

Poetics of performance

T.M. Krishna, in this, the first in a series of articles on our classical heritage and their manifestations today, looks at the Natya Sastra and its aesthetics of performing spaces?

The most common way of looking at the classical systems of India has been as one classical system that split into two forms: Hindustani music and Karnataka (referred to commonly as Carnatic) music. In reality, most changes and developments in society were far more complex and movements take place through a process of multiple influences.

I hope that, in the next few weeks, we can look at the musical forms of different eras in relation to Carnatic music. This is not to create a historical hierarchy but more to give us an insight into the complexity of metamorphosis. The journey will be through the eyes of musical treatises and singing traditions that we are aware of.

Over the coming weeks we will move from the Natya Shastra to the development of the Desi Tradition, peep into the music of the Silapadigaaram in Tamizh heartland and its singing traditions, moving on to the Vijayanagara Empire, to Thanjavur and finally, the citadel of music today, Chennai.

The most revered text in Indian performing arts is the Natya Sastra. The period given to the text varies from 200 BC to 200 AD and the geographical location is debated among scholars, with some believing that it was written in Kashmir but some do believe that it could be somewhere in the southern part of what is India today. The word Bharata is not only a name but also means an actor; therefore some scholars believe that the Natya Sastra was not authored by one individual but is a work of many actors and evolved through centuries; similar to the belief regarding the Mahabharata and the meaning of Vyasa.

Natya, the form

The term Natya itself does not refer to dance but to the form of presentation that includes Natya (Natya here is a component of Natya the form), melodic music (Gana) and percussive instruments (Vadhyā). In order to avoid confusion we shall refer to the component Natya as Abhinaya. Abhinaya includes, gesture, speech, involuntary reaction, costumes and accessories. Therefore, this is an amalgam of what we call dance and drama in the modern context. This is a very different aesthetic expression. The elements that constitute drama and elements that contribute dance belong together as one form. Bharata refers to two types of music: Gana and Gandharva. Gana refers to the music that forms part of Natya, and Gandharva, which we may call 'Art music', has an independent identity beyond the triumvirate of Natya.

Music does not refer only to singing but also to the playing of wind and stringed instruments that can produce a melody. It seems that all that can produce melody, whether human or instrumental, come under music. The focus is on the production of melodic variations.

The songs sung as part of Gana in the Natya presentation were called Dhruvas. The language of the songs that have texts is Prakrit. These were sung for various situations in the drama including entry or exit of a character, heightened emotions, to divert audience's attention who are experiencing a certain Rasa and songs for pure dance movements or steps. While the melody was

played Cymbals (Ghana) accompanied them. Some of the stringed instruments mentioned are CitraVina, Vipanchi and a secondary category comprises Kachchapi, Ghosaka. Among the wind instruments, Bharata talks about the Vamsa, Nadi, Tudakini and Samkha. Unfortunately there are no details on their construction. Vadya referred to instruments made of stretched membranes. This category refers to percussion and those instruments that are not melody producing even if they can be tuned to a note. Some percussive instruments mentioned are the Mrdanga, Panava, Dardara and some secondary instruments like Bheri, and Jhallari.

How do the three parts come together to form Natya? How do different parts make a whole? Are they just collections put together or do they give the whole a character? What is the basis of the relationship between the parts and whole? Abhinavagupta raises questions of this nature in his commentaries on the Natya Sastra regarding the relationship of the three elements of Natya. The three elements of Natya, though having separate entities, come together sacrificing their independent forms to provide Rasa in the form of Natya wherein there is a seamless relationship between what we perceive today as independent forms in dance, drama and music (both melodic and percussive). Today's Koodiattam or Yakshagana seem to have a similar Natya form.

Aesthetic experience

An important aspect of Natya was to evoke Rasa. Rasa is expressed as an aesthetic experience of the audience, which is the result of a context, a reaction and a transient feeling in the drama, expressed through Abhinaya resulting in a dominant or permanent mood. This experience is obviously beyond emotion and is aesthetic in nature. The Natya Sastra talks about Rasa as being derived only from the Natya form i.e. the coming together of Gana, Vadhya and Abhinaya in the presentation of Natya. Yet, when removed from this form of Natya, they don't evoke Rasa. It is interesting that Rasa is related to a visual representation of emotions (Bhava) within a story backed by Gana (melody) and Vadhya (percussion). We have later on related even poetry in terms of Rasa. So is this Rasa evoked from the Bhava born out of the poetry? Similarly, does pure art music sans lyrical content evoke a Rasa? This would be an interesting subject for discussion. There are some scholars who believe that it should be inferred that Rasa does include other arts.

Music in its purely art form is known as Gandharva. It is considered a very sacred form with the music meant only for the gods. It's considered a ritual and has a lot of rules and regulations regarding performance. There is no question of pleasing an audience or looking for appreciation. The benefits of performing this form is said to reach only the performers. These forms are presented before the start of a Natya presentation. The compositional forms mentioned in Gandharva are Gitakas and Nirgitas. Gitakas, as compositional forms, seem to be more determined by the Tala and are complex in nature. There are seven types of Gitakas mentioned. The language used in these compositions is Sanskrit and the content is mainly on Shiva. The Nirgitas are more oriented towards instrumental melody. They are two parts wherein one is the playing of the melodies on Vinas and the second is singing linguistically meaningless syllables, for example Jhantum, Jagatiya. There are many varieties of these forms.

The presentation of Natya had preparatory parts called Purvaranga, which included Gandharva music (pure music sans Natya), and then a Tandava Vidhi (a special presentation we will discuss next week) followed by a Sutradhara coming in reciting verses followed by rituals of removing all the obstacles carried out and then the events that lead to the Drama.

Different structure

What was the structure of the music? On a very fundamental level, the music was not based on a fixed tonic. That would mean that we would not have a constant fixed pitch to which the Thambura can be tuned irrespective of whatever music is performed. The music was based on various scales (Murchanas), which took their Svara intervals from one of two Svara groupings called Shadja-grama and Madhyama-grama. There was also another grouping known as Gandhara-grama.

A Svara had its identity along with the interval from its lower Svara and the interval was measured in terms of a unit called Sruti. There were also Jaathis, based on which melodies could be structured that had intervallic arrangement derived only from the Shadja or Madhyama gramas. Each Jaathi had more characteristics described like the note on which a tune had to begin in it (Graha Svara), its tonic note (Amsa Svara) and the note at which a melody must end (Nyasa Svara) and a few more features. Two Svaras, Ga and Ni had possible variants named Antara Gandhara and Kakali Nishada but these positions were not treated as full-fledged Svaras. All music in both Gandharva and Gana were sung on the basis of Jaathis as melodic sources.

