

GROUP GITA-S OF VINA VIJAYA VARADAYYA– A STRUCTURAL, TEXTUAL AND MELODIC ANALYSIS

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Abstract

Carnatic Music is abounded in a vast repertoire of Compositions in a number of raga-s, tala-s, concepts and themes. Group Compositions are musical forms composed with a unified theme and are works infused with melody, lyrics and rhythm. Eminent Vaggeyakara-s of all times have contributed richly to such thematic set of gems like compositions on Kshetra-s, Deities, Planets, Elements of Nature, etc. There are numerous instances of such group compositions, which mostly belonging to sabha gana. However, it is seldom taken up for Abhyasa gana forms like Gita-s, which are the simplest of compositions in terms of raga and tala. It is indeed interesting to note that Sri Vina Vijaya Varadayya, belonging to the 19th Century has composed a few Gitas as a set of Group Compositions, Pancharatna-s in praise of the deities Ranganayaka and Parthasarathi and Gita Ashtaka on several Yati-s. While these thematic Pancharatna Gita-s are composed in popular ragas and set to talas from among the suladi sapta talas, the Yatiraja Gita Ashtaka-s have been composed in all the five Ghana raga-s and three from the dviteeya Ghana raga panchakam. It is interesting to note that all these have been set to Jhampe Talam only. Gita-s as a musical form have immense lakshya-lakshana values and when the lyrical and musical aspects of this form are learnt and popularised, the utility of this form would be remarkable both from academic and practical viewpoints. Gita-s are learnt not only for the melodic qualities, but also for the lyrical substance and its interpretation. This allows for a better comprehension of the profound ideas in the thematic lyrical attributes of the group Gita-s and fosters the investigation of the music's emotional and spiritual components.

Keywords: Pancharatna Gita-s, Gita Ashtaka, Carnatic Music, Group Gita-s, Vina Vijaya Varadayya, Vina Ramanuja, Sangita Sarvartha Sara Sangrahamu

INTRODUCTION

Carnatic musical compositions are plenty and are of variety. Group compositions also known as Samudaya Compositions or Guchha compositions. In Sanskrit, the word 'Samucchayam' means 'a group'. So, the Group compositions can also be named 'Samucchayas', which means a bunch of a compositions composed on a particular theme. The theme may be on Raga, Deity, etc., The number of individual compositions in Samucchaya compositions is usually either 5 or 9. The significance of the numbers 5, 7, 9, 11, 13 and 16 is being referred to in many ancient works. Among the Trinity, Syama Sastri has to his credit only a single set of Krithi Samucchaya, the Navarathnamalika comprising of 9 krithis on Goddess Madurai Meenakshi. Muthuswami Dikshitar has composed the largest number of Krithi Samucchayas in Carnatic music. They include Pancha linga sthala krithis having 5 krithis, Vibhakthi krithis, Kamalamba Navavarna, Abhayamba Navavarana, Shodasa Ganapathi krithis having 8, 9 and 16 krithis respectively.

Pancharatna ('five gems') refers almost exclusively to the groups of 5 krithis composed by Tyagaraja. The most popular among them is the Ghanaraga Pancharatnas composed in the 5 Ghana ragas Nata, Gowla, Arabhi, Varali and Sri. The concept of Group Compositions was popularised in the era of Carnatic Music Trinity. We can say that, Veena Vijaya Varadayya might have been inspired by the concept of Group compositions, and composed Group Gitams – Ranganayakula Pancharatnams, Parthasarathi Pancharatnams and Yatiraja Gitashtakam.

SOURCE OF THE COMPOSITIONS BY VEENA VIJAYA VARADAYYA

Sangeeta Sarvaartha Sara Sangrahamu written by Tirunagari Veena Ramanujayya, is one of the earliest Telugu music books printed and published, containing many compositions with notation. This work was first printed in 1859. Its second edition and third edition were printed in 1885 and 1908 respectively. Copies of all the three editions are available. All the three editions were printed in Madras, but the second and third editions were published by different sets of people. This work pre-dates the monumental Sangita Sampradaya Pradarsini of Subbarama Diksitar by forty-five years.

