

Tadepally Venkata Subramanya Sastry-A Composer

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Abstract

Vaggeyakara or composer is a person who writes the keerthanas and sets the tunes to them by himself. There are so many composers post trinity who have composed many compositions under the influence of the Trinity(Thyagaraja, Syamasastri and MutthusamiDeekshithar). One of such composers is Tadepally Venkata Subramanya Sastry. He has composed many keerthanas, Harikathas, Burrakathas, novels, small stories, dramas and English rhymes. He has also translated many literary works.

Keywords: Composer, Keerthanas

1.0 Introduction

Tadepally Venkata Subramanya Sastry was born in a normal Telugu brahmin family. He was a normal child until the age of 18. At the age of 18, when his father induced him to participate in Bhajan programs, he was reluctant in the beginning as any normal child of his age. During one of those visits, he got an opportunity to perform and he excelled in it. Without any knowledge in music, he could sing the tunes perfectly. He himself wrote some of the bhajans and performed. This encouraged him to write a Harikatha on Kusuma Haranath and perform during the auspicious occasion of janmotsav of Lord Haranath. Later on, he learnt Carnatic music in a traditional way and started composing with music and poetic knowledge. He has also translated many literary works. He also had spiritual gurus to guide him in that path. This helped him to get introduced to various spiritual aspects.

He was also a responsible citizen and followed Gandhian path. He wrote many poems and songs in praise of Gandhi. He established few institutions to spread the Gandhian concept to the children in and around his place. With all this support and knowledge, he wrote 1000 krithis on 1000 names of Lalitha sahasranamas.

1.1 Birth

Tadepally Venkata Subramanya Sastry was born on October 2nd 1918 in a village called Peravali in Guntur district of Andhra. His parents were Tadepally Kesava Sastry and Udayasundaramma. His parents had no knowledge of music or Sanskrit, vedas or sastras. They just had utmost devotion on God in the form of Rama, Krishna and initiated TVSSastry into devotional path. His parents introduced him to devotional music of their times like Kusuma Haranath bhajans.



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1.2 Introduction to Composing

At the age of 18, he accompanied one of his distant relatives to one of the KusumaHaranathbhajan programs. That relative was a scholar in Telugu and Sanskrit and also had knowledge of veena and harmonium. He composed few bhajans and wanted to present during the performance. But he was denied a chance to perform. As a mark of respect to this composer, TVSSastry composed three namavalis and set tune to them. At that time, he was not introduced to music. But he could perform the namavalis in three speeds and won the appreciation of all the people present there. This new development gave him encouragement to write the birth story of Kusuma Haranath in the form of Harikatha and performed the same for 5 hours during the birth celebrations of Lord Haranath. With this his father prompted him to take up composition of poems and songs. The first poem's sequence was on Maruthi entitled Maruthistavam and the first krithi composition was on Sri Kusuma Haranatha Prabhu CharanaSeva in Thodi raga set to Adi thala. In the wake of that, he wrote 25 more krithis in praise of Lord Haranath and his consort with the title, 'Kusuma Haranatha Bhajan Keerthanalu'.

1.3 Musical Career

During his childhood, he used to frequent BhagavathulaAnnapurnayya, a renowned Hanumadupasaka. In one of his annual Hanumad Jayanti celebration, he once listened to the concert of ChilakalapudiVenkateswaraSarma of Vijayawada belonging to the Thyagarajaparampara. After being appointed as a clerk in Post office at Vijayawada, he got an opportunity to learn traditional Carnatic music from his Guru. He learnt all the basic lessons from sarali to geethams. After that he joined B.A (Music) and honed his music skills. During this period, he was frequently invited by AIR Madras and later by AIR Vijayawada to sing Carnatic music. Moving to Hyderabad in search of a job he was asked by controller of Broadcasting to perform Harikathas in addition to singing the compositions of Ramdas, Anamayya and ThumuNarasimhadas and to give talks on theory of music. He also had the opportunity to learn under the great Guru Sri. ParupalliRamakrishnayapanthulu.