Well-defined

The rhythmical aspects of music have also been dealt with at both an intellectual level and at the level of execution. Ghana instruments (Cymbals) were directly related to maintaining of Tala. Talas had three basic time units Laghu, Guru and Pluta. A notional time interval known as Matra is given and defined on the basis of the time taken to utter five short syllables. Each part of the Tala mentioned above was measured on this basis. Laghu was one Matra, Guru was two Matras and Pluta was three Matras. Laya is defined as the period of rest or the time duration between two actions. Talas were divided by Kriyas that were the divisions of the Tala shown through hand and finger movements of both the silent and non-silent types. The length of the Tala was defined by Marga, which is the total duration covered by the Tala, determined by the duration of each Kriya in the Tala, this obviously would affect the speed of the Tala. Bharata mentions three Margas. He also deals with extensions of Talas. This is a process of increasing Kriyas (divisions) in the Tala from its basic Kriya equals syllable form. This extension increases the total duration of the Tala but does not create any change to the Laya of the Tala, as the duration between every Kriya remains the same.

As we can see, the music of the Natya Sastra was highly evolved, defined and sophisticated and definitely centred on theatrics being the heart and soul of its presentation even though Gandharva as a form did exist. There were few more texts post the Natya Shastra that enumerate this same form of music

Though some terms mentioned in the Natya Sastra are still used, their context is different. Therefore we should not conclude that since these terms are present now the music we perform now is connected with the Natya Sastra. One aspect that is important is that there is no mention of improvisation, as we understand it in Indian classical systems today. This music seems to have died on its own and other traditions took over. It can also be speculated that, may be, some parts

of this tradition with influences of local regions where it was practised gave rise to another system that took over the reins, so to speak.

Season of music, and commerce

Today, the Madras music season has acquired its own cultural ambience but, then as now, its evolution is intricately linked to commercial foundations.



Heavenly rhythms: A sculpture at Halebid

The Desi Sangita tradition contained the embryonic elements of what would become the Carnatic music of today. T.M. Krishna continues his series on our classical traditions and their contemporary manifestations.

Either at the time of the Natya Sastra or sometime after, another tradition seems to have emerged. This tradition of “Desi” or “Sangita” is described in texts like the Brihadesi, Manasollasa and, finally, in the Sangita Ratnakara authored by Sarangadeva in the 12th/ 13th century. Between the days of the Natya Sastra and the Ratnakara are about 1000-1200 years. The emergence of this tradition is very important for us to understand where we are as a Carnatic classical idiom today.

Desi Sangita is the form of presentation like Natya was in the older Natya Sastra tradition. Bharata's Natya is referred to in these texts as Marga Sangita. Though Desi Sangita and Natya seem similar — as both have the three elements of Drama/ Dance, Music and percussion — there are some very important differences. Firstly, while the Marga Sangita refers to Natya, Gana and Vadya, the Desi Sangita refers to its components as Gita, Vadya and Nritya. The important change here is the use of Nritya instead of Natya. In its purest form, Nritya is considered an aesthetic expression that has limb movements where the actor is not being identified with the character and is not emoting a dramatic emotion. The use of his limbs and even some abhinaya are purely for the audience's aesthetic pleasure. It does seem that drama never had any role in Sangita.

Parallel traditions?

An older presentation type mentioned in the Sangita Ratnakara is Sudha Paddati, considered purer for this reason and prefixed as ‘Sudha’. This is described as a group of singers, musicians playing wind and percussion instruments and dancers coming on to the stage with the dancer hidden behind a screen. The instruments are tuned following which there is a presentation of compositions meant for the percussive instruments. Then the dancer is revealed, places flowers and begins dancing to the accompaniment of Prabandha singing and Vadhyas accompanying. Interestingly, this is very similar to the description of the Thandava Vidhi mentioned in the preparatory parts of the Natya presentation in the Natya Sastra. Also, the form of dance

described in Thandava Vidhi is Nritta, the same as in Sangita. The term used for the music in Thandava Vidhi is not Gana like in all Natya presentations but Gita, which is the same term used in Sangita. This does lead us to speculate whether the Sudha Paddati was derived from the Thandava Vidhi. There is also another possibility that this tradition already existed during the time of Bharata. Why would Bharata, in a primarily dramatic presentation, have an opening oriented towards music and dance? Did he adapt it from this tradition? These are all, of course, completely in the realm of speculation.

The Desi ragas seem to have appeared from older gramaragas and uparagas and their subsets known as Bhashas, Vibhashas and Antara Bhashas. These Desi ragas are classified into four categories, Raganga, Bhashanga, Kriyanga and Upanga. These ragas are the basis for all musical forms presented in the later 'Sangita' form. Originally in the presentation of Sudha Paddati, prabandhas may have been sung in older Gramaragas but later the Desi ragas took over. The Sangita Ratnakara also describes 15 varieties of Gamakas. These Gamakas are used only in Gana and are completely unknown in the Gandharva.

The two presentational forms of Desi music are Alapti and Prabandha. Alapti seems to be the first reference to what we may call improvisation in the modern context. Alapti is of mainly three varieties.

Familiar echoes

The purpose of the first, Raga Alapti is to crystallise the raga and prepare the ground to render the Prabandha with percussion accompaniment. This involved building the raga in four stages using phrases that make the raga from the Prabandha composed in it. This is similar to the modern Alapana-Keertana suite.

Rupaka Alapti is when melodic variations are a part of the Prabandha. In one variety, to a one line of the Prabandha melodic variations without lyrics are sung and concluded with the repetition of the line. The author of one other text mentions that before the repetition of the Prabandha line the melodic variations are sung as Svaras. This seems to hint at a possible precursor to what we sing as Kalpana Svara today.

The second type of Rupaka Alapti is when either one line or the whole Prabandha is taken up and melodic variations are sung with the lyrics of the Prabandha. A specification is that the duration between syllables of the lyrics must not be changed. The modern Neraval is a very similar way of improvising a line in a Keertana.

Prabandhas are songs that have four sections and six parts. Out of the four sections it is the third Dhruva that is the most important, which is repeated many times, and every Prabandha has to have this section. Some later Prabandhas do have a fifth section. Other than meaningful texts, Prabandhas are the first compositional forms that we come across that have a part that contains only Svaras (sa, ri, ga etc.) There is also use of the syllables of rhythms, ta, dhi, thom etc. and Thenaka which contain syllables of tena, tena. Many of the Prabandhas are on patrons or secular in character and composed in many languages like Sanskrit, Prakrit, Karnata, and Gauda. The two Desi presentations in Sangita that came after Sudha Paddati were Gaundali Vidhi and Perani Vidhi. While the songs in Sudha Paddati were originally known as Prabandhas, it's

possible that due to local languages when it came to Gaundali Vidhi the songs came to be known as Chayalaga Suda (meaning Sudas which are shadows of Sudha variety), that got corrupted to Salaga Suda. Therefore, in order to differentiate the older Prabandhas from these, they referred to the Prabandhas of the Sudha Paddatis as Sudha Sudas. There is one more variety of Prabandha called Ali.

