

THE PROSODICAL AND MUSICAL BEAUTIES OF M.D. RAMANATHAN'S POPULAR KRITI "TYAGARAJA GURUM ASHRAYE" IN THE RAGA KEDARAM

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ABSTRACT

M. D. Ramanathan's kriti "Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye" is a popular composition in the raga Kedaram. This paper explores the prosodical and musical beauties of this kriti, examining how the lyrics and musical elements work together to create an aesthetically pleasing and emotionally evocative experience. The analysis will delve into the unique style of M.D. Ramanathan as both a musician and composer, highlighting his distinctive approach to Kedaram and how it enhances the inherent qualities of the raga. Furthermore, the meaning of the kriti's text will be elucidated, providing context for understanding its prosodical nuances and their impact on the overall musical experience.

Keywords: M.D. Ramanathan, Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye, Kedaram, Prosody, Musical Aesthetics, Kriti Analysis.

Introduction

M. D. Ramanathan holds a significant place in Carnatic music as a multifaceted artist, renowned for his unique style as a vocalist, composer, and teacher. His contributions have left an indelible mark on the musical landscape, enriching the repertoire with distinctive compositions that showcase his innovative approach to raga interpretation and melodic phrasing. This paper focuses on one of his popular kritis, "Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye," composed in the raga Kedaram, to explore the interplay between prosody and musicality that characterizes his work. By analysing the lyrical structure and melodic contours of the kriti, we aim to uncover the aesthetic and emotional impact achieved through MDR's masterful craftsmanship. This exploration will delve into the specific characteristics of Kedaram as a raga and how MDR's interpretation enhances its inherent qualities. Furthermore, an understanding of the kriti's lyrical meaning will provide valuable context for appreciating the nuances of its prosodical structure and its contribution to the overall musical experience. This study seeks to shed light on the artistic brilliance of MDR, demonstrating how his compositions transcend mere musical constructs to become vehicles of emotional expression and aesthetic delight.

M. D. Ramanathan: As a Musician and a Composer

M. D. Ramanathan, a prominent figure in Carnatic music, distinguished himself as a versatile artist, excelling as a vocalist, composer, and teacher. His musical journey spanned several decades, leaving an enduring legacy that continues to inspire and influence musicians today. Born into a family steeped in musical tradition, MDR's early exposure to the art form shaped his sensibilities and laid the foundation for his remarkable career. He received rigorous training from renowned gurus, imbibing the intricacies of Carnatic music and developing a profound understanding of its theoretical and practical aspects. As a vocalist, MDR was celebrated for his unique style, characterized by a rich, resonant voice, impeccable intonation, and an ability to evoke a wide range of emotions through his renditions. His command over complex rhythmic patterns and melodic improvisations was unparalleled, captivating audiences with his virtuosity and artistic expression. As a composer, MDR's contributions were equally significant. He enriched the Carnatic repertoire with numerous kritis, varnams, and tillanas, each bearing the hallmark of his distinctive style. His compositions often explored innovative melodic and rhythmic ideas within the traditional framework of Carnatic music, pushing boundaries while maintaining the integrity of the art form. MDR's pedagogical approach was equally influential. He nurtured generations of musicians, imparting his vast knowledge and inspiring them to pursue excellence in their musical endeavors. His legacy as a teacher lives on through his students, who carry forward his musical lineage and continue to contribute to the vibrant tapestry of Carnatic music. This section will further explore the specific aspects of MDR's musical genius, delving into his unique style of singing, his distinctive approach to composition, and his significant contributions as a teacher.

M. D. Ramanathan's Unique Style of Singing

A Voice of Profound Depth

One of the most striking features of M. D. Ramanathan's music was his exceptionally deep voice. This baritone timbre, often described as "patala shruti" (voice from the netherworld), added a unique dimension to his renditions. His voice resonated with a depth and power that was both awe-inspiring and mesmerizing. This deep voice, however, was not merely a physical attribute;

it was an integral part of his musical expression. Ramanathan used his voice to convey a wide range of emotions, from the serene and tranquil to the intense and passionate. His deep voice lent a gravitas to his music, making it both profound and moving.

