

PANCHARATHNA KEERTHANAS OF GOPALAKRISHNA BHARATHI

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Abstract

Gopalakrishna Bharathi is a great Tamil composer who lived during the 19th Century. He has composed many keerthanas on Lord Nataraja which are in Tamil with simple language. They are all composed to inculcate bhakthi among the Saivites, the devotees of Lord Shiva. His compositions are in the pallavi, anupallavi and charanam format. As he was influenced and got attracted towards the compositions of Saint Thyagaraja, he followed his path in many of his compositions. Continuing this influence, he has composed Pancharathna keerthanas in the five Ghana ragas as Saint Thyagaraja. They are in the ragas Naattai, Gowla, Arabhi, Varali and Sri. They are all in Tamil language and are on Lord Nataraja.

Methodology: Analytical method is adopted for this study. The Pancharathna keerthanas are studied in detail to throw light on the composer and the compositions.

Key words: Gopala Krishna Bharati, Pancharathna keerthanas, Nataraja, Ghana Ragas

INTRODUCTION

Pancharathna keerthanas generally and mainly refer to the Ghana raga Pancharathna keerthanas of Saint Thyagaraja. They are composed in the five Ghana ragas namely Naattai, Gowla, Arabhi, Varali and Sri. They are all in Telugu language and are composed on Lord Rama.

Gopala Krishna Bharathi is a contemporary of Saint Thyagaraja and has met him to know about his proficiency in composing the keerthanas. After knowing about the Pancharathna keerthanas composed by Saint Thyagaraja, Gopala Krishna Bharathi followed his path and has composed Pancharathna keerthanas of his own.

These compositions are composed in Tamil language to enable the Tamilians sing the glory of Lord Nataraja. They are also composed to make the devotees of Lord Nataraja to sing His glory with great devotion. Though the language used is simple, it is very meaningful and touches the heart of the singers as well as the listeners. They are set to Adi and Rupaka Talas. The composer has also incorporated many musical beauties like Madhyama kala sahithya and atheetha eduppu. These make the compositions more beautiful and musically proficient.

LIFE HISTORY

Gopalakrishna Bharathi was born in a place called Narimanam near Nagapattinam in Tamilnadu. Approximate year of birth is said to be 1811. His father is Ramasamy Bharathiyar and his grandfather is Kodandarama Iyer. Their family is said to be a musical family. So Gopalakrishna Bharathi developed interest in music naturally. It is a family inheritance.

Formal Training: During his childhood days he had learned Sanskrit and Tamil proficiently. He has also read many books and developed his knowledge vastly. He also got trained in Vedantha and Yoga sastra from his guru Govindasivam. This helped him acquire vast knowledge in the respective fields.

Deity: He developed great devotion towards Lord Shiva and stayed as a Bramhachari (Bachelor) throughout his life. He did Biksha (seeking alms) and lived a simple and pious life.

Other Names: He lived in Mudikondan village for a few years and then moved on to Ananda thandava puram near Mayuram. Because of this, he was also called as *Mudikondan Bharathiyar* and *Aanathandava puram Bharathiyar*.

TRAINING IN MUSIC

As he had the family lineage, he had a natural instinct to listen to music. He acquired great knowledge by listening and conversing with great musicians. He used to go to different places to know about the versatility of different composers and musicians. He got associated with great musicians like Ghanam Krishnayyar. He was also inspired by then stalwarts

Kaivalya Navaneetham, Prabodha Chandrodayan, Thatthuva rayar
Paduthurai and Thayumanavar.

He learnt keerthanas of Maayurathammal, Papanasa Mudaliyar and Periya thirukkundram Subbarama iyer. This improved his musical and lyrical knowledge. He started composing small keerthanas on Lord Shiva and was very much accepted and appreciated by the musicians of his time.

He also had formal Hinduthani style musical training from a great musician Ramdas. He was the musician in the court of Amarasimha Maharaja. Ramdas was proficient in Hindusthani music. After this formal training, Gopalakrishna bharathi could master the Marathi Abhangs. This helped him to incorporate Hindusthani style in his Tamil compositions. That was a unique style at that time and Gopalakrishna bharathi became a pioneer in incorporating this style.

Compositions: He has composed many keerthanas on Lord Nataraja and Lord Shiva. He has composed in Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanam format. The language he used is Tamil. The style he used is very simple to be understood by all. The compositions are filled with full devotion and knowledge.

