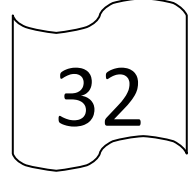


## MUSICAL FORMS IN SŌPĀNA SANGĪTHA

**Vishnuprabha.P**  
**Department of Music**  
**Sree Sankaracharya University of Sanskrit, Kalady**



### **Abstract**

The extensive contribution of India to the world is its variegated and rich art forms , with a great spirituality . Temples played a vital role for the development of several art forms . Kerala's own and a unique musical form , Sōpāna Sangītha can be traced to the temples of Kerala. The songs filled with devotional essence which are sung standing in front of the Sanctum Sanctorum of a temple with the accompaniment of the Edakka {percussion instrument} is called Sōpāna Sangītha . This Paper deals with the details of the Musical forms present in the Sōpāna Sangītha. There are Musical forms such as Tyānīs ,Nātya, Aṣṭapathi and Kīrthanās are mentioned and also the rare ragas and talas . The Prominent Singers, Composers, Instruments used in Sōpāna Sangītha are also discussed under the topic.

**Keywords:- Sangita,Sopanam, Sanskrit , Raga ,Natyam**

### **Introduction**

Bhakti is an inevitable part of Sōpāna sangītha and it is the most powerful way to reach god. Sōpāna sangītha is a branch of music that was popular in Kerala Centuries ago . It was the most important music in Kerala, atleast until the 18<sup>th</sup> century, when other influential musical forms did not come into vogue . It is an art form that is used to complement the daily “Anuṣṭāna” rituals in the temples of Kerala and equal to edakka kottipādi ceremonies. Although there have been many Musical forms throughout the ages , but Sōpāna Sangītha has survived the most from the centuries ago to present day . In earlier period , this art form was known as Kottipādisēva, Nadakkalpātu etc<sup>1</sup>. Carnatic music gained a lot of popularity in Kerala during the period of Maharaja Swathi Thirunnaal. But Sōpāna Sangītha existed even before that. When the art form Kathakalī was born , Carnatic music has not reached Kerala . Therefore Kathakalī music was surely sung in the Sōpāna style of music that existed at that time. It is said that overtime it was changed to Carnatic style of music.

Sōpāna music can be said to be a tributary of ancient Tamil music . Tamil literature such as Chilapathikāram has clearly mentioned the developed form of rāga music , rules and also about the musical instruments . Saptaswarangal were known as kaikilai , uzhai, ili, vilari and tāram. If Sōpāna Sangītha can be traced to that period it should also have a strong base on rāga . Most of the Sōpāna singers in Kerala opine that the ancients purely handled with precise Swara Prayōgās in each rāga. But no one has been able to any exact origin of Sōpāna Sangītha.

In Sōpāna Sangītha , nowadays there are two types of Musical forms are used, Tyānīs and Aṣṭapathi. Apart from these , Kīrthanās are also sung which are created later and solely meant for Sōpāna Sangītha . Another form called ‘Nātyam’ figured in Sōpāna many years ago . But today it seems to be extinct.



## Tyānīs

Tyānīs are short songs and one of the important forms of Sōpāna that are preserved and presented today. The word Tyāni is derived from the Sanskrit word “Dhyānam”<sup>2</sup>. There are different dhyāna slōkās in Sanskrit in praise of many deities . The Tyā nīs are composed in Malayalam language with the shade of these dhyāna slōkās in Sanskrit . The Sanskrit slōkās are composed entirely depending on tantric rituals<sup>3</sup>. Tyānīs are mostly seen in four couplets. It does not Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charana. There are different Tyānīs in varied rāgās and tālās praising many deities in different temples of Kerala . Each Tyāni is prescribed for a specific Pūja. Rāgās and Tālās also have this strictness. There are several ragas usually for singing tyānīs which are called Nidhāna rāgās . In the Mahākshētras in Kerala there are usually five pūjas and evening dīpārādhana . Usha pūja , Ethirtha pūja , Panthīradi pūja , Ucha puja , Athāzha pūja are the pūjas which are usually done in the Kerala temples<sup>4</sup>.

