



MUSICAL EXCELLENCE OF THE MODERN PERIOD

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Abstract

Arts or Kalas appeals to man's intellect and creates pleasant feelings in the mind. They are often used as a mode of expression to satisfy the inner feelings of man. Fine arts such as Music, Poetry, Dance, Painting, Sculpture, Architecture etc allures one to develop our imaginations and creative thoughts and takes a person to another level of existence. Of all fine arts, Music, appeals through the medium of the ears and a good piece of music when heard, makes it enjoyable and makes the listener happy. Music can be enjoyed by all, be it the rich or poor, the human or the animal. Hence it can be considered as the language of emotions. Each nation has its own music and it also plays a major role in the moulding of a person's character. Listening to good music purifies and cleanses our heart and learning of music develops the powers of concentration. Music is a Kala (Art), as well as a Sastra (Science). Most of the great philosophers, scientists, mathematicians and thinkers have spoken largely on music as something which can stir the soul. The Greek Philosopher Plato speaks about music:

"Music gives a soul to the Universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and life to everything".

This world devoid, of music, will be a dull and drab place and so many famous thinkers and leaders have given due importance to music through which a person can attain mental peace. Music is of two types – Melody¹ and Harmony². Melody means producing one note at a time, whereas Harmony meant sounding of three or more notes simultaneously. Indian music follows melody whereas Western music follows harmony. Indian music is one of the most developed of all musical systems in the world and its origin can be traced back to the Vedic period. Hence Indian music is enriched by legendary musicians, and Instrumentalists, in both Carnatic music and Hindustani music systems. Hence it is essential to know about both its theoretical as well as the practical aspects to have a good grasp of music. The diverse works on music are evidences which speak about the music which existed in the earlier centuries. The remarkable genius of the skilled Vaggeyakaras³ of Carnatic music, was another turning point in the development of music through the different centuries.

Key Words: - Music, Melody, Harmony, Vaggeyakara, Lakshana Grandha, Musical Trinity, Carnatic Music, Hindustani Music

Introduction

India is a unique land and has contributed much to the world through its various traditions, and all other kinds of arts. This country had a much more advanced culture and education at a time when knowledge and thinking were hardly perceptible. Hence India attracted many foreign travellers to explore its diverse languages, customs and traditions. India has produced a row of distinguished mathematicians, scientists, musicians, poets, sculptors, architects, philosophers, thinkers, historians, and painters who have contributed much to the development of all branches of study. Moreover, India had great kings and emperors of various dynasties who contributed much to the rich heritage and the cultural renaissance of this great land. Many important works speak of the varied, cultures, customs and traditions of this land. The greatest contribution of India to the world is its spirituality, and artistry of all kinds. The kings of various dynasties patronized all kinds of arts which are evident in the wonderful monuments all over India which speaks volumes about the rich heritage and artistry of this ancient land. Indian Literature is also rich and has innumerable works written in various languages. Amongst all the languages, Sanskrit is one language which was used extensively by dramatists, poets and learned scholars. The great epics such as the Ramayana, Mahabharata and the Shrimad Bhagavatam were all written in Sanskrit. The Vedas which contain a mine of information on all branches of study were also written in Sanskrit. Among all the fine arts, music was given much importance, by all emperors and royal patronage was accorded to these musicians and musicologists, who in turn contributed much to growth and development of Indian music through their musical compositions and great works on music written in Sanskrit and various other languages. We get umpteen references to works which explain various aspects of music which were described

through Sanskrit slokas. Hence these works on music written from time to time were called Lakshana Grandhas⁴ which describes about the theoretical and Lakshana aspects of music.

Indian music is one of the most advanced of all other music systems that exist in the world. A glimpse into the Musical history of India reveals a rich coloured history which can be categorized into three different periods- Ancient, Medieval and Modern periods.

