

YALPANAM N VEERAMANI IYER: AN ASTONISHING VAGGEYAKARA AND INCREDIBLE DANCER

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AIM

To introduce a new legendary composer Yalpanam N Veeramani Iyer to the Carnatic field and to popularize his composition which need to be acclaimed and was not yet popular in South India

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PROSOPOGRAPHY OF YALPANAM N VEERAMANI IYER

There are only a handful of modern Carnatic composers who have a legacy of more than a thousand pieces. One of them lived in a small village in Sri Lanka named Brahmashri Maha Vidwan Yalpanam N Veeramani Iyer. He was born in the village of Inuvil at Jaffna in the year 1931 as the son of Bhramasri N Nataraja Iyer and Sundarambal. The district of Yalpanam is located in the northern section of Sri Lanka. Veeramani Iyer was a child prodigy and exhibited his versatility in a variety of endeavors. In 1947, he won the prize for Best All-Rounder at Manipay Hindu College.

He moved to Tamil Nadu to pursue his artistic passions after completing his Senior School Certificate with the help of his brother. He lived in Madras, the cultural capital of Carnatic music, where he pursued his passion for all types of art. In the early days after the founding of Kalakshetra, possibly India's most famous fine arts institution, he learned Bharatha Natyam under the legendary Rukmini Devi Arundale. He studied vocal music from Padamasri M D Ramanathan and found a sahitya master in Papanasam Sivan. It is found that, Veeramani Iyer's works have slight similarities to Papanasam Sivan's compositions.

He was appointed as a sahitya expert for SMV (Saiva Mangayar Vidyalayam) during this time, and it was around this time that he composed one of his magnum opus dance dramas, Mylai Kuravanji, which is based on the presiding deities of Mylapore Kapaleeswara Temple. 'Karpagavalli Nin' one of the songs in this kuravanji, has given Veeramani Iyer an untold fame throughout the Carnatic world. The text of this beautiful song was inscribed on one of the Kapaleeswar Temple's granite pillars, with the words 'Yazhpanam Veeramani Iyer'. This may have prompted many followers around the world to acknowledge the Jaffna peninsula's significant contribution to Carnatic music.

The Mylai Kuravanji, like many of his other works, has largely been lost, particularly due to a lack of access to the original musical notation; while the lyrics have recently been discovered, but credit to the original composer has been lacking. During Veeramani Iyer's time in Tamil Nadu, renowned artists such as Maharajapuram Santhanam, Dr. M Balamuralikrishna, Sirkazhi Govindarajan, T M Soundararajan, and the Soolamangalam Sisters contributed their voices to his compositions, bringing great pride to Jaffna tradition.

He returned to Jaffna and began teaching music and dance at Manipay Hindu College and



Manipay Mahalir College. He frequently collaborated with others to create fantastic dance dramas. This was his forte; a reflection of his singular talents in the realms of music, dance, poetry, and narrative, as well as his vision of these fine arts as constituent parts of a larger whole. Many Sri Lankans say the fact that there was no other dance drama composer like Veeramani Iyer. It is mentioned that he has written over 350 dance dramas [*R:1], many of which were regrettably never staged beyond their original versions. Many dance dramas in Sri Lanka today are modelled after his manner, and his legacy is frequently credited with helping to establish an indigenous style and context for Carnatic music in the nation. Tiruvasagam Tanta Manivaasagar, Tiruketheeswara Kuravanji, Kannapar Kuravanji, Vishwaroopa Dharisanam, Sri Kathirkama Kanthan Kuravanji, Arjunan Thavam, and Karnan are some of the other dance dramas. Kritis were Veeramani Iyer's strongest suit. He was efficient in composing on the spot, with the beauty and bhakti but this fact was frequently not acknowledged by others because of his simplicity. He worked with a wide range of ragas, talas, themes, deities, and religions, and he was a prolific scholar. Mylai Keertanams, 175 Tala Keertanams, Tirukkural Keertanams, 35 Tala Keertanams, 72 Mela Raga Keertanams (based on the Karpagambal deity), Tirukuran Keertanams (based on the Quran), and Tiru Christuva Keertanams (based on the Bible) are among his many compositions.

