma, vikarma and akarma unite.

Karma is gross action. One can fulfil one's *svadharma* (duty suited to one's nature) only if the mind

co-operates. Vikarma refers to actions aimed at moulding the mind, i.e. special or subtle actions. Karma when united with vikarma becomes akarma (desireless action). Ultimately, *karma yoga*, described in the 6th chapter, is nothing other than sannyasa.

The *Gita* is not just for sannyasis; it is for ordinary people as well. It teaches how we can purify our interactions in life. It helps us to advance from our present position. Is there anything more foolish than frittering away our energies on anything other than uplifting ourselves spiritually? We need not condemn ourselves but must instead strive to remain centred in the Self always. To do so, we must have a lofty spiritual goal and the drive to attain it.

The 6th chapter discusses the different categories of special actions aimed at moulding the mind. The Lord elaborates on different kinds of sadhana, including devotion, meditation,

inquiry and analysis (*jnana* and *vijnana*), personality development, and discriminating between Self and non-Self.

Three things are important in *dhyana yoga*, the yoga of meditation: 1. one-pointedness of the mind; 2. a lifestyle that helps one develop this concentration; and 3. equal vision. To acquire these three, there needs to be *abhyasa* (relentless practice) and *vairagya* (dispassion).

### One-pointed Mind

A focused mind is indispensable if we want to succeed in either spiritual or worldly life. Without it, life would be an utter waste. If we gain one-pointed concentration, we can increase our spiritual strength even when the body gets old and feeble.

How to gain such concentration? How to anchor the mind in the Self? Taming the mind, which is most restless, is no small feat. Worldly life is not just outside; it is in our

mind as well. We are ruining our lives by misusing our infinite intellectual strength on silly matters. Even our prayers do not help us forget the world.

The untrained mind is always running after insignificant things. I feel sad when I see how people in India, which is *moksha-bhumi* (the land of spiritual liberation), are restlessly wasting their time in inane matters. Men have become slaves to their senses. If we do not purify our worldly dealings, how will the mind settle down when we sit for meditation?

We can purify our worldly dealings only if we align them with the ultimate goal of life: spiritual liberation. All our dealings must help to sweeten our last days. We must consume poison throughout life so that we can sweeten death. All our work during the day should help us sleep well at night.

*Mahatmas* (spiritually illumined souls), who epitomise the highest in human evolution,

lived not only in the past; there are mahatmas present even today. Why can't we emulate them? Why remain in the gutter? Why is the mind so scattered, turbulent and extroverted?

### Regulated Lifestyle

To marshal the scattered thoughts of the mind and focus them, we must lead a regulated life. We must curtail all our activities and control the senses. No matter what we do, we must exercise utmost and unceasing vigilance. We must have sentinels guarding our eyes, ears and mind, ensuring that the sense organs do not come into contact with anything detrimental. We must also exercise control over our food and sleep. Thus, all our inner and outer activities must be regulated and watched attentively.

### Equal Vision

The third thing is equal or pure vision. Regard all things

in creation as auspicious. Why then should we fear? *Viśhvam taḍbhaḍram yaḍavanti ḍevab'* — 'This universe is auspicious and full of goodness because God looks after it' (Rg Veda, 2.023.19)

We see flaws in the world because of our defective vision. How I am determines what the world will be for me. As long as we consider creation inauspicious, so long will we continue to regard things with suspicion. We are tormented by the idea that the whole world is conspiring to destroy us. "I am my only friend; everyone else is a foe!" So long as we harbour such thoughts, the mind will not be peaceful or focused. The mind becomes peaceful when we see auspiciousness everywhere.

It is best to learn by following one's intuition. In dhyana yoga, the Lord also speaks about abhyasa and vairagya. One is an injunction, the other, a prohibition. Vairagya is

eliminating evil thoughts and *vasanas* (latent tendencies). Abhyasa is cultivating noble thoughts.

Right at the beginning, the Lord declares that unshakeable confidence and resolute will power are necessary for the practice of dhyana yoga: *Uḍḍharedatmanatmanam na atmanm avsaḍayet'* — 'Elevate yourself by the power of your mind; do not degrade yourself' (6.5).

