

# The Contribution of Sri Vijaya Gopala Swamigal to the Bhajan Sampradayam

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## ABSTRACT

*Namasankeerthanam*, arguably the most vital current of devotional energy within the Bhakthi movement, traces its origins to the tenth century CE. At its philosophical core lie the twin disciplines of *Smarana* (remembrance) and *Shraavana* (attentive listening), which together constitute the principal means through which heightened *bhakti* and divine communion are cultivated. Across successive generations, numerous *Mahans* (saintly luminaries) and composers have enriched the *Bhajan Sampradaya* through a substantial and purpose-driven body of compositions. This tradition unfolds through an elaborate liturgical architecture comprising, among other contexts, *Thodaya Mangalam*, *Guru Keerthana*, *Ashtapathi*, *Tharangam*, *Panchapathi* or *Dasadi Keerthanas*, *Pooja*, *Devatha Dhyana*, *Divya Nama Sankeerthanam*, and *Dolothsavam*, in addition to the celebratory sequences of *Radhakalyanam* and *Seethakalyanam*.

Functioning as a striking instrument of cultural and national integration, the tradition brings together compositions in multiple languages, authored by composers drawn from diverse geographical and linguistic regions of the subcontinent. Exemplary of this pan-Indian synthesis are the contributions of Thyagaraja in *Divya Nama Sankeerthanam*, Annamayya in *Thodaya Mangalam*, *Thalapakkam chinnaya* in *Pavalimbu* and *Vasanthotsavam*, and Purandharadasar in the *Panchapathi* or *Dasadi Keerthanas*, among others. Spanning the entire devotional continuum from *Thodaya Mangalam* to *Dolothsavam*, the celebrated composer Vijaya Gopala Swamigal occupies a position of singular eminence within the *Bhajan Sampradaya*.

Against this backdrop, the present study undertakes a systematic examination of the history and enduring contribution of Sri Vijaya Gopala Swamigal, whose immortal compositions significantly adorned and enriched the traditional *Bhajan* system..

## SCOPE AND FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The present study proceeds through four principal observations. First, it traces the life history of Vijaya Gopala Swamigal, situating his birth, spiritual lineage, and formative influences within the broader devotional milieu of the *Bhajan Sampradaya*. Second, it compiles and examines a comprehensive list of his songs, attending to their Ragam, Thala, and Paddhati, thereby illuminating the musical and structural richness of his oeuvre. Third, it appraises his contribution as a Bhagavathar, considering the way he expanded, refined, and transmitted the traditional repertoire to succeeding generations of practitioners. Fourth, it documents his *Adhishtanam*, the associated Mutt, and its present-day website, thus connecting his historical legacy to the living institutional and devotional practices that continue to honour his memory

through Aaradhana and allied observances. Through this integrated enquiry, the article seeks to establish the enduring significance of Sri Vijaya Gopala Swamigal within the continuum of Namasankeerthanam. A note on method: this study is documentary and historical-musicological in approach. The corpus examined comprises the fourteen compositions of the Yathigal that survive in current Aaradhana and Bhajan Sampradaya practice; attribution rests on the composer's mudra, "Vijaya Gopala," borne in the charanam, together with their preservation in the compilation associated with Sathguru Swamigal. The biographical account draws principally on the Sri Vijayagopalayathi Swamigal Charithram, read against the broader tradition of the Dakshina Sampradaya Bhajan and Bhagavata Mela. Where the sources are hagiographical, or where the traditional chronology places the Yathigal in contact with figures of adjacent generations, such material is reported as preserved within the tradition rather than independently established and is weighed accordingly. The empirical mapping of the contemporary performance frequency and lineage-based transmission of these compositions across present-day Bhagavata schools remains a valuable avenue for further study.

**Keywords:** Namasankeerthanam, Bhajan Sampradayam, Ragam, Thala, Paddhati, Maha Samadhi, Aaradhana, Melatoor, Tiruvisaloor.

## **INTRODUCTION AND HISTORY OF VIJAYA GOPALA SWAMIGAL**

*Vandhey Bhakthagraganyam tham*

*Krishnaseva paraayanam |*

*Gurum Vijayagopala*

*Yatheendhram vaishnavottamam ||*

*SriKrishna charanaambhojayugala Dhyana thathparam |*

*Srimadh Vijayagopalayatheendhram Gurumaashraye ||*

— Sri Sri Krishna Premi Swamigal

Sri Vijaya Gopala Swamigal flourished during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a pivotal era for the structural codification of the Dakshina Bhajan Sampradaya. He was born in Andhra to Naagaphaiyar and Kamalambal. On the evidence of his song lyrics, and in view of his Andhra origins, it appears probable that he belonged to a Telugu Brahmin family. The Yathigal traced his descent from the *Harithagothram* lineage. It is held that his parents, longing for progeny, offered fervent prayers to their *Kula Devata*, Tirupathi Venkatachalapathi, and that Swamigal was thus born as a divine blessing of Bhagavan. In grateful acknowledgement of this grace, his parents named him Venkatesan.

