

EXPLORING THE MUSICAL DETAILS IN THE THIRD KHANDA OF VIṢṆUDHARMOTTARA PURĀṆA

R. VENIS RAJ¹, DR. D. AGNES SHARMEELY²

¹Research Scholar, Kalai Kaviri College of Fine Arts Tiruchirappalli

² Associate Professor of Violin, Research Supervisor, Kalai Kaviri College of Fine Arts Tiruchirappalli

Abstract

Purāṇas are treasures. They consist in them of the core content of Ancient Indian culture and Hindu religion. These contents are expressed through the complex layers of symbolism and stories. The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa is one such treasure. It is a upa-purāṇa. This vaiṣṇava tradition purāṇa has three khandas. This paper specifically deals with the 18th chapter of the third khandas of the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa which exclusively comprises the musical details. In the popular music tradition, it is believed that music has its origin in Vedas. This paper explores the musical details recorded in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa is reference with that of the present musical era.

Keywords: Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa, Khandas, Grama, Murchana, Markaṇḍeya Muṇi, King Vajra

INTRODUCTION

The art of Music is divine because of the affinity it has with God. Indian Music especially Carnatic music is deeply immersed in Bhakti. Almost all musical forms have some aspects of Bhakti in them. Human person is immersed in music from birth till death. (Chelladurai P.T, 1991). Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa is a upa-purāṇa which has three khandas. This article exclusively deals with the eighteenth chapter of the third khandas of the VDP. This particular chapter deals with music. The Markaṇḍeya muni explains the aspects of music to the King Vajra. At the end of the article a critical comment on the details of music in the eighteenth chapter is given. For a better and coherent flow of the article, the details of Purāṇa, and its era are mentioned.

Dr. Priyabala Shah's translation of the VDP in 1990 in English has been used for understanding the original Sanskrit text. Dr. Priyabala Shah was an erudite scholar of Sanskrit. She is known for her specialization in Ancient Indian Art and Sculpture. She has done the translation work of the Original Sanskrit work 'Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa. She has authored so many other important books on architecture, sculpture, iconography etc.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Books and articles have been written so far on Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa. Most of the authors have concentrated on the Painting and image-making for they are given vital importance in the original text. O.P Agarwal, Rajendra Chandra Hazra, Stella Kramrish, Parul Dave Mukherji, S. Lakshman Thakur and Priyabala Shah are some of the authors who have worked on the original text and the chapters of the text in particular Painting and image-making. But there are two authors namely Kapila Vatsyayan and Dr. S. Bhagyalekshmy who have written on the relationship of Music and Dance in India which is mentioned in the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa.

Dr. S. Bhagyalekshmy, the author of 'Lakshanagrandas in Music' mentions about the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa that it (Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa will be mentioned as VDP hereafter) mentions music as the basic for all arts. The importance that the author tried to claim for music in VDP is evident in her statement in her book 'Lakshanagrandas in Music.

Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa stresses the importance of music for dance. The king requested the sage to teach him the art of icon making so as to enable him to worship the Lord. But the sage advised him to learn painting, dancing, instrumental music, vocal music and lastly icon making. From this it is evident that music is indispensable and forms the basis for all arts. (Bhagyalekshmy. S 08).

But as per the translation of VDP into English by Dr. Priyabala Shah in 1990, The icon-making is mentioned as the most important art forms. There have been no articles or books written so far exclusively about music in VDP. And so, this article serves its purpose to fill that void.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PURĀṆAS IN HINDUISM AND INDIAN CULTURE

Purāṇa is a Sanskrit word which means ‘ancient’ or ‘old’. Tradition attributes that all the purāṇas were written by Vyāsa. In simple words Purāṇas are a collection of Hindu religious texts. These texts are considered as the core content of Indian culture and Hinduism. Purāṇas are also known for their complex layers of symbolism portrayed within the stories. The purāṇas have within a broad collection of stories on Hindu mythology, beliefs, tradition and more. R. De Smet and J. Neuner in their edited book ‘Religious Hinduims’ mention as follows

The purāṇas are not religious books. They contain the stories of creation and re-creation, the genealogies of kings, the descriptions of the earth, of the world-periods and their various regents, etc. But once more the Vaiṣṇavites and the Saivites used them for purposes of religious propaganda by interplating them with their mythology. The early Purāṇas date from the fourth century A.D. But there were earlier Purāṇas and some of their material must have penetrated into the actual Purāṇas. The Purāṇas grew continually by interpolation.¹

The stories of purāṇas include tales about the creation of the world, gods and goddesses like Viṣṇu, Shiva, Durga, and Pārvathi, and how to venerate them. The purāṇas were originally written in Sanskrit and other Indian languages.

