

Glory of Tyagaraja as portrayed in the compositions of Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavathar

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10

Abstract

Carnatic music shines bright till today with the legacy left by our great Vaggeyakaras. One such composer who is worshipped by one and all in Carnatic music is the Uttama Vaggeyakara Tyagaraja. He has dedicated his life to music and has shown the path of connecting the divinity in music. He is considered as an Avathara Purusha and his compositions have taught the meaning of life to many musicians and great composers. Such is the power and greatness of Tyagaraja's music. One such composer belonging to this great Sishya Parampara is Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavathar. As a mark of his Bhakti towards his guru, Venkataramana Bhagavathar has composed and sung the glory of Tyagaraja. This paper aims to understand the aspects that hail the glory of Tyagaraja by looking at two of the compositions written by Venkataramana Bhagavathar.

Keywords: Uttama Vaggeyakara, Avathara Purusha, Sishya Parampara, Bhakti

Introduction:

Our country boasts of a highly respected relationship that can never be experienced in any other place in the world. That is the relationship between a Guru (Master) and a Sishya (Disciple). The Master is someone who enlightens the disciple and shows them the right path. One such great selfless Master who shared his abundant knowledge with his disciples is Tyagaraja. Amongst one of his prime disciple - Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavathar, is one of the main reasons behind the spread of the great Sishya Parampara of Tyagaraja like an ever growing Banyan tree. He has paid tribute to his guru by pouring his heart out in the compositions he composed. He has taken up different musical forms right from Storms to Mandalay and sung the glory of Tyagaraja. This is a small attempt to not only celebrate the glory of Tyagaraja but also bring to light the contribution of Venkataramana Bhagavathar on his guru.

Brief History of Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavathar

Venkataramana Bhagavathar was born in Thanjavur District in Tamilnadu on 18-12-1781. His father was Nannuswamy Ayyampettai. His mother tongue was Sourashtram. He was also fluent in Sanskrit and Telugu. His interest towards music made him travel to Tiruvayyaru. Initially he used to stand outside Tyagaraja's house and listen to his music. This was later on noticed by Tyagaraja and the blessed moment of the guru accepting the disciple became a turning point in the life of Venkataramana Bhagavathar. He served his guru whole heartedly for nearly 26 years and learned many compositions of his guru. Tyagaraja and Bhagavathar had a very beautiful Guru Sishya relationship. It is believed that initially Venkataramana was unable to grasp the lessons. So Tyagaraja prayed to Lord Rama to bestow knowledge in music to his disciple. Such is the love and affection that Tyagaraja had for his disciple. At this instance the krithi "Gnanamosagarada" was composed and after this incident it is said that Venkataramana



Sri Venkateswara University Tirupati

International Conference

" Modern Cultural Influences On Performing Arts And Fine Arts "

Pranav Journal Of Finearts

Volume :1 Issue : 2 December 2022

Special Issue

Bhagavathar easily grasped the lessons taught to him. Venkataramana Bhagavathar was one of the main reasons that till today we are able to enjoy and experience the compositions of Tyagaraja. His perseverance in writing down the compositions and notating them has paved way for celebrating one of the most greatest Vaggeyakaras of carnatic music. He settled down at Walajapet. Following his guru, he too composed in several musical forms like varnams,swarajati,keertana,shlokas,stotrams,thillanas,ashtotrams..His signature that he used in his compositions is “Ramachandrapura Venkataramana”. He has composed several compositions. Out of respect for his guru, he composed few songs on Tyagaraja that reflected his Guru Bhakti. Venkataramana Bhagavathar attained mukti on 15th December 1874. A temple is dedicated to him near the Tyagaraja Samadhi in Tiruvayyaru. The Department of Posts brought out a commemorative stamp on Venkataramana Bhagavathar on 27th December 2009.



Image:1

List of available compositions in praise of Tyagaraja

1. Guru Charanam-Shankarabharanam-Adi-Krithi	5. Guru Mangalashtakam
2. Guruvara Mahimala-Anandabhairavi-Adi-Krithi	6. Sri Guru stotram-Ashtakam
3. Vadarasane-Purvikalyani-Adi-Krithi	7. Adi Guru stotrapancharatnam
4. Mamaguru-Kedaragaula-Adi-Swarajathi[5]	8. Vyaaso Nigama-Shloka

A brief description of two of the compositions are followed below:

Gurucharanam, Ragam:Shankarabharanam, Talam: Adi

In this krithi it is observed that he tells the world to offer respect to one’s guru and avoid doing any sinful act.Surrendering to the gurus feet will help one to cross the ocean of samsara.