1.0 Contribution to Society

After completing B.A., B.Ed., he joined a school as teacher. At that time, he inspired his pupils into patriotism and spirituality. He had great respect towards the nation and wanted the next generation kids to have patriotism. He devoted his years of service as a teacher to promote extra-curricular interest in music among his pupils. He followed the Gandhian principles and wrote many songs on him. He wrote 'One More Experiment with Truth'. He established Balamandiram and conducted many competitions to children to encourage them. He taught them many small compositions preaching good habits, patriotism and Gandhian principles. He also preached Rama rajya principles.

He established Sevanikethan-santhigramam following the footsteps of Gandhi. Through his works and compositions, he tried to bring changes in the society.



2.0 As a spiritual personality

In 1966, he was introduced to spiritual guru H.H. Sri Samartha Narayana Maharaj who was 11th Peetadhipathi in the clan of Sri Samartha Parampara. In 1972, during the 21 days of Gajakunda Mahalakshmi yagam, on 11th day on the occasion of deeksha kalam, Narayana Maharaj initiated into spiritual path by equipping sastry with Terakshari. With this blessing, TVSSastry composed Narayanashtakam Sadguru Stavam and SamarthaManasam-nearly 40 pieces of classical music in different ragas. Feeling happy with these compositions, Guru blessed him with a rare PeetathrayaRahasyam. The same was translated into 9 slokas and presented at the holy feet of the Guru as a Guru dakshina. At a later stage, Guru equipped with another powerful Sree Rama PanchayathanaGnanam, which TVSSastry summed up in the form of a krithi in Athana raga set to Adi tala with 24 charanas.

In early 1970's Sastry met another great saint H.H. Raja Rajeswari Peetadhipathi, descendant of H.H.SriKanchi Chandrasekhara Swami, who initiated him to PranavasahithaPanchadasi after being pleased with his 20 Lalitha sahasraNamakrithulu and Sri Kamakshi Panchadasi, a sequence of 15 songs and Kumara Ananda Lahari consisting of 41 songs, musical translation of Adi Sankara'sSoundaryalahari(first 41 slokas). All these three sequences were grouped to form Devi Stuti.

3.0 Spiritual lineage

- Music – Sri Thyagaraja
- Sri Rama Upasana- Sri Samartha Ramadas
- Sri Vidya Upasana- Adi Sankaracharya

Being a spiritual personality, he established the following ashrams

1. Sri Maruthibalashram
2. Sri Chaitanya ashram
3. Sri Gnana Saraswathi peetam

He took sanyasadeeksha in the year 1986 and thereafter called as PranavaanandaBharathikumar.

4.0 A Versatile Composer

TVSSastry is adept both in Telugu and Sanskrit. He composed many songs, keerthanas, rhymes, poems, Operas, Harikathas, Burrakathas and some translations too. His compositions are in Telugu and Sanskrit. They are in the format Pallavi, Anupallavi, Charanas. Some of the keerthanas have many charanas. His Mudra used to be 'Subramanya' in his poorva-ashrama. Then it was changed to 'Bharati kumar' after taking monk-hood. (sanyasa). The frequent occurrence of alliteration (Sabdalkara) in his songs exposes his poetic predisposition.



4.0.1 Compositions

Dwavimsathisruthulu This contains gems selected from among the 22 sequences to be rendered in the Kumara Geetha Jnana Yagna as a prelude in the manner of Saint Thyagaraja's Pancharathnas.