In respect to the understanding of Svaras, we find changes that indicate a movement towards a newer Svvara structure and fixed tonic though the music described in the Ratnakara is still based on the Gramas. The Svaras here too have 22 Srutis and Sarangadeva gives a detailed description of how he arrived at each Sruti using two Veenas with 22 strings each. He also provides the possibility of 10 Vikrita Svaras; Svaras that are not in the original position, possessing the interval as described in the music of the Marga tradition. Sarangadeva also speaks of another method of deriving Moorchanas where the Moorchana for Ni is not begun at the position of Ni but actually on the position of Sa. This seems to indicate changes leading to a fixed tonic. The Desi Talas were different from the Talas used in Gandharva. Breaking up the time units of Talas of Gandharva derived Desi Talas. 120 varieties of Desi Talas are mentioned. Desi Talas were mainly shown by either the sound of the cymbals or the sound of the hand. The use of silent movements in demonstrating Talas is not very clear.

From the above descriptions it is clear that the Desi tradition is definitely an independent if not a breakaway from the older Natya Sastra tradition. Significantly, there are a lot of indicators that this tradition was probably the embryonic stage of the development of Carnatic music given the movements towards more Svvara varieties, a fixed tonic, a independent set of ragas, improvisations like Raga Alapti and Rupaka Alapti, and the use of Gamakas. The final separation of Nritya from Sangita is attributed to Gopala Nayaka who pioneered the Chaturdandi tradition and created a tradition of only music. While all this was in relation to Sanskrit treatises, what was happening in Tamizh country? We will see next week.

***Clarification:** The Natya Sastra is known as the fifth Veda not because of its "profound impact on the arts over the centuries" but because the Natya Sastra itself in its first chapter while talking about the creation of Natya refers to it as a fifth veda created by Brahma. Secondly the Natya Sastra is not the only text that gives references to music of those times, other texts like the Dattilam, do talk about the music of the same tradition.*



Magnificent Hampi: There was a lot of development in music during the Vijayanagara empire.

By the 15th century, the basis of classical music had undergone major changes. The writer traces the contributions of the Haridasas and Annamacharya to the evolution of Carnatic music as we know it today.

A significant change that took place from the Sangita Ratnakara period was the move from shifting tonic and fixed svara interval system of music to that of a fixed tonic and variable svara interval system. The seeds of change were sown even in the Ratnakara but we cannot be sure when the complete transformation happened. We find, in many treatises, a sense of confusion about this change, but by the 15th century the basis of Indian classical music had changed forever.

From the early 1400s, the contribution of the Haridasas of the Kannada speaking region towards musical changes was invaluable and it's important for us to understand their work. Like the Tamizh Saivite saints from the 7th or 8th century, the Haridasas used music as a vehicle to spread the message of dvaita philosophy in Kannada. The music of the Haridasa was born out of the Desi Tradition (discussed earlier) and we will see the connection and analyse the same. What were the ragas used by the Haridasas? Most manuscripts available mention modern ragas, which did not exist at that time to the compositions. Therefore we need to look at the theoretical texts of the same period to get our answers.

At the time of the Haridasa movement, some important treatises included the Svaramela Kalanidhi by Ramamatya, Pundarika Vittala's Sandragachandrodaya and other treatises. We also

find a mention of a Sangitasara of Vidyaranya through the later work of Govinda Dikshita's Sangita Sudha. Therefore an analysis of the ragas in these treatises gives us an idea of the ragas that were possibly used in the compositions. Many of these ragas are still used in Carnatic music.

Tala system

An important contribution of the Haridasas is the regularising of the tala system. From the numerous Desi talas, they reorganised the tala system into the seven major talas, each with fixed counts: suladi sapta tala i.e. jampa (10), matya (14), dhruva (10), triputa (7), atta (14), eka (4) and rupaka (6). Though these seem similar to those used in Carnatic music today, there are some aspects we need to understand. First, laghu and druta were only time units and independent of the actions that were used to show the tala. The laghu was one matra duration (a notional duration to utter four short syllables) and the dhruva was half that. There was also an extension to each of these called a viraama, which measured to quarter duration of a laghu; although according to some, the viraama augmented the value of the time-unit to which it was attached by half its value. The Viraama probably transformed into the anudhruta. Today, all these are angas to a tala, which are divisions with certain counts. Secondly we are not sure about how these were actually demonstrated in terms of actions or movements. Two other talas used by the Haridasas are jhompata (a desi tala) and Raganamatya.

The Suladi was a unique musical form composed only by the Haridasa saints, which evolved from the Salaga Suda (prabandha). The suladi has verses where each is in one of the seven suladi talas. Not all the talas need to be in every suladi but at least five are found in each suladi. Even Raganmatya tala is used occasionally. Starting from Sripadaraya, all the Haridasas composed in this form. Sometimes ragas and even talas are not prescribed to the rendition of Suladis. Interestingly the only available notated Suladis (composed by Purandara Dasa) are the three available in the Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini (1904). From this notation we find that these compositions are more structured on the basis of the talas.

Another form that was used by the Haridasas was the vrittinama, which again seems to have evolved from the prabandhas of Desi music. This is the form that alternates between verses sung without tala and those sung with a tala structure.

Similarly ugabhogas, which were verses sung to ragas, are like vrithams. The difference being that they are not set to any metre and each line can be of variable length. Most ugabhogas don't have prescribed ragas.

Tamizh origins

Scholars believe that the Haridasas were the pioneers of the pada form. The pada form had a structure of a pallavi and multiple charanas or in the pallavi anupallavi charana structure. This nomenclature of Pallavi, Anupallavi, charana comes from the later use and is not given in any treatise or manuscript of the period under discussion. The pallavi is usually a two-line structure followed by verses of four lines, which we call charana. Sometimes there is an anupallavi. The only way to decipher the anupallavi from poetry is by the presence of dvitiakshara prasa, which is the sound concordance of the second syllable of the first line of the pallavi with the second syllable of the first line of the Anupallavi. While this seems a logical method we cannot be completely sure whether it was sung as an anupallavi or as multiple charanas. The very concept of dvitiakshara prasa is also related to Tamizh poetry, as this is not found in older Sanskrit/Kannada/Telugu literature. It does seem that the Haridasas also used the same pada

form for shringara texts, which were called gopigitas.

The Haridasa Pada is sometimes linked to the salaga suda (prabandha) form. The pallavi, anupallavi and charana structure is associated with the parts of the prabandha namely udgraha, melapaka and dhruva structure and the last line associated with the Abhoga. Since there is no prasa structure in Prabandha or any other relationship between the pada and the prabandha this probably requires more serious research and analysis. It is possible that the pada form independently evolved.

