

‘VANDHANAM KERALAMBE’ – A SPECIAL TRIBUTE COMPOSTION TO KERALA

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Abstract

Carnatic Music is an unfathomable ocean, it calls for a profound comprehension of the various elements such as the melody of ragas, arithmetic of talas, nuances of syllabic tones, plentiful compositions, the vast expanse of creativity etc. These all features form the soul of South Indian classical Music. Kriti is a predominant musical form in this protuberant musical system now. Kriti have flourished into full glory through the compositions of the musical trinity. The prominent composers from different centuries have attempted this musical form and they contributed much to the development of this form. Many modern composers are rising in the field of Carnatic Music and they are also very strikingly composing several numbers of Kritis. Thrissur C Rajendran is one of the composers from this group, who is an eminent Violinist from Kerala. In this article, the researcher is going to study one of the Kritis of C Rajendran – ‘Vandhanam Keralambe’ a composition dedicated to the state Kerala. This is a research- oriented article.

Keywords: Thrissur C Rajendran, Kriti, Kerala, Lyrical beauty, Musical excellence

INTRODUCTION

Thrissur C Rajendran¹ (CR) is well-known and one of the senior most violinists from Kerala. He is a retired All India radio staff violin artist and A-top artist of AIR. CR accompanied Violin for almost three generations of renowned artists in Carnatic Music and also performed many solo concerts all over India and abroad. As a violinist, he contributed much in the field of Carnatic Music and also made his footprint in composing. CR composed many Carnatic compositions in different forms and also composed many Poems, Light Songs, Devotional Songs, Lullabies, Patriotic Songs and Musical Dramas.

C Rajendran served in AIR for 34 years, not only as a violinist but also as a Broadcaster, Composer and Lyricist in part of a special duties of a staff artist. He contributed lyrics, tunes and both for many programmes on AIR for different occasions.

‘Vandhanam Keralambe’ is such a composition that, CR composed for an AIR special programme. This programme was broadcasted in the year 2006 –November 1st -a Keralapiravi day(foundation day of the state), as part of the celebration of the 50th year formation of Kerala. This is a Carnatic composition (Kriti) set in the raga Natta, tala- Khanda chapu. In this composition, CR extolled the state of Kerala with its history and diversity. This composition is very special, because the theme used in the Kriti is rare and peculiar. The lyrical exquisiteness and the musical brilliance of the composition are deliberating below.

Materials and Methods- The materials which have used are in the qualitative method which involves a collection of notation, personal interviews and phone interviews.

Methodology -The researcher has used the analytical methodology concept, where the description of lyrical and musical aspects of the Kriti – ‘Vandhanam Keralambe’.

Study area -The study area in this article is the composition of Thrissur C Rajendran where it includes the musical and lyrical excellence of one of his composition-‘Vandhanam Keralambe’.

The composition is as follows:

Kriti : Vandhanam Keralambe²

Raga- Natta

Tala – Khanda Chapu

Pallavi

Vandhanam keralambe vandhanam

Mahaniya charitha malayanamaku vandhanam

Anupallavi

Sundhara kera kedaramibhoovil

Bandhurangi nin makkalayi njangal

Vannu pirakkuvan janma janmanthara

Punyamathalathe matonnila karanam

Charana

Vamana rupiyam sri maha vishnuvin

Paadha pankaja mudra marilay charthi

Dhaanava rajan mahabhalithan maha

dhaana sheelathilthin sheethikal paadi

thunjanum shankaranum sri narayana guru

vaadhiyayullorku janmangaleki

adviata chinthathan vitthukal paaki

samskrithithan kathir vilayikummame

Madhyamakala sahityam
kavya sahitya sangita natiya kalaa
kerlamennayeshasezhumennuenum
dheera brghu ramanutha mahite malayala
Janani jayika jayika nee santhatham

THE LYRICAL EXQUISITENESS AND MEANING

The composer praised the land of Kerala through this composition and he combined the geographical, philosophical historical and mythological aspects of the state of Kerala. The lyrics of this composition is written in the Malayalam language, the official language of the state of Kerala.

KERALA- THE GOD’S OWN COUNTRY³

Kerala is one of the states in India situated in the southwestern coastal area, formed on November 1st-1956 by uniting Malayalam language speaking zones like Travancore, Malabar, Cochin and other parts. It is a small state with 560km length, 70km width and 14 districts. It is one of the highly developed states in India in the areas of Economy, Infrastructure, Education, Health, Industry, Agriculture, Transportation and Tourism etc. Kerala is one of the beautiful regions with greeneries and backwaters and the state is popularly known as God’s own country.