Arjuna has a doubt, "Suppose we are old and death is near. What is the use of sadhana?"

In response, the Lord reveals the secret of death. Death is a long sleep that provides respite from the toils and turmoils of life. It is like the blissful deep sleep that eases the sorrows of the day. Once we awaken from this sleep of death, we resume the work we were doing in our previous birth, just as one would

*(continued on page 14)*

# Bharata: Man Without Equal

by swami vijayamritananda puri



**D**uring one of Amma's Indian Tours, hundreds of devotees gathered at Amma's Calicut Ashram to receive Amma. The stage was festooned, the devotees were fervidly chanting mantras, and the conch was

being sounded, creating a dense atmosphere of devotion. Amidst all this, one devotee noticed a billboard advertising slippers, right in front of the ashram gates. He found it distasteful that the very spot Amma would be received was marked by a slipper advert, of all things. He even told Amma what he thought. Her response was significant: “Bharata worshipped Lord Rama’s *padukas* (holy sandals). He returned to Ayodhya holding aloft Rama’s padukas on his head. Those padukas were worthy of worship. We mustn’t regard slippers as contemptible objects. They protect our feet from stones, thorns and dirt. In a similar way, the Guru protects us during bad times. That is why we worship the Guru’s padukas. Lord Rama was a Guru to Bharata, who was the best example of surrender.”

There is nothing surprising about the fact that Amma

upheld Bharata as an exemplar of surrender and brotherhood. His life, steeped as it was in *dharma*,<sup>1</sup> attests clearly to this.

Seeing Bharata enter the Dandaka Forest with his armed forces, Lakshmana became enraged and decided to fight with his brother. Lord Rama mollified him: “Do not entertain any suspicion about Bharata. Our noble brother has not come to fight with us but to take us back to Ayodhya. Saying anything unbecoming about Bharata would be tantamount to casting aspersions on me.” Lord Rama and Bharata are extolled in the highest terms in quite a few places in the *Ramayana*. Rama hails Bharata as a person of unimpeachable virtue.

On the way back to Ayodhya, Bharata and his entourage stopped at the hermitage of Sage Bharadvaja. Seeing him carrying Rama’s padukas, the sage said, “O most noble

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1 Law that upholds the universe; code of righteousness.

among men, O best among the virtuous, the finest qualities find their abode in you in the same way as water fills a deep pit." Even Sage Bharadvaja, who was a knower of the truth and a formidable ascetic, praised Bharata as the best among men.

Bharata represents an ideal worthy of emulation. This will be clear when one studies his life. When he returned to Ayodhya from Kekeya, what awaited him was kingship. However, noble soul that he was, Bharata neither rushed to the throne nor embraced the life of monarch. He said, "As my father has ascended to heaven, and my elder brother has left for the forest, I have, for all purposes, become orphaned!" He felt only too keenly that, much more than palatial comforts or the perks and privileges of royal authority, what truly empowered him was the presence of his father and elder brother. So ingrained was the dharmic conscious-

ness in him that Bharata did not feel even the slightest desire for kingship, which he knew was Rama's by right. Not only that, Bharata even asked what benefit there could possibly be in kingship for one who had lost his father and become separated from a brother who was like a father to him, and who had therefore lost everything. When the court ministers urged him to take up the reins of the kingdom, he did not pay the slightest heed to them. Instead, he decided to hold Rama's coronation in the forest itself and bring Him back to Ayodhya. In these scenes, we can witness Bharata's unequalled rectitude.

Usually, one was exiled to the forest for crimes such as unpremeditated murder, stealing money from a Brahmin, coveting another's wife, or killing a foetus. Bharata knew that Rama, who was the very repository of infinite auspicious qualities, could never have committed any of these crimes.

Therefore, he regarded the banishing of Rama as the worst instance of unrighteousness. Considering himself the cause of his brother's exile, Bharata was even prepared to exile himself to the forest. Where else can we find such a noble exemplar of brotherhood?