This book deals with the theory and practice of music. Following this, there are forty-six gitams, nine prabandhams, chitta tanams in nineteen ragas, fourteen varnams, two swarajatis, 157 padams of eighteen composers and 192 kritis of nine composers including Tyagaraja, Syama Sastry and Subbaraya Sastry. In this book, we can find the Group Gitas composed by Veena Vijaya Varadayya, who is the grandfather of the author of the book.

GITAMS

The term 'Gita' etimologically means 'that which is sung', but in musical parlance it refers to a musical form or a composition. In the present-day practice, gita is taught after a set of preliminary svvara/solfa exercises. This is the musical form wherein the learner is introduced to meaningful matu or sahityam (text) to the corresponding dhatu or svvara-s/solfa syllables.

Gita is generally a syllabic composition in which every svvara has a corresponding sahitya syllable. So, in a Gita, the number of svvara-s present in an avarta or one tala cycle is equal to the number of aksharakalas of that Tala. Very rarely we find svaras extending over two or three aksharakalas to the corresponding vowel extensions of the sahitya syllables. Gita is generally sung as a single continuous piece without any repetitions in a medium and uniform tempo. In some gitas, a portion of the first part is repeated at the end as a refrain. The melody is always simple without any sangatis / melodic variations or fast svvara combinations. Gitas are available in almost all existing ragas. The talas used for composing Gitas are suladi sapta talas and its varieties.

VEENA VIJAYA VARADAYYA

A descendant of Bobbili Kesavayya, Vina Vijaya Varadayya composed with the mudra 'Vijaya Varada'. His descendant, Vina Ramanujayya lived under the patronage of Suri Chetty Govindaraja Chetty, a businessman of George Town, Madras. His son is Vina Raghavayya. His grandson, Veena Varadayya is a Veena artiste. Veena Vijaya Varadayya had composed many Gitas, Prabandhas and Lakshana Gitas.

As soon as we turn to the Musical Composition 'Gita', Vijaya Varadayya is revealed as a composer of merit. Sri Purandaradasa's Pillari Gitams are the first Gitams. He was such a devout Sri Vaishnava, that he has substituted the Sahitya for the second and third stanzas of Sri Gananatha by salutations to Sri Vishvakshena and Hayagriva. His bhakti to his ishtadaiva Ranganatha, Parthasarathi and to the great Ramanujacharya finds expression in the Sri Ranganayakula pancharatnam, the Parthasarathi pancharatnam and the Yatiraja gitashtakam.

STYLE AND LANGUAGE OF VINA VIJAYA VARADAYYA

His style of Gitam composition conforms to the classic definition of Gitam as a musical form. He has written in Sanskrit and Prakrit and incorporated the Gitalankara syllable (syllables adorning Gitams) a a', ayya', ayya', anno, iya', and 'are'. He labels the different khandikas (sections) such as Javada Khandika, Abhoga Khandika and Mudra Khandika and composed the music to correspond to the grammar of these.

RAGAS USED BY VINA VIJAYA VARADAYYA IN HIS COMPOSITIONS

He has composed in many rare ragas such as Natanachandrika, Saranganata, Malavairi, Ghantarava, Padi, Purvagaula, Suddhavasanta and Gummakambhoji.

There is a gitam, as well as an Ata tala varnam in Manohari raga. This raga poses a problem of identification as the compositions do not conform to any of the lakshanas found in books.

OTHER WORKS OF VINA VIJAYA VARADAYYA

Vijaya Varadayya's mastery is most evident, perhaps, in the two ragamala Gitams. One is a garland of thirty-six ragas, and for this there is no indication of the talam. As each avarta has ten akshara- kalas, the tala may be reckoned as Mathya or Jhampe. The second, consisting of thirty-two ragas, is in Dhruva tala. The handling

of each raga to express its identity in just ten or fourteen svaras is remarkable. The sahitya contains the name of each raga as it occurs. Also, a Sarva- laghu gitam in Raga Nata prefaces three sets of his compositions.

Five of Vijaya Varadayya's laksana gitams are given. They do not explain the lakshana of the raga, but list all the principal musical terms. There is a gitam in Simhanandana tala in Sankarabharana raga, A sloka is also given for this tala. The Gitam has subsequently been printed in several publications.