The Deliberate Tempo: A Journey of Musical Exploration

Ramanathan was known for his deliberate and unhurried tempo, a stark contrast to the brisk pace often favored by other musicians. He believed that music was not a race, but a journey of exploration. His slow and measured pace allowed him to delve deep into the nuances of each raga, to savor every note and every phrase. This deliberate approach also allowed him to convey the bhava (emotional essence) of the raga with greater depth and intensity. He often extended phrases and explored melodic variations, creating a unique and captivating musical experience.

Raga Bhava: The Soul of Music

Ramanathan's music was deeply rooted in raga bhava, the emotional essence of a raga. He believed that the true essence of music lay not in mere technical virtuosity, but in the ability to convey the soul of the raga. He was a master of conveying the nuances of raga bhava, painting vivid musical pictures with his voice. His music was not just a collection of notes; it was a journey through a landscape of emotions, a tapestry woven with threads of joy, sorrow, love, and devotion.

A Unique Approach to Rendition

Ramanathan's unique approach to rendition extended beyond his tempo and emphasis on raga bhava. He often experimented with traditional forms, adding his own unique touches to create a fresh and innovative musical experience. He was particularly known for his unique treatment of kalpanaswaras (improvised passages), which were characterized by their depth, complexity, and emotional intensity. He also introduced novel approaches to the rendition of kritis (compositions), often adding his own unique interpretations and embellishments.

A Legacy of Innovation

M. D. Ramanathan's unique style of singing not only captivated audiences but also had a profound impact on the evolution of Carnatic music. He challenged conventional norms, pushing the boundaries of musical expression and inspiring a new generation of musicians. His influence can be seen in the music of many contemporary musicians, who have been inspired by his innovative approach to rendition, his emphasis on raga bhava, and his deep understanding of the nuances of Carnatic music.

Influence of Thyagaraja on Ramanathan's Compositions

M.D. Ramanathan, a renowned Carnatic vocalist, was deeply influenced by the works of Saint Thyagaraja. This influence is evident in various aspects of his compositions, including:

- **Devotional Content:** Both Thyagaraja and Ramanathan were deeply devoted to Lord Rama. Ramanathan's compositions often reflect the same intense bhakti and surrender to the divine as seen in Thyagaraja's kritis.
- **Musical Structure and Style:** Ramanathan's compositions, like Thyagaraja's, adhere to the traditional structure of Carnatic music, with a focus on clear raga alapana, intricate neraval, and melodious swaras. He also employed similar musical devices and techniques, such as gamakas and kalpana swaras.
- **Raga Exploration:** Ramanathan, like Thyagaraja, was a master of raga alapana. He explored a wide range of ragas, often delving deep into their nuances and intricacies. His compositions showcase a profound understanding of raga bhava, similar to Thyagaraja's kritis.
- **Emphasis on Sahitya:** Both composers placed great importance on the lyrics of their compositions. Ramanathan's compositions are known for their poetic beauty and profound philosophical content, much like Thyagaraja's kritis.

While Ramanathan developed his own unique style, the influence of Thyagaraja is undeniable. Ramanathan's compositions serve as a testament to the enduring legacy of Thyagaraja and his profound impact on Carnatic music.

The Raga Kedaram and its Significance

Kedaram, a vakra audava-shadava raga in Carnatic music, is known for its distinctive melodic contours and emotive quality. It is characterized by the absence of *dhaivatam* in its ascending scale (*ārohaṇa*) and the presence of all seven notes in its descending scale (*avarohaṇa*). The zig-zag movement of notes in the *ārohaṇa* contributes to its *vakra* nature, adding a layer of complexity and intrigue.

Technical Description:

- *Ārohaṇa*: S M₁ G₃ M₁ P N₃ Ś
- *Avarohaṇa*: Ś N₃ P M₁ G₃ R₂ S

This structure, with its emphasis on *gandharam*, *madhyamam*, and *nishadam*, creates a unique melodic landscape that is both melancholic and introspective. The use of *catusruti rishabham* in the descent adds a touch of gravity to the raga.

Significance:

Kedaram is often associated with devotion and introspection. Its emotive quality lends itself well to expressing feelings of longing, contemplation, and reverence. The raga's association with Lord Shiva further reinforces its devotional character

Significance in "Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye":

M.D. Ramanathan's choice of Kedaram for "Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye" is significant for several reasons:

- **Devotional Context:** The inherent devotional quality of Kedaram aligns perfectly with the kriti's theme of reverence for Tyagaraja. The raga's melancholic undertones may also subtly reflect the longing for the guru's presence.
- **Melodic Suitability:** The melodic contours of Kedaram provide ample opportunities for expressing the nuances of the lyrics. The raga's characteristic phrases and gamakas can be employed to highlight specific words or emotions within the composition.
- **Tyagaraja's Influence:** While Tyagaraja himself did not compose any kritis in Kedaram, the raga's prominence in the Carnatic repertoire and its association with devotional themes makes it a fitting choice for a tribute to the composer.