When he heard that Rama and Lakshmana were clad in tree bark and sporting matted hair, and that they had left with Sita to the forest, Bharata fell unconscious. Learning from Guha that Sri Rama, who had hitherto only lain on plush mattresses, had spent the night on a bedding of grass, Bharata began wailing, lamenting that Rama's suffering had been caused by him. Not only that, Bharata vowed to lie on the bare ground from that day forth as an act of solidarity with his brother.

To host Bharata and his army, which had set out to find Rama, Sage Bharadvaja used yogic powers to create mansions inlaid with precious

gems. When he entered this mansion, Bharata noticed a throne inside. He did not sit on the throne. Instead, imagining Lord Rama ensconced therein, he circumambulated the throne, prostrated before it, and sat near it prayerfully. This act demonstrated not only his fervid devotion for Lord Rama but also his sincere and unfeigned desire that Rama be crowned king.

After leaving Bharadvaja's hermitage, Bharata and his entourage crossed forests, forded rivers, and eventually reached Chitrakuta. He said, "I won't enjoy peace of mind until I have seen Rama, whose beauty is like that of an unfurled lotus and who is as radiant as the full moon, until I have prostrated at my brother's feet, and until He has been crowned and begins ruling the kingdom." These words testify to Bharata's pure and brotherly sentiments, sense of propriety, and attitude of complete surrender.

Bharata had the unshakeable faith that Rama Himself was ruling Ayodhya. Armed with this conviction, he discharged his duties as a regent. Through this attitude, Bharata established himself for all times as the ideal of self-surrender.

Bharata had the unshakeable faith that Rama Himself was ruling Ayodhya. Armed with this conviction, he placed Rama's padukas on the throne to symbolize His presence, worshipped the padukas, prostrated before them, and discharged his duties as a regent. Through this attitude, Bharata established himself for all times as the ideal of self-surrender.

Garbed like an ascetic, Bharata spent his time in a hut in Nandigram. When his wife, Mandavi, asked if she could stay with him as his servant, Bharata dismissed her, asking her to take care of Mother Kausalya, who had become widowed and was

suffering the pangs of separation from her son, Rama. At every moment, Bharata was self-effacing, preferring to defer to others. He was a luminous example of nobility.

Through his life and conduct, Bharata's life demonstrates adherence to dharma, self-surrender, and brotherhood in their highest forms. In this day and age, when people do not hesitate to kill their own father or brother for money, the example of Bharata is more relevant than ever before. Even if we cannot become like Bharata, for as long as the world exists, his life will continue to shine as a sterling model of brotherhood and self-abnegation. 

# Lessons from Space



In the 11th chapter of the *Srimad Bhagavatam*,<sup>1</sup> there is a dialogue between an *avadhuta*<sup>2</sup> and King Yadu that reveals how a *sadhak* (spiritual aspirant) can learn from nature. The *avadhuta* learnt the principles of *sadhana* (spiritual practices) from the *pancha-bhutas* (five elements that are the basis of creation, *viz.* space, fire, water, air and earth). The *avadhuta* tells the

1 Also known as the *Bhagavata Purana*, it chronicles the lives and times of Lord Vishnu's different earthly incarnations.

2 Spiritually illumined soul, albeit one whose behaviour does not conform to social norms.

king how he performed his sadhana after assimilating those principles and in due course gained perfection.

What does space teach a sadhak? There is a tradition of meditating on the Self while imagining oneself in formless space. Many attributes of space apply to the Self as well. If we know this and meditate, our awareness of the Self will grow. Space is inside and outside everything. Similarly, the Self pervades all moving and unmoving forms of life. Space does not attach itself to anything. Similarly, the Self remains untouched by anything. Space remains one even when it appears divided or separated, say, by a pot or a room. Likewise, the Self, though one, also appears different in different bodies. Just as the space in pots of different colours and shapes does not acquire these qualities of the pots, the Self is not modified by bodies of different shapes, sizes or colours.

The true nature of the Self is that of the all-pervading *Brahman*, the Supreme. Everything exists in Brahman. All of creation exists in space. Everything is subject to change. But space remains unaffected by these modifications. Similarly, Brahman remains tranquil and impassive even during the monumental activities of creation, sustenance and dissolution.