Following his *Upanayana*, the young Venkatesan devoted himself to the study of the *Veda Sastras* and the *Upanishads*, thereby laying the foundations of his profound spiritual erudition. The family frequently journeyed to visit kinsfolk in such places as Melatoor, Tiruvisaloor, and Vepathoor, and it was through these sojourns that Venkatesan was first brought into intimate contact with the *Bhagavatha Mela* and *Nama Sankeerthana* festivals flourishing in those sacred centres—an early communion that would, in due course, shape the devotional destiny of his life.

## **LYRICAL REPOSITORY AND BHAKTHI OF ONE OF HIS COMPOSITIONS**

*Maadhava Govindha Madhusudhana Nandha Mayi Dhayam Kuru Hare!*

*Bhodharoopa Yadi No Kurushe Dhayaam*

*Vaardhireva Gathir Me Gopala ||*

This composition was rendered by Vijaya Gopala Swamigal at a moment of profound personal crisis. The

Yathigal and his wife had been blessed with a single son, and each day they would devotedly perform *Krishna Smarana* and instruct him in the ways of *Krishna bhakti*. Tragically, their son passed away at a young age. Overwhelmed by the profound grief of this loss, Swamigal and his consort resolved to end their lives in the sacred waters.

At that very moment, they perceived a young boy approaching them, whose form was possessed of extraordinary beauty and drew their attention at once. Filled with joy, they embraced the child and carried him to their home. According to the hagiographical narratives preserved within the oral tradition (Karna Parampara), the child unexpectedly vanished, leading them to perceive the event as a divine manifestation of Lord Vijaya Gopalan.

Thereafter, Swamigal set forth upon a journey to Brindavanam, bearing his *Krishna vigraham* with him. In his earlier years, prior to formal sannyasa, he performed Unchavruthi and travelled to numerous sacred locations, and in the company of many *Sadhus*, he offered praise through *Sri Krishna Keerthana*. Swamigal and his wife abided at Brindavanam for a considerable length of time.

It was at this juncture that Swamigal's wife attained the feet of the Lord. He then proceeded to the *Kasi Shethram*. There, according to the *Charithram*, Sri Ramanandhayatheendrar—described as the guru of Sri Narayana Theerthar and a contemporary of Bhagavanama Bodhendra Swamigal—initiated Swamigal into sannyasa. Having received *Sanyasa Deekshai*, he came to be honoured with the title "**SRI VIJAYA GOPALA YATHEENDRAR.**" Upon the recommendation of his guru, Sri Ramanandhayatheendrar, he obtained the *Darshana* of Sri Narayana Theerthar and Sri Bodendra Swamigal at *Dakshina Desha* and resided in their company. Together, they spread *Bhakthi Pracharam* throughout the region.

The Yathigal journeyed thereafter to several *Shethrams*, including Srikurmam, Pandaripur, Badhrachalam, Jaganaathapuri, and Sri Ahobhilam, bearing with him his *Dhanda Kamandalam* and the *Navaneetha Krishnan Swamy vigraham*. During this period, he ascended to Sheshaachala (Thirumalai), where he awaited the darshan of Lord Alamelu Manga Sametha Sri Venkatesha Perumal. When the Lord came forth in procession, accompanied by His *Deviyaar*, *Vedha Paarayanam*, and *Mangala Vaadhyam*, the Yathigal, beholding the divine procession, forgot himself entirely and began to sing this song:

*Dhevesha gana araadhitha dhivyāmbhuja paadha*

*Sree Venkata giri nāyaka shreeshaa hecharikaa*

*Jagadheesha hecharikā*

Overwhelmed with joy at seeing God, the Yathigal rendered this song at a swift pace. The deity's procession moved in perfect synchronisation, but the attendant procession could not keep up. The priest requested a slower rhythm, since followed by all Bhagavatas.

### NAAMA JAPAM OF SWAMIGAL

The Yathigal was desirous of receiving the *Namasootram* from Bhodendra Swamigal, and to this end he journeyed to Govindhapuram. On reaching the town, however, he learnt that Bodendra Swamigal had already attained *Jeeva Samadhi*, and so the meeting he had sought could not come to pass. Undeterred, he took up his residence there, before the *Adhishtanam*, where he entered a deep state of *Namajapa*. It is preserved within the tradition that, one day, Bodendral appeared to the Yathigal in a dream and bestowed upon him the *Bhagavan Nama Upadhesam* together with the *Sootram*. When the Yathigal opened his eyes, there was no one before him; yet, on beholding the *Japa Sootram* now resting in his own hands, he was overcome with devotion and delight.

Thereafter the Yathigal visited other *Shethrams*, including Varagoor. It was here that he came to know of the *Paddhati* titled "*Sri Krishna Leela Tharangini*", composed by Sri Narayana Theerthar. Deeply inspired by Narayana Theerthar's compositions, the Yathigal resolved to compose songs for his own *Gopala Moorthy* in the same style. He then returned to Tiruvisaloor and began the observance of *Maadhukara Bikshai*. It was during this period that he composed a *Grantham* bearing the title "*Bhajanotsava Tharangini*". Regrettably, only a small number of his compositions survive to the present day.

