

References of Shabari Bhakthi in Veggeyakaras' compositions

C Ramalakshmi, Research Scholar, Department of Music and Fine Arts, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India

R N S Saileswari, Professor, Department of Music and Fine Arts, Sri Padmavati Mahila Visvavidyalayam, Tirupati, Andhra Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT

Shabari, though of humble origin, embodies the ideal devotee, dedicating her life to the service of her guru and the preparation for Lord Rama's arrival. Her daily acts of devotion - removing thorns, fetching fruits, and keeping the ashram ready - are symbols of her love and unwavering anticipation. These seemingly small deeds reflect the immense spiritual discipline and humility that earned her Lord Rama's grace.

INTRODUCTION

Many composers in Carnatic music have written about Shabari. Some of these works are discussed in this article.

“यावत्स्थास्यन्तिगिरयःसरितःचमहीतले।तावत्रामायणकथालोकेषुप्रचरिष्यति॥ “ⁱ

A popular verse of Valmiki Ramayana, 2nd Sarga of Bala Kanda, 33 and 34 verses.

As long as the mountains stand and rivers flow upon the earth, so long shall the story of the Ramayana be told and spread in the world. It is said that "Rama is the epitome of dharma." Lord Sri Rama, an incarnation of Vishnu, took human birth to destroy demons like Ravana. The Ramayana is not merely an epic, it is a scripture that guides humanity on how to lead a righteous life. This is why, even after ages have passed, the story of Rama and the memory of Lord Rama remain worthy of daily reverence, now and forever.

The Ramayana contains thousands of characters, yet some are particularly significant and uniquely honoured. Among them, Hanuman and Shabari, who epitomized their devotion to Rama, hold a prominent place in the story. They are especially close to the heart of Lord Rama. Shabari's story serves as a moving illustration of selfless love and steadfast faith.

In Valmiki Ramayana, we find narration about Shabari in the Aranya Kanda, Sargas 73 and 74. This episode continues to inspire countless seekers, showing that sincere devotion and service to the divine lead to ultimate fulfilment.

Shabari's episode in the Ramayana starts with Kabandha telling Sri Rama about the Matanga hermitage and urging him to visit an ascetic named Shabari, a tribal woman who has devoted her life to spiritual practices and has been waiting eagerly for many years to see him. He also describes the hermitage as a miraculous place where the sweat of the rishis, who once lived there, has turned into ever-blooming flowers.

Kabandha also informs Lord Rama that Shabari had served Sage Matanga for many years at his ashram near Mount Rishyamuka till the moment the great sage attained salvation. Before ascending to heaven, the sage instructed her to stay behind and wait for Lord Rama, who would bless her and complete her spiritual journey. After the sage's departure, Shabari continued her daily tasks, preparing the ashram for Lord Rama's arrival. Each day, she cleared thorns and stones from the path, collected fruits, and kept the place ready, hoping that it would be the day Lord Rama would finally come.

Eventually, Rama and Lakshmana, guided by Kabandha's words, arrive at the hermitage. Upon meeting Shabari, Rama instantly recognizes her spiritual purity and realizes she has reached the highest level of spiritual achievement. When Shabari sees them, she greets them with folded hands, welcomes them warmly, and pays her respects. She offers them water to wash their feet and lovingly serves the fruits she gathered. She speaks to them with great affection.

Rama and Lakshmana are deeply moved by her hospitality. Rama enquires about her asceticism asking whether she has overcome all the obstacles in her journey of asceticism and whether her mind is filled with satisfaction.

The verse number 9 of Sarga 74 of Valmiki Ramayana

कच्चिन्नियमाःप्राप्ताःकच्चित्तेमनसःसुखम्।

कच्चित्तेगुरुशुश्रूषासफलाःचारुभाषिणि॥ ii

Shabari replies to Rama, “today has the fruition of my austerities been attained by me through your blessed sight. Today, my birth as a human being has borne fruit and my elders have been duly adored”. The relevant verses are given below.