Other musical forms of compositions used by the Haridasas were dandaka, koravanji, gadya etc. The main musical contributors among the Haridasas were Shripadaraya, Vyasaraaya, Vadiraja, Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa.

At the same time, in the region of Tirupati, we find an enormous musical contribution from Annamacharya and later poets. Annamacharya is said to have composed 32,000 sankirtanas. His son Peda Tirumalacharya got them inscribed in copper plates in the Tirupati temple but some of the copper plates are said to have gone to Ahobila and to Thanjavur. Today, including the sankirtanas of Peda Tirumalacharya and his son Cina Tirumalacharya, we have a total of 14,523 sankirtanas by Tallapakam poets. Annamacharya has also composed the Venkatachalamahaatmya in Sanskrit and Ramayana in dvipada metre in Telugu. Ragas are mentioned for the sankirtanas in the copper plates in Tirupati.

The sankirtanas again were either in the pallavi/anupallavi/charana structure or a pallavi/charana structure to use today's nomenclature. As mentioned earlier, the understanding of an anupallavi's presence is only on the basis of dvitiakshara prasa. Some scholars believe Annamacharya was the pioneer in giving the pallavi a structured form of two lines of equal magnitude.

The terms pada and keertana seem to be used synonymously in this period and it's only later that we have come to associate the shringara content with Padam and Bhakthi content with Keertana. Some also attribute the pada/keertana form to Narayana Theertha and Muthu Tandavar, but other sources link the Narayana Theertha tarangams to the prabandha tradition and we also cannot be sure about the period of Muthuthandavar. Irrespective of these differences in views we can conclude that there must have been lot of movement of musical and poetic forms in the land of the Vijayanagara Empire.

Correction

It's Sadragachandrodaya, not Sandragachandrodaya as published in this article. The following are the correct names/order and numbers. dhruva (14), matya (10), rupaka (6), jampa (10), tripata (7), ata (14), and eka (4)

Comments:

The music, prose and literary works of Vijayanagar spanned two main languages, Telegu and Kannada; Sanskrit and Tamil also provided with rich patronage. Vijayanagar rulers' were much devoted towards their religious preceptors known as 'Thathachariyars'. Of the Thathachariyars the Pancha matha bandhana Thathachariyar, who wrote the famous literary work of 'Panch matha bandhanam' and Lakshmi kumara Thatha Desikan, who wrote 'Srimath Hanumath Vimsadhi', 'Desika Prabandha Eedu' and 12 other literary works in Telegu were the most prominent. These works contain several verses, couplets and poetical forms that are strung in 'desi' music style and

practised even today by various yakshagana troupes in the South Canara district of Karnataka. Many kings of the devaraya dynasty were themselves litterateurs and authored classics such as (Krishnadevaraya's) 'Jambavati Kalyana' 'Amuktamalyada', a poetic and dramatically skillful work. Jambavati Kalyana is supposed to house several forms of tala, which could be interpreted to dance forms such as Kuchipudi, Kathakali and Yakshagana as we see today. Eight famous scholars regarded as the pillars (Ashtadiggajas) of music, poetry and literature adorned the court of Krishnadevaraya, the most famous being Allasani Peddana referred to as Andhrakavitapitamaha (father of Telugu poetry) and Tenali Ramakrishna, Krishnadevaraya's court jester who authored several acclaimed works. Also was Srinatha, considered the greatest of all Telugu poets, who wrote books like 'Marutracharitam' and 'Salivahana-sapta-sati'. These works are rarely heard anywhere in the present day, but may contain various forms of raga and tala formations. The Vaishnava Bhakti movement on the other hand was heralded by 'Haridasas' the Kannada poets and scholars of the empire. The Haridasa celebration of devotion are exemplified in the compilation of songs called Devaranama (lyrical poems) in the ragale metre. Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa are considered the foremost among many Dasas their immense contribution to the construction of grammar of carnatic music very well known. Gadugina Bharata, a translation of Mahabharata in Kannada by Kumara Vysa could be heard even today during bhajanavalis in the temples of Horanadu. These bhajanavalis are sung in various misra ragas, a combination of both grammar and folklore. Most Sanskrit works of the Vijayanagar empire were commentaries either on the Vedas or on the Ramayana and Mahabharata epics. The prose of these texts extolled the Advaita philosophy and many verses reflect the 'Gopucha yati' formation as seen in many of Dikshitar's works. Notable amongst them are secular writings on music and medicine of Vidyaranya's 'Sangitsara', Praudha Raya's 'Ratiratnapradipika', Sayana's 'Ayurveda Sudhanidhi' and Lakshmana Pandita's 'Vaidyarajavallabham'. All these works is supposed to have musical and tala construction in their recitation. The works of famous Dvaita saints of the Udupi Madhwa order, Jayatirtha, Vyasatirtha, Vadirajatirtha and Sripadaraya were mainly rebuttals to the Advaita philosophy. Of the many Tamil poets (of the Pandya lineage) patronised, Svarupananda Desikar who wrote an anthology of 2824 verses 'Sivaprakasaperundirattu', on the Advaita philosophy is prominent. His disciple the ascetic, Tattuvarayar, wrote a shorter anthology, 'Kurundirattu', that contains about half the number of verses. Krishnadevaraya also patronised the Tamil Vaishnava poet Haridasa whose 'Irusamaya Vilakkam' was an exposition of the two Hindu systems, Vaishnava and Shaiva, with a preference for the former. Most musical and literary works of the erstwhile Vijayanagar empire (apart from Purandaradasa and Kanakadasa) are rarely heard in any of the music platforms. My request would be for today's torch-bearers of carnatic music to research and bring to the fore the rich beauty of the Vijayanagar contributions. I recommend the reading as below for a deeper understanding of the contribution of the Vijayanagar empire to music prose and poetry: Nilakanta Sastri, K.A. A history of South India from prehistoric times to the fall of Vijayanagar. New Delhi: Indian Branch, Oxford University Press. Iyer, Panchapakesa A.S. Karnataka Sangeeta Sastra. Chennai: Zion Printers. Mack, Alexandra. 'The temple district of Vitthalapura', In John M. Fritz and George Michell (editors). New Light on Hampi: Recent Research at Vijayanagara. Mumbai.

from: Dr. Hari Subramanian



A coin of the Nayak period in Thanjavur with Govinda Dikshita's name on it.

From the 15th century many treatises have documented and explained various aspects of music that give us a perspective of changes and developments. Below are some of them. Svaramela Kalanidhi of Ramamatya (1550), Sadragachandrodaya of Pundarikavittala (1583 approx), Ragavibhoda of Somanatha (1609) and Sangita Sudha authored by Govinda Dikshita (1614). Govinda Dikshita was a musician, scholar and a very important minister in the court of the Nayaks of Thanjavur.