MEANING OF THE COMPOSTION⁴

Pallavi

In the pallavi composer greets the mother Kerala(keralamba) and praises the people who speak the Malayalam language and have a tremendous history. The composer says, Ohh! Mother Kerala I genuflect you. I salute the Malayalam people with a glorious history. Here the composer mentioned the official language of the state Kerala – Malayalam, in a beautiful way.

Anupallavi

In the Anupallavi the composer acknowledges for the thing that he is born in this beautiful state – Kerala, and he is considers it as righteousness in his life.

Kerala is a land of coconut trees. There is a line in a famous song- ‘shyma sundahra kera kedhara bhoomi’, to resemble this, the composer says -Kerala is a fertile land of coconut trees. He adored the beauty of the place and compared the beauty of the land to a lady with a beautiful body structure(bandhurangi). Then he says, to born in this beautiful land as your

children I have done virtue of birth and birth. There is no reason other than that, I was blessed to be born in this beautiful place.

Charana

The composer discourses some mythological, philosophical, historical, spiritual and literary aspects of the state of Kerala in the Charana. In the first four lines, he quoted a mythological story behind the celebration of the Onam festival in Kerala.

Onam- the story⁵

Onam is the national festival of Kerala. On the auspicious day of Thiruvonam, Mahabali, the fabled and adored king of Kerala, is believed to greet the people after emerging from the underworld. Mahabali was the grandson of Prahalad and son of Virochan and the great follower of Lord Vishnu. He was a just and generous man who treated each of the people he ruled equally. During his leadership, there was no poverty, crime, or cruelty. Mahabali was a devil ruler, but the empire was at its height of glory, and his people loved him. Mahabali's renown spread with each day, irritating the Devas. They approached Lord Vishnu for help to stop Mahabali, out of fear that they lose supremacy.

As a result, Lord Vishnu visited Mahabali in his Vamana Avatar (a small Brahmin boy), when the king was performing a yagna for the sanctification of Lord Vishnu. Mahabali asked the impoverished Brahmin child after seeing him, what does he need? In response, the boy said that he required a piece of land that could be reached in three steps. The boy's wish was granted by Mahabali and with the first two steps, the boy covered the entire world as his stature increased. Mahabali understood that the boy in front of him was actually Lord Vishnu. The king bowed before the boy and offered his head as the next step after realizing that there was no more land available.

Mahabali was sent to Pathala, or the netherworld, gave permission to visit his people once a year by Lord Vishnu, who was pleased with the king's devotion. Onam is connected to the legend of King Mahabali's sacrifice and the people of Kerala eagerly anticipate their beloved king every year during the 10 days of the Onam festival, which falls on the star sign of Thiruvonam in the month of Chingam.

The composer praised the land of Kerala connected to the above story, Kerala is the blessed place where the louts-like feet of Vamana, the incarnation of Lord Vishnu is placed on the chest and the land that sings songs of the great charity of the demon king, beneficent Mahabali. (*On the occasion of Onam, now also the people of Kerala sing together a folk song named "Maveli nadu vaneedum kalam". The song describes the great time of Kerala, when the Mahabali was ruled*).

In the next lines, the composer acclaimed the great persons of Kerala, who contributed much to the philosophical, spiritual and literature development of the state. He mentioned the names like Thunjath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, Adi Shankaracharya, and Sri Narayana Guru.

THUNJATH RAMANUJAN EZHUTHACHAN, ADI SHANKARACHARYA AND SRI NARAYANA GURU

- **Thunjath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan**⁶ was a devotional poet and polyglot person who lived in the 16th century. He is considered the ‘father of modern Malayalam language’ and the ‘first poet in Malayalam’. Ezhuthachan was one of the persons who created major changes in the history of Kerala’s literature associated with the great Bhakti movement.
- **Adi Shankaracharya**⁷ is one of Hinduism's most important philosophers and the head of defining and organizing the Hindu religion in its present form. He was born at Kaladi, Kerala, in the year 788 CE, very next to Kerala's biggest river, the Periyar. Sankaracharya's Advaita Vedanta is a school of Hindu philosophy that was once known as Purusavada and is a path to spiritual enlightenment in Hindu tradition. He is believed to formed many temples in Kerala and all over India.
- In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, **Sree Narayana Guru**⁸ was a well-known social reformer, philosopher, and spiritual figure from Kerala, India. He devoted his life to fighting the caste- and social-based injustices that were pervasive at the period. Even today, people are still motivated by his achievements and lessons.