All these special characteristics of space reveal to us the pristine nature of the Self. A seeker on the path to Self-realization will be able to progress by learning these lessons.

As Amma says, “A spiritual aspirant should look up to space. There is no movement there, no form and no quality whatsoever, only unbroken bliss. The Truth is one and there is no diversity in the Truth. Always act with the firm faith that ‘I am *Satchitananda-swarupa*,’ i.e. the essence of Truth-Consciousness-Bliss.” 



# Compassionate Touch

by br. sarvapriyamrita chaitanya

**A**s she was helping her son get into the school bus, Sindhu thought, “I’ve never asked the bus attendant her name even though I’ve seen her for the last two years. Today is my son’s final exam. From tomorrow onwards, the school will be closed for two months. The bus attendant is taking good care not only of my son but also of about 20 other children in the bus. I’ve never asked her how she was or even given her a heartfelt smile.”

That night Sindhu called Rosie, her friend and a teacher in her son's school. "Rosie, where does our bus attendant live?"

Rosie asked, "Did something happen? Any complaint?"

"No, no," Sindhu assured her, "No complaint. Just wanted to look her up."

That Sunday, Sindhu and her son went to the bus attendant's house. She was standing in the courtyard when she noticed Sindhu and her son. After a moment's surprise, she walked briskly towards them and ushered them into her house. As Sindhu was gazing at the beautiful pictures hung on the walls of the small and cosy home, the host went to the kitchen to prepare tea. Sindhu's

son ran after her. When the bus attendant came out with cups of tea, Sindhu said, "We were passing this way and thought of dropping by just to say hello."

Sindhu then took out a sari and blouse and passed them to the bus attendant, who looked stunned and asked, "What's all this?"

Sindhu smiled and gently said, "Please accept it... for my happiness." After the bus attendant had accepted the gift, Sindhu said "We'll take our leave now."

As she got up, the bus attendant said, "This is the first such experience in my life." She placed her palms on the child's head and said, "God bless you, son!" 

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# Panchatantra

by br. rupesh, india

**D**o not regard anyone with contempt. If you do, you might become outwitted like Dantilan, who in a moment of arrogance, treated a servant disrespectfully.”

All three princes sharpened their ears to hear the story of Dantilan from their master, Vishnu Sharma.

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Long ago, in a city called Vardhamana, there lived a merchant called Dantilan. As he was intelligent, the king entrusted him with many responsibilities. Human nature is such that if one does things that please the king, people will not trust that person, and if one does things that the people like, the king might feel jealous of that person. In Dantilan’s case, however, both the king and the subjects found him equally pleasing.

Once, Dantilan organized a grand celebration to mark his daughter’s wedding. When the king, his ministers, senior court officials and local leaders arrived,

they were shown to an area set aside for special invitees. It was then that Dantilan noticed Gorambhan, the palace sweeper, sitting among the special invitees. In fury, he grabbed Gorambhan's neck and pushed him out of the hall. The sweeper felt thoroughly insulted. He decided to take revenge.

A few days later, when he came to clean the king's bedroom in the morning, he realized that the king was still half asleep. Making use of this opportunity, Gorambhan muttered, as if to himself, "Dantilan's cheek! How dare he embrace the queen?"

With a shock, the king got up and asked, "What did you say? Dantilan embraced the queen?"

Gorambhan acted as if he had blurted something out inadvertently: "Pardon me, your majesty, I don't know what I said. I spent the whole night playing dice and did not sleep a wink. I'm so sleepy now



that I might have mumbled something unconsciously."

The king thought, "In dreams, people reflect on what they have seen and heard during their waking hours. Words spoken either while drunk or dreaming come from the heart. What Gorambhan says must be true.

He must have seen Dantilan embracing the queen!”

The king developed a hatred for Dantilan and made sure that he was denied entry into the palace. Dantilan was baffled. He did not know why he had lost his privileged access to the king.