- ❖ The Ancient period - Vedic ages to the Period of Brihaddesi (ascribed to the 9th century).
- ❖ The Medieval period - The period of Brihaddesi to the period of Purandara Dasa (16th century)
- ❖ The Modern period – The period after Purandara Dasa (16th century) to the present

A careful study of these works, of the three different periods, enables one to construct the musical history of India step by step through the different stages of developments. The works of the Ancient and Medieval periods laid a strong foundation for music and this was carried forward by the great composers and musicologists of the Modern period also. A closer look into these works reveals that those written during the Ancient period focused on Dance and Drama and so were grouped as “Naty Literature”. The Medieval works concentrated on music and very few works dealt with dance and so were grouped as “Gita-Naty Literature”. In the Modern period, music was given primary importance and it came to be grouped as “Gita Literature”. This is a modest attempt to unveil those distinctive excellences in the development of music during the Modern period, which became landmarks in the development of the Lakshya or practical aspects of music. Besides, this is also a peep into those important and rare works of the Modern period which were important sources of information that are helpful for any researcher who want to delve deep into the finer intricacies of music.

As indicated earlier, the Modern period may be referred to the period after Saint Purandara Dasa who was considered as the “Karnataka Sangita Pitamaha” i.e after the 16th century. The period from the 17th to 18th century may be called as the “**GOLDEN ERA OF CARNATIC MUSIC**” as the Musical Trinity stormed the musical era with their exquisite musical compositions. The Musical Trinity who were all devout Bhaktas, poets, and Vaggeyakaras, made remarkable contributions to Carnatic music. The scholarly genius of these composers paved the way for many new trends and these compositions had inspired many other Vaggeyakaras of the Post Trinity period.

The Modern period may be studied under the three sub divisions - Pre-Trinity Period, Trinity Period and Post-Trinity Period.

- Pre-Trinity Period – The period after Purandara Dasa & before the birth of the Musical Trinity (16th century)
- Trinity Period – The period of the Musical Trinity of Tiruvarur (17th century to the latter half of the 18th century)
- Post-Trinity Period – The Period after the Musical Trinity (latter half of the 18th century and to the present)

Pre-Trinity Period

The Pre-Trinity Period i.e., the period from 14th century to the latter half of the 16th century witnessed the emergence of Music as a path to Moksha. Music and Bhakthi were co-related and hence music was considered sacred. Singing the praises of the Lord was highly popular. In the 12th century, Jayadeva, the court poet of King Lakshmanasena, wrote the Sringeri Mahaakaavya “Gita Govindam” which had the love of Lord Krishna and Radha as its theme. Jayadeva’s Gita Govindam was written in Sanskrit and has 12 Sargas and each song had 8 Charanas and hence these songs came to be called as the “Ashtapadi” i.e a song with 8 Charanas. The Gita Govindam was exquisite and popular and came to be sung throughout the length and breadth of India. The “Geetha Govindam”, was a great influence in almost all art forms and the concept of Madhura Bhakthi gradually developed in all aspects. Later, Purandara Dasa systematized and gave a strong foundation to Carnatic music with his Swaravalis, Suladis, Geethas, Ugabhogas, and his simple keerthanas called “Devanamaas” were widely popular among the masses. The 15th Mela Mayamalavagaula was the first raga to be taught to any beginner learning Carnatic Music. Another great composer who contributed much, was saint Annamacharya who composed the “Adhyaatma Sangeethanalu” which were exquisite devotional songs on Lord Venkatesha of Thirupathi. The Modern period also saw the emergence of the concept of Raga and its different varieties. The scheme of the 72 Melakarthis described by Venkitamakhi in his monumental work also came into existence during this period. The Tanjore fretted Veena had its emergence during this period. The exponents of Bhajana Paddhati and Kathakalakshepam, contributed much to the development of music. The Royal patronage was extended to many musicians by the Royal courts of Mysore, Tanjore, and Travancore and as a result, Music evolved in both the Lakshana and Lakshya aspects. Musical forms such as the Varnam, Kriti, Keerthana, Padam, Ragamalika, Daru, Tillana, etc emerged during this time.

The composers of the Pre-Trinity Period laid a strong foundation of music which became a fertile land for music to grow during the Trinity period. Many eminent Vaggeyakaras such as Purandaradasa, Annamacharya, Narayana Thirtha, Bhadrachalam Ramdas, Margadarshi Sesha Iyengar, Kshetrarajna, Sadasiva Brahmendra, Melattur Virabhadrayya, Pachimiriam Aadiyappayya, Pallavi Gopalayyar, Uttukaadu Venkitasubbaiyar, Sonti Venkita Subbiah, Ramaswamy Dikshitar, Arunachala Kavirayar, etc. lived during this period and composed many compositions in Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada, Malayalam etc.

