

T.T.D. Religious Publications Series No. 1094

Price :

Published by **Sri M.G. Gopal**, I.A.S., Executive Officer,
T.T.Devasthanams, Tirupati and Printed at T.T.D. Press, Tirupati.

Srinivasa Bala Bharati

SYAMASASTRI

English Translation

Dr. Poturi Venkata Subba Rao



**Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams,
Tirupati**

Srinivasa Bala Bharati - 146
(Children Series)

SYAMASASTRI

Telugu Version

B. Rajanikanta Rao

English Translation

Dr. Poturi Venkata Subba Rao



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Prof. Ravva Sri Hari

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First Edition - 2014

Copies : 5000

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Executive Officer,

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams,

Tirupati.

D.T.P.:

Office of the Editor-in-Chief

T.T.D, Tirupati.

Printed at :

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams Press

Tirupati.

FOREWORD

If a beautiful garden is to be raised, one needs to take proper care of tender flower plants. In the same way in order to create a good society, great care needs to be taken of young children who are going to be future citizens of India. All their intellectual attainments will be futile if they fail to learn of their culture and its greatness. They need to be told of great men and women of this country so that they are inspired by their ideals. The essentials of our culture should be given to them in the form of simple and charming stories. They will cherish these ideals and be guided by them. They will promote good and they will love the society they live in. They make their families proud and bring great prestige to their country when they grow up into good citizens.

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams have brought out these booklets for children in Telugu under Srinivasa Bala Bharati Series. Although meant for children, they are useful to the elderly too. They have found place in the book shelves of every family. The stories of legendary men and women are narrated in a simple way. We hope that more and more children will read them and profit by them.

I congratulate Dr. R. Sri Hari, Editor-in-Chief, TTD for his efforts in bringing out the English translations of SRINIVASABALA BHARATI SERIES so well. We have received co-operation of many learned men and women in our efforts to popularize this series. I am thankful to them.

In the Service of the Lord



Executive Officer,

Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams.
Tirupati.

FOREWORD

Today's children are tomorrow's citizens. They need apt acquaintance with the life-histories of celebrated persons at tender so that they get opportunity to lead their lives in an exemplary way. They will come to know that great things such as Indian culture, basic tenets of life and moral teachings are abundantly available in the life-experiences of great men. It is observed that there is no scope to teach such subjects in school curriculum.

Observing such circumstances the Publication Division of Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams has published about hundred booklets in Telugu about the lives of famous sages and great men written by various authors under the editorship of Dr.S.B. Raghunathacharya under "Bala Bharati Series". The response to these books is tremendous and it has given impetus to publish them in other languages also. To begin with, some of the books are now brought out in English and Hindi by T.T.D. for the benefit of boys and girls and the interested public.

These booklets, primarily intended to the growing children and also to the elders to study and narrate the stories to their children, will go a long way to sublimate the aspirations of the children to greater heights.

R. SRI HARI
Editor-In-Chief
T.T.D.

Welcome To Srinivasa Balabharati Series

The series is the outcome of abundant grace of Lord Sri Venkateswara.

This will be an unfailing source of inspiration to the young.

It enshrines the best of Bharatiya tradition. May this noble endeavour be successful.

India has been known for its culture and civilization, its ethical and dharmic way of life from time immemorial. India has marched ahead with its commitment to dharma, its resistance to adharma, its espousal of life-affirming values and its humane attitude to life as a journey towards God realization. Those who embodied these values in their life have been a beacon of light to us. Their impact is deep on the life we lead. Young boys and girls will find them exemplary and feel proud of their invaluable heritage. They will love their motherland and dedicate themselves to its service.

It is therefore necessary that the young learn about these great men and women so that they will realize their indebtedness to them for their selfless contribution to the enrichment of life. This should indeed be a chief component of true education which ensures the perennial continuity of Indian culture and civilization. SRINIVASA BALA BHARATI SERIES has come into existence to acquaint the young boys and girls with right perspective of Indian life and values through a series of booklets written exclusively for this purpose describing in brief the lives of great men and women.

We welcome you to share our joy in launching these booklets.

S.B. Raghunathacharya

Cheif Editor



SYAMASASTRI

Srividya :

Our ancient Indian tradition is endowed with a particular kind of 'Vidya' (knowledge) which is merited even today as 'Srividya' by the learned scholars of "Mantra Sastra" (the science of the supernatural). Sridevi is the royal spouse of 'Parabrahman' who embodies in himself the 'Trinity' commonly known as 'the Brahma' (creator) the Vishnu (Sustainer) and the Maheswara (Destroyer). It is Sridevi who is the primeval deity and the progenitor of the three deities called Saraswati, Lakshmi and Parvati, the espousers of Brahma, Vishnu and Maheswara respectively. Srividya is a process of 'upasana' (spiritual discipline) for winning the grace of Sridevi by following rigorous discipline as it is prescribed in the Mantrasastra. Great are those who follow this path of 'upasana'. They are rightly called 'Srividyaopasakas'. The worship of 'Srichakra' is central to the 'Srividya' a system of Hindu worship according to the Vedic tenets. Among the great names that adorn the pages of the Hindu religious history, there is no one greater than that of Adisankara who is the first teacher, preceptor and promoter of 'Advaita' (non dualistic) philosophy. It is Sankara who first revived and promoted the tradition of 'Srividyaopasana' - a particular process of Srividya

system of Hindu worship. He is a great Jnani, yogi and bhakta.