One day, Gorambhan saw Dantilan standing near the palace gates. Within earshot of Dantilan, Gorambhan mockingly told the gatekeepers, “Be careful of that Dantilan. He’s the king’s friend. If you stop him, you might find yourself grabbed by the scruff of your neck and booted out unceremoniously!”

When he heard this, Dantilan realized that, somehow, Gorambhan had contrived to estrange him from the king. That evening, he invited Gorambhan to his home. Presenting the sweeper with a gift of expensive silk clothes, Dantilan said, “Please forgive me for kicking you out that day. When I saw you sitting

with the *raja-guru* (royal preceptor) and other dignitaries, I became angry, and in a moment of madness acted rashly.”

Gorambhan was touched by these words. Moreover, the gift had been a pleasant surprise. He said, “I’m no longer upset with you. Don’t worry. The king will soon invite you back to the court.”

The next day, when Gorambhan went to clean the king’s bedroom, he muttered, “How tragic! Our king has taken to eating cucumbers while seated on the toilet!”

Hearing this, the king began enraged and shouted, “You dirty fellow! What did you say? Have you ever seen me do such a thing?”

Gorambhan pretended to be shocked at hearing the king’s words. He said, “Forgive me, my lord! I played dice the whole night and didn’t sleep at all. My head feels groggy and I might have spoken rubbish. Please pardon me, your majesty.”

The king thought, “What this fool said about Dantilan must also have been rubbish. I made a big mistake of listening to his words and expelling Dantilan from the palace.” He recalled Dantilan to the palace, gave him gifts, and restored the powers and privileges he had enjoyed earlier.

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The princes were completely taken by the story. They were the sons of Amarashakti, a virtuous and powerful king who ruled the ancient city named Mahilaropya around 200 BCE. The three princes, Bahushakti, Ugrashakti and Anantashakti, were intellectually dull, disinclined to learning, and indiscreet. The worried king was wondering how he could educate the princes when the reputed scholar, Vishnu Sharma, an adept in all branches of knowledge, arrived at the

court. He accepted the challenge of educating the princes. Overjoyed, the king promised the master 100 villages if he succeeded in making the princes virtuous, skilled and knowledgeable. But Vishnu Sharma replied, “O king, I do not sell knowledge for money. But I promise you, I will make these boys experts in governance within six months. If I fail, you may hang me!”

It is believed that, for the purpose of educating the princes, he composed a collection of fables, which later came to be known as *Panchatantra*. *Panchatantra* means ‘five treatises.’ Vishnu Sharma divided the subject of governance into five areas:

1. *Mitra-bheda* (Loss of Friends, or causing dissension among allies);
2. *Mitra-samprapti* (Winning of Friends, or securing allies);
3. *Kakolukiyam* (Of Crows and Owls, or war and peace);

4. *Labḍhapranasam* (Loss of Gains, or losing what one has gained);
5. *Aparikṣhitakarakam* (Imprudent Actions, or hasty actions).

Through captivating stories that convey morals with a deft and humorous touch, Vishnu Sharma taught the princes the entire science of statecraft: how a ruler should tackle problems arising at the individual and social levels and how to resolve them in the light of knowledge, governance and psychology.

The *Panchatantra* travelled all over the world and became assimilated into local cultures as folk stories long before the age of printing. In the 6th century CE, a Persian physician named Borzuya translated the *Panchatantra* into Pahlavi, a Middle Persian language. In the 8th century CE, Abdullah Ibn al-Muqaffa, the Arabic writer, translated it from Pahlavi into Arabic. In

1483, *Panchatantra* became the first Indian book to be printed and published by the Gutenberg Press in Germany. Since then, it has been translated from Sanskrit into about 50 non-Indian languages. Many scholars are of the view that the *Panchatantra* was the inspiration behind and source of works such as *The 1001 Arabian Nights* and *Aesop's Fables*. The great linguistic scholar, Franklin Edgerton, has declared that no other work in world literature has contributed as much as the *Panchatantra*.