- **Sri Kusuma Hara Taravali:** This is the first sequence of Sukumara Geetha Sravanthi consisting of 28 songs in various ragas set to Adi, Roopaka, Chapu or Ata talas. It contains songs on worship-puja, nivedana, harathi, lullaby, taking leave and waking up the Lord.
- **AlaghukritiMandalam:** This is a sequence of 40 krithis starting with a song on Ganesh. There are four songs on Basara Saraswathi followed by 2 songs about his own life. This also contains songs on Lord Narasimha, Lord Venkatewara, a song on Kamakshi inspired by swarajathi of Syamasastri, on Hanuman and Bhava raga tala panchakam set to five ghana ragas of Thyagarajapancharathna set in 5 different talas.
- **Ihaparapanchayathanam:** This is a sequence of 27 songs as a result of parayana of Devi manasika pooja of Adi Sankara as is predicted by the phalasaruthi that whoever does it becomes a poet.
- **ShodasaKusumanjali:** This is a sequence of 22 songs exclusively on Parameswari starting from Melukolupu(waking up of God). This consists shodasaupacharas and 6 more songs.
- **Aradhana Panchakam:** A sequence of Melukolupu, Abhishekam, Archana, Lullaby and Redemption prayer.
- **Sadguru Sthavamu:** This is a sequence of 13 songs on his Guru Samartha Narayana Maharaj-starting with Narayana Ashtakam. A navaragamalika extolling the virtues of Swamiji, his Leelas and lineage of Samartha Ramadas.
- **PeethathrayaRahasyam:** It is a sequence of 9 slokas with Phalasaruthi as the end piece. First four slokas extol the greatness of Saiva thatva; the next three slokas expound the Vishnu thatva; the last two slokas the shakthithatva.
- **SamarthaManasamu:** A sequence of 24 songs on Lord Rama defining Rama thatva.
- **Sri Rama PanchayathanaGnanamu:** This is a single song in Athana raga set to Adi tala with 24 charanas containing the essence of Rama thatva.
- **Sri MaruthiBalaSthavamu:** The sequence consists of 8 songs on Maruthibala, the presiding deity at Peravali.
- **Sri Lalitha Panchadasi:** A sequence of 20 songs, the first 5 being introductory to the rest of 15 which are the explanation of the first 15 names among the 1000 RahasyaNamas of Sri Lalitha. This sequence forms the Poorvapeethika for the 1000 krithis subsequently composed during the period of 20 years.
- **Sri KameshiPanchadasi:** After being initiated into Srividya by Sri Amba prasad Tejaswi, a sequence of 15 songs with dhyana slokas were composed concluding with mangala sloka. These songs contain the Adwaitic philosophy of Sri.Kameswari.



- **Kusuma Ananda Lahari:** The first 41 slokas of Adi Sankara's Soundarya Lahari are translated into as many krithi forms in different ragas with an introductory and concluding song thus making it to 43 songs.
- **KamakalangaSthavam:** This is a sequence of 13 songs relating to Kamakala, a personal mystical experience.
- **SukumaraManasamu:** This is a sequence of 49 krithis containing the entire 69 slokas of Devi Manasika Pooja of Adi Sankara.
- **Sri HanumanthaNakshtraMala:** This is a Telugu version of Hanuman Chalisa of Tulsidas in Mohana raga set to Adi tala containing 27 charanas.
- **AlaghukritiPanchaDasi:** This is a collection of 15 songs. The first one on the DevathaPeetham, songs 2-6 on the experiences during the Badrinath and Kedarnath visits. The other songs being on Ayyappa, Jayendra Saraswathi, VenkatesaKalyanam, Anjaneya, Sri chakra Rajeswari, Sri Lalitha and Sri Lalitha Maha Tripura Sundari.
- **Asrutarpanam:** This is a sequence of 10 songs composed on his wife's demise.
- **KrodhanaNivedana:** This is a sequence of 13 songs containing valuable gems and personal experiences containing appeals, universal religion, the greatest secrets about Terakshari, Sri Rama Jaya Rama Jaya Rama.
- **SowbhgyavaneeswariSthavam:** This contains 9 compositions on BasaraSaraswathi narrating the various facets of her greatness and the 9th song mentions her as Gururthrayaswaroopini.
- **Sri Lakshmi Narasimha Sthavam:** This contains 20 songs on Narasimha starting with Melukolupu to lullaby.
- **Srikrishnastavam:** This comprises of 15 songs, 14 on Lord Krishna and the last one on Lord Haranath and the mangalakrithi.