Even today we have many towns that are named after him like Ayyampettai and Govindapuram. Govinda Dikshita held Vidyaranya, a scholar of the 15th century (Vijayanagara region) in great esteem and through Govinda Dikshita we learn about the treatise Sangita Sara attributed to Vidyaranya. Govinda Dikshita's son Venkatamakhin authored the Chaturdandi Prakashika, which is probably the most important treatise in the Mela era. Following Venkatamakhin, his descendant Muddu Venkatamakhin is attributed to have authored the Ragalakshana (early 18th century). The Maratha rulers of Thanjavur were also major contributors to musicology including Shahaji who authored the Ragalakshanamu (1684 – 1711) and Thulaja who authored the Sangita Saramruta (1729 – 1735).

All the above texts deal with various developments in music including the nature of svaras, the features of each raga in practice, the various classifications of ragas, the Vina etc. Some treatises deal with presentation aspects like Alapa, Thaya, gita and Prabandha. Many authors refer to older aspects of music even though the music they were discussing was far removed. The differences in opinion between various authors also leads to very sharp critiques like Venkatamakhin's very harsh criticism of Ramamatya. One constant fact remains that all the above texts do have a historical connection.

Finally we have the Sangraha Choodamani (approx 1800) attributed to Govinda. Interestingly we do not have any information about this author or the source of this treatise. In fact this treatise never refers to older works and seems totally devoid of historical references even though the author mentions all the older ragas that have a history.

Ragas are described through the ages based on various aspects, like Graha (starting note of the melody), Amsa (tonic), Nyasa (ending svara of melody). After a while the word Graha starts referring to the tonic. Ramamatya talks about Uttama raga (raga with a lot of scope), Madhyama (relatively less scope) and Adhama (limited). The Ragalakshanamu of Shahaji gives us a new classification called Ghana (ragas which were probably sung faster with tight movements), naya (which had more glides and slower), Desi (which were foreign). The most commonly used classification is Upanga and Bhashanga. Originally Upanga and Bhashanga refer to the sources from which they were derived but, for the first time in the Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini (1904), Upanga raga is defined as one that does not have a foreign note (Anyā svara) and Bhashanga raga is one that has an Anyā svara. Even in this treatise some Bhashanga ragas don't fulfil the definition.

Naming ragas

Treating ragas in terms of a Mela was possibly the most game changing approach in musical history and therefore it is important for us to understand its original intent and present state. The idea of the Mela can be traced to the Svaramelakalanidhi of Ramamatya. Mela refers to a collection of seven svarasthanas (svara positions). All ragas are Janya ragas, and janya ragas that have a common set of svarasthanas are placed in the same mela. The name of the Mela was given to the raga among the group that was most popular. At this stage the raga that held the title for the mela did not need to possess all the seven svaras and though the mela was referred by its name, it was still a janya raga. The Svaramela Kalanidhi mentions 20 melas. Through the references in the Sangita Sudha we find that the Sangitasara seems to be the first work that uses the Mela-janya nomenclature with 15 melas and 50 janya ragas. The intention of the Mela system was to organise existing ragas that were in practice.

Later scholars started computing the maximum number of seven svara combinations they could derive (melaprasthara) based on the number of svara positions. Here each author computed a different number of Melas based on the number of svarasthanas they had theorised. For example the Sadragachandrodaya mentions a possible 90 melas while in the Raga Vibhoda there are 960 possible melas. Even though they come up with this computation they find that only a limited number of these were actually used in the form of a raga therefore for eg., Somanatha feels that 23 melas will suffice to classify the 67 ragas then in practice.

In the Chaturdandi Prakashika, Venkatamakhin comes up with a possible 72 melas based on 12 svaras and 16 svara names (as sometimes the same svarasthana can take two svara names depending on the raga). But he only mentions 19 melas, which occupy respective positions in the possible 72 melas. Of the 19, 18 are older ragas and one (Simharava) was his creation. Therefore all the above scholars computed a possible number of melas but considered them non-functional, as there were no ragas that fit in. The ragas mentioned were only those that were functional and evolved through the natural process of practice with the exception of Simharava.

There is also a battle about whether the mela name must be taken from the raga that has all the seven svaras (sampoorna) and this does get established. This only means that seven svaras must be present in the raga but does not refer to the order of the svaras or arohana/avarohana. In fact this idea of arohana-avarohana had not even entered the raga concept.

In the Ragalakshanamu of Shahaji, we come across the term Melakartha given to the janya raga that is given the name of the mela. Even if a raga is called the melakartha it is still considered one of the janya ragas of the mela. A raga is still being considered a janya of a mela and not of another raga.

Later in the Ragalakshana of Muddu Venkatamakhin a drastic shift in the concept of Mela takes place. Muddu Venkatamakhin synthetically creates janya ragas for the remaining 53 non-functional Melas (19 out of the 72 already existed). Here for the first time a raga is created purely on svarasthanas. It is also at this stage that we first come across the terms arohana and avarohana to describe the characteristic of a raga. This might have been the result of the very synthetic process of trying to create a raga from the arrangement of svaras.

Here two schools of thought emerge. The Muddu Venkatamakhin tradition, which uses the terms Raganga raga (equivalent term to melakartha) and janya raga, adopts the opinion that the Raganga raga needs to be Sampurna in either arohana or avarohana but non-linear. Muthusvami Dikshitar gave form to most of these ragas through his compositions.

The other school established by the Sangraha Choodamani adopts the view that all the meladhikara (equivalent term to melakartha) has to be Sampurana in arohana and avarohana and importantly the svaras have to be in linear order.

Here 66 ragas were synthetically created and made functional as only 6 were older ragas. Thyagaraja seems to have given form to many of these ragas. The subtle but important difference in both schools regarding the linearity and non-linearity of the svaras in arohana and avarohana is a very important distinction.

Finally the Mela–janyaraga classification is replaced with janakaraga-janya raga. Therefore Mela started out as a way to organise existing ragas but moved to creating scales as ragas using the mela structure. Probably for the first time in musical history theory influenced practice. This is probably why many ragas in performance even today are only svara structures sans features that give a raga an organic form.



Wealth of knowledge: Inscriptions on the rock face

Inscriptions in Kudimiyamalai are testimony to the mingling of the Desi tradition with local music. T.M.KRISHNA traces the contours of the synthesis.

Kudimiyamalai is a small hill situated in the Tamizh heartland near Pudukottai. On a rock face behind the Shikhanathaswamy temple, on the hill we find the earliest source of notation in Indian classical music history. These inscriptions, dated to the 7th/8th century AD during the reign of the Pallavas, are in Pallava grantha script. There is mention of a Rudracharya and historians believe that this refers to the Pallava king Mahendravarman I.