Vishnu Gupta (also known as Chanakya) bequeathed to the world the grand concept of statecraft through his works, *Arthashastra* (Science of Governance) and *Chanakya-neeti* (Law of Chanakya). Vishnu Sharma explained the same subject through simple and enjoyable stories that both children and adults can understand easily. The whole world has embraced the ideas of these Indian geniuses. 

# The Trinity of Carnatic Music

by sooraj subrahmanyam, india

The poet-saints, Tyagaraja Swami, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Shyama Shastri, were known as the Trinity of Carnatic Music, i.e. the classical music of South India. They were contemporaries who lived in the 18th century. They wrote, scored and sang devotional songs that touched the hearts of common people, and were thus instrumental in spreading devotion among the masses.

These composers were not just musicians; they were also *mahatmas* (spiritually illumined souls).



*nidhi cbala sukrama  
ramuni sannidhi seva sukha-  
ma  
nijamuga paluku manasa.*  
What gives more pleasure,  
earning more wealth  
or serving Lord Rama?  
Speak the truth, O mind!

These lines issued spontaneously from Tyagaraja Swami when his brother insisted that he sing before the king to gain position and wealth. Through those lines, the saint revealed his spiritual inclination and his conviction that devotion surpasses all worldly attainments.

Tyagaraja Swami was born into a Telugu Brahmin family in Thiruvavur, Tamil Nadu. As he was believed to have been born by the blessings of Tyagaraja Shiva, the presiding deity of the Shiva temple at Thiruvavur, his parents named him Tyagabrahmam or Tyagarajan. He started composing devotional songs from a very early age. By his intense devotion, he invoked the presence

of Sage Narada, the celestial bard, and obtained from him a treatise on music named 'Swararnavam' ('Ocean of Musical Notes'). Tyagaraja was a musical genius who infused devotion for Lord Rama into Carnatic music.

Apart from poems glorifying Lord Rama, Tyagaraja also wrote devotional songs in praise of Lord Shiva, His consort, and Lord Vishnu. Although most of his poems are in Telugu, Tyagaraja also wrote many poems in Sanskrit. The *Pancharatna Kritis* ('Five Musical Gems'), which include four compositions in Telugu and one in Sanskrit, are among his most celebrated compositions. They were composed in five '*ghana ragas*,' or melodic modes that are considered especially majestic and grand.

There is a legend associated with Muthuswami Dikshitar. He attained unparalleled ability in music after eating a piece of rock candy that Lord Muruga, in the guise of a peasant,

gave him in the Thiruthani Muruga Temple. As a token of his intense devotion to the Lord, he added the signature phrase, 'guru-guha,'<sup>1</sup> in all his works.

Besides Carnatic music, Dikshitar also learned Western music from Europeans and Hindustani music (the classical music of North India) in Varanasi. He undertook pilgrimages to renowned temples such as Kanchi, Tiruvannamalai, Chidambaram, Tirupati, Kalahasthi, Srirangam and Thiruvarur, where he sang songs extolling the deities there. Most of his *kirtans* (devotional songs) are in Sanskrit; the rest are in *Manipravala* (a mix of Sanskrit and local languages). Dikshitar composed about 500 songs that are a remarkable blend of devotion and knowledge, science and literature.

Shyama Shastri was a *Devi bhakta* (devotee) who composed

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1 Guha is one of Lord Muruga's names. 'Guruguha' thus means one whose Guru is Lord Muruga.

songs in praise of the Universal Mother. Though most of his works are in Telugu, he also wrote in Sanskrit and Tamil. Shastri composed fewer songs than Tyagaraja and Dikshitar. Nevertheless, each of his compositions is unequalled in musical brilliance and depth of meaning.

In one of his famous Tamil compositions, Shastri tells Devi, "O Universal Mother, the consort of Shiva, please take care of me. Am I not your own son? I don't have another mother." This kind of devotion, wherein one regards God as Mother, can also be seen in his other works.

The sublime beauty of the melodies and the devotional fervour of the lyrics immortalized the compositions of the Trinity. Though centuries have passed, listening to these devotional songs today can still give us a taste of the sweet nectar of love for God. Their music is truly a portal to God.