11 to 13 verses of Sarga 74 of Valmiki Ramayana

Verse 11:

अद्यप्राप्तातपःसिद्धिःतवसंदर्शनात्मया।
अद्यमेसफलंजन्मगुरवःचसुपूजिताः।।ⁱⁱⁱ

Verse 12:

अद्यमेसफलंतप्तंस्वर्गःचैवभविष्यति।
त्वयिदेववरेरामपूजितेपुरुषर्षभ।।^{iv}

Verse 13:

तवाहंचक्षुषासौम्यपूतासौम्येनमानद।
गमिष्याम्यक्षयांलोकान्स्वात्मप्रसादादरिंदम।।^v

Shabari told Rama, "O gentle Rama, by your gracious sight, I have been purified. O bestower of honor, I shall now attain the eternal worlds through the grace of my own pure self, O destroyer of foes".

Afterwards, Rama enquires about Sage Matanga’s ashram. Shabari shows the entire ashram and gives a detailed note of all the wonderful aspects of the ashram. She then seeks his blessings for liberation. With His grace, she enters a fire. Her soul ascends to join her guru, Sage Matanga, and the divine realms.

Three compositions are being taken for this article. One composition is of Tyagaraja swamy, one of Muthuswamy Deekshitar, one composition of Annamacharya.

Tyagaraja's composition: (page no. 136 of the complete krithis of srithyagaraja)

"entaninEvarNintunushabarIbhAgya" ^{vi}

raagam: mukhAri

Aa:S R2 M1 P N2 D2 S

Av: S N2 D1 P M1 G2 R2 S

taaLam: rUpaka

pallavi

entaninEvarNintunushabarIbhAgyam-

anupallavi

dAntulavarakAntalujagamantanindiuNDagan-

charaNam

kanulArasEvincikammaniphalamulanosagitanuvupulakarınca

pAdayugamulakumrokkainakulapatisamukhambunapunarAvrtti

rahitapadamunubondinatyAgarAjanaturAlipuNyamunu

entaninEvarNintunu

In Pallavi Tyagaraja said, "how can I adequately describe the fortune of Shabari?"

In Anupallavi, he said, "While great ascetics and sages were everywhere in the world, Shabari, with her selfless devotion became worthy of Lord Rama's grace".

In the charanam, he said, "She lovingly served (Rama) with utmost devotion, offering him delightful fruits, and was thrilled with joy. She bowed at his feet, and in the presence of the

Lord of the universe, attained liberation (freedom from rebirth/punaraavruttirahithapadam).
how can I describe the greatness of her merits?

Tyagaraja narrated the entire story of Shabari in this composition. Tyagaraja marvels at Shabari's devotion and the unique blessings she received by directly serving Lord Rama. He expresses awe at her unconditional love and her attainment of moksha (liberation) in the presence of Rama, a fortune many sages desired.

Tyagayya selected the Mukhari Raga for this composition aptly. Mukhari raga is meant for evoking the emotions of karuna (compassion) and bhakthi (devotion). Mukhari is a derivative of 22ndMelakartha raga 'Kharaharapriya'.

Many other compositions of Tyagayya, Ex: Apparama Bhakthi in Pantuvarali Raga have mention of Shabari.

Muthuswamy Deekshitar's composition:

rAmacandrasyadAsOham

raagam: [dhAmavati](#)

Aa:S R2 G2 M2 P D2 N3 S

Av: S N3 D2 P M2 G2 R2 S

taaLam: Adi

Pallavi:

rAmacandrasyadAsOhamshrIsItAnAyakasyaguruguhahitasya

SamishtiCharanam:

sAmadAnabhEdAdichaturasyasajjanapAlasyaduStaharasya

samayAchArasampradAyakasyAshabarImOkSapradasyavarasya

This composition is in Sanskrit. It is a remarkable composition by Muthuswamy Deekshitar, extolling the greatness of Lord Rama. One notable aspect of this work is that it is written in

the Shashti Vibhakti (sixth case or genitive case). Muthuswamy Deekshitar is an adept in composing works using various grammatical cases (vibhaktis).