The Trinity Period

As stated earlier, the period of the Musical Trinity, the period from the 17th to the latter half of the 18th century, was considered as the “Golden era of Carnatic Music”. It was during this period that the Musical Trinity of Thiruvarur – Thyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar, and Shyama Shastri contributed much to the development of Carnatic music. Many eminent patrons and landlords promoted Carnatic music. The “Geyanatakam” or the musical opera emerging as a classic form during this period. The patronage extended to all forms of art, in the royal courts of Mysore, Tanjore, and Travancore attracted many musicians, dancers, scholars, and artists to bring out their best performances. Veena was one of the most important of all musical instruments in India and great performers on musical instruments made “Vadhya sangeetham” gaining importance. With the British assuming power in India, English Bands also came to be introduced in the royal courts during the Medieval period that paved the way for the emergence of Western music bands in royal courts. The musical instrument Violin, was adapted into Indian music as it could produce almost all the Gamakas in Indian music. With the invasion of the foreign rules, kings of the various dynasties lost their grandeur and power, and the patronage that was extended to Musicians, Dancers and all other craftsmen, in the royal courts, gradually, began to disappear which left an indelible mark on the cultural history of India. However, steps to preserve the oral traditions, practices, art and culture came of this land to be more pronounced and this was urged to by landlords and many other connoisseurs.

The Music of North India came to have fusions with Persian music and came to be known as “Hindustani music”. The influence of “Hindustani music” gradually crept in and musicians of the different royal courts started borrowing and exchanging of ragas from both Hindustani and Carnatic systems. The Preservation of Manuscripts, Inscriptions and palm leaf manuscripts gained momentum. Gradually books on the theoretical and Practical aspects of Indian Music, Notation of Indian songs in Staff Notation, etc came to be written and translated to the different languages of India. As a result, Indian music came to be introduced into the Western countries. Important works in Sanskrit and various other languages came to be translated into English and other local dialects. Different scholars began writing and publishing Books on interesting topics such as Music, Dance, Sculpture, Painting, Cooking etc. which were restricted till then and limited to few in the fields, and so the common man gained access to explore over many subjects. The music which was of a sacred nature till then, began slowly to untie its divinity and music became more of an entertainment.

Post-Trinity Period

The period after the Musical Trinity produced a galaxy of brilliant musicians. Many great Vaggeyakaras flourished during this period and composed different musical forms during this period. Some of the most important Vaggeyakaras who contributed much during this period are Subbaraya Shastri, Shadkala Govinda Marar, Tarangampadi Panchanada Iyer, Chinnaswami Dikshitar, Balaswami Dikshitar, Vina Kuppayyar, Thiruvottiyur Thyagayyar, Paidala Gurumurthi Shastri, Gopalakrishna Bharati, Tanjore Quartete, Maharaja Swathi Thirunal, Irayiamman Thampi, Parameswara Bhagavathar, Neelakanta Sivan, Papanasam Sivan, Pattanam Subramanya Iyer, Maha Vaidhyanaatha Iyer, Pallavi Sheshayyar, Mysore Vasudevacharya, T.Lakshmana Pillai, Achyuta Dasar, Ramnad Srinivasa Iyengar, Harikesanallur Muthaiyya Bhagavathar, Jayachamaraja Wodeyar, G.N.Balasubramanyam, K.C. Kesava Pillai, M.D.Ramanathan, Annamalai Reddiar, Kotiswara Iyer, Thanjavur Shankara Iyer, etc. Many different musical forms which evolved during this period added to the rich repertoire of musical forms of Carnatic music. Many new ragas such as Kadanakuthalam, Hamsanandi, Mohana Kalyani, Niroshtha, Gaudamalhar, Valachi, and many other ragas came to be created by Vaggeyakaras. New schemes of Melakarthis such as 144 Melas, 5184 Melakarthis etc came to be found by musicologists. The ideal of Absolute music and absolute dance came to be realized in full during this period. Dance music also developed and we find the emergence of musical forms suitable to be sung for Dance concerts also. Instrumental music also evolved immensely. The musical instrument “Violin” which was adopted into Indian music by Baluswami Dikshitar from the band of the Tanjore court was introduced in the royal court of Travancore by Vadivelu who was one of the Tanjore Quartet. Gradually the influence of western musical instruments such as the Harmonium, Clarinet, Saxophone, Mandolin, Guitar, began to creep in, and as a result many newer experiments in music began to take place in Hindustani Music and Carnatic music also. Jugalbandis which were dual concerts with musicians and instrumentalists of both the Indian musical systems came to be introduced. Many authoritative books and works on music, Journals, etc came to be published. Madras Music academy with its untiring efforts to conduct of Musical Conferences, musical performances and other initiatives, contributed much to the development of Carnatic music in all its aspects. Many organisations, and Higher Educational Institutions sprang up and Courses which had both the theoretical aspects and practical aspects of Carnatic music sprang up. Many important birth places of musicians and birth places of Vaggeyakaras came to be considered as important seats of music. The emergence of Sangeetha Sabhas in these prominent seats of music was a giant leap. Music concerts came to be conducted on important festive occasions, as part of temple rituals as well as for the general public. The emergence of the films and other media was yet another landmark which gave a boost to all performing arts which interested man to explore his creative thoughts. The practical aspects of music were truly explored by these eminent musicians and composers. The Modern period also saw great development in the theoretical aspects of music also as we see many important works being written during this time.