In the composition, the composer mentioned these great persons’ names in the way that he admired Kerala, who gave birth to persons like Thunjath Ramanujan Ezhuthachan, Adi Shankaracharya, and Sri Narayana Guru. They saw the seeds of thoughts in the minds of the people, that one is with God and attained the fruit or culture in the state of Kerala and all over India. That means the advaita tattva was spread by those great sources and developed that base of culture. Here, the knowledge of the composer is invisibly compared this thing with sowing the seeds and getting a grain of paddy is really admirable.

MADHYMAKALA SAHITYA

In the coming Madhymakala sahityam, the composer again adulates the land of Kerala. He says, that with a rich background in Poetry, Literature, Music and Dance, this place always will proudly be known as ‘Kalaa Keralam’(the land of art). According to Hindu mythology, there is a myth behind the formation of Kerala related to Lord Parshurama. The composer cited this in the next line of the composition.

PARASHURAMA⁹- THE DISCOVERER OF KERALA

Parashurama is the incarnation of Lord Vishnu, the sixth avatar among the Dasavatara. This avatar carries an axe in his hand and he is an immortal (Chiranjeevi). There is a story in Hindu mythology about sage the Parashurama that he rescued the land of Kerala from the sea.

After travelling from Kanyakumari to Gokuram, Parashurama tossed his combat axe into the sea. As a result, the land of Kerala was come out from the sea. Because of this story, the state of Kerala is also known as ‘Parashurama Kshetram’ or the ‘land of Parashurama’.

The composer explained this beautifully in the composition like, ohh!!The mother of Malayalam with full of the glory of brave Brghu rama(synonym of Parashurama), may you always win.

The composer, C Rajendran extraordinarily narrates the history, culture, language, art, literature, philosophical background and many other factors of the state of Kerala in this composition. The way he described the different theme through a Carnatic composition and his proficiency in the language is highly appreciable.

MUDRA (THE SIGNATURE)

In Carnatic compositions, the composers used some signatures in their compositions, those stamps are identified or called Mudras and they may be in different categories¹⁰.

In this composition the composer used **Vaggeyakara Mudra**(the signature of the composer) – **Raja** in Charana like – ‘Dhanava **rajan** Mahabhalithan’ in this potion.

The **Raga Mudra** also comes in this composition, as in the suchitha category of Raga mudra (the name of the raga coming indirectly). In Madhymakala sahitya the composer mentioned the name of the raga ‘Natta’ indirectly in the line ‘kavya sahitya sangita **natiya** kalaa’. The ability of the composer in the area of the lyrical part is clearly visible in this part.

PRASA¹¹

Prasa is a literary adornment or sabda alankara, that similar sounds coming in the lyrics of a composition.

SN	Name of the Prasa	In Kriti- Vandhanam keralambe
1	Adiprasa (similar letter employed the commencement of a line)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dhaanava • dhaana
2	Dvitiyakshara prasa (second syllable is alike in the lines)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • sundhara • bandhurangi • vadhiyayullorku • adhvaita
3	Antya prasa (The rhyming words befalls towards the ending)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • keralambe vandhanam • malayanamaku vandhanam • janmangaleki • vitthukal paaki
4	Anu prasa (repeating a similar letter or word in a same line)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • vandhanam keralambe vandhanam • janma janmanthara • Janani jayika jayika

MUSICAL EXCELLENCE IN THE KRITI

RAGA

C Rajendran composed this composition in raga Natta. Because this was the first song in the AIR special programme held on 2006 and the raga Natta is considered as a mangala or auspicious raga in Carnatic Music and the raga signifies the starting of a concert.

Natta is a janya raga of the 36th mela Chalanatta and also a vivadi raga, because of the notes coming at very close intervals.

The arohana and avarohana of the raga can find are different deviations:

Arohanam – s r₃ g₃ m₁ p n₃ ś / s r₃ g₃ m₁ p d₃ n₃ ś¹²

Avarohanam – ś n₃ p m₁ r₃ s / ś n₃ p m₁ g₃ m₁ r₃ s

This is a tristayi raga and also an upanga raga. The usage of the dirga pryogas of the g, d savras reduce the vivadi dosha of this raga. Madhyamakala prayogas and tana phrases are the specialties of this raga. There are many Ganesha compositions and Mallari tunes are in the raga Natta. This is one of the oldest ragas, mentioned in many Lakshna grandhas. The raga Jog in Hindustani Music have quite resembles with this raga.

C Rajendran comprised the essence of the raga Natta in this Kritis and he tried to include all the main prayogas and vishesha sancharas of the raga in this composition. CR completely avoid the usage of the svara- dhaivatha-‘d’ in his composition like Thyagaraja’s Natta pancharathnam.

