

CHAPTER 12
CHARITRAMS
GOPALAKRISHNA BHARATI

Gopalakrishna Bharati

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GOPALAKRISHNA BHARATI

Gopalakrishna Bharati, also known as Gopalakrishna Bharatiyar, was the son of Ramaswami Bharathi and was born in 1810 in Narimanam near Nagappattinam. He lived in and around Mayiladhuturai and lead a celibate life. Bharathi was a genius in music since childhood and possessed great dexterity in composing songs. His ancestors were musicians and his father as well as his grandfather, were good Vainikas. Bharati was attracted towards the Chidambaram temple right from his childhood. He would visit Chidambaram sthala on all occasions, especially when Abishegam on Lord Nataraja was performed.

Gopalakrishna Bharati was ostracized by the orthodox people because he composed and performed a *Kathakalakshebam* on Tirunilakanta Nayanar one of the 63 Saivite Saints who was supposed to have belonged to an inferior community. His own people shunned him and made him an outsider in their community.

Kathakalakshebam is a story-telling from the Puranas, to the accompaniment of musical instruments with crisp musical dialogues, witty stories inserted at relevant places with songs. The impact of the Maratha culture on South Indian devotional music was primarily responsible for the development of the '*Hari Katha Kalakshebam*'. Gopalakrishna Bharati composed another opera named *Nandanar Charitram* which is well-known even nowadays and sung in concerts. It was Maha Vidwan Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai, himself a great musician, who brought Bharati to one Vedanayakam Pillai. The latter was a great inspired poet popularly called *Varakavi* that is, one who has been blessed with a divine inspiration to compose poems. Bharati spent sometime with Vedanayakam Pillai composing his work '*Nandanar Charitram*'. Bharati had to bear again all the sufferings he was subjected from his people. The '*Nandanar Charitram*' was again an opera

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Nayanar, who is said to have belonged to the inferior community. Sekkizhar, the author of the Periya Puranam had written 37 verses about Nandanar in his '*Tiru Thondar Puranam*'.

Nandanar Charitram' is a great work left by Gopalakrishna Bharati to South Indian music. It describe the life of Nandanar who by his devotion to Lord Siva attained moksha in Chidambara Nataraja Temple.

The '*Nandanar Charitram*' was also referred to as '*Tiru Nalai Povar Charitra Kirtani*'. Many characters have been portrayed in this opera. *Kirtanai*, *Nondi Chindu*, *Ananda Kalippu*, *Irusol alankaram*, *Lavani*, *Khadga*, *Dandaka*, *Agaval* and *Savayi* are the musical forms that have been presented in this opera. By its musical and devotional aspect, '*Nandanar Charitram*' has acquired the position of being an equivalent of Tyagaraja's opera '*Nowka Charitram*' and '*Prabalada Bhakti Vijayam*'.

In addition to common ragams, Gopalakrishna Bharati has composed kirtanais, in rare ragams like Dwijavanti, Sengalam and Manji. Apart from the musical form kirtanai, he was also well versed in the *Chindu*, *Kummi*, *Kami* and *Dandakam* forms of music. Gopalakrishna Bharati through his knowledge in Hindustani music, which he learnt from Ramadas, was able to compose songs in the Marathi musical forms like *Panchapadi*, *Lavani*, *Abhang*, *Saaki*, *Dindi*, *Ori* and *Doba*.

The work '*Nandanar Charitram*' was printed in 1861 by the French collector Sisay of Karaikkal, who came to a '*Harikatha*' performance, held in Nagapattinam and was mesmerized by the great opera. Carnatic music maestro Dhandapani Desikar increased the popularity of the songs in the '*Nandanar Charitram*' by singing them in his concerts.