Hari kathas

Harikatha is a composite art form composed of storytelling, poetry, music, drama, dance and philosophy most prevalent in south India. TVSSastry has composed 3 Harikathas during his life time. They are

1. **ThyagarajaVijayamu:** This is the story of Sri Thyagaraja. This comprises of many poems depicting the story and some krithis of Thyagaraja.
2. **Hari Hareswarodbhavam:** This depicts the story Haranatha. This comprises of 21 krithis composed by TVSSastry and few Telugu poems composed to depict the story.
3. **Sri Krishna Chaitanya:** This depicts the story of great saints like Dattatreya, Krishna Chaitanya and Haranatha. This also comprises of many krithis and poems in different ragas.

Burra kathas



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Burrakatha is an oral storytelling technique in Jangam Katha tradition, performed in villages of Andhra Pradesh and Telangana. The troupe consists of one main performer and two co-performers. It is a narrative entertainment that consists of prayers, solo drama, dance, songs, poems and jokes. TVSSastry has composed 2 of such Burrakathas

1. **SisuVihaaram:** This is based on the plans started by Government of India like Five-year plan. Through this burrakatha, Sastry wanted to bring out awareness in the public to support the plans and to help for the growth of the country.
2. **Premaavatharudu:** This is the story of Kusuma Haranatha.

Dramas, Stories, Novel, Poems, Rhymes

TVSSastry being a versatile composer and writer, has written many dramas, stories, novels, poems and English rhymes. He has written 3 social dramas, Upaadhyayudu, Samaikyatha and Naveenavidya, 3 stories, Anthimavijayam, Krotthapetalokotthapadavi and vennelathri. He has also written a novel called Sathanikisankellu, a set of poems in the name of Sukumarakandamulu, Vedanthasaramu, Saralaandhra Geetha, Samayasphoorthi, Navathulasimalika and Guru Geetha.

In this Nava thulasimalika is in Telugu, a translation work of Ramyana by Sant Tulsidas.

Other compositions

1. **AnubhavaSahithikadambamu:** This comprises of a drama, 3 stories, 3 poems, rhymes and articles.
2. **AnubhavaSahithi:** This comprises of patriotic songs, songs on soldiers, five-year plan, small songs for children, songs on Freedom fighters such as Gandhi, Nehru, NCC cadets etc.,

Penultimate Composition on Lalitha SahasraNamas

Apart from the credits of 600 krithis besides several works in Telugu poetry, TVSSastry has composed 1000 krithis on 1000 names of Lalitha SahasraNamas. This was composed over a period of 20 years. This is composed in various ragas. Apart from composing in 72 melakartha ragas in an order and famous ragas like amruthavarshini, abheri, many rare, obsolete and unknown ragas like sabhadyapi, Adhivasu, Nivaramu, Pavanakari are used to compose the krithis. They are set to different thalas like Adi, Rupaka, Chapu, Jhampe, Ata etc.

Release of his Major Literary Works

His NavaTulasi Malika was published in the year 1993 in the August presence of then Governor of AP, Sri KrishnaKanth. Sri Lalitha Rahasya Nama Sahasrakruthulu was published in the year 2010 in the presence of dignitaries like P V Ramana murthy and Amba Prasad Tejaswi.



Awards

In recognition of his contribution to the society and world of Music, he was awarded ‘Sri Mathasri Sahitya Sangeetha Samrattu’ by Viswasaahithi, Antharjaatheeya Telugu SahithiSaamskruthikaSevaSamstha(affiliated to Sahithya Academy). A special cover was released to celebrate the Birth Centenary of BramhasriTadepally Venkata Subramanya Sastry at Tenali on 19th September 2017.

Conclusion

Tadepally Venkata Subramanya Sastry is one of the versatile composers who has composed varieties of compositions. As he had good control over the languages like Telugu and Sanskrit, he could compose tough compositions like The Lalitha Rahasya Nama Sahasrkruthulu and also devotional and patriotic compositions that are easy to be sung by normal people. He also proved himself to be a responsible citizen by composing few songs to inspire children and youth to follow the right path of patriotism and spirituality at the same time.

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