The Lakshanagrandhas of the various musical periods played a major role in the development of music. The musical works of the earlier centuries, created a stir amongst the musicologists and musicians who delved deep into the intricacies of music. Thus, the Modern period also saw the emergence of many important Lakshana Grandhas which are enlisted below:

Raga Vibodha of Somanatha

“Raga Vibodha” written by “Somanatha” was an important work which spoke about music and its theoretical and Practical aspects. This work is ascribed to the 17th century and has 5 Chapters - Sruthi svara Viveka, Vinabheda Viveka, Melaviveka, Raga Viveka and Ragarupaviveka. This work spoke largely on Marga and Desi Sangita, Nadam, 22 Srutis, Sapta swaras and Vikrita swaras, Veena, Melakartas, Ragas, Time theory of ragas and so on

Sangita Sudha of Govinda Dikshitar

“Sangita Sudha” written by “Govinda Dikshitar” was another classic work which dealt with Music and its various aspects. Govinda Dikshitar was the Prime minister during the reign of Raghunatha Naik who was the ruler of Tanjore Samsthaanam from 1614-1628. He is said to have authored other important works such as Gajendra Moksha, Valmika Charithra, Paarijaathapaharana which were all composed in Sanskrit. This work consists of 7 chapters and speaks in large about the music that existed during that time. The work gives references to Sapta svaras, Ragas, Prabandhas, Nada and its origin, 22 Srutis, Dhruva Veena - Chala Veena experiment, the 3 Gramas, Lakshanasa of ragas, Gamakas, Alankaras, Varnas, Gayaka Guna doshas, Rasas, Talas, Vadhya, and Nartana and its various aspects.

Chathurdandi Prakasika of Venkitamakhi

“Chathurdandi Prakasika” authored by “Venkitamakhi” is yet another classic work which speaks authoritatively about music and its various aspects. This Lakshana Grandha is an illustrious and important work such as the Sangeetha Ratnakara as it speaks extensively about the Melakartha Ragas which is of ultimate importance regarding music. Venkitamakhi was the son of Govinda Dikshitar who was the author of the Sangitha Sudha. This work consists of 10 chapters and speaks of Veena and its varieties, Sruthi, Cycle of Fifth and Fourth, Origin of the Swaras, Gamakas the 3 Gramas, the 72 Melakarta scheme and all its details, Raga, Alapa, Taaya, Gita and its varieties, Prabandhas, its angas, and its varieties, and Talas and also speaks of the Chathur dandi or the four dandis of music.

Ragatatva Vibodha of Srinivasa

“Ragatatva Vibodha” written by “Srinivasa” is another work which deals with music. This work which is ascribed to the 17th century describes the various aspects of music and comprises of 9 chapters -Sruthijathi prakarana, Swaraprakarana, Grama Murchana Prakarana, Gamaka Prakarana, Melalakshana, Ragaprakarana, and Sruthinirnaya. The work explains in detail about the 22 Srutis, the Sapta swaras and Vikrita swaras, Grama Murchana Jati system, Gamakas, Melakarthas, and the time theory of ragas.