Pallavi: Gurucharanam Bhajare he manasa durita gunam tyajare

Anupallavi: Sharanagata Jana durityavali samharanam bhavaasaagara taranam shri

Charanam 1: Kakarlanvayajaladisha sangam shoka nikarasam harabiruthangam

Lokanugraha karam akalankam shri karunya Nidhim nisshankam

Charanam 2: Ramabhramma sudhimanitanayam Rama nama paripurita hridayam

Kamakoti sundaram anapayam prema Bhakti yuta jana samudayam

Charanam 3: Narada guru karuna patram sriman narayana dhrta divya sugaatram

Sarasa netram shubacharitam parama pavitram budhajana mitram

Charanam 4: Dhrtagalatulasimani haaram santatam aganita sevaka parivaaram

Atulita natajana tata mandaram shatasahsra kirtana krithi dheeram

Charanam 5 : Rajaraja paripujitha charanamrajita panchanadapurabharanam

Pujita bhusura vara shri Tyagarajahvayam anagham sakshaat shri

Charanam 6: Samadasadguna paripurnam amita gana shastrartha nipunam

Amala Ramachandrapuravara Venkataramana Bhagavatha vimala hridistham

Meaning: The one who rose from the ocean like a moon in the Kakarla dynasty, the one who removes sorrow from ones life, the one who blesses the whole world, the one who is pure at heart, the one who is an ocean of mercy, the one who cannot be doubted on anything. The son of Ramabharmma, the one whose heart is filled with Ramanama, the one who glows with radiance, the one who is always surrounded by his followers. The one who is blessed by Sage Narada, the one who has the almighty inside him, the one who is lotus eyed, the one who had an auspicious life history which was pure and the who maintained friendship with learned and wise men. The one who was adorned with a tulasi mala in his neck ,the one who was always surrounded by countless disciples, the one who always blessed people who worshipped him, the one who has written about hundred thousand krithis. The one who was worshipped by Adishesha (the serpent), the one who is considered as a precious ornament for Tiruvayyaru or Panchanada kshetra, the one who lived a pious life sticking to his tradition, he is none other than the one who is called by the name Sadguru Tyagarja. The one who was filled with six good virtues like selflessness, patience etc, the one who is an expert in the field of music, the one who resides in the pure heart of Venkataramana Bhagavathar.

Guruvara Mahimala, Ragam: Anandabhairavi ,Talam: Adi

Pallavi : Guruvaramahimala nemani bhuvilo koniyadadura

Anupallavi : Tiruvayyanaru puramuna velasina haribhaktha gresarulaku Tyagaraja

Charanam 1: Ninnareyi na swapnamunanduna pannuka venchesi

Mannana thoda madhavu paramuga konni krutulu jatagurchumanina shri

Charanam 2: Narada munu karunaku patrudata varada bhramamata

Saramaina ganamruta rasamu che sarveshvaruni santosha parachunata

Charanam 3: Ramachandra bhaktha rajiva sudharasa panudata

Ramachandrapuravara shri Venkataramana puravara Bhagyodayamata



Meaning: What do I tell about my guru-the one who was born in Tiruvayyaru and the one who is a great bhaktha of Lord Vishnu. How do I sing the glory of my guru who came in my dreams and told me to compose krithis on Lord Vishnu. My guru is blessed by sage Narada and he has made Lord Shiva happy with his aesthetic and knowledgeable music. How do I praise my guru under whom this Venkataramana Bhagavathar is fortunate to be a disciple.

From the description of both the krithis it can be observed that Venkataramana Bhagavathar has given many minute details regarding his guru's birth, his dynasty, his virtues, even to the extent of mentioning that he is equivalent to Lord (It is evident from the phrase Sarasa Netram-Lotus eyed). Like Lord Rama is everything for Tyagaraja, Tyagaraja was everything for Venkataramana Bhagavathar. The mention of Tyagaraja as "**Sadguru**" proves that he stood high in the heart of his disciple.