अत्र श्रीधरवेङ्कटेशगुरुणा संप्रार्थिता जाह्नवी कूपे प्रादुरभूत्तथा विजयगोपालेन्द्र संपूर्जितः । आस्ते श्रीनवनीतकृष्ण इह सल्लापोऽभवत्यावनः श्रीबोधेन्द्रसदाशिवेन्द्रगुरुराट् श्रीधायि तेजीयसाम् ॥

This sloka confirms the Yathigal praised Lord Navaneetha Krishna, once enshrined at Tiruvisaloor but no longer found there. In Telugu and Sanskrit, bearing the *mudra* "Vijaya Gopala," it belongs to Sri Bhajanotsava Tharangini.

## CORE MUSICOLOGICAL PROFILE

The surviving lyrical repository of Sri Vijaya Gopala Swamigal exhibits a deliberate structural framework tailored to the devotional requirements of the Sampradaya and may be characterised through several foundational parameters. His *Ishta Devata*, or principal deity, was Lord Navaneetha Krishna, venerated specifically through the consecrated *vigraham* he carried throughout his travels. His compositions employ a bilingual medium of Telugu and Sanskrit, a synthesis that mirrors at once his regional heritage and his scriptural erudition. As his authorial signature, the composer weaves the *mudra* "Vijaya Gopala" into the concluding *charanam* of his songs, affirming their authorship. These compositions are drawn from his principal *Grantham*, the *Sri Bhajanotsava Tharangini*—a compendium modelled upon the structural style of Narayana Theerthar, from which his surviving works are preserved.

## LIST OF SONGS COMPOSED BY YATHIGAL

| S.No | Song                                        | Ragam                                       | Thala       | Liturgical Context |
|------|---------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| 1    | Devesha Ganaaradhitha                       | Saveri                                      | Roopakam    | Thodayamangalam    |
| 2    | Maadhava bhavathuthey mangalam <sup>1</sup> | Panthuvarali / Mangalakowsikam / Sowrastram | Aadi        | Thodayamangalam    |
| 3    | Yehi dhadha                                 | Nadanamakriya                               | Aadi        | Poojai             |
| 4    | Jaya jaya devathi                           | Madhyamavathi                               | Aadi        | Poojai             |
| 5    | Paahi madhana Gopala                        | Thodi                                       | Aadi        | Divyanamam         |
| 6    | Krupaya maamumdhara Sri krishna             | Madhyamavathi                               | Aadi        | Divyanamam         |
| 7    | Govindha krishna paahi                      | Yadhukula Kambhoji                          | Aadi        | Divyanamam         |
| 8    | Pankajasana                                 | Punaagavarali                               | Tisra Ekam  | Divyanamam         |
| 9    | Deva Deva Devaki                            | Kedaram                                     | Tisram      | Divyanamam         |
| 10   | Madhava Govindha                            | Punagavarali                                | Aadi        | Divyanamam         |
| 11   | Dhanyoham Krishna                           | Sankarabharanam                             | Misrachapu  | Divyanamam         |
| 12   | Suprasanobhava                              | Bhoopalam                                   | Misrachappu | Divyanamam         |

|    |                      |               |         |             |
|----|----------------------|---------------|---------|-------------|
| 13 | Dwaraka Nagara Varey | Neelambari    | Gathyam | Dolothsavam |
| 14 | Kasthurika thilaka   | Punnagavarali | Jambai  | Mangalam    |

**Note on Ragam Performance Variance :**Maadhava bhavathuthey mangalam" varies by lineage: different Dakshina Bhajan Paddhati schools render it in Panthuvarali, Mangalakowsikam, or Sowrastram for Thodayamangalam's celebratory mood.

## SWAMIGAL'S BRINDAVANAM

Sri Vijaya Gopala Yathigal's Aaradhana falls on Shukla Paksha Dwadashi in Maaha month, along with Bhagavata Saphthagam. Over time, the Mutt and Brindavanam were neglected as villagers migrated, and the annual Aaradhana stopped. Sri Krishna Premi Swamigal (Anna), well-versed in the Swami's compositions, searched for his Brindavanam. In 2003–04, the Swami revealed himself. At Polagam (Pugalur-Agraharam), in the Adi Kesava Perumal temple, Anna found the Swami's Sanidhi, confirming he had lived there. He then found the ruined Brindavanam under the Tirumalai Rajan riverbank, restored it, and revived the Aaradhanautsavam—now eight days of bhajans, Radha Kalyanam, and a Mutt for Bhagavatas. Only fourteen songs survive today, found in Thodayamangalam, Poojai, Divyanamam, and Dolothsavam, plus his Mangalam "Kasthurika thilaka sobhitha."

## Conclusion

Sri Vijaya Gopala Swamigal's compositions spanned the full liturgy—Thodayamangalam to Mangalam. Though not written for the Dakshina Sampradaya Paddhati, Sathguru Swamigal later honored and compiled them in the nineteenth century, valuing their depiction of Krishna's Roopa Lavanyam and Leelai. His songs also preserved conventions like the Tirumala hecharika and Bowli–Bhoopalam usage..

## Website

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