Sangeetha Paarijatha of Ahobala

“Sangeetha Paarijatha” written by Ahobala is an authoritative work on music. This work is ascribed to the 17th century and has 8 chapters – Swara, Grama, Murchana, Alankara, Jathi, and Gamaka, Samaya and raga. The work commences with the origin of music, Nada and its emanation, its varieties, Sthayis, 22 Sruthis, Sapta swaras, Vikrita swaras, Melakartas, time theory of ragas, Navarasas, and other aspects of music.

Ragatarangini of Lochanakavi

“Ragatarangini” written by “Lochanakavi” is a lakshana grandha which explains important aspects of music. This work is ascribed to the 17th century and has 5 chapters called Tharangas. This work speaks in detail about varieties of swaras, Melakarthas, the Ragaragini Parivara system of Hindustani music and this work also includes songs of Jayadeva and Vidyapati. Lochanakavi is said to have been the court poet of King Vallalasena.

Sangitha Saramritha of Tulaja – I

“Sangitha Saramritha” written by “Tulaja – I” is a monumental work about explains the various aspects of music. Tulaja – I was the Maratta ruler of Tanjore from 1728-1736 A.D and was a distinguished scholar himself. This work explains the theoretical and practical aspects of music that existed then. It is ascribed to the 17th Century and comprises of 14 chapters – Sruthiprakarana, Suddhaswaraprakarana, Vikritaswara prakarana, Gramamurchana Murchana, Sadhaarana prakarana, Varna alankara Prakarana, Jaati prakarana, Giti Prakarana, Mela, Raga, Vadya, Gitaprakarana, Tala and Prakirnaka. It describes largely about Nada and its varieties, its emanation, Swara, Grama, Murchanas, Jathi, varieties of Tana, Ragas, Gitis and its varieties, Vadhyas and its varieties, 22 Sruthis, Prabandhas and its different varieties, Talas and various aspects of Dance.

Sangraha Chudamani of Govindacharya

Sangraha Chudamani authored by Govindacharya is an important work ascribed to the latter half of the 18th century. He was said to be the Asthana Vidwan in the Tanjore royal court. This work describes the music prevalent during that time and is written in Sanskrit. This work is said to have two sections - the Purva Bhaga and the Uttara Bhaga. He discusses the Origin of music, the 22 Srutis, the Sapta Svaras the 12 swarasthanas, the 72 Melakarta ragas and their Lakshanas, Janya ragas and so on. He explains the scheme of Melakarthas according to the Chathurdandi Prakasika and discusses the requirement of Sampoorana swaras for a Melakarta raga. He further speaks about the “Bahattaramelakartas” written by Venkita Kavi who is also known as Lavani Venkata Rao. Lavani Venkata Rao is supposed to have been the court poet of Sakha Ram Sahib of the Maratta dynasty who is said to have composed this lengthy composition incorporating the 72 melakartas. The music for this lengthy composition “Bahattaramelakarta” was set by the great musician Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer, who later on composed another lengthy composition on Lord Pranatharthihara” in which all the 72 Melas are incorporated in its different sections in a Ragamalika format. This work is considered as the link between the music of the Medieval period and the Modern period.

Sangitha Sampradaya Pradarshini of Subbarama Dikshithar

“The Sangitha Sampradaya Pradarshini” of “Subbarama Dikshitar” is another voluminous work which deals with many aspects of Music. This work is ascribed to the 19th century and is one of the most important works written during the Post Trinity period. Subbarama Dikshitar was the grandson of Baluswami Dikshitar who was the brother of the great composer Muthuswami Dikshitar. Subbarama Dikshitar was said to be the Asthana Vidwan in Ettayapuram Court and it is said that he wrote this voluminous work upon the request of Chinnaswami

Mudaliar who was a landlord who took much interest in Music. This work is said to have two sections – Sangeetha Lakshana Pradhana, and Sangita Lakshana Sangraha and he has described various musical facts and phenomena which was prevalent during his time. Through this work, Subbarama Dikshitar has tried to preserve many kritis of Muthuswami Dikshitar with notations, selected kritis of the musical trinity, Lakshana Gitas of Venkitamakhi, Ragamalikas composed by Ramaswami Dikshitar, and also included the biographies of reputed musicians, 72 Melakarta Ragas and their lakshanas, and also Janya ragas that were in use then.