Three gems of music :

Of the great Trinity who composed many 'Kritis' contributing not only for the enrichment of the carnatic music but also for the enhancement of aesthetic pleasure, two are the ardent disciplinarians of the Srividyaopasana as it is ordained by Sankara. The Trinity of the carnatic music are Syamsastri, Tyagaraja and Muttuswamy Dikshitar. Syamasastri is the oldest among the three of the diamonds of the carnatic music. While Tyagaraja followed 'Nadabrahmopaasana' by making Sriramachandra as the objective form of his worship, Syamasastri and Dikshitar did the same 'upasana' through the form of 'Parasakti'. All of them attained true realization by means of their respective 'upanasas'. It is wonderful that the three great composers were born and flourished in the same century between 1740 and 1850 AD in Tiruvarur in Tanjore District of Tamilnadu. Such great souls are born for championing a great cause and so they are rightly called "Karanajanmulu", since they have a life mission to accomplish. Syamasastri is the oldest of the trinity of carnatic music. Next to him is Tyagaraja, the last one being Muttu Swamy Dikshitar. Later on Syamsastri has become a preceptor and mentor (guru) to Dikshitar in the "Srividyaopasana" by initiating him to the final

instructions related to Srividya known as “Padukanta Deeksha”.

Golden Kamakshi :

There are seven cities in India which bestow upon the believers wealth and salvation; Kanchi far excels the seven. Brahma has undergone rigorous penance, at Kanchi and finally found the world savior ‘Gouri’. To make his wonderful vision and inexplicable experience eternal, Brahma turned the form of Gouri into a golden idol and named it as “Kamakshi”. “I bow to the royal spouse of Ekamreswara and the queen of the city Kanchi who is adored and eulogized by the great sage Sankara as ‘Srividya’. Residing in unnumbered centres she adorned Kanchi, worshipped by beings of the three worlds”.

Kanchipuram is a sacred place where once Brahma had undergone severe penance. It is one of the seven sacred cities of salvation in ancient India. According to the traditional lore, Ayodhya, Madhura, Maya, Kasi, Kanchi, Avantika and Puri are the seven cities where salvation is bestowed upon. As the rigorous austerities observed by Brahma at Kanchi came to fruition, the goddess of the world appeared before him in a wonderful form. Brahma had formed a golden icon of the deity who appeared before him, built a temple and installed the icon there for the benefit of the devotees. The deity who was then installed by Brahma in the days of yore in the form of a golden icon has come to

be known as 'Bangaru Kamakshi' in later times. This story of Kamashi belongs to the 'Puranic Age' that transcends the limits of history.

Installation of Srichakra :

In the history of Hinduism, Kanchi occupies an important place. It is wellknown that Sankara who is often called Sankaracharya lived in 8th Century A.D., had revived the temple of Kamakshi and installed Srichakra at the seat of the lotus like feet of the Goddess. In the Srichakra formed of the eight triangles into a circle wherein the space of each of the triangles the 'Bija' letters are written according to the tenets of "Mantra Sastra" by invoking the power identified as the creative energizing force of the Devi. It is popularly believed that Sankara had installed Srichakras in most of the important seats of Adisakti in our country.

Inseparable attachment :

Kamakshi Devi is one such of the installed icons representing the creative energizing force of the universe at the sacred place of Kanchi or Kanchipuram. Tradition holds it that, Adisankara had appointed one of the learned scholars among the ancestors of Symasastris as hereditary priest making him responsible for the care and worship of the image of Goddess Bangaru Kamaskhi, whose temple is in Thanjavur. The progenitors of Syama Sastri according to Subbarama

Dikshitar belong to the clan of Dravida brahmin family of the north who lived in Kambham of Karnool District. From then onwards the Sastry family was comfortably settled in Tiruvarur over some centuries maintaining a long tradition as devoted priests and scholars in the presence of Bangaru Kamakshi. Thus an inseparable attachment had been formed between the Goddess and the priest's family. The Goddess made our hero Syamasastri compose prolifically and sing those Keertans dedicated to her in Telugu, Sanskrit and Tamil languages.

Varali Raga - Chapu Tala

Pallavi (Burden of the Song): Kamakshi, Bangaru Kamakshi Nannu brovave

Anupallavi (Response of the burden): Tamasamele Rave Samagana Iole, Sushile Kamakshi, Bangaru Kamakshi Nannu brovave

Swara Sahityam: (Literature of the Note) Na manavi vinu Devi Nive Gati Yani Namminanu Mayamma Vegame Karunajudavamma, bangaru bomma

Charanam (Couplet): Syama Krishna paripalini (Amba) Sukasyamale Sivasankari Sulini Sadasivuniki Rani, Visalataruni, Saswata Rupini

(Oh! Kamakshi, Golden Kamakshi come to my rescue... Don't be late... thou enamoured of the

Samagana good natured. Please hear my appeal. I hail you as my protectress and savior. Be merciful oh Golden Kamakshi benign ruler of Shyama Krishna... Sivasankari (Amba) thou art eternally formed... the bearer of the trident save me).

At Tiruvarur :

The Bahmany Sultans unitedly waged war against the Vijayanagar empire at Thallikota in 1565. This war not only caused the downfall of the Vijayanagara empire but also resulted in anarchy and tumult. It is a war which affected even the interiors such as Kanchipuram of the Vijayanagara empire. As such the priests of the temple were rather compelled to take refuge at a place free from the onslaughts of the sultans since their sole aim was to keep the icon of and the wealth belonged to the Bangaru Kamakshi safely protected. So the priest family moved away from their native home and roamed about the thick woods and populous states and had stayed at the court of the ruler of 'Chenge Kota' for 15 years. By and by they had spent seventy years at Udayarpalem on the request of the Zamindar of that region. They felt that their activities regarding the worship of the deity were not carried on unhindered. Finally, they decided to reach Kanchipuram and before reaching their destination they stayed at different places like Annakudy, Vijayapuram, Nagur, Madapuram, Sikkil and other villages over thirty years.