GROUP GEETAMS BY VEENA VIJAYA VARADAYYA

Vijaya Varadayya has composed three varieties of Group Gitams on his favourite deities Sriranganayaka (Pancharatna Gitas), Parthasarathi (Pancharatna Gitas) and Sri Ramanujacharya (Gitashtakam)

SRI RANGANAYAKULA PANCHARATNAMULU

Specialty of the Group:

The composer has composed all these Gitas on Pancharanga kshetras, dedicated to Ranganatha Swami, on the banks of Kaveri River. The first Gita is in praise of Sriranganayaka. The second Gita is in praise of Mannaruranga sameta Sri Chengamalavalli. The third Gita is in praise of Sri Sarngapani sameta Komalavalli. The fourth Gita is in praise of Sri Vijayalakshmi sameta Sri Chakrapani. The fifth Gita is in praise of Chengamalavalleesa.

Order of the Group:

1. Sri ranganyakurere - Kedaragaula Ragam – Khanda Jati Jhampe Talam
2. Srngaara sekharā - Natakuranji Ragam - Dhruva Talam
3. Dasa mukhaari - Mukhari Ragam - Ata Talam
4. Padmasambhava - Sankarabharanam Ragam - Tripura Talam
5. Sreesa mat parimalaranga - Bhairavi Ragam - Rupaka Talam

Structure:

The first Gitam has three Khandikas. This Gitam is set to Khanda Jati Jhampe Talam and has 22 avartas. The second Gitam has two Khandikas and is set to Dhruva Talam. This Gitam has 5 avartas. The third Gitam also has two Khandikas and is set to Ata Talam, having 4 avartas. The fourth Gitam, again has two Khandikas, set to Tripura Talam with 8 avartas. The fifth Gitam has two Khandikas and is set to Rupaka Talam with 44 avartas.

About the Sahitya:

All the five gitas are in Bhandirabhasha. In these Gitas, composer described the particular kshetra and the deity presiding. He also mentioned location of the kshetra. He used Raga mudra and Kshetra mudra in some of the compositions. The usage of Gitaalankaara padas like ayya, tiyya, rere also can be seen in these compositions. All the Gitas have the mudra, Vijaya Varada.

PARTHASARATHI PANCHARATNAMULU

Speciality of the Group:

All the five Gitas are in praise of Sri Parthasarathi Swamy at Parthasarathi Swamy Temple, Triplicane, Chennai, Tamilnadu. The name of Pushkarini at this temple is 'Kairavani', which can be seen in all the Gitams.

Order of the Group:

1. Sreedhara - Kalyani Ragam - Tripura Talam
2. Sreelakshmi pati - Kambhoji Ragam - Dhruva Talam
3. Aarere dasaratha - Bhupalam Ragam - Rupaka Talam

4. Kamala sambhava - Reetigaula Ragam - Jhampe Talam
5. Are tune bhootali - Suddhasaveri Ragam - Mathya Talam

Structure:

The first Gitam has two Khandikas. This Gitam is set to Tripura Talam and has 10 avartas. The second Gitam has two Khandikas and is set to Dhruva Talam. This Gitam has 6 avartas. The third Gitam has three Khandikas and a Mudra Khandika. In the Mudra Khandika, the Sahityam contains both Kshetra Mudra and Vaggeyakara Mudra. It is set to Rupaka Talam, having 61 avartas. The fourth Gitam, again has two Khandikas, set to Jhampe Talam with 9 avartas. The fifth Gitam has two Khandikas and is set to Mathya Talam with 7 avartas.

About the Sahityam:

All the five Gitas are in Bhandirabhasha. They are composed on Sri Parthasarathi Swamy. The usage of Gitaalankaara padas like ayya, tiyya, rere also can be seen in these compositions. All the Gitas have the mudra Vijaya Varada and two of these Gitams have Kshetra mudra i.e., Dakshina kanchi.

YATIRAJA GEETASHTAKAMU:**Speciality of the group:**

All the Gitas are in praise of Yati Ramanujacharya. The first five Gitas are composed in the Ghana Ragas. The remaining Gitas are composed in Upa Ghana Ragas. All the Gitas are set to Jhampe Talam.