Other than the formal keerthanas, he has also composed songs related to Nalangu, Oonjal, Lali,

Kummi and Kolaattam. They are songs sung in normal household functions. Earlier such songs were on Lord Rama and Krishna. Gopalakrishna Bharathi composed these songs on

Lord Shiva and Lord Nataraja which were much appreciated and accepted by all. Many musicians and small children came to him to learn these songs. They sang them on different occasions and were well received. He has also composed a few songs on the request of the audience. One such composition is Chidambara Kummi.

Siva Kathai: Vaishnavites used to narrate the stories depicting the glory of Lord Rama and Lord Krishna. Saivites of that time had longed to narrate the story of Lord Shiva in the same way. Knowing about the knowledge of Gopala Krishna Bharathi, many requested him to narrate such stories. Immediately he composed Siva Kathai like Hari Kathai. He started narrating to large crowds and was appreciated by many.

Operas: He has composed *Nandanar Charithram* in Tamil which was a revolutionary piece at his time. It was one of such kind during his times. Listening to this, the Vysyas residing in Nagapattinam requested him to compose an opera on Nayanar of their community. On their request, Gopala Krishna Bharathi composed an opera on *Iyarpagai Nayanar Charithram*. On the request of some people from Chidambaram, he has also composed *Thiruneelakanta Nayanar Charithram*. But these two are not as popular as the *Nandanar Charithram*.

Mudra: In his compositions, he has used the mudra Balakrishnan and Gopalakrishnan.

Influence of Saint Thyagaraja: As he used to travel to different places to meet different musicians, he travelled to Thiruvayyar once to meet the great Saint Thyagaraja. As Thyagaraja had not seen Gopalakrishna Bharathi he could not recognise him. He casually enquired about the great composer with himself. Immediately Gopala Krishna Bharathi introduced himself and both felt very happy at the meet.

At that time, his students were singing *sri rama seetha alankara swarupa*, a Thyagaraja composition in Abhogi. After the completion of the rendition, Thyagaraja asked Gopala Krishna Bharathi whether he had composed any keerthana in that raga. As Bharathi didn't compose any keerthana in that raga, he kept quiet. But when they met the other day, Bharathi sang the keerthana *sabhathikku veru deivam*, in Abhogi. Listening to this, Thyagaraja appreciated him very much. After that meeting, Gopala Krishna Bharathi was very much influenced by the great composer and started adopting the style of Saint Thyagaraja. Going forward, he composed the Ghana raga Pancharathnam on Lord Shiva with the inspiration of the Ghana raga Pancharathnam of Thyagaraja.

Disciples: Inspired by his compositions, many came to him to learn his compositions. They also regularly performed in and around their places and were much appreciated. Some of his famous and important disciples are 1. Chidambara Ponnusami Deekshithar, 2. Chidambara Sri Raja rathna Deekshithar 3. Mayuram Ramasami iyer 4. Natesa iyer and 5. Subramanya iyer.

Ghana Raga Pancharathna Keerthanas: Pancharathnam means five gems. The ragas Naattai, Gowla, Arabhi, Varali and Sri are the Ghana ragas. They are called so because of their quality to be sung in Ghana format. The ragas are suitable to play Tanam on the Veena. They are all composed on Lord Shiva. They are all composed in Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanam format.

The compositions are

- Arahara siva sankara in Naattai ragam set to Rupaka Tala
- Saranagathi endru in Gowla ragam set to Adi Tala
- Piravaada varam Thaarum in Aarabhi ragam set to Adi Tala
- Aadiya paadame gathi in Varali ragam set to Adi Tala Retta kalai
- Maravaamal eppadiyum in Sri ragam set to Adi Tala

ANALYSIS OF COMPOSITIONS

HARA HARA SIVA SANKARA

Musical: This is set in Raga Naattai in Rupaka Tala. Some traditions follow the raga Gambheera Naattai. But Naattai is more apt as Gopala krishna bharathi followed the tradition of Thyagaraja. In this composition, chathusruthi deivatham is not used. The mudra Gopalakrishna is used in this composition. This composition has pallavi, anupallavi and a charanam. The whole of the composition is in sama eduppu. The keerthana has a atheetha prayogam in pallavi in the word ananda thanrava raya. In general, Anupallavi is composed lengthier than Pallavi. In this composition, Pallavi is lengthier than the Anupallavi. Unusual to the traditional way, Pallavi is set to four avrthas (cycle of Tala) whereas the Anupallavi is set to two avrthas only. Few traditions sing chittai swara also.