The gift of the Goddess :

The priest's family after reaching Tiruvarur had installed "Bangaru Kamakshi" on the premises of the temple of Tyagarajaswamy - an image of Siva. The priest's family had to worship the idol "Bangaru Kamakshi" by turns between the brothers. When Viswanatha Sastry's turn to worship the deity came, his wife Vengu Lakshmi, with the blessings of the goddess, conceived a male baby who later on became popular as Syamasastri. The family lived at Tiruvarur until Syamasastri became 19 years old.

At Tanjavur :

Those were the days when Haider Ali was at the zenith of his power and the attacks of his soldiers were unexpected. With a view to protect the icon of Bangaru Kamakshi and the wealth of the deity, Viswanatha Sastri successfully negotiated with Tuljaji, the king of Tanjavur, to keep the goddess in the premises of Konkaneswara Swamy temple. Thus, the family had shifted from Tiruvarur to Tanjavur with the goddess - Bangaru Kamakshi. Five years after they had moved to Tanjavur, the king Tuljaji built a permanent temple and installed the goddess in it with 'kumbhabhisheka' and charitably endowed the temple and the priest with lands and 'Agraharams'. Thus Bangaru Kamakshi who was installed two centuries ago in Tanjavur made Syamasastri, the eldest son of Viswanatha Sastri -

compose Kritis with an unparalleled stroke of genius and sing them with equal dexterity.

Dhanyasi Ragam - Triputa Talam
Meenalochani brova yochana deenajanavana
Amba

Ganavinodini Amba Neesamanamu
Jaganaganamma Amba!!

Kanna talli gadaa naa vinnapamu vinavamma
Pannaga bhushanunikirani ninu vina
Ilalo Data levarunnamma Bangaru bomma
Amba!!

(Oh protectress of the destitute, fisheyeed Amba - why dost thou hesitate - entertained of the music. I don't find your equal in the World. Please listen to my appeal oh! Spouse of siva whom snakes adore and who is more charitable than thou art in the World. There are none except you. Oh golden toy like beauty - Amba)

In those days - - -

From 1740 onwards with a difference of 5 years, three great men - Syamasastri, Muttuswamydikshitar and Tyagaraja were born in Tiruvarur of Tamilnadu, pioneering great transition in the history of South Indian music. At this juncture, it is apt to know the political, social and cultural conditions prevalent during the period which mark the birth of the trinity of Carnatic music. After the downfall of Vijayanagara empire the weak kings of that dynasty who made Veluru and Chandragiri

as their capitals had only a precarious hold on Madhura and Tanjavur rulers belonging to the Nayaka dynasty.

The reign of the Tanjavur Nayaks has opened a new era with a grandeur almost equaled to that of Krishnadevaraya of Vijayanagara empire in so far as their patronage to literature, art and architecture is concerned. Their splendour had been on the wane with the repeated conquests of the Maratha kings, who were the descendants of Sivaji. Finally the glory of the Nayakas had vanished in course of time under the Maratha Kings.

The Maratha Kings realized that they could not win the favour of the people unless they continued the noble vision of the Nayakas by elevating the cultural and literary activities as flourished under the rule of their predecessors. By contributing for the development of art and architecture the Marathas could gain the favour of their vassal kings who paid tributes to them, the old leaders of different communities and the ordinary people. They patronized poets, scholars and musicians. Their contribution to propagation of knowledge was so great that they got literary classics translated into different Indian languages and established a very big library known as 'Saraswati Mahal'. They built theatres popularly known as 'Rangamantapas' to develop fine arts like music, dance, painting and sculpture and traditional arts like Yakshaganas and Harikathas.

Unbridled life :

Along with these virtues, the courts of the kings have become centres for sundry vices inevitable of royal life like redtapism, bribery, nepotism, debauchery and many other such activities. More often than not the king was beset with sycophants who very easily influenced the king while the really deserving and the worthy were very badly neglected. Sometimes courts have become the abodes of nefarious activities and centres for envy and places where plots were hatched with envy against power. All sacred institutions such as 'Devadasi vyavastha' were exploited for sexual pleasures.

Need for reforms in music :

It was the time when there was a lot of controversy among great musicians on different theses of music and the sole aim of a classical concert was to defeat the peer in competition and to put him to ridicule. This being the tendency of the scholars in musical art it did not contribute for enhancing real aesthetic pleasure. Moreover the great musicians and bards of the day had given top priority to compositions based on love theme, since their main objective was to please and win the favour of either the ruler or his concubine. By and large, it was time to revive literature and music from such a mundane existence to lofty ideals leading to self realization. In such an exigency it became rather

expedient that great reformers should incarnate to justify the cause of literature and music.

Installation of Bangaru Kamakshi :

As it has been already discussed earlier, the priest family of Tiruvarur had wandered away from their native home to different places with the idol Bangaru Kamakshi and the wealth belonged to the deity and finally reached Tiruvarur after a long period of time. Etymologically “Tiruvarur” means a sacred place on the bank of a river. By the time they arrived at “Tiruvarur” the scholar priest of the Brahmin family Venkatadri Ayyar belonged to Goutama Gotra and Bodhayana Sutra was the master of the family. At that time Venkatadri Ayyar’s son Viswanatha Sastry was 25 years old and his daughter-in-law Vengalakshmi was 20 years old. Then as Viswanatha Sastri had become the Principal priest of Bangaru Kamaskhi, 19 years after the installation of the deity at Tiruvarur, a wonderful incident took place. By then Viswanatha Sastry did not have any children.

