

TRAVANCORE ROYAL FAMILY AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO MUSIC

K. S. AKILASHRI¹ & DR. T. N. SUSEELA²

¹Reg.No: 19113281082002, Full Time Research Scholar, Department of History, Women's Christian College, Nagercoil. Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-12 Tamil Nadu, India

²Research Supervisor & Associate Professor, Department of History, Women's Christian College, Nagercoil. Affiliated to Manonmaniam Sundaranar University, Tirunelveli-12 Tamil Nadu, India

Abstract

Travancore was a beautiful strip of land on the south-west coast of India. The state of Travancore has been from early time famed for its music. Music became an integral part in the social, religious life of its people and even got encouragement from the Travancore royal family. Travancore royal family inherited its throne from the Chera kingdom, which for a considerable period exercised sovereignty over the whole of south India. It was also the home an ancient Tamil culture. Many old melodies in ancient Tamil works, though lost to the rest of South India, have been preserved in Travancore, such as Indisa, Indolam, Puranir, Padi, Kanakkurinji etc. The striking feature of Travancore music was the remarkable nature of its variety. Travancore royal family has been great patrons of arts and literature. Several of them were great composers and scholars.

Keywords: Travancore, music, art, maharaja, instruments

INTRODUCTION

According to Herpert Spencer Music is the finest of the fine arts. He defines it as the idealized language of the feelings and also as the exaggeration of the natural language of the emotions. Music owes much of its variety and harmony to the intercourse between the north and the south. Seven hundred years ago Alaudin Khilji carried away musician from the south. The gold and silver which he plundered ignited his way to the throne. But the art and culture which followed his army in its return to the north have left effects of a more permanent character. Nor has the present absolutely ruled out the marks of that influence. The rapturous compositions of Swathi Tirunal Maharaja are admired throughout India. So deeply did the great Thyagaraja esteem the talents of Govinda Marar of Travancore that he styled him Govindaswami and composed one of his famous songs in his honour.

According to Mr. Day, a great authority on South Indian Music, Travancore owes to the influence of Tanjore much of its excellence in music and other fine arts. One Kannayya Bhagavatar, a pupil of the great Tyagaraja, lived many years in Travancore and through him and his pupil Raghupati Bhagavatar attached to Travancore Maharajah's palace. Thus Tyagaraja's compositions became popular in the State. His songs were sung in the palace and in the bazaars, in the temple and the street. The Seventh and Eighth centuries of Travancore witnessed a religious revival associated with the bhakti movement and connected with the theistic and popular sects of Vishnu and Siva. This revival was spread far and wide by means of songs composed by the leaders of the movement and so resulted in a great development of musical activity among the people generally and in the spread of musical education. The old melodies to which these songs were sung were lost, though Travancore claims to have

preserved some of them in the ancient Travancore ragas such as Indisa, Indalam, Padi, Puranira.

Govinda Marar was another well-known southern musician. He lived in Travancore, a native state with a long and honourable musical tradition. Govinda Marar was known as Shatkala Govinda, because he could sing a piece in sextuple time. A story is related of his meeting with Tyagaraja. A number of musicians including himself were seated with the master when a *pallavi*(chorus) in the *raga pantuvarali* was sung round by all. Govinda, using his own peculiar *tambur* which had seven strings, sang it in shatkala(sextuple) accelerated time. Tyagaraja was so astonished that he gave him the name of Govindaswami and composed a song in his honour which began, ‘there are many great men in the world and I respect them all’.

In the 14th and 15th centuries A.D. the music of Travancore underwent a remarkable transformation by the introduction of the Githagovinda of Jayadeva, which in many respects transmuted the musical melodies extant in the country and gave them a profound grace and dignity combined with majesty.

A greater composer of songs, particularly in Kathakali was the great Karthika Tirunal Maharaja (1758-1798). He was not only an artist but also a master of the scientific technique of fine arts. The works of Karthika Tirunal are Rajasuyam, Subhadraharanam, Bakavadham, Gandharvavijayam, Panchaliswayamvaram, Kalyanasaugandhikam, Balaramabharatham etc.

