

## Haridasas of Karnataka

M.G. Prasad

([www.taranga.us](http://www.taranga.us))

### Introduction:

The word “dasa” means “a slave”. It is well known that a slave refers to one who has no freedom whatsoever. This loss of freedom in the case of human beings is not something that can be easily accepted or understood. Also it is to be made clear whether this loss of freedom refers to body, mind or soul. It is a common human experience that any amount of loss of freedom reflects a suffering rather than joy. So, the question is how and why anyone wants to be a slave or a dasa? An answer for this question is that an individual will transform into a dasa after encountering the limitations of one’s own self and a personal overpowering experience of the Omnipotent, Omniscient and Omnipresent Supreme Being. This Supreme Being is referred as Sriman Narayana or Sri Hari. Thus dasatva (or becoming a slave to the Supreme Being) is an individual’s true experience of the total loss of limited and finite freedom. A dasa realizes that this notion of limited freedom was the source of various undesirable qualities such ego, arrogance, greed, etc. The transformation into dasatva is a one time irreversible transformation. Such dasas of Lord Hari dedicate their lives to joyfully sing and describe the glories of the Lord. They show the way for others who seek dasatva.

### Transformational Experience of Purandara Dasa:

There are many Haridasas and their lives and literature is eternally inspiring. Purandara dasa is such a Haridasa who went through such a transformational experience. In the life before transformation, Purandara dasa was known as Sreenivasa Nayaka, who was a very rich but miser merchant in the empire of Vijayanagara. He was known for not giving any charity. Srinivasa Nayaka had owned a pawnshop. Once a poor Brahmin came with his son seeking charity from Srinivasa Nayaka for conducting sacred thread ceremony. Srinivasa Nayaka refused to give any charity in spite of poor Brahmin seeking for charity several times. Then once, the poor Brahmin went to Srinivasa Nayaka’s home (when he was in the pawnshop) and asked for charity from Saraswati Devi, wife of Srinivasa Nayaka. Saraswati Devi, who was a compassionate lady, gave her diamond (nose) ring to poor Brahmin. Although she was afraid of her husband, she gave her diamond ring as she had received it by her mother.

The poor Brahmin with his son after receiving the nose ring went right away to the Srinivasa Nayaka. When Srinivasa Nayaka was about to drive him away, the poor Brahmin said he has now come to sell the diamond ring for money so that he can conduct the sacred thread ceremony. When Srinivasa Nayaka saw the diamond ring, immediately he recognized it as his wife’s ring. In that moment, he kept the diamond ring locked very safely in a box in the shop and closed the shop and asked poor Brahmin and son to wait near the shop. Then he rushed to his house with anger and demanded from his wife her diamond nose ring. Saraswati Devi with fear told that she had kept it in kitchen and went inside to bring it. Srinivasa Nayaka was waiting outside with impatience. Saraswati Devi as she was nervous went to kitchen took some poison in the cup. She was about to drink by taking Lord Hari’s name, and then a miracle happened. She heard the sound of diamond (nose) ring falling into the cup. Immediately she brought the diamond ring and gave it to her husband. Srinivasa Nayaka was greatly

puzzled with this and he immediately ran to his shop. He hurriedly opened the safe locker box in which he had locked the diamond ring but could not find it. He was shocked and astonished. Also he could not find both Brahmin and his son. At that moment Srinivasa Nayaka was totally transformed.

Here was Srinivasa Nayaka who was attached to money and was ever careful in his trade. However he could not even understand what happened. He experienced utter helplessness to understand the turn of events. All his ego and greed was removed. His total attachment to wealth was turned to detachment to wealth and attachment to God. He realized that poor Brahmin was none other than Lord Hari himself. He relinquished all his wealth. He became Purandaradasa. Lord Purandara is another name for Lord Hari.

### **Compositions of Purandara Dasa:**

Purandara dasa composed innumerable songs, which bring out devotion, knowledge and spiritual wisdom. In his songs we can see the joy of surrender to the Lord Purandara. In one of his songs, Purandara dasa compares our dependence on the Lord to that of a traveler (jeeva) in a boat (body) on the boatman (Lord Narayana).

Oh! Lord, the boatman, You are the Husband of the Mother of the Universe. I have put total faith in you.

The body is like a boat. The body has nine openings (two eyes, two nostrils, two ears, mouth and two excretory passages) Oh! Boatman, please steer this boat with your affection, as You only know the destination.

Oh! Boatman, see the turbulence in my life, which are strongly pushing and pulling me. I am getting caught in whirlpool of birth and death, please hold me and take me out of the whirlpool.

Oh! Boatman, see the six types of huge waves (hunger, thirst, suffering, illusive attachment, old age and death) that are attacking me. Nobody else except you can protect me from the onslaught of these waves.

Oh! Boatman, time is passing by and I am surrounded by two groups of five members (first group of cognitive senses: ears, skin, eyes, tongue, and nose and second group of senses of action: mouth, hands, legs, excretory and procreative organ). Please take me and give me the vision of Truth.

Oh! Boatman, take me through the sublime path with highest level of devotion as the means to the abode of Purandara Vitthala, which is abode of total freedom (liberation).

### **Concluding remarks:**

Through many soul-stirring compositions, Haridasas guide us through the spiritual path. Their lives and compositions provide the inspirations and divine experiences. Their teachings are in simple Kannada language so that any seeker can understand and use it in his or her spiritual development. For the seekers, who have taken refuge in Lord Hari, the compositions of Haridasa not only provide joy but also show the way to Lord Hari.