Gopalakrishna Bharati was a contemporary of Saint Tyagaraja. It is said that he visited Tyagaraja at Tiruvaiyur and

144 *Singing with Saivite Saints* composed the Kṛiti ‘*Sabbapatikku*’ in Abhogi ragam set to Rupaka talam. He is also the author of the ‘*Pancharatnam Kṛiti*’ in Tamil in the five ragams;

Song Ragam 1. Hara Hara Sivasankara Nattai 2. Charanagata mendru Gaulai 3. Piravada Varum Tarum Arabhi 4. Adiya Padame Gati Varali 5. Maravamal Eppadiyum Sriragam

Some of Gopalakrishna Bharati’s famous kirtanais are ‘*Tiruvadi Charanam*’ in Kambhoji ragam, ‘*Tillai stalam*’ in Sama ragam, ‘*Nadanamadinar*’ in Vasantha ragam, ‘*Kanakasabesan Sevadi*’ in Khamas ragam, ‘*Sivalokamengira*’ in Natakapriya ragam, ‘*Mahadeva Saranam*’ in Sarasangi ragam. Furthermore, besides the ‘*Nandanar Charitram*’ and the ‘*Tiru Neelakanta Nayanar Charitram*,’ Gopalakrishna Bharati composed the ‘*Iyarpagai Nayanar Charitram*’ and the ‘*Karaikekal Ammaiyar Charitram*’. But the ‘*Nandanar Charitram*’ became more popular than the other Charitrams. His Mudra, signature of a composer at the end of a song, was Gopalakrishna or Balakrishna.

It is said that Gopalakrishna Bharati composed more than a thousand songs. His 426 Opera songs and his ‘*Viduti Kirtanais*,’ and ‘*Kannis*’ 180 in number only are available now. Gopalakrishna Bharati attained eternal bliss in 1896 at the age of 86.

Since the *Nandanar Charitram* of Gopala Krishna is very popular here is a brief life sketch of Nandanar (Tiru Nalai Povar Nayanar).

Tiru Nalai Povar Nayanar Nandanar was born in Adanur in the Chola Kingdom.

He was an embodiment of humility and devotion. Nandanar

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He would supply hides, leather drums and strings for the musical instruments that were used in the temples. He took the opportunity to visit holy places at the same time and would always remain outside the temple and worship Lord Siva. Nandanar was a great devotee of God Siva.

One day Nandanar wanted to worship Lord Sivalokanathar at Tiruppunkur. Reaching Tiruppunkur, Nandanar stood in front of the temple. Nandanar was grieved because Nandi was always in front of the Lord and was hiding him. Nandanar prayed to Sivalokanathar with great fervor. Siva who was highly pleased with the devotion of this great soul, ordered Nandi to move aside so that Nandanar can see Him. Nandanar was delighted of the darshan of Lord Siva. Even today, in the temple of Tiruppunkur one can see the trace left and the position of Nandi which has moved aside. Before proceeding, to his native place, Nandanar dug a tank near the temple.

Some times later, Nandanar wanted to have the darshan of Lord Nataraja in Chidambaram. The love towards Siva had grown so intense that Nandanar would shed tears of love and tell his friends “Tomorrow I will go to Chidambaram”. This expression earned him the name ‘Tiru Nalai Povar’ (One who would go tomorrow).

Nandanar left for Chidambaram and did not want to enter the temple. He prayed to Lord Nataraja for several days begging His blessings to see His Cosmic Dance in the Nritya Sabha. One day Lord Siva appeared in his dream and requested him to go into the sacrificial fire which the Dikshitaras would make for him and then come to the Kanaga Sabha. At the same time Lord Siva appeared before the Tillai priests in their dream and requested them, to prepare a ‘Homam’ in which Nandanar will go into before coming to Him. The priests welcomed

1. Tiruppunkur is situated about 5 kms from Vaitheeswaran Koil.

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GOPALAKRISHNA BHARATI COMPOSITION

“Enneramum”

Ragam : Devagandhari **Talam** : Adi
(2-Kalai)

Pallavi: enneramum undhan sannidhiyiley naan
irukka veyndum ayya – ponnaiyya

Anupallavi : thennancholai thazhaikkum then
puliur ponnambalatharasey ennarasey

Charanam : thisai yenganum pugazhum sivagangaiyum theyva
sabaiyum sivagaami dharisanamum pasi kodaadhu paarta peyrku
kalakkangal parandhida magizhndu unnai paadi kondu

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MEANING

That I always remain in Your presence Is what I want,
my Master, my precious Master!

Coconut groves flourish in Thenpuliur In the
Golden Hall rules my Lord , my Ruler!
Ganga-bearing Siva that all worlds adore The celestials and the
Goddess Sivagaaami Hunger and such needs vanish As we joyfully
sing in praise of You!

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Nandanar enters the fire.
Everybody realizes the great devotion of Nandanar to Lord Siva



