

**The Role of
Sanskrit Literature
in
Indian Renaissance**

**Dharmaraj Adat
Reeja B. Kavanal**

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Edited by

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NEW BHARATIYA BOOK CORPORATION
DELHI (INDIA)

Published by :

New Bhartiya Book Corporation
208, 2nd Floor, Prakashdeep Building,
4735/22, Ansari Road, Daryaganj,
New Delhi-110002
Phone : 011-23280214, 011-23280209
E-mail : deepak.nbbc@yahoo.in

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Edition : 2017

ISBN : 81-8315-205-8
978-81-8315-205-1

Laser Type Setting :
Creative Graphics
Delhi

Printed by :
Jain Amar Printing Press
New Delhi

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Reflections on Kaṛṇātic Music Related to Sanskrit and Indian Renaissance

Manju Gopal

Sanskrit and Karnatic Music

In India, all disciplines-art or science developed through Sanskrit, which was a medium for nationalism. Indian culture got flourished and nourished through Sanskrit which has been a medium of Sangīta from ancient times and it formed the text part of Sāmagāna-the vedic music. Almost all the lakṣaṇagrāntas in Kaṛṇātic music beginning from "NāṭyaŚāstra" of Bharatamuni down to "Sangīta Ratnākara" of saraṅga Dēva and "Sangītasudha" of Raghunātha Naick were written in Sanskrit. It is noteworthy that the musicalforms figuring in them were also in Sanskrit.

Sanskrit is a phonetically perfect language in which there is a distinct alphabet for each sound/viceversa. Dhvani is the first common factor between Sanskrit and Sangīta. In language, just as there are vaṛṇas/alphabets combined to form a word (name) which denotes meaning and creates feelings (rasa), in music there are svara-s (notes) which are combined to form rāga-s, each of which have a distinct svarūpa capable of evoking feelings (rasa). The 'champu' in Sanskrit sāhitya is said to be the forerunner of "kṛti", the most highly evolved musical form in Kaṛṇātic music. (Sreevatsa, 2003)

Jayadēva's Gīta Gōvinda (12th cent AD), Nārāyaṇa Tīrta's (1590-1675 AD) Kriṣṇa Lila Taraṅgiṇi are milestones, since in them, there is a firm bond between the two, Sanskrit and Sangītha. Annamāchārya (1424-1503 AD) and Purandara Dāsa (16th cent AD) also contributed compositions in Sanskrit. In the 17th century MārgaDarśi Sēṣa Iyengār laid down the prototype of a kṛti in Sanskrit.

Karnatic music reached the zenith of its glory during the 18th century, with the emergence of three saint-composers, Śāma Sāstri, Tyāgarāja and Mutusvāmy Dīkṣitar, who were collectively called The Musical Trinity. Sanskrit had been utilized by all the three, with Mutusvāmy Dīkṣitar

outpouring the cent percent of his creations in it. It was natural that these composers who were religious minded and who also studied purāṇās, Āgamās, Tantrās and Vēdānta of Hindu culture outpoured their musical ideas in the dēvabhāṣa. In the truest sense it was a period of Renaissance to Indian music, since it put forward many new ideas, rāgās, tālās and compositions, the basis upon which the system of Kaṛṇāṭic music stands even today. The changes occurred to the art, traversed through centuries and are kept anew even in this computer age. Under the liberal, discerning and the enthusiastic patronage of four Nāyaka kings (1532-1673AD) and ten Bhonsle rulers (1676-1855AD), Tanjore witnessed an acme of many sided cultural development in literature, music, dancing, painting, sculpture and architecture. (Sathyanarayana, 2002) Along with Sanskrit, the vernaculars were also utilized for composing music (viz Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Maratta). Manuscripts and treatises of dance and music were collected and preserved during this period.

Indian Renaissance and Karnatic Music

The Indian Renaissance which broke out in the 19th century, with the intention of eradicating many social evils and for the emancipation of society had a great impact on Indian culture. The static feudal society had transformed into a lively democratic one. The advent of Christian missionaries brought many changes in the education system, throughout the length and breadth of the country. From 16th century onwards, and during the British rule, many new technologies like printing machines and printing press made entry in India.

Publication of Music Works

During the period of Renaissance, there had been a rapid revival in the preservation of the music of yester years and about 500 musical compositions of the Trinity and Kshēṭrajña in Telugu and Sanskrit were propagated between 1870 and 1900 (RangaRāmanuja Iyengār, 1972). Many books made their appearance and songs inscribed on palmleaves were printed and published.

In 1859, 20 songs of Tyāgarāja with notation and 80 more without notation were published by Tirunagari Veena Rāmānujāya. In 1868, the text of Prahlāda Bhakti Vijayam appeared followed by that of Nouka Caritraṁ (Lakshmi Subramanian, 2006) A.M. Chinna svāmi Mudaliyār published a book viz Oriental music in Staff Notation (1893). Zamindars and rulers setup printing presses. The publication of Saṅgīta Saṃpradāya Pradarśani was aided by The Zamindars of Ettayapuram. The first publication of Svāti Tirunāl kṛitis in 1916, again in 1917 by Karamana Raṅganātha Bhāgavataṛ, in 1943 by Mutiah Bhāgavataṛ, and in 1947 by

semmaṅguḍi Srīnivāsa Iyer in Tamil-Malayāḷam-Dēvanāgarī script were supported by the Travancore rulers (S. Guptan Nair, 2008:93,94) In Tamilnadu, Sri Rāmanujāchāri and Dr V Raghavan produced a volume of 600 compositions of Tyāgarāja in Telugu and Dēvanāgarī script. Still later Sarasvati Mahal library in Tanjore brought out many works on music and dance like saṅgīta Darpaṇa of Dāmōdara, Bharatārṇava of Nandikēsvara, Nātya sāstra and so on. (Dr V Raghavan, 2002)

The publication of lakṣaṇa grantas in Sanskrit was a landmark since it provided the background for further studies related to musicology. Critical studies of these textbooks in translation reached the commonmen in a more easier way. The number of aspirants, connoisseurs and music students multiplied.