'Sarangan Marugane' is a very famous ragamalika of Veeramani Iyer which demonstrates the minor variations between male and female ragas. He coupled different ragas with their female counterpart in each half avarthanam: Saranga with Saveri, Mohanam with Nayaki, and so on. Maharajapuram Santhanam, inspired by the beauty of this song, recorded it and continued to perform it in his concerts.

Many people are unaware that Veeramani Iyer was a driving force behind Jaffna University's decision to create a Fine Arts department. In 1971, he spoke about the importance of establishing a faculty for visual art, music, and dance to train and promote graduates in these subjects, allowing Sri Lankans to learn about their culture without travelling to another nation and spend considerable overseas fees. Unfortunately, these dreams were tainted by decades of civil war, which forced many people to flee Sri Lanka. Regardless, from the University's founding in 1974, the Faculty of Arts has been undoubtedly the best in the University (including the Ramanathan Academy of Fine Arts) and has produced a large number of fine arts graduates. When Yazhpanam N Veeramani Iyer died in 2005, he left behind an unforgettable legacy for his countrymen. Not only he educated and propagated many art forms, but also composed compositions that combined the beauty of Tamil, the richness of Hinduism, and the demand for national freedom – a fusion of music, dance, poetry, and devotion. Many of his pieces have either been lost or the original music cannot be found due to the afflictions that affected Sri Lankan Tamils and difficulties in preserving works during that period. While his name lives on unnoticed, the efforts of a small group of musicians and educators throughout the world are helping to resurrect his works and shed new light on his legacy. [R:1]



CONFLUENCE OF MUSIC AND LITERATURE

Here, several important elements from 72 mela compositions of Veeramani Iyer are examined.

These compositions are in praise of the Karpakamba of Kapaleswara Temple, Mylapore. There are other works by him praising deities like Vinayaka, Krishna, Muruga and so on. The study of this 72 Mela compositions of Yalpanam N Veeramani Iyer is relevant because they contain various aspects of music as well as the esoteric aspects of Karpakamba and Siva.

His composition contains the description of the glory of music and the underlying principles of the world. Yalpanam N Veeramani Iyer has also provided a definition and scope of creative composing style of music like Papanasam Sivan. By doing so, Veeramani Iyer enhanced greatly the greatness and sanctity of music.

Veeramani Iyer is highly influenced by his lyrical guru Papanasam Sivan. The best example for that is the use of Prasa. He cleverly used Antyakshara Prasa in all his composition and also used the Dvitiyakshara and Anu prasa in some of his composition. The method of adding Raga Mudra to the lyrics is also ingenious. The another special factor to be mentioned that, some of the compositions of Veeramani Iyer is also episodic and descriptive in nature like the composition of Papanasam Sivan. For example:

- “*Arahara mahātēvaṅ āṇantamāy urukum*” the composition in Kharaharapriya raga.

There is a line in the caranam,

“*sāmakāṇapriya sāmpacivaṅ kapāli*

Vāmapākam koṅṭa vaṭivāmpikai nīli”

which gives a clue Siva kept Parvati on his Left side of the body and forms Sivasakti Swaroopa which is also described by Papanasam Sivan in his composition ‘*Pati avaṅa ulakam patināṅkiṅ*’ in Chenchuriti Raga.

- “*Parvatā calanāṭaṅ putalvi – pārvati*” the composition in Chalanatta describes the episode of Siva who incinerated Kamadeva with fire in the last line of the caranam- “*Kaṇalāl eritta araṅ kapāli īsvari!*” and the continuation of this story is described in the caranam of “*Kāmavarttaṅi Kaṛpakāmpikē*” the Kamavardani Raga composition.

“*Pātātūḷiyaip pūjikkum mataṅam*

Vētaṅai tīrtta viriṅja nayaṅam”, here devi is worshipped as those who have lotus eyes which healed the pain of cupid who worship even the dust in the foot of Siva.