Sangeetha Kalpadrumam of Harikesanallur Muthaiyyah Bhagavathar

“Sangeetha Kalpadrumam” authored by “Harikesanallur Muthaiyyah Bhagavathar” is a magnum opus which explains about the various musical aspects. This work is ascribed to the 19th century. Harikesanallur Muthaiyyah Bhagavathar was said to be the Asthana Vidwan in the Mysore royal Court under the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar. This work is one of the most important of all Lakshana Grandhas as the author has meticulously explained all facts relating to music. This work was written in Tamil in two volumes and submitted to Sri Chithira Thirunal Maharaja of the Travancore royal court. The author has codified the information of almost all Lakshana grandhas written earlier and give due importance to both the Lakshana and Lakshya aspects in a detailed manner. The first volume comprises of 8 Chapters – Upodghatham, Nadaprakarana, Sruti Prakarana, Swara Prakarana, Varnalankara Prakarana, Svaraprastara Prakarana, Jathi Prakarana and Gita Prakarana. The second volume has 6 Chapters -Prabandha Prakarana, Vadhyaprakarana, Tala Prakarana, Raga Prakarana, Nartana Prakarana, and Vaggeyakara Lakshanam. This magnificent work is considered as the Bible of all Lakshana Grandhas as it deals with almost all aspects of music.

Sangitha Chandrika of Aattoor Krishnapisharody

“Sangitha Chandrika” written by “Aattoor Krishnapisharody” is an important work of the Modern period. Aattoor Krishnapisharody was an eminent scholar of Kerala. This work written in Sanskrit, in the form of verses, and describes various facets of music through 467 Slokas. This work is ascribed to the 19th century. This work comprises 12 Chapters – Nadaprakasa, Sruthiprakasa, Svaraprakasa, Veenaprakasa, Gramamurchanaadiprakasa, Melaprakasa, Talaprakasa, Varnalankaraprakasa, Gamakasthyadiprakasa, Prabanhdhaprakasa, Ragaprakasa and Geethaprakasa. The author has quoted many of the earlier Lakshanakaras in this work. The musical aspects such as Nada and its varieties, Sthayis, the three fold aspect of Gita, Vadhya and Nritta, Marga and Desi Sangita, 22 Srutis, Svaras and its varieties, Veena and its importance in music, 3 Gramas and its Murchanas, Tanas and its varieties, Tala and all its complicated aspects, Varnas, Alankaras, Gamakas, Jathis, Gitas, Ragas and all its varieties, Melas and ragas prevalent during that time, are all mentioned.

Conclusion

Indian music which had its roots in the Vedic music had passed through different stages of evolvement and with each passing century, it has stood ground firmly. The Vedic music and its various scales of development, the concept of Raga, the various talas and the complexities, the Gamakas around which the Indian ragas are woven, the different branches of Manodharma Sangita and the exploration attitude of the Composers, Lakshanakaras, renowned musicians, to surge their creative talents have all been boons to Indian music. The royal patronage extended by the rulers of Tanjore, Mysore, Travancore and other Samasthanams also played a major role in the development of music. However, the contributions of the various lakshanagrandhas of the different periods of music, which gave umpteen references to music and the vivid analytical explanations given by various other scholars later, has been important in this aspect as it threw light on many musical aspects. These monumental works strengthened the roots of South Indian music. Besides, the illustrious line of prominent composers of various centuries, who enriched Carnatic music with their exquisite compositions, have inspired many musicians of the later period, to continue their explorations in composing music which continues to grow day by day. To conclude, pioneering effort taken by musicologists, musicians and composers have paved the way for the development of Carnatic Music in all its rich colours.

Endnotes

1. Melody - Practice of singing of one note at a time
2. Harmony - Practice of singing of three or more notes simultaneously.
3. Vaggeyakara - The term for a Composer who is the lyricist as well as the person who has set to tune the song.
4. Lakshana Grandha -Term for authentic works relating to the study of Music written earlier which are vital references on the topic.

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