THE EPOCH OF PURĀṆAS

It is a common belief in the Hindu religions that the Purāṇas were never written. They were heard and transmitted through mouth (reciting). However, when historically approached it has to fall in any of the timeline. And so there are three eras in which the Purāṇas were composed. The initial stage Purāṇas were composed between 350 and 750 CE, the next stage of period was between 750 and 1000 CE and the finally the nearer period was between 1000 and 1500 CE.

MAHĀPURĀṆAS AND THE UPA-PURĀṆAS

There are two main types of purāṇas. They are called the Mahāpurāṇas and the Upa-purāṇas. Traditionally it is believed by Hinduism that there are eighteen mahāpurāṇas and eighteen upa-purāṇas. Both Mahāpurāṇas and Upa-purāṇas are devoted to Shiva, Vishnu and some purāṇas to a goddess. By far the most popular Purāṇa is the Bhāgavta-Purāṇa, with its elegant treatment of the childhood and early life of Kṛṣṇa. There are also 18 “lesser” Puranas, or *upa-puranas*, which treat similar material, and a large number of *sthala-puranas* (“local Puranas”) or *mahatmyas* (“magnifications”), which glorify temples or sacred places. These songs of praise are recited during the religious services to the deities in the temples.

THE EVOLUTION OF ART FORMS

Ancient Indian practice of fine arts specially music, Dance, Painting, sculpture, architecture etc. provides a historical principle of the same. The fine arts are the ones which can be traced from the origin of human race. From the advent of human race these fine arts such as music, dance, painting, sculpture etc. have always been aesthetically (that which is beautiful) pleasing and emotionally evocative. These fine art forms incorporate a wide range of disciplines which are contributing to the cultural heritage of humanity till date. These art forms provide a means of creative expression and echoes the social and cultural values of different periods. It is vivid

¹ The insertion of something of a different nature into something else.

to see in the history of humans that the fine arts (music, dance, painting, sculpture etc.) have played a vital role to communicate their ideas, emotions and stories.

VIṢṆUDHARMOTTARA PURĀṆA

Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa is one of the eighteen sub- purāṇas of Hindu religion. It is encyclopedic in nature. It encompasses not only the stories but also discusses the universe, geography, astronomy, astrology, time division, calming the angry planets and stars, customs, penance, duties of Vaishnavas, law and politics, war strategy, treatment of human and animal diseases, food, grammar, prosody, dictionary, oratory, drama, dance, music and many other arts. 32 tantra-yutyaks ¹ have been mentioned in the sixth chapter of the third section of Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa. Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa is considered to be an appendix of Viṣṇu Purāṇa.

THE PLACEMENT OF VIṢṆUDHARMOTTARA PURĀṆA ERA

When exploring the periods of *lakṣaṇagrandhas* in music we have the ancient period which ranges from v̥edic period to the period of Maṭaṅga i.e upto the 9th century AD, Medieval period ranges from Maṭaṅga to Purandaradāsa i.e upto 16th centry, and modern period ranges from Purandaradāsa to the present day. (Dr. S. Bhagyalekshmy, 02) Hence we can comfortably place the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa in the ancient period.

Dr. Priyabala Shah in her book ‘Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa’ dealing with only the first khanda which has 269 chapters, mentions as follows,

It is evident that in, the beginning of the eleventh century two works with the title Viṣṇudharmottara or Viṣṇudharma existed and that both were considered to be canonical by Beruni’s Pandits who, one and all, were Vaishnavas.

Different scholars have tried to place this text in different periods. Prof. Deepak Kannal, the former Head and Dean, Faculty of Fine Arts in M.S University, Baroda, during one of his Lectures on Chithra sutra of VDP, says the following on the periods of the VDP placed in history.