- “*Tiṅapantu nīyē tirumayilai*” the Subhapantuvarali raga composition. Here also in the caranam he used a sentence “*ciramaṅik kapāliyiṅ ciruṅkāra nāyaki*”

The word Siramani is a slash prayoga which can be illustrated in two ways: those who wear a lot of ornaments in the head and those who wear a skull on the head. Both the descriptions are accurate in the case of Siva. But here Siramani is associated with the word kapaliyin, so the apt meaning is those who wear a skull on the head. Here there is an episode of Siva, which is a continuation of the story “Siva is known as “Anaadi” which means endless. Lord Brahma and Vishnu once had a heated argument about their superiority. They arrived at Siva and after a long conversation, presented their case to him. On the next day, Siva transformed into a massive flame, and a holy voice tells Brahma and Vishnu that whomever finds the head and foot of that



flame,ie; the beginning and finish, would be regarded as superior. Later Brahma appeared as a swan in the upper part and Vishnu appeared as a pig in the lower part. Vishnu admitted defeat after searching for a long time and failing to reach the end of that flame. However, while Brahma started going upwards, one Ketaki flower was falling downwards. Brahma asked the flower to tell Lord Siva a lie. He approached Siva and informed him that he had seen the flame's head and that the soul witness was the Ketaki flower. Brahma and the Ketaki flower were cursed by Lord Siva, who was able to recognize the truth. Brahma is no longer worshipped in any temple as a result of this tragedy, and the Ketaki flower is considered unfit for Siva worship. The entire scenario can be depicted with abhinaya in dance. The above episode is also stated in the Chenchurutti Raga composition by Papanasam Sivan.

From the lyrics of all these songs, it is analyzed that, Veeramani Iyer wrote his compositions in episodic and descriptive manner, that are not less than the quality of the compositions of his guru Papanasam Sivan. The lyrics of his compositions which reflect his personality, knowledge in dance, music and literature are more meaningful and useful for the art forms like dance and drama.

ASPECTS OF BHAKTI

As we all know, Bhakti is the path to achieve 'mukti'. Bhakti is proposed as a solid criterion for achieving bliss. This composer has made devotion as a thread that runs through all of these pearl like compositions. Devotion is a kind of notion for supreme realization and it can be elevated to the position of a 'free movement.' This statement must be accepted since there are no castes, colours, religions, or sects in front of God's feet, and all devotees are one. Many distinctions, like as age and gender, are avoided in devotion, which can sometimes be an impediment to religious advancement. Devotion is also viewed as a tool for obtaining God's favor and experiencing eternal happiness.

Sage Narada and several others have defined Bhakti in the past. It was defined as being in the form of pure love (premarupa), immortal, and ever existing. Furthermore, anyone who had that experience will be joyful and will be eternally rewarded. Veeramani Iyer appear to be in perfect agreement with the previous views on Bhakti. According to him, Bhakti denotes love, affection, and other qualities, which are denoted by Sanskrit words such as 'prema,' 'Anuraga,' 'Preeti,' and 'Karuna'.

He adopted a type of bhakti known as Dasya Bhakti in most of his composition especially in 72 mela composition about Karpakambal. It is a type of bhakti that means devotion to God's feet. In this scenario, the devotee views himself to be God's servant.

Some examples from 72 Mela compositions:

- When I bow at your golden feet all my sins are gone (maṇṇiṭum porpātam eṇ viṇai karukkum- Kankangi raga)
- Oh Parvati! the one who protects(palini)those who serve your feet every day (patam nidam paṇintēn- Mayamalavagowla raga)
- Save me, O helpless one(tamiyēṇaipparipāli), by giving me Your lotus feet (tāmaraip



patantantē – Kharaharapriya raga)

- Your feet are my only help on this earth (Tirumalaraṭi tuṇai taruvāy taraṇiyil – Sankarabharanam raga).
- Oh cāmuṇṭi!cāmpavi! May I be blessed with your lotus feet (caraṇamalar aruḷvāy – Subhapanṭuvarali raga).
- Your lotus feet are as precious as the sweetest honey from the flowers (Pūmaturattēṇ porṇpatāmpujē – Kamavardani raga)
- Oh!The power of all mantras,(carvamantra cakti)
- Only your feet are my refuge (caraṇam caraṇākati! -Darmavati raga)

PHILOSOPHICAL ASPECTS

Philosophy can be described in various ways. There is yet to be a consensus on a final definition of philosophy. Philosophy is defined as a way of looking at life that nourishes people's hope and practical living. Every religion has a philosophy behind it, hence religion is considered the practical component of one's life, whereas philosophy is the idea behind it.