Order of the above Group:

1. Are bhootapura vaasa - Nata Ragam - Jhampe Talam
2. Are dharitree - Gaula Ragam - Jhampe Talam
3. Atulita vibhava - Varali Ragam - Jhampe Talam
4. Mantra gururaanmantra - Arabhi Ragam - Jhampe Talam
5. Anantaamara - Sri Ragam - Jhampe Talam
6. Sreemadadbhuta - Bouli Ragam - Jhampe Talam
7. Visishtaadvaita - Salanganata Ragam - Jhampe Talam
8. Jaya bhaashyakaarjayatu - Narayanagaula Ragam - Jhampe Talam

Structure:

All the Geetams are set to Jhampe Talam. The first Gitam has two Khandikas and a Mudra Khandika. This Gitam has 11 avartas. The second Gitam has two Khandikas and has 8 avartas. The third Gitam has two Khandikas and a Mudra Khandika. It is having 9 avartas. The fourth Gitam, again has two Khandikas and a Mudra Khandika with 9 avartas. The fifth Gitam has two Khandikas and a Mudra Khandika with 10 avartas. The sixth Gitam has two Khandikas and a Mudra Khandika with 8 avartas. The seventh Gitam has two Khandikas and a Mudra Khandika with 9 avartas. The eighth Gitam has two Khandikas and a Mudra Khandika with 9 avartas.

About the Sahityam :

The theme of all the Gitas is in praise of Yati Sri Ramanujacharya. He is praised as Sadguru, Ubhaya Vedanta Desika, Tridanda dhara, God Father of Visishtadvaita Vedanta and Yatiraja (King of sages). The usage of Gitaalankaara padas like ayya, tiyya, rere also can be seen in these compositions. All the Gitas have the mudra Vijaya Varada and Bhootapura vaasa and few of these Gitams have Kshetra mudra i.e., Dakshina kanchi.

MELODIC FEATURES OF THE GROUP GITAS

In these Group Gitas, the composer has portrayed the Raga sanchara with utmost authenticity. While observing these Gitas, we can see Graha, Amsa, Nyasa, Tara, Mandra features being incorporated aesthetically. Janta prayogas and Ranjaka prayogas are used gracefully within the limits of Ragalakshana. Vijaya Varadaya has composed a Gitam in a rare Ragam like Bhoopalam in the Parthasarathi Pancharatnams. In the Yatiraja Gitashtakam, the first 5 Gitas have been composed in Ghana ragas. The remaining 3 Gitas have been composed in 3 of the Upaghana Ragas which are Bauli, Salanganata and Narayanagaula.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Carnatic music is a treasure trove of diverse compositions, encompassing a wide range of ragas, talas, concepts, and themes. Among these, Group Compositions stand out as works infused with melody, lyrics, and rhythm, often focused on unified themes such as Kshetras, Deities and Elements of Nature. While such compositions are in availability, it is fascinating to discover the contributions of Sri Vina Vijaya Varadaya, a 19th Century Vaggeyakara, who composed a set of Group Compositions in the form of Pancharatna-s and Gita Ashtaka-s.

The research is driven by a pure, practical, and qualitative approach, employing a conceptual framework and analytical interpretation. Emphasizing the lakshya-lakshana values of Gita-s, the study recognizes the importance of understanding both their melodic and lyrical dimensions, which contribute to their remarkable academic and practical utility. The Gita-s featured in the earliest known notated publication 'Sangita Sarvartha Sara Sangrahamu' by Vina Ramanujayya in 1859, making them invaluable in the understanding of Carnatic music's rich heritage. The Sriranganayakula Pancharatnams, helps music aspirants to know about the Pancharanga Kshetras, leading to further research. This information will also help Music lovers and Pilgrims for Conceptual Tourism.

The Parthasarathi Pancharatnams, helps music aspirants and Pilgrims, to know about the Parthasarathi Swamy Temple in Triplicane, details of the temple like temple history, pushkarini, deities, etc., Through the Yatiraja Gitashtakam, Sri Ramanujacharya's attire and his contribution to Ubhaya Vedanta can be seen. This information about sage Ramanujacharya can be useful to the researchers in the field of Vedanta. A Music student can be benefited with Basic Sanchara of 18 Ragas used in all the 3 Group Gitas. In essence, the study of these Group Compositions elevates the understanding and popularity of Gita-s as a unique musical form in Carnatic music. By delving into their intricacies and preserving their traditions, we can ensure the continuity of this art form and further enrich the cultural heritage of Carnatic music.

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