Each rāga and prescribed tyāni is sung according to the time prescribed for pūja . Nidhāna rāgās are Dēśākṣi , Śrīkanti, Nalatha, Malahari, Āhiri, Bhūpāli, Sāmanthamalahari, Nātta, Andhari, Puranīru and Andhāli . At dawn, during Usha pūja , Dēśākṣi rāga is sung in Triputa tāla. In the Morning , when Ethirtha pūja is taken place , Tyāni in Śrīkanti rāga set to Triputa tāla is sung . And in the late morning , during Panthīradi pūja , Tyāni sung is in Nalatha rāga and in Rūpaka tala . For the Usha pūja at noon , Tyāni in Malahari rāga is sung in Rūpaka tāla. And also if the pūja is delayed at the noon Āhari is sung with Triputa tāla . For Dīpārādhana, Sāmanthamalahari is sung with Triputa tāla . At night for Athāzha pūja , Nātta or Bouli are sung with Triputa tāla and in Pradhōṣa Andhāli rāga and Chempa tāla are used . Tyānīs among Nidhāna rāgās are listed below:-

| Beginning words | Rāga            | Tāla    | Type of Pūja            |
|-----------------|-----------------|---------|-------------------------|
| Mathikala Mudi  | Dēśākṣi         | Triputa | Usha Pūja               |
| Kshirāmbudhi    | Śrīkandi        | Triputa | Ethirtha Pūja           |
| Kodiyum kūde    | Nalatha         | Rūpaka  | Panthīradi Pūja         |
| Malarvathinu    | Malahari        | Triputa | Ucha Pūja               |
| Kamsa kimsana   | Āhiri           | Triputa | Ucha Pūja (get delayed) |
| Nīlakanda       | Sāmantamalahari | Triputa | Dīpārādhana             |
| Udhathan vatam  | Bauli           | Chempa  | Athāzha Pūja            |

In rāga Puranīr , there is also a Tyāni , the starting line is “Sarasija nayanē parimalagāthri”. Almost all the temples of Kerala follows this pattern . During the morning there is a waking up ceremony called ‘Palliunarthal’ of the preceding diety of the temple<sup>5</sup>. During this ritual the rāga Puranīr and tāla Chempata are used.

## Rāga Details

In the Usha pūja , rāga Dēśākṣi is used to sing the Tyāni . In carnatic music Bilahari’s ārohana-avarōhana with Kaiṣiki Niṣāda is equivalent to Dēś ākṣi. There is a Tyāni starting with the sahitya “Mathikala mudi thannil “. This is a usual Tyāni commonly seen and is in praise of Lord Gaṇapathi.

The Sanchārās of rāga Dēśākṣi as sung in the temples of Kerala and Tyāni is given below:-

Sa ni da,sa,sa sa ri ri ma ga ri/ pa,ma ga ri/ma,ga ma ma rig a sa/sa sa ri ri ma ga ri/sa rig a sa ri / sa, ni da sa, pa, pa,/ da da ni da pa ,/ ma, pa da ma, pa / ma ga rig a pa , ma, ga ri / ma, ga/ ma ma rig a sa/ sa sa ri ri ma ga ri/

## Tyāni in Dēśākṣi Rāga:-



Mathi kala mudi tannil mēvina  
Mātanga mukha nāga bhūṣaṇa  
Mathi thannil ninachanpil nin padam  
Itha kanivōde kūppunnēn jaya  
Sarasija puthu poovil santhatham  
Sarasamāyi sukhichanpil mēvina  
Saraswathy dēvi nin pādāmbujam  
Swara rīti varuvan vanangunnēn.’’

One of the Sōpāna singers depicted the Sanchārās and Bhāvas of Dēśākṣi rāga they use traditionally . And also he sang the Tyāṇi in this rāga . The Sanchārās of Dēśākṣi is sung in a beautiful pleasing way with a melodic waving effect and giving more emphasis to the Bhāva. The gliding prayōgās are mostly seen in those phrases . So it reveals the importance of Jāru prayōga in Sōpāna Sangītha.

During the time of Ethirtha Pūja the rāga used for singing is Śrīkandi . In Carnatic music there is no rāga called Śrīkandi . In ancient tamil music , there is a raga called Śrīkandi. There is a slight similarity in the names of these rāgās . This has got the resemblance of rāga Kambhō ji in Carnatic music . Ooramana Rajendra Marar , one of the famous Sōpāna gāyakan in Kerala , said that these type of rāgās are sung according to the hereditary tune taught by their gurūs . In Panthīradi Pūja, Naḷatha rāga is used and also it is a rare one not found in Carnatic music.