# Amma in Arunachala

by Padmaja Gopakumar, India

After the Christmas celebrations in Amritapuri, everyone eagerly awaits the announcement of Amma's Indian Tour dates. This year, Amma began Her South Indian tour on January 23rd with the Madurai Brahmasthanam Festival.

On the way to Madurai, the tour group stopped near a temple for lunch. During the stop, Amma spoke about the attitude of acceptance. "Children, even though salt and sugar look alike, they are different. Similarly, if we accept one another, knowing that each one has his or her

nature, there won't be any problem." She added that there are all kinds of people in creation. "If Kaikeyi and Manthara did not exist, there wouldn't have been a *Ramayana*," She added, referring to the two characters who precipitated the crisis that led to Lord Rama's exile and His subsequent war with Ravana.

There were about 1,000 people from all over the world travelling with Amma. This meant that people from different cultures would have to spend time together for a few weeks, often sharing spaces with limited conveniences. Amma advised the tour group to cultivate the attitude of acceptance, saying that every experience in life teaches us some lesson and can also help us correct our mistakes.

A highlight of this year's Tamil Nadu Tour was Amma's public program in the holy city of Tiruvannamalai, which She had visited in 1982 and 1984 with just a few followers.

En route to Tiruvannamalai, Amma stopped at a gas station in Perambalur. The place was located by the side of a highway with heavy traffic and looked derelict. Many of those travelling with Amma were curious about why Amma had chosen this place.

After meditation, She served everyone a dinner of chapattis and curry. After dinner, a few devotees shared their experiences with Amma. The owner of the gas station was wonderstruck hearing these stories. Though he was not a devotee of Amma, he later said that it had probably been one of the most memorable days in his life. He then told a few brahmacharis about the gas station.

Though the construction of the gas station had been completed two years earlier, the government had still not issued him the licence he needed. He had invested hugely and, receiving no returns, began to lose all hope. It was then that he unexpectedly received the

licence. That very evening, Amma arrived in Perambalur. He said he believed that all the obstacles had been cleared only because Amma, whom he described as *Mangaladayini* (one who bestows auspiciousness), had thought about coming there, and thus blessing the place.

One hears so many such experiences around Amma. Perhaps, the owner of the gas station had been associated with Amma in some past birth and forgotten about it. But can the Divine Mother forget? Even if we forget to call out to Amma, She comes, when the time is ripe, and showers Her grace on us.

In Tiruvannamalai, an exceptionally large gathering attended Amma's program. For centuries, this holy city has hosted many *mahatmas* (spiritually illumined souls). Devotees believe that Lord Shiva Himself manifested on earth as the Arunachala Mountain.

When He was 16 years old, Sri Ramana Maharshi, who considered Lord Shiva to be his father, arrived at the Arunachala Temple and said, "Father, I have come to You in accordance with Your instructions." He lived and attained samadhi there.

Besides the Ramanashram, there are other ashrams and temples in Tiruvannamalai. Senior representatives from these temples and ashrams, officials from the city administration, and spiritual teachers like Nochur Venkataraman were present to receive Amma. It was a thrilling to see the Arunachala Mountain looming towards the left side of the stage, as if watching the *lilas* (divine play) of the Divine Mother. When Amma last visited in 1984, though She was not well-known then, the *avadhuta*<sup>1</sup> Ram Surat Maharaj

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1 A spiritually illumined soul, albeit one who is often unknown and whose behaviour might not conform to social norms.

“Children, even though salt and sugar look alike, they are different. Similarly, if we accept one another, knowing that each one has his or her nature, there won’t be any problem.”

had rushed to Amma, hailing Her “Kali! Kali!”

Among those who came for Amma’s darshan this time was Mooji, a spiritual leader from Jamaica. This was not his first meeting with Amma. He had earlier received Her darshan in the US. This time, he brought his disciples with him. Amma embraced him, gave him prasad, and affectionately asked, “How are you son? Hope you are keeping well.” After his darshan, he sat on the stage, watching Amma. When he was ready to leave, Amma turned to look at him smilingly.