Veeramani Iyer appears to be a forward-thinking and progressive individual. It is clear that, the composer appears to believe in the sacredness of human life and philosophy. It is already stated above that; Bhakti is an interesting subject in Vedantic philosophy. Vedantic philosophies are used in the sahyita of the musical compositions by most of the composers.

For example:

Veeramani Iyer used some philosophical terms in his composition like:

- Composition -Kanakangi raga-In Anupallavi
Tatpara kapāli tāḷkkum mā mayilē
Cirparāyē kauri civakāmi mayilai

Kapāli(siva:the diety in the Kapaleeswara temple)which is equal to the meaning of the word 'tat', who embracing the Maha devi(ma maiyile:here devi is addressed as mayil[peacock]gowri, sivakami (other names of devi)who lives in Mylapore(mayilai: other name of Mylapore)as a form of 'chit sakti'.

- Composition -Todi raga-In Anupallavi
Parintōṭi maintiṭum piṇiviṇai yiṭṭanamē
Tirain tōṭi viṭaitaṇil tikaḷum arantaṇamē

Even philosophers are scrambling to answer the question of what constitutes principle.' (Tirain tōṭi) When the answer is revealed, it gleams with the wealth of Siva! (viṭaitaṇil tikaḷum arantaṇamē) All my faults will be cleansed by your blessing when I see you today (Parintōṭi maintiṭum piṇiviṇai yiṭṭanamē).

- Composition – Chalanatta -In Anupallavi
Tarmasamvarttaṇi tākṣāyaṇi umā
Varmamā karṇpakamē varantarāt tāmatamā?

Parvati, the daughter of Daksha, who enhances Dharma (tarmasamvarttaṇi tākṣāyaṇi umā) Is there any big quarrel to me (varmamā karṇpakamē) Is that the reason,for delaying your blessings (varantarāt tāmatamā?)



- Composition -Subhapantuvarali
Aṇupallavi
Mōṇac civapōta ṅāṇacakti māyē!
Tēṇamutāṇa Untaṇ tiruvaruḷ purivāyē!
Caraṇam
Varamaruḷ cupapantuvarāḷi vaiṣṇavi
Caraṇamalar aruḷvāy cāmuṇṭi cāmpavi
Ciramaṇik kapāliyiṇ ciruṅkāra nāyaki
Karamnitam kūppiṇēṇ karuṇaipuri tēvaki

Here devi is addressed as māya and tēvaki which means illusion or dream and black or divine respectively.

- Composition -Simhendramadhyamam -in caraṇam
Narasimhētra nārāyaṇaṇ cōtari
Sarasijalōcaṇi sarvalōkēsvari
Ciracacitāriṇi citrūpi civēsvari
Puracivanāyaki varamaruḷ īsvari

Used a word ‘citrūpi’ which means You are the wisdom.

CONCLUSION

Music, like all other traditional cultural aspects, is an intrinsic part of a society in which philosophy, science, politics, trade, and all other social phenomena must be seen spiritually. South Indian music has long been associated with worship centered around the temple and its surrounds, having emerged from religion. Furthermore, these works primarily contain Hindu scriptures on classic myths about gods and goddesses. The spiritual value of music drew the attention of our country’s finest philosophers. Music is seen by Indian philosophers as a means of elevating and illuminating the spirit. Music and philosophy aids man in comprehending his divine nature. The soul gets elevated through correct vocalization and then merges into ‘Sachchidananda’ or ‘Brahmananda.’ This exactly happens when one learns the inner meaning and music of compositions of Jaffna Veeramani Iyer.

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