## Nātyam

Like Tyāṇīs , Nātyams are also small kṛtīs with 8 lines. Nātyams are mostly composed in the rāgās such as Śrīkandi , Bhūpāli, Bawḷi, and Indaḷam . In earlier times it is said that the Nātyams existed in lot of rāgās . Overtime the singing of Nātyams declined and Aṣṭapathīs and kīrthanās became more accepted.

In Ethirtha Pūja , a Nātyam composed in Śrīkandi rāgam praised in Dēvi Saraswathi was used:-

“Sangīthāmbuja bringē śaraṇam

Saraswara rasa kārini śaraṇam

Sarvaiśwaraya samdāyini śaraṇam

Sakalādhīpathi saraswathi śaraṇam

## Aṣṭapathi

Aṣṭapathi composed by Jayadēva ( gīta gōvinda) with the Sanskrit hymns in the 12<sup>th</sup> century. It is the latest introduction to the Sō pāna Sangītha compared to the other forms. It is a very beautiful musical form in which lyrics , rāga, tāḷa are equally important. The Bhakthi aspects of Aṣṭapathi is very rich and found mostly in the praise of Lord Kṛṣṇa. Nowadays, Aṣṭapathi has become widely accepted and new innovations and creations are also taking place in it.



## Kīrtanās

Kīrtanās sung for Sōpāna Sangītha might be a later introduction . Composers of Kīrtanās include Ṣatkāla Govinda Marar and many others such as Thrikka mburam Krishnan kutti Marar (a well known Sōpāna musician ), Kaippilli Keshavan Namboothiri, Ooramana Rajendra Marar contributed a lot of Compositions in Sōpāna Sangītha. Some kīrtanās of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal and Iriyimman Thampi are also used for singing Sōpāna.

Ṣatkāla Govinda Marar composed many Sōpāna kīrtanās . One of his kīrtana is 'Kshīra sāgara vāsara mādharma' in Kēdaragoudam rāga set in chembada tāla . This kīrtana is about Narasimha Mūrthi . Apart from that, Thrikkampuram Krishnan kutti Marar composed some Kīrtanās for singing Sōpāna. Some of his kīrtanās are:-

Kīrthiyēridum – Madhyamāvathi – Chempada tāla – Narasimha mūrthy

Sandhānagōpāla – Nāta/khamās – Chempada – Viṣṇu

Madana Dahana – Surutty – Chempada – Bhagavathy

Kaipilli Keshavan Namboothiri is also composed Sōpāna kīrtanās and he composed Daśāvathāra kīrtanās and Navarāgamālika . Ooramana Rajendra Marar , a prominent Sōpāna musician, composed some Kīrtanās. Such as:-

Vandē māthe – Kānada – Chempada – Bhagavathy

Madana kōmala – Yadukulakāmbhōji – Chembada – Bhagavathy

## Accompanying Instruments in Sōpāna Sangītha

- Edakka – Edakka is a divine auspicious instrument that is mostly used as an accompaniment of Sōpāna Sangītha.
- Chēngila – The Chēngila is an instrument used for temple rituals , Kathakāḷi Music and also Sōpāna Music . While singing Sōpāna Sangītha, the tāla made by Chēngila
- Thoppimaddalam – Thoppimaddalam is an instrument that was formerly used as an accompaniment of Sōpāna Music.

## Popular Sōpāna Musicians and Institution

- Njeralathu Rama Poduval of Thirumāndhāmkuṅṅu Bāni
- Janardhanan Nedungadi of Guruvāyūr
- Damodara Marar
- Sadanam Divakara Marar
- Pallavoor Kunjukutta Marar
- Thrikkamburam Krishnan kutty Marar
- Ooramana Rajendra Marar
- Eloor Biju



- Ambalapuzha Vijayakumar  
**Institution**  
Kshētra Kala pītam Vaikam

## Conclusion

Sōpāna Sangītha as existed in ancient days had a strong base of Rāgās and Tāḷās . It should have follow the system of Tamil Music in those days . And Sopāna has given the background music to Kathakaḷi which is more developed . Nowadays,both Kathakaḷi and Sōpāna have been enriched by the presence of many Carnatic rāgās , which might have affected the original version of the singing.

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