A wonderful prophecy :

There lived a highly orthodox Brahmin in the next street to the house of Viswanatha Ayyar. He was a great devotee of lord Venkateswara. He used to worship lord Sri Venkatachalapati on every last Saturday of the month and invite brahmins for lunch as a part of that religious ceremony. Keeping that occasion in view

brahmins far and near would gather at his home as participants of the worship of lord Venkateswara. On such an occasion, a brahmin was divinely inspired and said in frenzy with a choked up voice; “call Viswanatha Sastri’s wife here”. She was there at that place sitting with other women participating in the ceremony. She came out and stood before the brahmin with all humility. The divinely inspired brahmin said with a prophetic tone; “next year in the month of ‘chaitra’ when the star ‘krittika’ will be on, you are begetting a son ... arrange for a ritualistic lunch for 100 brahmins”. His prophecy came true. Even before Viswanatha Sastri’s wife completed her sentence - “do we have that capacity to feed hundred brahmins” the brahmin said “if not a hundred and twenty five even” - Sastry and his wife reached home happily. True to the presage of the brahmin his wife conceived within a few weeks and delivered a male baby on 26th April 1662; the month and year according to Hindu calendar was Chaitra of chitrabhanu, when the star “krittika” was on. The infant was named Venkata subrahmanyam by his grandfather and parents. As the boy was dark complexioned like Srikrishna his parents would fondly call him as “Syama Krishna” with all love and affection.

Maternal Uncle’s association :

His parents, grandpa, and kith and kin only knew that the boy Syama would become famous one day or the other, but they did not know exactly in what field

he would shine. Theirs was an orthodox brahmin family which maintained the long tradition of devoted priests and scholars but, there were no musicians in that family before Syamsastri. His father trained his son and ensured that the boy attained scholarship in Telugu and Sanskrit and gained some knowledge of the Vedas required of a priest. We don't know how Syam had spent his early boyhood days and what his favorite pastimes were. His maternal uncle though not a scholar but a connoisseur of music taught Syama the basics of music. It is believed that his maternal uncle used to take the boy along with him to the classical concerts and the open theatre performances of the episodes from the Bhagavata which are called the 'Bhagavata melas' in the premises of the temple. That is the reason why in Syama Sastri's compositions we find the predominance of 'chapatula' as a result of his fondness for the Bhagavatamelas even as a boy. The 'melas' always showed a fascination for 'chapatula'. Though his maternal uncle first initiated him into music, his interest in it was multiplied by the classical music concerts and Bhagavata melas. His interest in the classics of Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil was propelled by his grandfather and father who were no mean scholars of these languages. Besides, Syamasastri was endowed with a mellifluous voice.

Family's shift to Tanjavur :

As such it can't be unusual to think that his mother was also imbued with hereditary interest in music. As

the boy was very much fond of his mother, it is but natural that he would take more liberty with his mother than with his father. All the affection he had for his mother could be discerned from the phrases he fondly used in his 'kritis' dedicated to Bangaru Kamakshi. It could be conjectured that either his grandfather or father would have disciplined him in 'Sri Vidyopasana'. With all the interest he had in music and literature, Syamasastri spent his days in close association with his mother and maternal uncle who contributed a lot for his formative years as a musician. When Syamasastri was 18 years old their family moved to Tanjavur on receiving invitation from Tuljaji - the Maharaja of Tanjavur. Syamasastri who was born and had lived at Tanjavur for 18 years would have definitely associated and formed friendship with Tyagaraja (1767). Since both Syamasastri and Tyagaraja had music and 'Bhagavata mela' as their common interest it could be presumed that Syamasastri who was born in 1762 and had lived for 18 years at Tiruvarur would have definitely associated and formed friendship with Tyagaraja who was five years senior to him in age and was born at the same place in the next street.

In Tanjavur :

As it had been already pointed out Viswanatha Sastri's family moved from Tiruvarur to Tanjavur in 1781, they kept the idol of Bangaru Kamakshi Devi in Konkaneswara Swamy temple in the premises of the fort and continued to worship the goddess. His

Highness Tuljaji, the Maharaja of Tanjavur who invited Viswanatha Sastri had asked him to keep and worship the deity in Mule Hanuman temple for three years until he built a temple specially for the goddess as 'Tanjavur Kamakshi Ammal' temple. The temple was built, the idol of Kamakshi was grandly installed and a 'kumbabhisheka' was performed and the king bounteously gifted the priest Viswanatha Sastri's family with an 'Agraharam' and a lot of wealth. He had also decreed thirty two acres of land as per law for the maintenance of the temple as an endowment land. The splendor of the temple is still being continued even after 150 years.

An envious Act :

Syamasastri who had completed 18 years by the time they reached Tanjavur had to invariably take up new responsibilities like assisting his father in the process of worshipping the goddess and holding up of minor religious activities for the benefit of the devotees. On one occasion Syamasastri had to act as the principal priest instead of his father as his father was away at a nearby village. Then a reputed gentleman of the town visited the temple to serve Kamakshi Devi with some special process of worship. Syamasastri performed the puja not only according to the scriptures but also sang the 'stotras' in different styles of Ragas of which he was thoroughly conversant with. The gentleman was pleased with the priest and felicitated

Syama Sastri with a shawl. When Syam Sastri told his maternal uncle all about the felicitation he had received from the gentleman of the town, he became so envious of his nephew that he tore all the significantly important papers on music written by Syamasastri. His father heard all about this but kept quiet and his mother consoled Syama and boosted up his morale.

