

THE VIJAYANAGARA MUSICOLOGICAL NONET

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Aim

To understand the importance of Lakshana Granthas so as to avoid the parallax that's quite prevalent in recent times with respect to raga names, the authorship or the nature of a raga exposition and related terminologies.

Abstract

Theory kept pace with musical practice closely throughout the Vijayanagar period, maintaining a remarkable spatio-temporal continuity through the theoretical works. Each work records a revolutionary and seminal concept or development, cumulatively resulting in modern Carnatic music. Nine such musicological treatises were composed in the Vijayanagar period. These may be called the *Vijayanagar Musicological Nonet* or the *Vijayanagar Sangeethashastra navaratnagalu*.

Keywords

Vijayanagara nonets, Lakshana, Sangeethasaara, Taaladeepika, Swaramelakalanidhi, Ramamatya, Raga, Taala, Prabandha, Veena.

Introduction

The Vijayanagara Empire came into being in the early part of the 14th Century when Southern India came under Muslim invasion. The Hindu kingdoms who were ruling this part of the country were weakened and eventually subdued by the Muslim forces. The Vijayanagara Empire rose to repel the Muslims and re-establish Hindu dominance. Over the next two centuries, the Vijayanagara Kings extended the empire to cover most of Southern India and established peace and stability in the region which was essential for cultural survival and development. This was the historical backdrop against which development took place in different cultural spheres such as literature and fine arts, of which music was an important part. This presentation gives a historical overview and also describes the cultural factors which stimulated musical activity in the Vijayanagara Empire.

Throughout the Vijayanagara period, theory and musical practice kept pace with each other closely. Great musicologists like Vidyanarya, Salva Gopa Tippendra, Kallinatha, Kumbhakarna, Ramamatya, Laksmanarayana, Pandarika Vittala, Somanatha, Locana Jha and Hrdayanarayanadeva contributed to musical theory of both North and South India during this period. Tanappacharya, Govinda Dikshita and Venkatamakhin made foundational contributions from Tanjore about a century later. Each work of these scholars records a revolutionary and seminal concept or development which cumulatively resulted in modern Carnatic music. Nine musicological treatises of great significance were composed in the Vijayanagar period and these have been called the Vijayanagara Sangitashastra Navaratna or the 'Vijayanagara Musicological Nonet'.



1. Sri Vidyaranya's Sangithasara

Sri Vidyaranya has written a musicological work called Sangithasara which brought in revolutionary changes introducing the concept of Mela in Ragas for the first time in the history of Karnataka music. The speciality of his work is that it takes some of the concepts of the earlier Grama-Murchhana-Jati system and integrates them seamlessly into the new Mela system, laying the foundation for the further refinement of the Mela concept in the next few centuries in Karnataka music. This work has been extensively quoted by Sri Govinda Deekshitha (who was the minister to Sri Raghunatha Nayaka of Tanjore in the early 17th century) in his work Sangithasudha(nidhi).

The Sangithasara by Sri Vidyaranya (1336 to 1386 A.D.), the Guru of the founders of the Vijayanagara empire, is chronologically the first musicological work of the Vijayanagara Empire. Though it is not available in manuscript form, the Mela and other concepts given in this work have been described by Sri Govinda Deekshitha in his musicological treatise 'Sangithasudha(nidhi)' written in the early 17th century. Sri Govinda Deekshitha was a versatile traditional scholar well-versed in advaita philosophy, a great benefactor and builder of temples and choultries. He was the prime minister to Sri Raghunatha Nayaka, King of Tanjore.

Sri Vidyaranya's work is the very first to describe the Mela system in the history of Karnataka music. In this system, a group of Ragas is called a Mela. There are totally fifteen Melas and fifty Ragas belong to them. The fifteen Melas as per this system are: Natṭa, Gurjari, Varatī, Sri, Bhairavi, Shankarabharana, Ahari, Vasantabhairavi, Samanta, Kambodi, Mukari, Suddharamakriya, Kedaragaula, Hejjujji, Deshakṣhi.

For the Ragas mentioned above, the Sangithasudha describes the Graha, Amsha, Nyasa svaras. Graha, Amsha, Nyasa have been described in earlier musicological works such as Sangitharatnakara as the Lakshanas for Jatis. Before describing the different Ragas, Sri Govinda Deekshitha describes the various Angas of Ragalapana which are Akshipthika, Ragavardhini, Vidari, Sthayi, Vardhani/Makarini, Nyasa. For each of the fifty Ragas, the Alapa procedure through different stages has been described very clearly in the Sangithasudha(nidhi).

Apart from the Mela system, other details given in this work are: Features of a Vaggeyakara (composer), Features of a Gayaka (singer), Types of Gayakas. The Mela system propounded by Sri Vidyaranya presented a revolutionary concept in the grouping of Ragas, as it laid the foundation of the Mela systems described by later musicologists. It has also been opined that Sri Vidyaranya's system bears some similarity to the Paṇ-Palai system of Tamil music.

