Saturday, 11 October 2014

William Jackson's gracious letter

**By A Prasanna Kumar**

[](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/-xsgGUYNHCdY/VDjMNDvwswI/AAAAAAAAEs4/QStKsB5STlM/s1600/William%2BJackson.jpg)

A welcome and splendid addition to the Tyagaraja lore is the meticulously researched work of the American scholar Prof William J. Jackson*- Tyagaraja Life and Lyrics.*M.S.Ramaswami Aiyar wrote in 1927, “ From the ruling Prince down to the lowliest beggar Thiagaraja has been invariably an entertaining philosopher, friend and guide.” Seventy years later William Jackson described Tyagaraja as “a Gandhi of music, a genius gaining ground in an Indian artistic domain which impelled people’s lives inspiringly.” Tyagaraja’s kriti, according to Jackson, was recognized as an integrative cultural form which ‘popularised classical music and classicised popular music’. Jackson writes that Tyagaraja’s music “was able to transport the mind beyond the worldly cares.” His music is “gold that has acquired fragrance.” Tyagaraja’s genius combined ‘the stability of rigorous discipline and the vast freedom of impulsive creativity.’ His sangatis manifest a joyful inventiveness. “The ‘poetisphere’ of Tyagaraja”, he writes, “consisting of melodies and lyrics rooted and grounded in everyday sounds, language, expectations, musical possibilities, emotional associations, rhythmic patterns and reveries accumulated for centuries in his region in South India….. Tyagaraja charted a soothing map in songs which were also the vehicle to peace and freedom. His music is the way to peace. His kritis are wonders, goddesses of enchanting beauty.”

Two weeks of tireless efforts enabled me to get in touch with the celebrated scholar during my recent visit to the US and send a copy of the book *Ramadas & Thyagaraja,* the fourth edition of which was released during this year’s Tyagaraja Aradhana Utsavam on January 14, 2014. Despite being busy shifting to a new place Prof Jackson graciously replied to my mails and lyrically acknowledged receipt of the book. I cannot thank him enough for sparing his time to reply to my mails. But I have pleasure in publishing his generous replies, with his kind permission.

*Dear Professor Kumar,*

*It is good to hear from you.*

*Thanks for your kind words regarding my work on Ramadas and Tyagaraja. It was a privilege to spend time studying those great devotee-composers. My retirement from IUPUI began a few years ago and I am in the midst of buying a house in another part of the country, and selling the house I have lived in for many years, and packing and attending to some family matters in Illinois as well, so this is an especially busy and hectic time.*

*It would be wonderful to read your book.*

*William Jackson*

*Indianapolis, IN 46220*

*Dear Dr. Kumar,                                                                                   May 30, 2014  
  
This is a beautiful book, and I can see that a lot of care and thought has gone into the making of it. I admire the work you have done in the beautiful book.*

*I remember fondly going to Bhadrachalam with Rajanikanta Rao, and also learning from TS Parthasarathy in Madras about Ramadas and his lyrics, while studying Tyagaraja's lyrics.  
  
I wrote a poem about a Ramadas story, along with the stories of other saints who got into trouble with rulers:*

**Rescued from Hot Water**

*St. Thomas was given money to build a palace for a king  
he used those funds to feed the needy poor instead;  
hearing of this the king summoned Thomas, asking him  
“Trusting you with gold and a mission, what was I thinking,  
Where is my palace?” Thomas, full of faith boldly said  
“Your palace is in heaven far above the changing winds.”  
And the king was shown the heavenly palace in a vision...*

*Tax man Ramadas spent a king’s revenues on a temple;  
hearing of this the king was furious, imprisonning him.  
Rama and Lakshmana came with bags of money for the king  
and Ramadas gained his sweet freedom once again...  
Manikkavachakar was supposed to buy horses for a king;  
Shiva had to come as a trickster and rescue him from prison  
when he spent the king’s money on Shiva worship instead.  
Shiva turned some little jackals into horses in a wink  
and took them to the king to pay Manikka’s debt to him.  
(Never mind that at midnight they turned to jackals again.)  
We recall these great souls with obligations to their kings  
who got themselves in crises and had their Lord rescue them.*

*Namaskaramandi.*

*Sincerely,  
Bill*

*(Prof. William J. Jackson)*

Posted by [Sruti Magazine](https://www.blogger.com/profile/07438923380988482057)at [Saturday, October 11, 2014](http://srutimag.blogspot.in/2014/10/william-jacksons-gracious-letter.html)

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