Some other landmarks in music during the period of Renaissance are :

- a. Adoption of new musical instruments from the west like Violin.
- b. Establishment of music institutions and Sabhas like Gāyan Samāj, Madras music Academy (1926), Kalakshētra, Madras (1936), Śrī Ṣaṅmukhānanda Sabha, Bombay (1944), colleges in Tamil nadu like Maharaja's college of music and dance, Vizhianagaram(1919) Annamalai University of Madras (1929), Queen Mary's college Madras (1930) Central college of Karnatic music (1931), TamilNadu Govt Music college (1949) Tyagaraja Govt College of music and dance, Hyderabad (1952). The establishment of Svati Tirunal music college at Thiruvananthapuram (1939) is noteworthy, since its objective was to preserve Svati Tirunal's compositions (most of which are in Sanskrit)
- c. The launching of Akāśvāṇi and the emergence of Gramophone companies which recorded voices of eminent professionals made the music directly reach the public.
- d. The entry of women in the concert platform
- e. The development of the system of notation and the dissemination of musical knowledge.

All these can be counted as achievements regarding the art of music, from the democratic point of view. But on the other side, it is also criticized that when music catered for the masses rather than for the enlightened few, the quality and standards went down. As R Rangaramanuja Iyengar states 'Music of mass entertainment have developed into powerful vested interests of their own problems of image building, competition, diminishing returns and struggle for survival. All these are factors far removed from ideals of culture and ultimate values. But their impacts on trends cannot be ignored' (1972, 274)

The Preponderance of Bhakti and rarity of Social themes in Sanskrit Musical Compositions

In Karnatic music compositions from the pre-Trinity period to the modern era, there is similarity in the presentation of the themes like the Kēśādipāda varṇana of various deities with as much as prosodic beauties like prāsa, yamaka, and yati, by all composers. Mutusvāmy Dīkṣitar and Svāti Tirunāl, the composers who profusely handled Sanskrit are often criticized for this fact. The element of bhakti having been given primary importance by them, it was inevitable also. Dīkṣitar an advaitin, propounded the nirguna aspects of bhakti by using epithets like 'bōdham', 'sankalpa vikalpam', 'Śivam', 'Budha Sudha Nitya Vikalpam' along with the saguṇabhāva.

Even though sahitya is said to be secondary in karnatic music, we get a lot of puranic narration, episodes from Epics, moral teachings, philosophical thoughts, different paths of devotion, the ways for spiritual upliftment, salvation and so on. But it is a fact that the Karṇātic composers stood aloof from dealing with any of the social problems or evils and the realistic view of the downtrodden, which the 18th and 19th centuries witnessed. It is surmised that they might have prayed to the Almighty for the lowly ones through the invocations like 'Duritavimōchana', 'Durita bhañjana', 'Dinabandhō', 'Dinajanavatsala' etc or should we think that 'for those who have drunk the rare milk of wisdom and who have ascended the throne of self realization, what is the necessity for worldly matters?'

Rare Examples of Urge for Social Reformation through Music in India

During the beginning stages of the Bhakti movement, Tuḷasi dās through 'Rāmacaritamānas', Sūrdās and kabīrdās through dohais, Tukārām through abhaṅgs, Annamāchārya through Sankirtanams pictured the then prevalent social life as well as advocated the methods for the revival of Hindu society. Love of humanity and service to the society were their motto. The movement did not transform the society, but only gave some sort of vigor to protest against the feudal rule. But there also, rather than Sanskrit, the vernacular had been the medium.

When the freedom struggle reached its peak, Karṇātic music did cooperate with it. Some of the composers like Subramānya Bhārati (who composed mostly in Tamil and rarely in Sanskrit)

K.C.Kēśava Pillai and Kuttamattu (who composed in Malayalam) wrote patriotic songs, praising mother India. Many eminent vocalists started singing patriotic songs. M.S. Subbalekshmi used to sing Vandē mātaram of Bankim Chandra Chatterjee and songs of Subramānya Bhārati. Madurai Mani Iyer participated in the freedom movement of India by singing many

patriotic songs in various meetings conducted by the Congress freedom fighters. Musiri Subramaṇya Iyer also took part in the national movement by recording songs for the National Congress.

Most of the patriotisong composers were pro-vernaculars, which was inevitable to reach the masses. Even then some composers like Vēda-nāyakam Pillai (1826-1889) who fought against the social evils and who preached the niṛguṇa aspects of God, who also praised Jesus Christ could not come to the forefront, mainly due to religious dogmas.

Nāmasankirtanam, still the forte of Sanskrit compositions

Apart from the theme of patriotism, Karṇātic music is still moulded in the same frame work of Nāmasankirtanam, especially in the Sanskrit compositions, keeping to the tradition maintained through centuries. The disciples and followers of the Musical Trinity continued their sojourn in a more vibrant way, more or less in the same manner as their predecessors with Sanskrit as a strong medium for communicating the musical ideas. Even though the vernaculars continued to be the medium (viz Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam) the place of Sanskrit never vanished. Many 20th century composers like Jaya Cāma Rāja Woḍeyār (1919-1974) who created 94 kritis in Sanskrit and Tuḷaseevanam Rāmachandran Nair who contributed all his compositions in Sanskrit exploited the beauty of the language suitably for clothing them in musical ideas.

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