By exploring the technical aspects and emotive qualities of Kedaram, we can gain a deeper appreciation for M.D. Ramanathan's artistic choices in "Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye" and understand how the raga contributes to the kriti's overall impact.

Textual Analysis of the Lyrics

Here's a breakdown of the meaning of the lyrics you provided for "Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye":

Pallavi:

- *Thyagaraja Gurum Ashraye* - I seek refuge in my Guru, Tyagaraja.
- *Sada Muda Shri* - Ever blissful and auspicious. This likely refers to the state of being under Tyagaraja's guidance.

Anupallavi:

- *Nagaraja Shayana Dasam* - Servant of the one who reclines on the divine serpent (referring to Lord Vishnu, upon whom Tyagaraja meditated).
- *Raga Bhava Layollasam* - One who revels in the essence of raga, bhava (emotion), and laya (rhythm).
- *Samagana Saptaswara* - One who is immersed in the seven notes of music.
- *Sat Sangitavasam* - Residing in the abode of true music.

Charanam:

- *Vara Pancanadikshetram* - The sacred place of pilgrimage in the five directions (possibly referring to Tyagaraja's influence spreading far and wide).
- *Vara Naradavataram* - The blessed incarnation of Narada (the divine sage and musician).
- *Swararaga Sudha Rasayuta* - Filled with the nectar of melody and raga.
- *Sankirtanadharam* - One who upholds the tradition of congregational singing.

Madhyamakala Sahithyam:

- *Varakedaradhyakhila Raga Ratna Malikam* - The Lord of Kedaram, the garland of all precious gems of ragas. This could be interpreted as Tyagaraja's mastery over all ragas, with Kedaram being highlighted.
- *Parama Bhakta Yogi Varam* - A boon to the greatest devotees and yogis.
- *Varadadasa Sanmutam* - Praised by Varadadasa (likely referring to a devotee, possibly the composer himself, using a pen name).

Overall Meaning:

The lyrics express deep reverence and devotion towards Tyagaraja, highlighting his musical genius, spiritual attainment, and influence. They portray him as a master musician, a divine incarnation, and a source of inspiration for devotees and musicians

alike. The choice of Kedaram raga, with its devotional and introspective qualities, further enhances the emotional depth of the lyrics.

Lyrics of the kriti “Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye”

Ragam – Kedaram

Arohana – S M1 G2 M1 P N3 S

Avarohana – S N3 P M1 G2 R2 S

Talam – Rupakam

Composer – MD Ramanathan

Pallavi

Thyagaraja Gurum Ashraye

Sada Muda Shri

Anupallavi

Nagaraja Shayana Dasam

Raga Bhava Layollasam

Samagana Saptaswara

Sat Sangitavasam

Charanam

Vara Pancanadikshetram

Vara Naradavataram

Swararaga Sudha Rasayuta

Sankirtanadharam

Madhyamakala Sahithyam

Varakedaradhyakhila Raga Ratna Malikam

Parama Bhakta Yogi Varam Varadadasa Sannutam...

Chittaswaram

||S , - p , - S , - P , - S , - R S N P , - M G R ||

||S , , , , , - R S N P - N P M G - M G R S R ||

||S S M G , R - S S P M , P - G M N P , N - M P S N S|

||S S M G , R - S R S , N - P , N P , M , G , M , P , ||

||S S M G M - G M P M P - M P N P N - P P S N S |

||S S M G - G R R S - S N P - R S N P N P M G M P N S

||S S M G M , - G , - R , - S , - N , - P , - G |

, R , S , N , P , - G R S N P R S N P M , - M G r s r ||

Notation of the kriti “Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye”