2. Sri Devanacharya's Sangithamukthavali

Sri Devanacharya was a choreologist in the court of Sri Devaraya II who reigned from 1425 AD to 1446 AD. Not much is known of him except that he was the disciple of one named Raghu. He was also known as 'Devendracharya'. He has written a treatise called Sangithamukthavali which is dedicated to dance. However, it also contains important information related to Tala perimeter in the Vijayanagara period.



3. Saluva Gopa Thippendra's Taaladeepika

Taaladeepika is a work by Sri Saluva Gopa Thippendra or Sri Salva Gopa Thippa Bhupala who was Viceroy under Devaraya II. He has an inscription dated 1474, therefore this work must have been written around that time. It is in this work that for the first time in Indian musicological history, the ten vital elements of Taala, called the 'Tala-Dasha-Pranas' have been described. He has also listed over a hundred Deshi Talas, some of them his own creations. Majority of the Dasha Pranas are aligned to the Margi Talas.

4. Chathura Kallinatha's Kalanidhi

Kallinatha was the musicologist who was under the patronage of the Vijayanagara King Devaraya II who reigned between 1425 AD to 1446 A.D. The 'Kalanidhi' commentary by Sri Kallinatha on the famous work, the 'Sangitharatnakara' by Nishanka Sarangadeva, It is considered as one of the most important commentaries written on this work as Kallinātha has not only explained Nishanka Sarangadeva's original shlokas, but also in some instances, highlighted certain developments occurring in music during his time. These developments paved the way for revolutionary changes in music subsequently. The contemporary developments mentioned by Kallinatha signify important developments in the Svara system, Ragas, Prabandhas and Tala system. These paved the way for major changes in both these systems in the subsequent centuries.

5. A Telugu commentary by Bhandaru Vittaleshwara on the Sangitaratnakara in the last quarter of the fifteenth century forms the fourth of the navaratnas. Though there seem to be no details about the author or his work, he himself quotes that his father Keshava was honoured for his musical prowess with three thousand tolas of gold by Ghiyasuddin Sultan of Mandwa in Gujarat.

6. Sri Bhandaru Lakshminarayana's Sangeetha Suryodaya

This work was composed by the musicologist and dance teacher Sri Bhandaru Lakshminarayana who was in the court of King Krishnadevaraya. His introductory section mentions military campaigns of his patrons, which gives important historical data. It can be inferred from these that the work was composed between 1509-1529 A.D. It comprises of five chapters on Tala, Nritta, Svara, Jati and Prabandha. It does not deal with the topics of Ragas and Vadyas (musical instruments). It is surprising to see a section devoted to Jatis though they had become obsolete at this point of time. The author devotes a large portion of the work to Nritta as he was primarily a dance teacher. This work borrows heavily from the 'Sangitharatnakara'. In the Tala chapter, there are some significant developments described by him which are:

- Virama and Anudruta have both been mentioned as Angas. This is the first time that Anudruta has been mentioned as an Anga in a musicological work of the Vijayanagara period. This has been used in the lakshanas of Talas and also in Prastara and related Merus. Kriyas for Anudruta and Virama have also been described.
- A new Margi – Kshipra has been described, in addition to the four given in Sangitharatnakara
- Clear definitions for the five Jatis - Chathurashra, Tryashra, Mishra, Khanda and Sankeerna have been given for a span of 4, 3, 7, 5 and 9 laghu aksharas. The Jatis have been associated with Deshi Talas. These Jatis have been used in the lakshana of Talas.



- The other original contribution by the author of this work is in the chapter on Prabandhas, where he mentions new forms in contemporary lakshya such as Koulū (Khayāl?) and Gajalu (Ghazal?) which might have come into Indian music due to Muslim influence.

7. Sri Achyutaraya's Talakalabdhhi

Talakalabdhhi is a work by the King Achyutharaya around 1543 AD. The work is dedicated to the description and analysis of the ten Pranas of Tala (Dasha Pranas). The author quotes extensively from the 'Sangitharatnakara'. He seems to be aware of Kallinatha's commentary of the 'Sangitharatnakara' (though he does not mention it by name) because some of his descriptions match those of Kallinatha. As in the case of Sangithasuryodaya, the author sticks to the 'Sangitharatnakara' and earlier texts in many of the conceptual definitions especially pertaining to Margi Talas. However, he has introduced some original ideas which he tries to demonstrate as a continuation of the earlier concepts. The author first describes Tala on the lines of the description in the 'Sangitharatnakara'. He then takes up the Dasha Paranas.

This work is the second work in the Vijayanagara period after the Taladeepika which is devoted to the analysis of Talas. It is far more elaborate than the latter as it mentions many other Lakṣaṇa Granthas such as Sangitharatnakara, Sangithachudamani and Talakalavilasa, the last named not being extant. For each of the Tala dasha pranas, the author has taken into consideration the information from all these Lakshana Granthas and analysed them. The author has proposed new ideas but he has prefaced them with quotes from earlier works, notably the 'Sangitharatnakara'. He has demonstrated the continuity with respect to earlier tradition while putting across new developments. Some of the noteworthy features of this work which are mentioned for the first time in Lakṣaṇa history are given below:

This is the only Lakshana Grantha in the Vijayanagara period (perhaps the first in Lakshana history) which defines Kala in terms of Kshana, Lava, Koota etc.