Since Tanjavur is the capital and the priests' family won the favour of the king, Viswanatha Sastri used to visit the court of the king on important festival days following the royal conventions. Young Syama Sastri more often than not would visit the royal court along with his father. As king Tuljaji himself was a maestro who authored a book on classical music, he would quite often hold music concerts. Though Syama Sastry did not participate in the classical discussions and concerts held in the court of the king, his active audience of these music concerts stirred his dormant flair for music and thus so many melodious songs welled up from his sonorous voice.

With Sangeeta Swamy - - -

Exactly at the same time a Sanyasi known as Sangita Swamy, a learned musician skilled in both music and dance, stayed at Tanjavur during the 'chaturmasya' period of the year. 'Chaturmasya Deeksha' means during the rainy season - for a period of four months sanyasi's stay at one location spending their time in worship and preaching. He was not only adept at dance

and music but also one who knew the secret mysteries of both the arts. It is said that the swamy used to dance before the shrine of Visweswara in Varanasi, popularly known as Kasi. He belonged to Andhra and during his saintly wanderings through important pilgrim centres, he stayed at Tanjavur to spend the 'chaturmasya' period.

Blessings of Sangita Swamy :

One day Viswanatha Sastri invited Sangita Swamy for "bhiksha" i.e., as the saintly guest of the family as per the convention. The Swamy accepted the 'bhiksha' and after all the said formalities were over, Viswanatha Sastri introduced his son Syama Sastry to Swamiji. Syama prostrated at the feet of Swami and swamy was very much impressed with his behavior and predicted that the boy would become a great maestro of music and also a renowned scholar. Viswanatha Sastri was greatly pleased at the prediction of the swamy and expressed his gratitude in unequivocal terms.

A rare experience :

Receiving blessings from the Swamy was one of the remarkable opportunities in the life of Syama Sastri. As Sangita Swamy understood the merit of Syama he blessed him to become a master of music. Recognizing his potential, the swamy educated him on many advanced aspects of music during his four month stay and also presented him several rarest of the rare musical texts. A Similar wonderful experience occurred in the

life of the other two great musical scholars of the Trinity, Syam being one among them. There has been a legend that the great saint Narada assuming the form of a yogin named Rama Krishnananda had appeared before Tagaraya in his prime youth and presented him a book entitled 'Swararava' and also taught him some mystical secrets of the musical art. It is said that in the same way Muttu Swamy Dikshitar had been initiated into the art of music by a great saint of the day known as Chidambara yogi. Even after completion of the deeksha Sangita Swamy would visit the house of Viswanatha Sastri at Tanjore in order to tutor Syama Sastri in the secrets of music regarding 'raga' 'tala' and 'swara prastana' hitherto unknown to the mediocre.

So far his biographers have not given any evidence to the maiden efforts of Syama Sastri's compositions before he had come into contact with ascetic Sangeeta Swamy. As his compositions show Syama Sastri studied Sanskrit and Telugu and started composing first in Sanskrit in which he had several pieces and later turned over to Telugu and Tamil. Elders who are thoroughly conversant with music hold the opinion that

“Janani natajana paripalini” is the earliest compositions of Syama Sastri in Sanskrit.

Ragam - Saveri - Aditalam

“Janani natajana paripalini - pahi mam Bhavani”

**Satata vinata suta Ganapati Senani
 Rajarajeswari visala taruni akhilajanapavani
 Satinuta charite sada madhura bhasha
 vigaladamruta rasadhwani
 Sutanu, tava supada vikasita Eha madhu gatra
 matimatramajani sujani**

(“Oh! Liberator of the devotees who prostrate at thy feet - always adored by the bow headed Ganapati, the commander, Rajarajeswari, broad minded goddess and purifier of all the sins of people; always praised by women with songs sung in mellifluous language like that of the flow of nector, more of ‘Rasa’ and ‘Dhwani’ oh! wondrous beauty we drink the nector streamed from the compositions written on you with suitable words”).

In this kriti (composition) or in some other compositions we do not find the insignia or ‘mudra’ - Syamakrishna pujita or Syamakrishna sahodari - which is significant in most of his ‘kritis’. It is believed that he wrote these ‘kritis’ before he had come under the influence of Sangeeta Swamy - unaware of putting his insignia at the end of his compositions. He composed his ‘kriti’s’ mostly on Kamakshi in three languages.

Association with Pachchi Mirium :

Sangeeta Swami’s association had strongly contributed to the reinforcement of musical appetite in Syamasastri. The ascetic not only enriched the

compositions of Syamasastri but also helped him to become one of the most renowned composers of the carnatic music by explaining to him all the intricacies involved in the science of music. Satisfied with the musical performance of Sastri the Swamy recommended that he listen to as many of the fine musicians of the area as possible and suggested that he cultivate the friendship of the court musician of Tanjavur Pachchi Mirium Adi Appaiah. Later on Sangeeta Swamy went on his pilgrimages with the satisfaction that he had given a great musician to the world.

Kamakshi !

Pachchi Mirium Adi Appaiah as a maestro of carnatic music authored so many kritis of which 'viriboni' composed in 'Bhairavi Raga' and 'Ata tala varna' is prescribed to the second year students of the carnatic music. From their first meeting itself, both Adi Appaiah and Syama Sastri have become close friends and the former would always appreciate the way the latter composed kritis. Adi Appaiah always addressed Syama Sastri as 'Kamakshi'. It is neither because of Syamasastri was the son of Viswanatha Sastri nor because he worshipped Kamakshi in his father's absence but because of the insignia Sastri puts at the end of each of his compositions as 'Syama Krishna pujita' or 'Syama Krishna sahodari. As Adi Appaiah became a great admirer of Syama Sastri, it could be

presumed that he did not make any difference between the goddess and Syama and so addressed him as 'Kamakshi'

Todi - raga Adi tala - Swarajati Pallavi;

**“Rave Himagiri Kumari Kanchi Kamakshi
Varada -**

manavi vinavamma shubhamimma mayamma”

**Bhairavi - raga, Misrachapu - tala, Swarajati
Pallavi**

“Kamakshi anudinamu maravaka ne nipadamule dikkanuchu nammitini, Sri Kamakshi” - // Kamakshi //

I believe and pray every day that your lotus like feet are my recourse Sri Kanchi Kamakshi.