Notations

The music notated is related to the Desi tradition and it is believed that the notations were used to teach music. Seven gramaragas have been notated and these ragas represent the form that was in vogue before the classification of gramaragas into suddha, bhinna etc. had arrived. The colophon also mentions the parivardhini (a type of veena) and scholars associate this inscription to instrumental playing of these ragas.

The rock face has 38 horizontal lines of musical notation. Each line has 64 svaras split into four sets each with each set having four svaras. There does not seem to be any variation of duration in the svaras. We find that a svara never repeats itself immediately and the last svara in each set of four svaras is the same in each line. For the first time consonants S,R,G,M,P,D,N are used to denote the seven svaras. Secondly and more importantly we find that these svaras are followed

by four vowels u,e,a,i. For e.g., we find that for svara G the use of a(Ga),i(Gi),u(Gu),e(Ge). We also find the presence of two vikrita svaras antara gandhara (A) and kakali nishada (K). Both these svaras are weak in nature, meaning not used very often and used only as leading svaras to M and S respectively. In the case of these two svaras the vowel ending i is never used. The functionality of these vowel endings have led to various explanations.

Explanations for the usage of the vowels given by scholars have varied from associating them to techniques of instrumental playing to trying to associate them to the 22 srutis but they are all found wanting for various reasons which I shall not elaborate here. Dr Richard Widdess gives an explanation that seems to be the most accurate when we analyse the notation and his interpretation. Without going into details, here are the observations. Vowel usage in the notation indicates the relative svarasthana level between two svaras. The vowels are ranked as u,e,a,i with u denoting the least relative interval and i the largest relative interval. We know for example that S – N is a larger rising seven note interval as compared to S – G which would be a three note rising one. This is exactly what these vowels seem to indicate. Therefore in the above example we could use Su – Ni to denote S - N and Su – Ge for S - G. Of course the vowels are also used in relation to all the four svaras in each set. We must understand that since there are only four vowels for seven notes their usage is spread sometimes arbitrarily .We need to understand the same in each context. Dr Widdess has corroborated his explanation with various other references from grantha script to the Sangita ratnakara.

These inscriptions are important and definite proof of Desi music in Tamizh land. When we also look at the treatises from the same period including the commentators of the Silapadhigaaram we find a lot of commonality with Sanskrit treatises. Therefore it is safe to assume that there was interplay between Desi music and local music of the Tamizh region without going into which came first.

The Tirumurai are about 11000 Saivaite Hymns by 27 authors, which constitute the works of all the great saivaite saints of the period 7th – 12th century in 12 parts. The first seven Thirumurai composed by the three saints Tirugnanasambandar (7th century AD), Thirunavukarasar (6th /7th century AD) and Sundarar (8th century AD) are generically known together as the Thevaram. The Thirumurai originally consisted only of the works of the three saints; later Sivaneeshachelvar added four more Tirumurais of other saints, which included the Thiruvachakam of Mannikavachakar.

Between the times of the three saints and the 12th century the singing tradition of these Thevarams seem to have disappeared and the manuscripts were locked in a vault in the Chidambaram Nataraja temple. In the 12th century the Chola king Raja Raja Chola found and revived the Thevarams, and with the help of Nambiandar Nambi. Nambiandar Nambi added the last Tirumurai namely, the Periya-puranam of Sekkizhaar, giving an account of the sixty-three Nayanmars.

Pann classifications

In Tamizh treatises we find the reference to 103 panns. Of these 103, only 23 are found in Thevarams. There is one more pann called Yazhmuri pann (with an interesting anecdote to it),

which is not found in the 103 panns. The 23 panns are divided into three groups: Pagalpan (those that can be sung during the day), Iravu pann (for singing in the night) and podupann (those that can be sung at any time). The music of these Thevarams is attributed to a lady belonging to the Tirunilakantayazhpaanar family. She was approached by Nambiandar Nambi, as nobody knew how to sing the hymns when they were found.

The singing tradition of Thevarams belongs completely to the Odhuvars of Tamizh Nadu. They were officially appointed and paid to sing these hymns in the Saivaite temples by Raja Raja Chola in the 12th century, a tradition that still continues. Most of the Odhuvars learnt thevarams in oral tradition while some of them have learnt Carnatic classical music formally. Odhuvars perform Panniru Tirumurai inside the sanctum of the temple very strictly following the panns as handed down without liberties of improvisations etc, accompanied by cymbals but are allowed to sing the same Thevarams with far more flexibility and improvisation and even change panns while singing outside the sanctum in the temple. Outside the sanctum over the ages many instruments like Yazh, flute, mrudangam, sarangi, clarinet, violin, and harmonium have accompanied the renditions.

From 1949 the Tamizh Isai Sangam has been trying to find raga equivalents to the panns. This has been done on the basis of the singing of the Thevarams by traditional schools of Thevara Isai. The 23 panns have been equated to 15 ragas meaning that there are multiple panns for the same raga. The obvious question now arises: how can we be sure that the tunes have not changed in the last 1000 years of rendition? The explanations are that the Odhuvars even today do not include panns other than the 23 in their renditions and that they did not practice any other form of music. Both these reasons may not be airtight as we do find differences in panns being used in different temples and even in the conclusions made by the Tamizh Isai Sangam. For example the pann Indhalam is believed to be equivalent to Mayamalavagowla though the Odhuvars sing it as Nadanamakriya but some scholars believe it is Hindolam.

It's also a fact that the temple was a hub of music and dance. It is very likely that the music of the Thevarams did change with the times, as the Odhuvars would have been exposed to Carnatic ragas. It is possible that the panns they were using were close to some raga melodies and later they completely merged into the raga identity. All that we can confidently conclude is that panns as they are sung in the 20th century are similar to certain ragas of the modern era and sometimes even the same pann is sung as two different ragas in different traditions.

The Silapadigaaram is not only a story of love and misunderstanding, but also a text with a wealth of detail about the music of its time. T.M. Krishna uncovers the intricate relationship between the Tamizh landscape and melody that it reflects.

The Silapadigaaram is the story of a married couple Kovalan and Kannagi whose lives are disturbed by the entry of the courtesan Madhavi into Kovalan's life. Smitten by Madhavi's beauty and skills in music and dance, Kovalan showers her with gifts and wealth. A misunderstanding causes this relationship to break. Kovalan comes back to Kannagi and their financial position forces a move from the Chozha kingdom to Madurai, the capital of the Pandyas. In Madurai, Kovalan is accused of stealing the queen's anklet when he was actually trying to sell Kannagi's anklet and is executed. A furious Kannagi proves in court that the anklet was indeed hers leading to the death of the king who dies in remorse. Kannagi's curse burns Madurai and she moves to

the Chera kingdom where she leaves this world and unites with Kovalan. Hearing this story the Chera king orders the building of a temple in her memory as he considers her a goddess.