Lyrical: This keerthana is composed depicting the dancing Lord Nataraja. His flag, Ganga and Moon on his head are all mentioned in this composition. Gopala krishna bharathi says that the life of the one who couldn't have a glimpse of the Lord's Holy feet is useless. Swarakshara prayogam is used in words like s,npm-aananda, gmr,s,- kodiya and gm psns-gopala. This keerthana depicts the Paada sevnam of the Nava vidha bhakthi. Dvitheeyaakshara prasa is followed throughout the keerthana. This keerthanam is similar to Jagadaananda karaka where Thyagaraja depicts Lord Rama.

SARANAGATHI ENDRU

Musical: This is set in Raga Gowla in Adi Tala. This composition is also set in Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanam format. The kshethra mudra *thillai* and nama mudra *krishna* are used in this keerthana. The beauty of the Raga is maintained throughout the keerthana. Sama eduppu is followed in this keerthana.

Lyrical: This keerthana starts with the word saranagathi which means total surrender. The composer totally surrenders himself to Lord Shiva. The composer requests God to give him a position where he doesn't have the fear of life and death. He also says that he doesn't know any special ways of prayers like thava (penance). Swarakshara is used in the words mpn,- karuna, snp,- sabayil, mpn,- manana. Dwitheeyaakshara prasa is used in Pallavi and Anupallavi.

PIRAVAADA VARAM

Musical: This composition is set to Raga Arabhi in Adi Tala. Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanam is the format used in this keerthana. The kshethra mudra *thillai* and nama mudra Gopalakrishna are being used. Anaagatha eduppu is used in the pallavi whereas the anupallavi and charanam has sama eduppu.

Lyrical: The composer pleads with God to give him a boon not to have birth again. In charanam, he says that he is fed up with having births in all the eighty-four lakh types of living organisms. Though he is a Bramhachari, he has written in general that life is wasted with wife and children. Swarakshara prayogam is used in the words like pds,- pirava, rp, pmgr,- pirandume and madyamam in the words manaivi and manavilasam.

AADIYA PAADAME

Musical: This composition is set to Raga Varali in Adi Tala (Retta kalai). Thyagaraja has composed the Varali pancharathnam in rettai kalai. The same way Gopala krishna bharathi has composed this keerthana in retta kalai. Panchama varjya prayogas are used to establish the beauty of the Raga. In this composition, kshetra mudra *thillai* and deiva mudra *chidambaranathan* are used. His nama mudra is not used in this keerthana. This is composed in Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanam format. The eduppu is anaagatha eduppu in all the three places. The retta kalai decreases the tempo of the composition and thus increases the raga bhava. Prasa is maintained in Pallavi and anupallavi. A special Madhyama kala usage is done in the charanam.

Lyrical: The composer mentions about the Holy feet in this composition. In charanam, he mentions the religious community (brahmin), saints, Sun, Moon, Nandi and Narada. Swarakshara prayogam is used in words like p, dp,- paadame, snd,p dns,- chidambara, ggpm-kondada.

MARAVAAMAL

Musical: This composition is set to Raga Sri in Adi Tala. This keerthanam is also in Pallavi , Anupallavi and Charanam format. Thyagaraja has composed this raga pancharatnam without using Deivatham. The same way Gopala krishna bharathi also composed without using Deivatham throughout the composition. The kshethra mudra *ponnambala* and nama mudra *Gopalakrishna* are being used. The eduppu of Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanam are all in

atheetha eduppu. Pallavi is fit in two avrthas whereas the Anupallavi is set in only one avrtha only.

Lyrical: This composition is like the composer tells his own mind to think of Lord Shiva. In charanam, the composer describes that life is a vicious circle and only Lord Shiva will rescue us from this to give the boon of escaping the cycle of births. There is a mention of Thiruvadirai festival which is very important in Saivite culture. Swarakshara prayogas like mmpm-marai, pmpn,p- pidipadaapu, grrsnp pn- kanaka sabayil padi.

ANALYSIS

Though Gopala krishna bharathi got inspired by Thyagaraja in composing the Pancharathna keerthanas, he didn't follow the swara sahithya format as followed by Thyagaraja. The pancharathna keerthanas of Thyagaraja has music as the priority and has many intricacies of music. But these keerthanas have bhakti as its main tool. Though Madhyama kala sahityam is found only in Varali keerthanam, the basic margam (gait) is itself in madhyama kalam in keerthanas like Gowla and Arabhi.

CONCLUSION

Though the composer was influenced by Thyagaraja in composing the Pancharathna keerthanas, he followed his own style in composing these keerthanas. Some of the principles are being followed as Thyagaraja for sure. But these compositions are mostly depicting the surrendering nature. These also have utmost devotion. The composer has maintained his own style in all the keerthanas.

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