

A FORGOTTEN SCHOOL OF CARNATIC MUSIC

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The present day tradition of carnatic music, traces its origin to the systematisation of music effected by the great poet - composer Venkatamakhin, who lived in the court of Tanjore Nayak ruler, Vijayaraghava in the 17th century.

He organised the musical system into 72 *melakarta ragas* and their derivatives, *Janya ragas*. Most of the modern exponents of carnatic music, follow this system of raga renderings, especially when they sing the compositions of the great music trinities - Thyaga Brahman, Muthusvami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri. It is held by some, that while Dikshitar followed closely Venkatamakhin, Thyaga Brahman followed a school, which shows subtle variations in raga rendering, especially the *apurva ragas*. He is said to have received a rare text named '*Svararnava*' and probably followed the same in his compositions. Thyaga Brahman makes a pointed reference to this text '*Svararnava*', in his composition "*Svararaga Sudha*". According to late Mudikondan Venkatrama Iyer, though Thyaga Brahman's Raga Lakshanas are slightly different from the school of Venkatamakhin, yet his work followed the 72 *melakarta ragas* and the *janya raga* systems, thus confirming, that all the present day tradition falls back on *melakarta* and *janya raga* system.

It is against this back ground a varitable treatise on music and dance,

written around 1700 a.d. may be viewed. A classical treatise named '*Siva Tattva Ratnakara*' written in sanskrit, by the Keladi Nayak ruler Basava Bhupala, exists in nine *Kallolas* and 108 *Tarangas* i.e., sections and chapters. It deals with all branches of Indian lore, like philosophy, royal administration, agriculture, economy, warfare, architecture, music, drama, medicine etc. and is said to be a guide book for the crown prince, to educate him as a foremost ruler. The book is in the form of questions raised by the prince and the answers by Basava, the ruler himself.

Basava gives the ancestry of the Keladi Nayak dynasty, from its beginning to his times: The Keladi Kingdom consisted of western Karnataka from Goa in the north, to north of Cannanore in the south including Konkan, and a part of Shimoga district. Keladi Nayaks, like the Nayaks of Tanjore were great patrons of arts and literature. Like the enlightened Nayaks of Tanjore, the Keladi Nayaks have themselves written many works in Sanskrit and Kannada. Basava himself has written many works in which he cites authors and works yet to be identified. Four manuscripts of Basava Bhupala's work *Siva Tattva Ratnakara* are known, including the one in the Government Oriental Manuscript Library, Madras. The work in its entirety has been published. Basava ruled between 1648 and 1710 a.d. and the book was composed around 1700 a.d.

Among several topics, there is a chapter on the construction of dance hall, with good ventilation, abundance of natural light on one side, and dimly lit part on the other side, to have artificial lighting. The pillars should be covered with gold; and precious stones other pillars are to be made of coral (colour) and some made of Sandal Wood, to emit Sandal fragrance in the Audience Hall. The steps are to be covered with brass sheets. The walls of the hall are to be tastefully painted. The text also gives valuable information on preparation of plaster, mixing it with a paste prepared by boiling buffaloe skin, the mixing of colours, application of plaster on the wall, drawing out lines of the pictures, filling them with colours, and shading with specially prepared brushes. A few chapters of this text are devoted to dance (Natya), followed by a number of *Tarangas* on music.

As mentioned earlier, the music section is a veritable treatise on music, dealing with technical aspects like *Nada*, *Sruti*, *Svara*, *Gramas*, *Murcchana*, *Tana*, *Varna*, *Alamkara*, *Raga* etc. The text mentions svara as 22 in number, (this numbers has dwindled to 12 in modern times) and speaks of *Shadja*, *Madhyama* and *Gandhara* gramas. It also defines the *Suddha*, *Shaadava* and *Audhava* (the pure, hexatonic and pentatonic system) tanas. A point of great interest is that the work gives illustrations of *svara*, and the *arohana* and *avarohana* of svaras of each raga, and also gives a composition, for singing. For example, the *Avartaka Alamkara*, is given as

Sa Sa Ri Ri Sa Sa Ri Sa
Ga Ga Ma Ma Ga Ga Ma Ga
Ri Ri Ga Ga Ri Ri Ga Ri

etc. Similarly the "sampradhana alamkara" is illustrated as -

Sa Sa Ri Ri Sa Sa
Ri Ri Ga Ga Ri Ri
Ga Ga Ma Ma Ga Ga
Ma Ma Pa Pa Ma Pa etc.

Defining *Gamaka* as oscillation of Svaras, Basava Bhupala lists fifteen varieties of *Gamakas* among which one is called '*Tiripu*'. That *Tiripu* a Tamil word, has been assimilated as a part of the technical vocabulary of music in western Karnataka deserves notice, Basava's work though written in 1700 a.d., does not refer to the classification of Ragas as *Melakarta ragas* and *Janya ragas*, as is noticed in all the works written after Venkatamakhin, but states that there are only 32 *pradhana ragas* (main ragas) which are divided into 8 *Purusha ragas* and 24 *Stri Ragas*; *Bhupala*, *Vasanta*, and *Saranga* are found among the *Purusha Ragas*, while *Mallari*, *Kurunci*, *Dhanyasi*, *Bhauri* and others are found among the "*Stri Ragas*". Some of the well known ragas like *Todi*, *Bhairavi*, *Kambodi*, *Madyamavati*, etc. are said to be '*stri*' ragas, resting on one or the other purusha ragas.

The text is also interesting as it lists ragas appropriate to different parts of the days, as ragas to be sung in the morning, in the midday, evening, night etc. Bhairava, Bhupala, Saveri and other for example are said to be appropriate for early morning. It is interesting to see, a raga named "*Dravidi*" in the list of ragas

suited for evenings. It is well known, many ragas are named after different regions of India like Gaudi, Malava, Kannata, Varati (virata) etc. indicating their place of origin or popularity. The *Dravidi* is obviously a raga named after the Tamil country. This raga is known to early writers on music, like Khumbha, Somaraga and Vriddhatapa. Kumbha categorically states that this raga derives its name from the country (Tamil), "*Dravidi desanarnayam Vikhyaata*" other derivatives of this raga as *Dravidavarati*, *Dravidagauli*, and *Dravida Gandhari* were also known to writers. Though this raga "*Dravidi*" was well known and was in vogue in western Karnataka as late as 1700 a.d., it is totally

forgotten in the Tamilnadu country of its origin, for none of the modern carnatic musicians know this ragas.

The chapter on music in this work - *Siva Tattva Ratnakara* by the Keladi Chief Basava Bhupala is of great practical use as it gives the definition and Lakshana of all the ragas, the *arohana* and *avarohana* of each raga, and also songs for each raga, thus serving as a text book for learners. It is surprising that this valuable work, composed as recently as 1700 a.d. in western part of Karnataka, has not received the attention it deserves among the carnatic musicians and musicologists. □

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