Shivrammurthi places it (VDP) in the Kushan and Gupta period (This empire lasted from the second century BC to the third century AD). But Stella Kramrisch places it at a very late date i.e. 8th century AD. And Priyabala Shah who perhaps is the most important translator and commentator of this text has placed it in the sixth century A.D. And considering the language of this text I think 6th century A.D is more convincing date. (Prof. Deepak Kannal)

STRUCTURE OF VIṢṆUDHARMOTTARA PURĀṆA

The Viṣṇūdarmottara Purāṇas is a huge upa-purāṇa. It has about sixteen thousand verses in it. The Viṣṇudharmottara purāṇa’s text (in Sanskrit) which we have now has three parts. They are called ‘Khanda’s in the Sanskrit texts. The first part (Khanda) has 269 chapters, the second part (khanda) has 183 chapters and the third part (khanda) has 355 chapters)

The first khanda which has 269 chapters is the second huge of the three khandas. Those chapters are on the origin of the world (It’s common that the purāṇas usually give the origin of the world), descriptions related to geography, astrology, genealogies of kings and sages etc. and Shankargita, Pururava, story of Urvazhi, Shraddha, etc.

The second khanda which has 183 chapters is the smallest among the three khandas. Those chapters contain topics related to the daily life of human beings like religion, politics, ashrams, paitamaha-theory of astrology, medicine etc.

¹ tantra-yukti means the methodology of studying a science to interpret its correct unambiguous meaning for its practical application.

The third khanda which has 355 chapters is the biggest among the three khandas. It contains not only literary subjects like grammar, dictionary, prosody, poetics etc. of Sanskrit and Prakrit, but also fine arts like dance, music and fine crafts like architecture have been discussed in detail.

EXCLUSIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE TEXT

The Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa is the most important purāṇa among other Mahā-purāṇas and upa-purāṇas for its exclusive information on fine arts. The materials related to fine arts found in this purāṇa's chapters are not available anywhere else before this. It can undoubtedly be counted among the comprehensive and greatest scriptures on fine arts of ancient India.

RELIGION AND MUSIC

During the ancient period music was sacred and religious in nature. It was used for religious worship and was associated with temple worship and rituals. Music was treated as an applied art and considered as most sacred form. To attain happiness in both the worlds, one must worship the gods. Music and dance came into use for religion and their form became essentially religious. The fine arts in India developed and matured under the shadow of religion. In India, religion is not an external practice, religion is an integral part of life.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF MUSIC

In the Viṣṇudharmottara Purāṇa text When the Mārkaṇḍeya muni teaches the king Vajra with the musical knowledge he starts with the characteristics of music (Gīta-Lakṣaṇa). The word 'lakṣaṇa' denotes the features facilitating perception. without certain rules which are meticulously followed by great artists, the classical arts lose their identity and value. (Dr. S. Bhagyalekshmy, 01) Markaṇḍeya starts the first characteristic of music with sthānas. It simply means the organs used for speaking words or producing music. In popular music we mention it as nādha which means an orderly and beautiful musical sound which is pleasant to hear. (Chelladurai. P.T, The Splendour of South Indian Music). The sthānas mentioned in the VDP text are *Urah* (chest), *Kanthah* (throat) and *sirah* (head). They give rise to three notes *Mandra* (low or base), *Madhya* (middle) and *Tāra* (high). Then Markaṇḍeya mentions about the three grāmas Ṣadja, Madhyama and Gāndhāra. In the present time music practice we have four jātis for Ṣadja grāma namely Ṣādji, Naiṣadi, Dhaivati Aṣabhi, three jātis for madhyama grāma namely Ghāndhāri, Madhyama and Panchama. These are seven suddha jātis. The Gāndhāra-grāma became obsolete long ago. Then the muni mentions about the seven notes (sapta swarā) of saṅgīta - Sadja, Ṛṣabha, Gāndhāra, Madhyama, Pancama, Niṣāda and dhaivata. It has to be noted that in the English translation of the VDP by Dr. Priyabala Shah it is mentioned in that order only.

DETAILS ON MŪRCHANĀS

There are 21 Mūrchanās mentioned in the 18th chapter of the third khanda of the VDP.