8. Ashtavadhana Somanarya's Natyachudamani

Sri Somanarya was an Ashtavadhani, vide who was able to conduct eight different activities at the same time. He also uses the names Somanatha, Somappa and Somasuri and is said to be a student of Sri Sitharama. According to scholars, he lived during the reign of King Achyataraya. He has composed the work Natyachudamani. This work has many musical concepts described for the first time such as the Suladi form and the Tambura instrument. It also displays a unique approach to Svaras, Gamakas and mentions the classification of thirty-two Ragas as Stri and Purusha.

9. Sri Ramamatya's Swaramelakalanidhi

This work was written at the behest of King Rama Raja (Aliya Rama Raya, the son-in-law of Krishnadeva Raya) by Sri Ramamatya, his minister, in August 1550 A.D. Sri Ramamatya was also an excellent musician and composer of many musical works such as EIA, Ragakadamba, Sudaka. This work deals primarily with Ragas and does not cover Talas and Prabandhas. It takes up the Mela system and describes the classification of Ragas and the different Shuddha and Vikruta svaras constituting the Melas. As has been well-recognized, Svaramelakalanidhi represents a very significant departure from the Lakana Granthas composed before it as it removed redundant elements from the Vikruti Svara system and streamlined it to provide a



proper structure in keeping with contemporary practice. His Mela system too did away with the association of Ragas with the Grama system and represented a new approach. His classification of Ragas and design of the fretted Vina were the result of a practical approach. Thus, Svaramelakalanidhi could be considered as the below ground-level foundation of the musical systems of Karnataka music prevailing today.

The importance of Svaramēlakalānidhi is because it is a very practical-oriented work and is more relevant and related to the modern practice than the books written prior to it. This work has documented certain contemporary developments for the first time.

- Svara arrangement - The concepts of Vadi, Samvadi, Vivadi and Anuvadi are now independent of the concept of Grama and stand alone. The concept of Adhara Shruthi has been mentioned for the first time. The number of Vikruti Svaras is given to be 7 as compared to 12 mentioned by Sarangadeva. Consecutive 3- shruthi intervals in Svaras were now allowed. Two consecutive Svaras could occupy the same pitch position and be called by different names, e.g. Panchashruthi Rishabha and Shuddha Gandhara. Thus, the total number of Svaras available in an octave or Sthayi was 16. These spanned 12 Svara-Sthanas or specific pitch positions. The concept of two different svaras occupying the same pitch position is unique to Karnataka music even today and is not seen in Hindustani or Western Classical music.
- The 6-Shruthi value for a svara (Madhyama) mentioned by Kallinatha in his Kalanidhi commentary which was an exception in his time, now became the norm and is seen to be commonly used for other svaras like ri and da. Usage of 5-shruthi ri and da also is more commonplace. Shadja and Panchama were now unalterable, i.e. they did not have Vikrithi varieties. Vikruthi pa was now called Chyuta Pancama Madhyama and considered to be a variety of Madhyama rather than Pancama.
- Veena - For the first time, the concept of Svayambhu Svaras was used to arrive at the Svaras of the Veena. In five steps, all the frets of the Veena could be placed. In the Grama system, the three octaves in vogue were the Mandra, Madhya and Tara Sthayis. Sri Ramamatya increased the range by adding two more octaves in his Veenas – Anumandra and Atitara Sthayis. Sri Ramamatya introduced in his Veena 3 strings which are placed perpendicular to the 4 main strings and tuned to sa, pa, sa. These are used even today in the South Indian Veena. There are some Svaras which can be played on more than one string. There is a technique to determine which string should be used to play a particular svara. This is known as Pakka Sarani and was introduced in this work for the first time. The tuning system for Madhyamela Veena introduced by Sri Ramamatya- Anumandra pa, Mandra sa, Mandra pa and Madhya sa for the four main strings consecutively – is in vogue in the Veena in Karnataka Music even today.

Conclusion

The coining of these treatises as Musicological Nonets essayed during Vijayanagar rulers is not cited or documented. It is just with mere interest that this name will seem vivid in the study of these treatises.

The change in the Svara system as seen in the works of Chatura Kallinatha and Sri Ramamatya is in continuation of the Mela system, first seen in Sri Vidyanarya's Sangithasara, which was the first ever musicological work in Karnataka music and serves as a bridge between the ancient Grama system and the modern Mela system, as it retains some of the features of the former (such as the definitions of Graha, Amsha and Nyasa svaras) at the same time building a



foundation on which the Mela system of subsequent musicologists was built. The Tala system underwent fundamental changes as seen in the musicological works written exclusively on Tala.

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