In this composition, there is only a brief mention of Shabari. Deekshitar refers to Lord Rama as the deity who granted liberation (moksha) to Shabari.

This composition praises Lord Rama as a compassionate and wise ruler who protects the virtuous, vanquishes evil, upholds righteousness, and grants liberation, as he did for Shabari. Muthuswamy humbly declares himself to be a servant of such a gracious Lord.

It is in Dharmavathi Raga – 59thMelakarta Raga. As per Venkatamakhi's nomenclature, it is 'Dhamavathi'. This Raga is also used for evoking devotion.

Annamacharya's Composition: (page No. 277 of Annamayya Sankeertana Ratnakaramu)

rAmacandruDitaDuraghuvIruDu:

pallavi

rAmacandruDitaDuraghuvIruDukAmitaphalamuliyagaligenindariki

charaNam 1

gautamubhAryapAliTikAmadhEnuvitaDughAtalakaushikupAlikalpavrKSamu
sItAdEvipAliTi Chintamani itaDuItaDudAsulapAliTiihaparadaivamu

charaNam 2

paragasugrIvupAliparamabandhuvitaDu sari hanumantupAlisAmrAjyamu
nirativibhISaNunipAlinidhAnamuItaDugarimajanakupAlighanapArijAtamu

charaNam 3

talapashabaripAlitatvapurahasyamualariguhunipAliAdimUlamu
kalaDannavAripAlikannuleduTimUritivelayashrIvEnkaTAdrivibhuDitaDu

This composition is a beautiful work in Telugu. Due to the unavailability of musical notations for Annamacharya's compositions, later generation artists independently composed tunes for his works.

In this piece, Annamayya highlights Lord Rama's various acts of benevolence towards different characters from the Ramayana. Among them, he also makes a mention of Shabari. One unique feature consistently found in all Annamayya's works is *Dvitiyaakshara Prasa* (second syllable rhyme). For example, in the first stanza of this composition, we find words like Gauthamu, Ghaathala, Seetha devi, and eethadu – second letter is 'tha' in all these words.

In this composition, Annamacharya means to say that, Rama, the valorous descendant of the Raghu dynasty, is the one who grants desired fruits to all who seek him.

He was like the wish-fulfilling cow Kamadhenu to Gautama's wife, Ahalya, and like the divine tree Kalpavriksha to the sage Vishwamitra.

For Sita, he was the wish-granting gem, Chintamani, and for his devotees, he is the eternal deity who grants both worldly and spiritual blessings.

He was the closest friend and ally to Sugriva, and the giver of great power to Hanuman. For Vibhishana, he was a great treasure, and for his followers, he was like the celestial Parijata tree, fulfilling all their desires.

He revealed the profound secrets of spiritual truth to Shabari and was the primordial essence for Guha (the tribal chief).

For those seeking his divine form, he is the eternal deity manifesting as the Lord of Tirumala, Sri Venkateswara.

In this composition, Annamaacharya praises Lord Rama as a compassionate deity who fulfils the desires of his devotees. He draws on various episodes from Rama's life, showing how Rama became a protector, friend, and guide to those in need, bestowing blessings and guidance.

Shabari has been metaphorically referred to as a symbol of liberation and portrayed as a devout woman character in the above compositions. By following the instructions of her Guru, Sage Matanga, as her Swadharma (righteous duty), she carried out her tasks with pure dedication, sincerity and steadfast devotion.

Shabari stands as a profound example of how liberation transcends all barriers of caste, creed, religion, age and gender. Her life is a testament to the universal truth that true devotion and righteous conduct alone lead to spiritual fulfilment and divine grace.

REFERENCES

Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, Gita Press 2024, p. 71

Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, Gita Press 2024, p. 924

Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, Gita Press 2024, p. 924

Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, Gita Press 2024, p. 924

Srimad Valmiki Ramayana, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh, Gita Press 2024, p. 924

Maddali Venkata Subbaiah, The complete Kritis of Sri Thyagaraja, The ICFAI University Press, Hyderabad 2008, ISBN: 978-81-314-2093-5, p. 136