It is believed that Syamasastri was probably the first to compose a new form of Swarajati, a novel musical genre. Prior to this the Swarajati was primarily a dance form and was close in structure to the 'Padavarnam'.

Please don't feel :

There is a gap of nearly 30 years in age between Adi Appaiah and Syamasastri. Syama was only twenty two years by the time he became a disciple of Appaiah who was in his fifties and was renowned as a musical scholar in the court of the king of Tanjavur. As it has already been told Appaiah was very much fond of

Syamasastri and developed a fascination for his compositions. Syama Sastri was in the habit of chewing betel even before his teacher and mentor. One day when both the teacher and the taught were totally immersed in conversation the betel juice spilled out from the mouth of Syama on the outer garment of Adi Appaiah. Syama felt sorry over the incident that happened quite inadvertently and begged his teacher's pardon. When he was about to bring water to clean the red stain of betel, Adi Appaiah said: "I take it as a blessing of the goddess Kamakshi on me. I have been waiting for this moment over a long period of time. I think the deity blessed me like this to know the secrets of the musical art. Don't feel". From this it could be assumed that Adi Appaiah had a knowledge about the inborn talent of Syama Sastri and that he was only instrumental in bringing out that talent. He believed that their relationship was predestined by God.

An attractive personality :

While walking along the streets of Tanjavur Syama Sastri would attract one and all with the majesty of his impressive personality. He was fair complexioned, his broad forehead always glowed with stripes of 'vibhudi' and a red kum-kum mark shining just above the centre of eyebrows gave him the appearance of the three eyed Siva; a chain of gold studded with 'rudrakshas' adorned his neck; and his ears had diamond rings; dressed in the conventional attire of shining white

‘dhoti’ and ‘uttarium’ (lower and upper garments) and a stick in hand he would command the awe and reverence of one and all in Tanjavur. He was considered to be the Emperor of carnatic music by people of that region. His personality created an indelible impression on the minds of those who knew him. He succeeded his father as the main priest of the temple and successfully accomplished his duties. He worshipped Bangaru Kamakshi not only with the fragrant flowers picked up from the garden but also adorned her with the magical fragrance of his musical forms. He is responsible for the extension and enrichment of the treasure of carnatic music by offering songs which are very rich in rhythmic conception. He was an absolute musician and he sang with obvious facility, spontaneity and effortless ease. Although Syama Sastri did not compose as many compositions as his two prolific contemporaries, his ‘kritis’ are equally reputed for their rare ranges and wonderful talas. He composed in Telugu, Sanskrit and Tamil mostly addressing goddess Kamakshi. Syama Sastri is credited with about 300 kritis and Swarajatis. Most of them are written in Telugu; others in Sanskrit and a few in Tamil.

The Trinity of Carnatic Music :

Syama Sastri’s development could be discerned at two levels: one is his devotion to goddess Kamakshi and the other is his ability of musical composition. As he was a ‘Srividyaopasaka’ in his inspired moments he

felt himself as a son to the deity and composed kritis in an emotive mood in the form of affectionate dialogue between a mother and a son. He is one among the Trinity of carnatic music, Tyagaraja and Muttu Swami Dikshitar being the other two who explored the possibilities of novelty in carnatic music.

Trio is the trio :

The Trinity of carnatic music are not only contemporaries but also hailed from the same place - Tiruvarur. Each of the three is a musical genius.

The expressive facility of language coupled with the inventive style of musical technique make their composition not only harmonious but also exemplary. They have attained great reputation as the glorious Trinity of carnatic music because of their unparalleled genius in so far as their musical compositions are concerned. Certain common traits are discernible in their compositions. Their kritis are written with unequal expertise in blending the theme of the 'kirtana' with a rare Raga or molding the krithies with different combinations of Ragas, so as to enable the audience experience the sublimity of their composition. The trio are the scholars of Vedas and Puranas adept in astrology and magical science. They are born for a cause to be fulfilled and all of them got initiation from yogis of unequal merit in divinity so as to become great masters of musical art. Learned scholars say that

Tyagaraja's style is instantly enjoyable by the audience as that of grape juice and Syamasastri's style needs some effort on the part of the audience as one should bite the fruit to enjoy and Dikshitar's style is a bit difficult as a hard coconut which is internally sweet. The style of Tyagaraja is like the flow of Godavari and Syamasastri's style can be compared to the flow of river Krishna and Dikshitar's with that of river Kaveri which has the qualities of both Godavari and Krishna. The objectives of modern carnatic music are embryonic in the compositions of the Trinity. They visited all the important pilgrim centres and composed pancharatna and navaratna 'kritis' and Malikas on the deities with devotion. They are great philosophers; they are yogis of uncommon insight; they are incomparable preachers and they are great saints who attained salvation at their will!