SVARA PHRASES

- **Graha svara**(starting svara)

1	Madhystayi paaanchama - p	Pallavi
2	Madhystayi paaanchama - p	Anupallavi
3	Madhystayi gandhara- g	Charana
4	Tarastayi shadja - ś	Madhyamakala sahitya

- **Amsa svara** (predominant svara)- g , m , p, n
- **Nyasa svara**(finishing svara)- n
- **Janta svara** (repeating svara twice, thrice etc) - Ex – **pp** n, **ss**, - p,**nn** pm
- **Vakra svara**(zigzag svaras) - Ex- mg pm np- ś[˙] n[˙] pn mp
- **Samavadi svara** (semitone) - Ex – s, **p**, m, - **pśn[˙]ś**
- **Tarasthyai svara** (higher octave notes) - Ex- ś [˙] r, [˙] g, **p[˙]m[˙]m[˙]**, [˙] r ś,

- **Manthrasthayi svara**(lower octave notes) -Ex- $s\dot{n}s\dot{r}$
- **Vishesha prayoga**(special phrases in a raga) - Ex - $nsr,snpm - gmpnpsnrs mrsnpsnr-ns mr sn rs np- g,,pmm, r,,$
- **Tristhayi prayoga**(svara in three octaves) Ex- $s\dot{n}s, ,, p, m, ,, np p\dot{n}s n, ,, ,$
- **Dirga svara prayoga** (expansion of svara) Ex - $g, ,, pmm, r, ,, - g, ,, m, p, ,,$
- **Rare raga prayogas** – Ex- $s s, n m,$

SANGATIS AND STRUCTURE

C Rajendran implemented some sangatis or variations to bring out the color of the raga Natta in this Kriti. Each sangatis are helping to enlighten the raga bhava and main paryogas of the raga. The composer is a violinist, so he added some instrumental type sangatis, which gave an extra beauty to the composition.

Ex – ||mg pm np sn rs || m r s n p n s r sn||

ma.ha.ni. . . .ya cha.ri.tha.ma.la.

- In pallavi the composer added four sangatis
- In anupallavi had three sangatis.
- In charana had no sangati variations and a portion like same as anupallavi is coming after the first four lines.
- Then finally added a crisp madhyamakala sahithyam to highlight the strength of the raga.

TALA

C Rajendran set this Kriti in Khanda chapu tala¹³. Chapu talas are a type of talas used in Carnatic Music, which never takes any anghas of other talas and it contains only beats to show the measurement. Khanda chapu is tala with a cycle of 5 in number, that is 2(thaka)+3(thaki ta) = 5. The time ratio is 2:3, aksharakala is 2 ½ and the kriya is 5(one beat for thaka and two beats for thaki ta) in this tala. Khanda chapu tala is perfectly suitable for the flow of lyrics of the composition.

GAMAKA

Gamaka is an ornamented or graced movement of svaras and it is the mainstay of Indian classical Music. Gamkas are different types¹⁴, which establishes the characteristic features or melody in a raga.

SN	Name of the gamaka	Phrases
1	Arohana (ascending)	s r g m p n ś - pallavi
2	Avarohana (decending)	ś n p m g m r s - charana
3	Ulasitha (gliding) Ekku jaru (upward) Digu jaru(downward)	s s, / n m, - pallavi ś, r n ś \ p, nmp, - madhyamakala sahityam
4	Tripa (stressing)	x x x x x x mg pm np ś n r s m̄r - pallavi

COMBINATION OF BOTH LYRICAL AND MUSICAL ASPECT

SVRAKSHARA¹⁵

This is a significant fragment in Kritis with dathu(musical part) and matu(lyrics). An identical sahitya syllables occurs, corresponding to the svara syllables in the composition.

SN	Svrakshara	Kriti 'vandhanam keralambe'	Section
1	Suddha (the svara syllables and sahitya letters exactly same)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> m g p m n p ma. ha . ni . m g m p n, p , ma. . ka lay. . . p , , , n , p , m , pa.. .dha pa . . n p ni . 	Pallavi Anupalalvi Charana Madhyamakala sahityam
2	Suchita (the sahitya syllables are slightly different svara)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> p, m , , ra. mi . . p , m , g , <u>pmm</u>, pa . . nga ja . . . r s g , m , sam. gi tha 	Anupallavi Charana Madhyamakala sahityam

CONCLUSION

Kritis occupies the predominant place in Carnatic Music concerts and without Kritis, no concerts can thinkable. There are thousands of Kritis widespread and widely staged by various composers. The Kritis - Vandhanam Keralambe by Trissur C Rajendran is one pearl in the ocean among the composition. The uniqueness of the theme of the lyrics and the musical entity of the composition is highly commendable. This composition should be come to limelight and need to widely stage by the musicians in Carnatic Music and definitely it will be an asset to the field of Music.

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