Mooji later said, “The way Amma gives... only one with the power of God can do that. No one can deny what Amma is doing for the world. The supreme love that She showers

on each! Amma’s presence! That sight is so beautiful. I came to pay my respects to Amma. When we saw the huge crowd, we never thought we would be able to make it to Her. It is only by Her grace that we could have Her darshan and enjoy Her divine presence.”

Amma’s darshan continued until about 10 the next morning. Many of those who came from other ashrams in Tiruvannamalai were watching Her with awe and wonder. One of them said, “Travelling around the world every year with so many people, embracing all who come to Her, listening to their problems, and trying to solve their material and spiritual needs... no mahatma has ever been known to do such things.” 

# Lilas Around Amma

## Omnipresent Amma

Chottanikkara Devi was my *pratyaksha devata*,<sup>1</sup> and I would often go to the Chottanikkara Devi Temple. I had my first darshan of Amma here.

At that time, I was teaching some children a dance that was to be

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 1 Chottanikkara Devi (literally, 'Goddess of Chottanikkara') is a form of the Divine Mother. There is a famous temple dedicated to Her in Chottanikkara in Kochi, Kerala. 'Pratyaksha devata' literally means a visible or tangible form of divinity. The term is often used by devotees who have palpably felt the presence of the divine through a particular form of God.



performed before Sri Satya Sai Baba. Unfortunately, the program was cancelled at the last moment. Getting another chance to perform before Him seemed impossible. I felt sad and would cry myself to sleep almost every night.

It was at this time that my daughter and I met Amma. She was giving darshan in a room in the temple rest house. The room was dark except for the glow emanating from a big oil lamp. I reached Amma and bowed down before Her. She touched my heart and put Her hands on Her forehead, saying “Shiva... Shiva... Shiva... Shiva...” This darshan gave me a lot of relief.

A few days later, I received a call from the Sai Satsang asking me to present a dance drama before Babaji during Onam.<sup>2</sup> I was pleasantly surprised, and felt sure that this had come about by Amma’s blessing.

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2 Kerala’s harvest festival.

Soon after, I moved, and this forced me to stop my dance classes. I was sad about this, as I loved teaching dance. At this point, I received another blessing from Amma: a woman wanted me to teach her child a dance that she could perform before Amma Herself! I was thrilled and readily accepted the request. The girl was to dance to the bhajan ‘*Chilanka ketti*.’ The challenge was that she was barely three years old! Nevertheless, as soon as I finished teaching her the dance, Amma gave us a chance to perform before Her. We presented the dance in the *kalari*<sup>3</sup> as Amma lovingly watched us. Later, during bhava darshan, Amma told me, “I will give you a chance to present a bigger program soon!”

True to Her word, Amma gave me a chance to present a dance drama before Her on Her birthday that year. This

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3 The old shrine where Amma used to give Devi and Krishna Bhava darshans.

## My desire to teach dance was further fulfilled when I taught the students of Amma's school and college.

blessing continued for the next few years.

During this period, I completed my B.Ed. (Bachelor of Education) degree and joined one of Amma's schools as a teacher. My desire to teach dance was further fulfilled in the following years by teaching the students of Amma's school and college and even the teachers. This was the most beautiful period of my life.

All this came to an abrupt end when I fell seriously sick with meningitis and jaundice. During this turbulent period, Amma told a friend: "I have allowed her to suffer only one percent of what she is destined to undergo. She will be alright!" Needless to say, I recovered, but my faith was put to the test. My convalescence period was distressing and I became depressed. I would

often complain to Amma mentally. One such day, when I was feeling particularly despondent, I mentally asked Her, "Have you forgotten me completely?" When I turned around, I saw Amma standing beside me and gazing at me compassionately. I was stunned!

This vision reinforced my faith in Amma and in Her omnipresence. It also taught me an important lesson: the need to learn surrender to Amma. My spiritual journey is still continuing with its ups and downs, but at each stage, I have experienced Amma's palpable protection and guidance. My only prayer now is to develop the ultimate spiritual qualities of complete acceptance and unconditional surrender to Amma's will. 

— *Prabha Menon, India*