Mūrchanās which means intonations of sapta-svaras are dependent on each of the three grāmas. The Madhyama grāma Mūrchanās are seven. They are Sauvirī, Harināsava, Kalopa-nata, Suddha-madhyamā, Mārgī, Pauravī and ṛsyakā. The Sadja-Grama Mūrchanās are seven. They are called Uttaramandrā, Rajanī, Utrāyatā, Suddhasadjā, Matsari-Kṛtā, Asva-Krāntā and Udgatā. The Gāndhāra-Grāma Mūrchanās are seven which are Ālāpā, Kuntimā, Suddhā, Uttārā, Sadajā, Pancāyatā and Udgata. It is to note that this group of Gāndhāra-Grāma Mūrchanās are very different from that of the ones used in the present day ones. The present day Ghāndhāra-Grāma Mūrchanās are as follows, Nandā, Visāla, Sumukhi, Vichitra, Rohiṇī, Sukha and Ālāpa (Sambamurthy, P)

Then Markaṇḍeya mentions about the forty-nine Tānās (key-notes). It is mentioned with the names of the key-notes. The Madhyama-Grāmas are assigned with 20 tānās, the Sadja-Grāma is assigned with 14 Tānās and the Gāndhāra-Grāma is assigned with 15 Tānās.

Then there is a mention on the three Vrttis named Vādi, Samvādi And Anuvādi.

THE COMBINATION OF *RASAS* AND *SWARAS* IN VDP

It is mentioned in the 18th chapter of the VDP that the nine rasas are related with the musical notes (Svaras). For Hāsyā and Srngāra madhyama and pancama are used, for vīra, raudhra and adbhuta Ṣadja and Ṛsabha are used, for karuna, Nisāda and Gāndhāra are used, for bibhatsa, and bhayānaka Dhaivata is used and for Sānta Madhyama is used.

THE COMBINATION OF *RASAS* AND *LAYAS* IN VDP

For Srngāra and Hāsyā, madhyama is used. For Bibhatsa and Bhayānaka Vilambita and for Vīra, Raudra and Adhuta, Druta is used. The Markaṇḍeya Muni then mentions that in Rūpakas pure musical composition practice of singing should be used for the worship of divine. There are some slokas which mention the Lakṣanas of Jātis which every wise man should know. They are (Lakṣanas of Jātis) Graha, Ansa, Tāra, Mandra, Nyāsa, Upanyāsa, Alpatvam, Bahutvam, Ṣādava and Odava. Then the king is taught about the four kinds of Alankāras which are Prasannādhī, Prasannāntah, Prsannādhyantah and Prasanna-madhyas. Then the different types of musical compositions are explained to the king namely, Aparāntakam, Ullopyam, Mandrakam, Prakari, Vainakam, Saro-bindum, Gitakāi. Then ṚK-Gāthā, Pānikā and Brahma-Gītikā which are composed by Dakṣa are mentioned. Their singing practice is called Coksah.

Concluding Words of Markaṇḍeya Muni in the 18th Chapter of VDP

After instructing these musical details to the King Vajra, the Markaṇḍeya Muṇi mentions that he briefed the above-mentioned details for pleasing gods. Then he concludes by saying that

If the man well-versed in Music (Gītājñā) does not reach the highest place (Sumum bonum - Dr. Shah's expression) by music, he would become a servant of God and enjoy bliss in his company.

CONCLUSION

The musical details in the eighteenth chapter of the third khanda of the VDP are very important. They are real treasures for the music lovers and researchers. But they are not in the proper order in the original text. The sapta swara order was jumbled at least with one swara that is 'da'. This is found in the translated work of the VDP by Dr. Shah. The grama murchana order which we use in the present music structure is a little different with that of the ones mentioned in the translated work of the VDP. The Gāndhāra grāma mūrcana is different in order. In the present day practice and even in the days of Sangīt Ratnāgākaram (13th century) days it was in the order as (Nandā, Visāla, Sumukhi, Vicitra, Rohiṇi, Sukha and Ālāpa) but in the VDP text the Gāndhāra grāma mūrcanas are mentioned as Ālāpā, Kuntimā, Suddhā, Uttarā, Sadajā, Pancāyatā and Udgata. The musical details in the VDP are not elaborate enough for a better grasping. It looks as if that musical information should be mentioned in this work, or in the order of all the art forms icon-making comes vital and so music is inevitable so it is mentioned too. But after having understood the details mentioned about music it can be further understood that music had been already a well-established art form, and so there need not be any detailed and simplified information mentioned in the text. So that the Markaṇḍeya Muṇi instructed these musical details to the King Vajra.

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