Successive Development of the Kirtanas :

The 'kirtana'; as an eulogy of the infinite qualities of God which was pioneered by Annamaiah had been divided into two streams as 'Adhyatma Kirtana' and 'Sringara Kirtana' later on the same 'kirtana' had been transmitted into 'padam' by Kshetraiah absorbing the quality of rhythm (Tala) from the 'Yakshaganas' combined with the easeful melody of verse. It is designed to express the tenderest feelings of the erotic pleasures of the deities in a devotional manner. 'Kirtana'

has expanded as a blend of literature and music by expanding its magnitude with the ease and facility of expression in literature and by extending the depth of the Raga.

Limpid glory of the majestic music :

Pure kritis of music always aim at the composition of raga as it is the ideal of its objective. Here literature should be simple as it has only a secondary role as the garb of letters since the sole aim of a 'Suddha Sangita Kriti' is to make explicit the combination of the 'swaras'. Analyzed from this point of view Syama Sastri's compositions have a profound depth and magnitude in so far as the combination of the swaras is concerned and the literature is as tender lucid and glorious as the new born flower! It is said that his skill in such compositions is almost equal to the ability and skill of Kshetraiah in composition of his 'padas'. So in short, Syama Sastri is an absolute musician and his kritis constitute absolute music. His kritis show an obvious spontaneity and effortless ease. He never imitates others and makes his indelible impression by his ability to compose in the most complex of 'Talas' so as to make the 'Raga' flow like the torrent of a stream. Though he composed in many talas such as tripata and rupaka, he specialized in chapu and his kirtanas are replete with the beauties of chapu tala. Besides, he used different gatis like trisra and misra in his compositions and they stand as a testimony to his prowess in laya.

Meal in late hours :

Syama Sastri lived a happy life with all the wealth and priesthood given to him by Maharaja of Tanjavur. He seems to have enjoyed a contented life with his family members since there was nothing to be worried about. Therefore he never had an occasion to use his gift of music for his earnings. It is said that he would often visit Tiruvarur and spend some of his time with Tyagaraja discussing music. As and when both the masters were deeply immersed in their discussion, the students of Tyagaraja would conclude that they would get their meal only in the late hours of the day. It could be surmised that Sastri would also visit Dikshitar every now and then.

Not possible for the mediocre :

His kirtanas reflect the exceptional prowess the maestro had in 'Tala' and 'Gati'. Sastri made his 'kritis' so profound that only scholars who are erudite in music could sing them! Even those who are adept at singing Tyagaraya 'kritis' could not sing the songs of Sastri. Nothing to mention about the mediocre. He composed kritis, varnams and svarajatis with the insignia (ankita mudra). He was probably the first to compose in a new form of the 'Swarajati' in musical genre. His three famous Swarajatis which are meant to be sung in the concert rather than danced for sometimes referred to as 'Ratna Traya'. By and large, the tunes

he set for his compositions in rare ragas such as ‘Mangi’ ‘Kalagada’ and ‘chintamani’ hold up a mirror up to his rare genius. Some of his ‘kritis’ could be sung in ‘Madhyama’ and ‘Vilambakalas’. He made two wonderful compositions in kalyani Raga - one in Sanskrit and the other in Telugu. If they are not presented vocally but played to the accompaniment of any musical instrument, it is very difficult to distinguish one from the other for it gives scope for one to conclude that both are the same.

Kalyaniraga - Rupakatala

Pallavi (Burden of the Kirtana): Birana varalicchi brovumu ninu nera nammiti

Anupallavi (Response): Purali Manoharini Sri Kamakshi //Birana//

Oh! Kamakshi beloved of Siva - please bless me immediately with more gifts - I believe in you.

Kalyaniraga - Rupakatala

Pallavi: Himadri sute - pahi mam varade Paradevate-

Anupallavi: Sumeru Madhya Vasini Sri Kamakshi

(Oh! daughter of the Himalayas I bow before you - protect me - Oh! Deity of transcendent nature)

Favorite - Anandabhairavi :

All his compositions whether in Sanskrit, Telugu or Tamil are on goddess Kamakshi. In all his

compositions the recurring theme is an honest appeal for the favour of goddess Kamakshi just as a son begs favours of his mother; with an insignia ‘Syama Krishna Pujita’ or Syama Krishna Sodari as a symbol of dedication. There is a pun on the vocative phrase ‘Syamakrishna sahodari’ - denoting as the sister of the composer ‘Syam Krishna as she is the presiding deity of Syama Sastri’s family and also as the sister of Vishnu - the primordial deity from whom the creation has come into existence. Bhairavi swarajati is one of the three epics of its class, the other two being yadukula kambhoji and todi. His ‘Ananda Bhairavi’ will continue to sway and rock us on the billows of ineffable bliss as that of few others can. As he had composed most of his kritis in Ananda Bhairavi, it is assumed that the raga always fascinated him.

The tanavarnam starting with the burden ‘Swamini Rammanave’ is composed in ‘Ananda Bhairavi raga’ and ‘Atatala’ in which the heroine sends a message through her maid to the hero Kanchi Varada Raja Swami. The ragas which he composed hold testimony to the fact of his essential occupation with music since most of them are ‘Rakti Ragas’. As we have already observed Syama Sastri’s fascination for Ananda Bhairavi had taken a grip over his students and one of his scholar students wrote Swara Sahitya (composition of tunes) for Sastri’s kirtana O! Jagadamba composed in Ananda Bhairavi. The art of composing was carried

over by the next generation too. The inimitable style of Syama Sastri as it were, found an expression not only in the compositions of his son Subbaraya Sastri whose insignia is kumara, but also in the wonderful kritis of his grandson Annaswamy Sastri. It is Annaswamy Sastri who himself composed Swarasahityam (composition of a tune) for a kriti - 'Palinchu Kamakshi' in 'Madhyamavati Raga'.