Guide to music

The Silapadigaaram is authored by Ilango Adigal and approximately dated to the 2nd century AD. Unlike texts like the Natya Sastra, Dattitram etc, this is not a musical treatise but built into the story are details about the music and dance of the times and it is a veritable guide to understanding their society.

In the Silapadigaaram, we notice that details on the music are short, indicative and brief in nature, scattered over the text. Therefore how do we understand the music? Many centuries later — between the 9th and 12th centuries — two commentaries on the Silapadigaaram, the Arumpada urai and Adiyaarkkunallaar, used the material in the epic along with other texts on music like the Pancha Marabu (most others are not available now) and created a theory based on their interpretation of the same. Therefore we need to clearly understand that there are two parts to this material; first details in the Silapadigaaram and second the commentaries. The huge time lag between the original and the commentaries is an issue since we cannot be sure about how the changes in the music and practices of the times of the commentators influenced their perspective. About six chapters in the Silapadigaaram contain substantial information on music. Out of these the Arangetru Kaadhai and the Aaychiyar kuravai are very important. In the Silapadigaaram there is a clear indication that there were two traditions of music. The older tradition is the Thondrupodumarai and the newer Vamburumarabu.

While talking about the Thondrupadumurai the commentators mention the Naarperum pann (the four major pans). This is when four types of lands are associated with a specific pann (a melodic source), and an instrument, Yazh (a form of harp), Parai (skin instrument) and deity. We also find Mullai, another type of land also with similar associations (see box).

Notes (svaras) are known as Narambu. Narambu are the gut strings used in the Yazh. Each string of the Yazh was tuned to one note therefore this association of Narambu to note. In the Aaychiyar Kuravai, Ilango Adigal describes a dance by seven girls in a circular formation. This is a metaphor for the seven Narambu (svaras). The seven nerambu are known as Kural (Sa), Thutham (Ri), Kaikkilai (ga), Uzhai (ma), Ili (pa), Villari (da), Tharam (ni). This circular formation is known as a Vattapalai. Commentators place these seven notes in a circle that has twelve places. These twelve places are associated with the twelve zodiacs. The commentators derive this association due to some indications in the Silapadigaaram. The commentators have specified the zodiac in which each Narambu is positioned. Therefore you have seven notes positioned in seven zodiacs out of the twelve. The position of the Kural (sa) is fixed in the Thondrupadumurai at the zodiac Libra (thula), which lies to the left side of the circle. The maatrai (sruti) interval difference between each of these notes is not given in the Silapadigaaram but in the commentary. This circle of notes is the basis of evolving the Naarperum pann. Through a process known as Ilikramam, the note positions for the Naarperum pann are derived by a verse of association between the notes given in the commentaries. The association is one of every fifth note or every eight position in the circle.

In the chapter Arangetru kaadhai that appears in the story before the Aaychiyar Koothu, there is

a mention of the newer tradition Vamburumarabu. A process of changes in the interval between the Narambu (svaras), later called Alagu maatram by commentators, is applied, and the position of kural (sa) is moved to the right side of the circle in Taurus (rishabha). Through this process we derive new positions for all the notes in the Circle Vattapalai for Vamburumarabu. From this by a process of Kural thiribu, seven palai-s (scales) are derived. I am not going into the technical details. When this same process of kural thiribu is applied to the Paalai yazh in the older system, we get seven palai-s. They are Cembalai, Padumalaipalai, Sevvazhi, Arumpalai, Kodipalai, Vilaripalai, Merchempalai. They are the same seven in the newer tradition but in a different sequence as the position of kural (sa) has been moved.

Varied interpretation

Among modern scholars there have been varied interpretations to the methods mentioned. Aabraham Pandithar has used the position of the notes in both the older and newer system in two circles and derived the Naarperum pann. Vipulanandar does not agree with the intervals between the notes suggested and works on the same interval difference as the Natya Sastra. Dr S. Ramanathan, has, in the process of Alagu maatram in Vamburumarabu, differed with the other scholars. He has also gone on to give the complete structure for the Mullaitheembaani even though the Silapadigaaram only indicates four notes; he has inferred its structure and given it a five-note form. Another scholar V.P.Kamakshisundaram has a very different interpretation to both the process of finding the Naarperum pann and the Kural thiribu method for the Palai-s. The original text of the Silapadigaaram only uses the word pani and this is interpreted as thalam. Interestingly the commentators talk about five types of pani starting with the chachatputa, which in fact is also one of the five thalas mentioned in the Sangita Ratnakara. The musical forms known as “Uru” are mentioned in the sixth chapter Kadalaadu Kaadhai. The two forms mentioned are Maayonpaani and Naalvagaipaani. The commentators talk about many other forms and they have many sub-classes. The word Pani here has a connotation of musical form.

Instruments found in the Silapadigaaram include melodic instruments like the Kuzhal (flute), Yazh (a form of harp) and Veena. Percussion instruments include the Thannumai, Muzhavu, Murasu, Aamandrika.

There is no doubt that the music of the times was a thriving tradition but it is the later commentators, and not Ilango Adigal, who have elaborated on the musical details in the text. Some scholars of the 20th century have tried to equate the palai-s of the Silapadigaaram to modern ragas. The original commentators of the Silapadigaaram have not made this association between raga and palai. The concept of the modern raga is determined because we have a fixed tonic system. We cannot be sure that the music of the Silapadigaaram was fixed tonic, though the importance to the first note Kural (sa) is clear. Secondly we do find that at a very basic level the palai-s giving each note in the decreasing order the first position is similar to the moorchanas in the Natya Sastra. Therefore it would be similar to trying to equate each moorchana in the sadja grama of the Natya Sastra to ragas. Scholars are still debating about whether there is any connection between the Natya Sastra and the music of the Silapadigaaram. Both these were musical traditions that belonged to a different era and the best we can do is to celebrate them without trying to derive any contemporary relevance. The pannas that come in later in the Tevarams may have been using the same names but history does indicate that there may have

been many changes that could lead us to believe that the nature of pann had changed.

The growth of music and dance during the rule of the Marathas and Nayaks in Thanjavur is very significant. T.M. Krishna, in the last of his series, traces the contribution of composers during that time.