A brief musical analysis of the above two compositions:

- Style of composition: It is clearly evident that he has followed his guru's footsteps and has composed multiple charanams in both the songs. An interesting fact is both the songs start with the same word "Guru". This again reassures his respect and devotion towards Tyagaraja.
- Usage of rhyming patterns, prasa and yamakams (rhetorical patterns) and swarakshara patterns can be found in abundance in both the compositions. Quoting few examples from both the compositions below as follows:

Song 1: Gurucharanam, Ragam: Shankarabharanam:

Dwiteeyakshara prasa:

Kakarla-Shoka-Loka-shrika	Narada-Narayana; Sarasa-Parama
Ramabhramma-Ramanama-Kamakoti-Prema	Rajitha-Pujitha
Dhrta-tata	Amala-Ramana

Anthyakshara prasa:

Sangam- harabiruthangam	Anapayam - samudayam
Tanayam-hridayam	Charitram- mitram
Patram- sugaatram	Mandaram- Dheeram
Haaram parivaaram	Charanam-Bharanam
Akalankam - nisshankam	Purnam-Nipunam

Yamakam: **Raja-Rajaparipuritha** charanam-A beautiful yamaka pattern in the charanam 5

Anuprasa- **Atulita-natajana tata** in charanam 4 is a classic example of anuprasa.



Swarakshara: Both suchita and suddha swaraksharam are found in the pallavi and anupallavi respectively.

Song 2:

S	M
Sa	ra

S	R
Gu	Ru

Guruvarula,Ragam:Anandabhairavi

Dwiteeyakshara prasa:

Pallavi-Guru
Anupallavi-Thiru

Antyakshara prasa :

Ninna-Panna-Manna-Konna	Narada-Varada
Patrudata- bhramamata	Panudata-bhagyodayamata

Swaraksharam:Suchita Swaraksharam is found both in the pallavi and anupallavi

G	M
Gu	Ru

Ś N N, Ś , Ś ,
Vela si na

From the above observations we can understand that Venkataramana Bhagavathar was adept not only in portraying the glory of his guru by using the lyrics intelligently but was an expert musically as well. In both the compositions it can be observed that he has used his signature very meaningfully and conveys that emotion that no other person is greater than his guru and he feels extremely blessed and proud to be the disciple of Tyagaraja.

Conclusion:

They say that it is very difficult to get a master who can guide a disciple to the path of enlightenment. From the composition of Venkataramana Bhagavathar, it is evident that Tyagaraja was not only a great guru but at the same time a person of Sadguna-good virtues, one who always taught his disciples the importance of displaying faith in the almighty and staying away from worldly affairs. Having such a master is a great boon to the disciple. Venkataramana Bhagavathar is definitely a blessed disciple and he has done complete justice in portraying his guru Bhakti by offering such beautiful compositions and singing the glory of his guru. He has covered many details about Tyagaraja in his compositions. "Guru leka etuvanti Guniki" is one of the famous krithi of Tyagaraja. True to the words of Tyagaraja, his disciple also followed the same path of gurubhakti. "Guru Saakshat Param Bhramma"-A saying that means "The Master is equivalent to supreme god" that is how Tyagaraja was for Venkataramana Bhagavthar. It would not be surprising to tell that for Venkataramana Bhagavathar it was "Sadguru Tyagaraja Saakshat Param Bhramma". Last but not the least this one shloka is enough to understand the greatness and glory of Tyagaraja.

vairāgye śuka eva bhaktivisaye prahlāda eva svayam |

brahmā nārada eva cāpratimayos sāhitya sa!gītayo

yo rāmāmṛta pāna nirjīta śivas ta” tyāgarājam bhaje ||

The meaning of this shloka is that “Tyagaraja is like Vyasa in Vedic studies,like Valmiki in his poetic instincts,like sage Suka in detachment towards worldly affairs,like Prahlada in portraying bhakti,like Narada in his musical wisdom. the one who surpasses Lord Shiva in chanting the Rama nama”.Venkataramana Bhagavathar worships and salutes that great guru Tyagaraja.

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9. Image-1: Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavathar with Tyagaraja and a stamp issued on the memory of Bhagavathar-Source: Google Images



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Pranav Journal Of Finearts

Volume :1 Issue : 2 December 2022

Special Issue