Pallavi

||S s n P S ;S |gm P; mgrs R| G S;;;|;sr||

Ty-a gara-ja gu rum a----- shra Ye -----sri

||S s n P S ;S |gmd P, mgrs R| G S;;;|;sr||

Ty-a ga ra-ja gu- rum a--- shra Ye sri

||S s n P S ;S |gmpnsnmpmgrsr | G S;;;,r|snpnpmgmgrsn||

Thya ga ra--ja gu – rum-- a-----shra ye sada- muda— sri-----

Anupallavi

||,S, p p p mgM,|p S s S S; ||

naga ra- - - ja -- shayana dasam

||S; M G ;R|S rg S R S S ||

Sa ma ga na la yo - la - sam

|| S ; M G ; R| S; nrsn P P||

Sa ma ga na sap tha - svara

|| ;gmP, nP,M |G,r S R S; ||

sat san gi----ta ----- va--sam||

charanam

||;gM P, PP|P; P; P; ||

Vara pan jana thakshetram

||;gMP;snP|;mgRsRS,||

Varana radha va-----tha-ram

||;g M P,SS|S; SRsnP||

Svara ra ga sudha rasayutha

||;pnSnP;m|G,rSRS; ||

Sangirtha-na - - dharam

||sn P S mgr s s n |S m G m pnm P,||

Vara keda ra-- dhyakila ra ga rat na ma likam

||mgm psn mgrssn | psn P mG r ssn||

Paramabaktha yogivaram varadha dasa sannutham

Prosodical Beauties in the Kriti Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye

Anuprasam

It is the representation of similar letters ,syllables or words. Anuprasam occurs in the Pallavi sada- Mudha and Raga-Ratna in the charanam.

Pallavi : sada mudha sree

Charanam : Raga Ratna Malikam

Antyakshara prasam

It is the representation of similar letters ,syllables or words at the end of the sahitya.

Antyakshara prasam occurs in Anupallavi “ **dasam , lasam , vasam**” and in charanam shetram, vatharam, nadharam, malikam, varam, sannutham

Anupallavi : nagaraja shayana **dasam**

Ragabhava layo**lasam**

Samagana saptaswara

Sangeethava**asam**

Charanam : Vara Pancanadik**shetram**

Vara Naradav**ataram**

Swararaga Sudha Rasayuta

Sankirtan**adharam**

Varakedaradhyakhila

Raga Ratna **Malikam**

Parama Bhakta Yogi **Varam**

Varadadasa **Sannutam**

Adhyakshara prasam:

It is the representation of consecutive lines or verses in a poem or song shares a similar sound. Adhyakshara prasam occurs in the charanam “vara”

Charanam : **Vara** Pancanadikshetram

Vara Naradavataram

1 Avartanam of Adi tALam (tisra gati) = 48 aksharams

Last avartanam of ciTTaswaram had the kaNakku: 6 + 15 + 10 + 5 + 1 + 5 + 1

+ 5 aksharams to make a total of 48 aksharams

It came like

tha dhi ki Na thom , (6)

tha ; dhi ; ki; Na; thom; (15)

tha, dhi, ki, Na, thom, (10)

tha dhi ki Na thom, (5 + 1)

tha dhi ki Na thom, (5 + 1)

tha dhi ki Na thom (5)

Equivalent swaram representation was sung as

S S M G M , (6)

G; R; S; N; P; (15)

G, R, S, N, P, (10)

G R S N P, (5 + 1)

R S N P M, (5 + 1)

M G R S R (5)

Conclusion

M. D. Ramanathan's profound impact on Carnatic music stems from his multifaceted artistry as a vocalist, composer, and teacher. His unique style, characterized by a slow, meditative pacing, innovative raga alapana, and a deep focus on *bhava* (emotional expression), set him apart. His minimalist approach to ornamentation and his resonant voice allowed the purity of the raga and the depth of the lyrics to shine through. His compositions, often simple in language yet profound in meaning, further showcase his artistic vision. By prioritizing the aesthetic and spiritual experience over mere technical virtuosity, MDR's music transcended musical constructs to become a vehicle for emotional and spiritual exploration, leaving an enduring legacy that continues to inspire and influence musicians today. His contributions, particularly his distinctive approach to Kedaram as exemplified in "Tyagaraja Gurum Ashraye," enrich the Carnatic repertoire and offer a unique perspective on the interplay between prosody, musicality, and emotional expression. Further research could explore the influence of MDR's pedagogical approach on subsequent generations of musicians and the broader impact of his unique style on the evolution of Carnatic music.

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