Most musical forms that are in practice in Carnatic music as part of the art music repertoire and the dance music repertoire can be traced to the rule of the Nayaks and Marathas in Thanjavur. King Raghunatha Nayak (1600 – 1634) was a scholar, composer, vina player and a great patron of arts. During his period, it is quite clear that the form of art music presentation was the Chaturdandi form consisting of Alapa, Thaya, Gita and Prabandha. There is said to be a lot of notations of this form of presentation belonging to this period at the Saraswathi Mahal Library (Thanjavur). In the sphere of dance though we do find musical forms mentioned such as Perani, Jakkini, Korvai, Sabda Chintamani etc. We do know that, during the reign of Raghunatha and again during the reign of his successor Vijayaraghava Nayak (1633 – 1673), Kshetrappa the composer of Shringara Padas (Pallavi/Anupallavi/Charana form) from Muvva visited Thanjavur and even composed padas in praise of Vijayaraghava Nayak but it is clear that, in spite of his influence, the Nayak rulers still preferred the older Prabandha form of art music presentation. There are numerous Yakshaganas composed by the Nayak kings themselves. We do find one composer of this period Peda Dasari whose Keertana in raga Devagandhari is found in the Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini.

I

In the later Maratha period, we come across numerous composers and compositions but most of them seem in relation to dance presentations rather than art music. Almost all the forms of compositions that are in vogue today are connected to this period. Secondly, the Pada form was firmly established and all the compositional structures were variants of the same pallavi/anupallavi/charana form be it a Varna (colloquially 'varnam'), Svarajathi, Ragamalika or Thillana.

Melattur Virabhadrayya is found to be probably the first composer who used the svarajathi form. This is not the Svarajathi as found in the compositions of Syama Sastri. The older Svarajathi form was similar to the Varna with the main difference being the existence of Jathis as an important part of the structure. Virabhadrayya was also probably the first composer of the Varna, Ragamalikas and Thillanas. Other than this, he also composed Keertanas. Therefore, Virabhadrayya's contribution to compositional music is immense. He was also the guru of Ramasvami Dikshitar, the father of Muthusvami Dikshitar who himself was a composer, mainly the Varnas and Ragamalikas.

A name synonymous with the Varna is, of course, Pachimiriyam Adiyappayaa, composer of the famous Bhairavi Varna Viriboni. Today, the two types of Varnas namely Pada Varna and Tana Varna are differentiated on the basis of the existence of Sahitya for the svaras passages in the former and the lack of the same in the later.

Varna compositions

This is definitely a later development. Originally, both these forms had sahitya for the svara passages and the difference between them was in the far more fluid padam style structuring of the pallavi and anupallavi in the padavarna vis a vis a rigid structuring in the Tana Varna. It is also important to note that Varnas of that period concluded by connecting the Charana with the Pallavi.

The later Varna compositions have done away with this structure. One of the early composers of the Sringara Padas post-Kshetrappa seems to have been Giriraja Kavi who adorned the courts of the early Marathas rulers.

He composed numerous Sringara Padas and even employed Desiya ragas like Brindavani. Other composers immediately after him who used the Sringara Pada form were Vasudeva Kavi, Soma Kavi and Rama Bharathi.

There were many composers who followed suit and composed Shringara Pada, Varna, Svarajathi and Keertanas. This includes composers like Kavi Mathrubhutta, Pallavi Gopalayya, Sonti Venkatasubbiah, Arunachala Kavirayar, Muthu Thandavar, Papavinasu Mudaliar, and Margadarshi Seshaiyengar. In many cases, the music of the composers mentioned above is lost or very few are available.

The Maratha kings themselves were prolific composers including Shahaji, Thulaja I, Ekoji II, Sarabhoji II who composed numerous padas, musical operas, Kuravanji's, Daru, yakshagana etc. The watershed moment, of course, is the advent of Tyagaraja, Muthusvami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri. It is interesting that, in the period before these three, there were svarajatis, Tana Varnas and keertanas composed but we are not sure where they were exactly used. We know that most other compositional forms were probably used in dance and that there were musical operas composed and performed. Even accounts of musical contests that we hear about only relate to elaboration of Ragas or Pallavi contests. Therefore, what an art music performance consisted of is an unanswered question. In the period of the Nayak kings it is evident that the Chaturdandi form was presented both in a vocal and vina presentation. But in the period after this the musical forms are more operatic and dance related.

The Musical Trinity of Tyagaraja, Muthusvami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri were very different from one another. We do notice that Syama Sastri seems like the traditionalist among the three with most of his compositions being in ragas that are found in older treatises. The exceptions in his case are only Chintamani and Kalgada. Muthusvami Dikshitar, unlike his father, concentrated on the Keertana form and even improvised on it with the Pallavi/Anupallavi structure Keertana. He remained loyal to the Venkatamakhin tradition and gave form to most ragas mentioned in the Ragalakshana attributed to Muddu Venkatamakhin.

Tyagaraja was an innovator who created ragas and broke away from older ragas. In fact, the main reason the treatise Sangraha Choodamani has validity is because of the compositions of Tyagaraja in many of the ragas mentioned in the treatise that are not found earlier. We also need to mention Gopalakrishna Bharathi, a very important and significant composer who was a junior contemporary of the Trinity.

The post-Trinity period saw many composers, some disciples of the trinity who themselves became prolific composers of Keertanas, Varnas, Thillanas, Swarajathis, Jathiswarams, Shabdams and Javali (which is a post-Trinity form). This included composers like Subbaraya Sastri, the Tanjore Quartet, Patnam Subramanya Iyer, Veena Kuppaier and many others. Even in the post-Trinity period, it does seem that very few compositions were sung in art music presentations but by the turn of the century (1900), it's evident that Tyagaraja Keertanas had become popular due to the extensive use of the same in Harikatha expositions and entered concert music. Compositions of Muthusvami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri gained prominence only slowly but nevertheless by the early periods of the 20th century, the Keertana content in concerts had become as important as manodharma sangeetha including many other composers in the presentation.

The objective of the present series was only to give an introduction to the musical history in India from the angle of Carnatic music and therefore at times, I have been unable to go into the nuances or details. It is evident that music has obviously developed and changed at multiple layers due to multiple influences and is not a result of linear connection of dots. Today we view tradition either as what we learn from our teachers/schools of music or our sense of tradition, begins with the 20th century. Both these standpoints are incomplete. An understanding of tradition within the larger canvas of musical changes over centuries is needed to actually give us a far clearer picture of where we stand today and why we stand here. For those who believe that tradition is only a weak link, a deeper study into history only reveals that tradition is a strong but hidden link that needs to be unravelled. As musicians, we must look into the past; and understand its nature and influence on the present before we try creating the future.

I must finally thank the numerous scholars whose work I continue to study to improve my understanding of our history. I must specifically thank Dr. N. Ramanathan and Dr. R.S. Jayalakshmi for helping me put this series together.

The writer is a Chennai-based Carnatic vocalist.

Correction

In the article "Centred upon centuries" in the Magazine dated January 23, 2011, it must read "The Maratha rulers of Thanjavur were also major contributors to musicology" and not as published.

Reproduced from "The Hindu", January 31, 2011.