

Fountainhead of Carnatic Music

It was Purandara Dasa who devised a learning-regimen. Also, he gave Karnataka Sangeetham a strong foundation and a clear sense of direction.

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Indian Music has been growing, rather slowly, for centuries. Perhaps the earliest musical treatise was Brihaddesi of Matanga where the "raga" is mentioned. Subsequently, in response to Deogiri Yadavaraja's desire Sarngadeva (Kashmira Sarngadeva) wrote Sangita Ratnakara which has remained a reference work for both Hindustani and Southern music systems. He has divided ragas into male and female and has explained the methods of alapana etc.

The southern music system was for the first time called "Karnataka Sangeetham" in the 12th Century. As Vijayanagar expanded and prospered quickly, many great musicians and musicologists came and settled down in Hampi. They however had their own ideas of how music should be sung. The mutual contradictions were so great that Vijayanagar King Achutharaya commissioned Ramaamaatya around 1550 to write a treatise reconciling the contradictions. He wrote the Swaramela Kalanidi but that failed to have any great impact. The main drawback was that, while ragas (35) and talas (108) were known nobody knew where to begin. It was the creative genius of Purandara Dasa that stemmed the rot. He devised the initial lessons and prescribed the graded exercises like sarali varisais, janta swaras, hetchu sthayi swaras, alankaras, geethas and so on. A person following this regimen was guaranteed to become a competent musician.

Besides, Purandara Dasa pioneered many other practices. For the first time he started commenting in his songs on the daily life of

the people. He incorporated in his songs popular folk language and introduced folk ragas in the mainstream. The most important contribution he made was the fusion of bhava, raga and laya into organic units. That only Tyagaraja has done this most beautifully and successfully after Purandara Dasa is proof of the Dasa's greatness as a composer. But for Purandara Dasa giving it a strong foundation and a clear sense of direction we would not be having "Karnataka Sangeetham" today.

Purandara Dasa died in 1564 (or 1565) and the Vijayanagar empire collapsed in 1565. Musicians, other artistes and scholars fled south. It was the Wodeyar rulers of Mysore and the Naik rulers of Thanjavur who gave refuge and encouragement to these artistes.

Thirumala Raya, who was the Governor of Mysore area with head-quarters at Srirangapatna went away shortly after 1565. Raja Wodeyar (1578 to 1617) took over the reins and continued the Vijayanagar traditions of Dasara celebrations and encouragement to fine arts. Chamaraja Wodeyar V, who ruled between 1617 and 1637, became a great patron of arts. Vocal and Veena concerts were a daily affair. Kanteerava Narasaraja Wodeyar (1638 to 1659) was also a great patron of arts. In his court were such great musicians as Bharati Naiya, Veena Narasayya and Veena Krishnayya. Narasaraja's successor was Dodda Devaraja Wodeyar (1659 to 1678) who continued the traditions.

The next king was the notable Chikkadevaraja Wodeyar (1673 to 1704). In

the recitals in his court various musical instruments were played. These have been named as Thambura, Veena, Maddala, Mukha Veena, Sankha, Bheri, Thaala, Jambaka, Dindima, Muraju, Dakka, Thambata and Venu (Flute). In his court, dance performances were accompanied by many musical instruments.

Chikkadevaraja was himself a proficient veena vidwan. He was a Vaggeyakara. He has composed many songs in sāptapadi and thripadi metres. His most famous work was the Geetha Gopala, which resembles Geetha Govinda in many respects. Mainly intended to popularise the visihtheadwaitha system of Saranagathi and Prapaththi, the work contains many beautiful songs of high musical quality.

The next notable King of Mysore was Krishnaraja Wodeyar II (1734 to 1766). In his court was the well known Karachuri Nanjarajayya or Nanjaraja. One of his works was Sangita Gangadhara in Sanskrit. It also resembles Gita Govinda.

When Hyder Ali deposed the Wodeyar King in 1766 and appropriated the Mysore throne, one of the Asthana vidwans was Pachimiraiadiyappayya, whose Ata tala varnam in Bhairavi has remained an unexcelled musical composition. It is an authentic example of the shape of the raga from the days of Purandara Dasa down to the earlier years of the 20th Century. The sudden increase in the use of Chaturruti dhaivata since then has changed the complexion of the raga itself. Adiyappayya migrated to Thanjavur and became a court musician under King Sarabhoji. Adiyappayya's son Kuppiyah had three children - two sons Appayya and Kusappa and a daughter Narasamma, whose son was Veena Chikkaramappa. His son was Veena Seshanna.

After the fall of Tipu Sultan, Mysore was restored to the Wodeyar family but the kingdom was put under British protection. Krishnaraja Wodeyar III (1799 to 1866) shifted

the capital from Srirangapatna to Mysore. Under his rule, Mysore became a great centre of arts. Many great musicians came and lived in Mysore during this time. Adiyappayya's grandson through his younger son Veena Seshayya, came to Mysore at the invitation of Dewan Purnayya. He taught music to the Maharaja who presented him with a golden Veena.

It was during the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar III that such famous musicians as Veena Sambayya, Veena Anantha Subbayya, Veena Chikkaramappa, Veena Dodda Subbaraya, the great vocalist "Janjaa maaruta" (cyclone) Subbayya, Syama Sastri's disciple Appukuttan Nattuvanar, Tyagaraja's disciple Lalgudi Rama Iyer, his sons Guruswami Iyer and Radhakrishna Iyer, Mysore Sadasiva Rao, and Thatchur Singarachar all were Asthana vidwans. Music recitals were a regular feature of the Mysore Court especially during festivals like Dasara and Sivaratri. During this time a number of musical treatises like "Swara Choodamani" Sri Taswa nidhi, and Bharatha Saara Sangraha were published.

Chamaraja Wodeyar (1866 to 1902) carried on the traditions followed by his predecessor Krishnaraja Wodeyar III.

It was again during the reign of Krishnaraja Wodeyar IV (1902 to 1940) that music rose to great heights. The legendary Veena Seshanna, Sri Bidaram Krishnappa, Sri Vasudevacharya and Sri Muthiah Bhagavathar, who were all great composers adorned the court. It was also during this time that such famous Karnataka Sangeetha musicians as Veena Dhanammal, Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar and Tiger Varadachariar and Hindustani musicians like Abdul Karim Khan regularly performed at the Mysore Court.

Jayachamaraja Wodeyar was the last of the Mysore rulers. He was himself a composer of merit.