Honour in Madhurai :

It is said that Syama Sastri had a little occasion to go out of Tanjavur but from his pieces it could be surmised that he along with his friend A. Krishnaiah went to distant Madhurai where he composed and sang nine kritis known as 'Navaratna Malika' (garland of nine gems) in praise of goddess Meenakshi of Madurai temple. He sang his 'kritis' Sarojadala Netri and Devimeenakshi in Sankarabharanam. 'Mariveregati' in Ananda Bhairavi, 'Nannu Brovu Lalita' in Lalita Raga, 'Mayamma' in Ahiri, 'Devi ni pada sarasa' in Kambhoji, 'Meenalochani' in Dhanyasi and the other 'kritis' and dedicated them to Meenakshi. The priests of the temple felicitated him with all the honours of the temple intended for a great Devi Upasaka.

Protect the honour of Tanjavur :

By the time Syama Sastri reached to the prime of his youth he became reputed as a great worshipper of Devi and a great scholar of music. Shara Bhoji ascended

the throne of Tanjavur after the demise of his father Tuljaji. Sharabhoji is well known as the patron of arts and music and he is responsible for the extension of Saraswati Mahal library. The king Sarabhoji being adept in fine arts encouraged all kinds of musical presentations like plays, concerts and yakshaganas. Syama Sastri restricted himself to only his priesthood and compositions and he never kept close contacts with the king and his court.

There is an interesting episode which stands as a testimony to Syamasastri's strength in 'laya'. Once an insolent scholar in music from North named Bobbili Kesavaiah visited Tanjavur on the howdah of an elephant. He presented the testimonials of his scholastic victories over the scholars of the different royal courts in South and exhibited his conceit by challenging the local scholars for a scholastic contention in the art of music. This challenge agitated the local scholars and they mooted the matter at a meeting and finally resolved to have recourse to Sastri's scholarship. They called upon him and solicited to keep the prestige of Tanjavur by his scholarly encounter with the boastful contender. Syama Sastri finally consented to compete with Bobbili Kesavaiah but he had his own fears of success as he heard a lot about the erudition of his contender in music. He also heard about Kesavaiah's successive victories. When he went to the temple of Kamakshi for evening worship he prayed her by an instant composition in

chintamani raga, beginning with the burden “Devi brova Samayamide”. He gained confidence when he saw falling of the flowers from the deity as a presage of his victory.

A day before the musical contest the news of the competition spread over the city and everybody was curious to see the contention between the two great savants of music. The king remained confident that Syama Sastri would definitely rise to the occasion and defeat the contestant.

Is this all or anything else remains ?

That was a crucial situation. Everybody assembled there as tense as they waited for the scholarly competition in music between Syama Sastri and Kesavaiah. Both of the contestants were ready with their arguments. Syama Sastri covered his shoulders with a shawl and the red ‘kum-kum’ mark was brilliantly shining on his forehead like the third eye of Siva. Pin drop silence pervaded the court and the gifts for the winners were readily kept beside the king in golden plates. Kesavaiah started the programme by taking up a ‘raga’ and took the ‘Tanam’ with different ‘talas’, ‘Jatis’ and ‘gatis’ as an evidence of his erudition and experience in the musical art reflecting his arduous labour in attaining that perfection. While his presentation was making everyone spell bound, Kesavaiah stopped. Then Syama Sastri asked “Is this all or anything else is

left-out?” Kesavaiah nodded his head as though nothing was left out from his side. Then Syama Sastri showed so many novelties in his gana, tana and gatis to the wonder of his rival musician as he was adept at composing in rare ragas. Not satisfied with that Syama Sastri, asked Kesavaiah whether he could sing systematically without deviating from the rules of the science of music. Kesavaiah replied in the positive. Then Syama Sastri challenged ‘please sing ‘Tanam’ without shaking your head even a wee little’. It is written in the classical books on music that shaking head while singing a ‘Tanam’ is a great flaw. Kesavaiah no doubt is an adept singer but he could not overcome the habit of shaking his head to sides while singing. Anyway he was discouraged as this particular flaw was not rectified by him even after longer years of practice.

Victory with applauds :

Now the turn had come to Kesavaiah. He challenged Syama Sastri to continue the pallavi which he started in ‘Simhanadataala’ the longest tala with 120 beats per cycle. To every one’s amazement he not only sang it but also composed a new pallavi in Sarabhanandana tala - 79 beats for cycle - and challenged Kesavaiah to continue it - ‘Sarabha’ is a legendary animal with eight legs and a head like that of a lion; which can easily defeat a lion. This figure could be found in the architecture of the south Indian temples.

This Sarabhanandana talam is an invention of Syama Sastri as a result of his longest exploration of the possibility of producing a new tala with a blend of different talas that would transcend the normal pattern. As Kesavaiah never knew this new tala and it was not practiced, he had to accept his defeat. The king was so pleased that he felicitated Syama Sastri with so many encomiums inscribed on a copper plate. In the same way Syama Sastri defeated 'Appakutti' who became insolent with his scholasticity in music at Nagapattanam and made him take vows of 'Sanyasin'.

Five days after her :

Subbaraya Sastri, one of the sons of Syama Sastri, is one of the dearest disciples of Tyagaraja. Unlike Tyagaraja and Muttu Swamy Dikshitar, Syamasastri did not have any set of pupils. As Syama Sastri is also a great astrologer he proclaimed that his life would come to an end after the demise of his wife. She is not only obedient to him but also took pride in his achievements. He was 65 years old when he died on 6th February 1827. He left his mortal coil to join the Adiparasakti in the form of 'Bangaru Kamakshi'.