Swathi Tirunal Maharaja of Travancore was innately musical. He was fortunate to learn from great masters of the era. Thanjavur Subba Rao, also known as English Subba Rao for this mastery over the language, was a master in Carnatic music. Swathi Tirunal learnt to play the swarabat from him. Other teachers such as Karamana Subramanya Bhagavathar played a key role in the studies of Swathi Tirunal. The latter was trained in instruments such as the Mrithangam and the Veena. Swathi Tirunal was greatly influenced by the Margadershi Sesa Iyengar, the 17th century composer. The monarch musician generalised in his work Muhana prasa Antya prasa Vyavastha guidelines to be observed by all composers in Sanskrit. The presence of erudite and accomplished masters of music in his court and the contact he established with luminous names like Vadivelu (disciple of Muthuswamy Deekshitar), Kanniah Bhgavathar (a disciple of Saint Thyagaraja), and Govinda Marar added to his musical horizons.

The successors of Swathi Tirunal Maharaja, Uthram Tirunal Marthanda Varma Maharajah (1847-1860) and Ayilyam Tirunal Rama Varma Maharaja (1860-1880) were also ardent lovers of music. During their reigns and the succeeding years it became an established practice to sing the compositions of Swathi Tirunal Maharaja in most of the important temples in the State and particularly at Trivandrum. . Even the regent queen Maharani Sethu Lakshmi Bayi also learnt music and played musical instruments like Veena in excellence.

In the closing of the 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century, the music of Travancore suffered a great degeneracy in standard and in growth. It was due to the absence of first-rate masters to keep alive the musical art of the State. The reign of Sree Chithira Tirunal Bala Rama Varma was remarkable for the resuscitation of the fine arts in Travancore. The popularity of the radio, the gramophone, both reflectors and not provokers of music, was giving an incentive to the comparative study and appreciation of music.

SCHOOL OF MUSIC IN TRAVANCORE

The school of music in vogue in Travancore was Carnatic. The Hindustani school has also been practiced, but it has not taken a deep root here. Besides these two systems, there was a third style known as soupanam. It was an indigenous style of music peculiar to Malabar and Travancore and took a trace of the one prevalent Dravidian music. The soupanam is, however, confined to the temples in the country parts. The names of some musical instruments such as Chenda, Kidupidi, Mlavu,(Buzhavu), Udukka, Kombu and Nedumkuzhal are purely Dravidian words. These show that the origin of Travancore music is Dravidian. Hindu music has from time immemorial been patronized by the sovereigns of Travancore. Music became a part of religious ceremonies performed in temples especially those under State Management. Ayilyam Tirunal Maharajah of Travancore was another great musician and scholar patronized music and the other fine arts with genuine enthusiasm. The most celebrated musicians of the day such as Maha Vaidyanatha Aiyer and Raghavaier were pets at his court and received liberal encouragement.

NATIVE INSTRUMENTS

The native instrument used in Travancore is of all three classes, pulsatile or drums, wind instruments such as pipes and horns and stringed instruments like the guitar. The conch shell which is blown in temple worship, and the kokra, used in demon worship can scarcely be classed as musical instruments. The gong also, a flat plate made of a composition of copper, zinc and tin, is beaten in temple worship, or as calls to ceremony, and gives a deep rich tone. Strings of small ankle-bells are used by the devil-dancers, tied round the leg as the symbols of their profession. They produce a faint clashing sound. Larger ones are tied round the necks of bullocks like sleigh-bells on horses. And small hand-bells are rung in all idol-worship.

MUSICAL INSTRUCTION

There was no School or College where Hindu music was regularly and exclusively taught in Travancore. But most of the leading musicians were private tutors. Girls in well- to- day families were taught vocal and instrumental music in their homes by specialist engaged for the purpose. Violin was the most popular instrument, but Veena was a high class instrument of music and was also taught in many of the Vernacular girl's school in the State. Music and singing were taught were generally to all girls above the infant classes. Even in mixed schools where boys and girls were taught together to a limited extent. But the instruction was given in an elementary character. In His Highness the Maha Rajah's College and High

School for Girls systematic education was provided in English music, but only very few Indian girls took advantage of it. In order to improve the musical instruction and afford better facilities for the pupils to learn European music, a lady musical teacher was appointed in Girl's college.

CONCLUSION

Thus Travancore royal family contributed much for the development of fine arts like music. The present generations of the Travancore royal family are also excelled in many arts. Each rulers of Travancore learnt music as their subject and preserved the art. Some even went to the extent of composing new hymns. The titles got by the royal rulers showed their knowledge interest in preserving the music.

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