

Sornakkadu Bhajana Paddhathi

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Abstract

Bhajana means to praise. In India, through ages people followed Sanathana Dharma and they prayed to Gods in different ways. From Kashmir to Kanyakumari there were many great saints and composers who worked hard for the propagation of Bhakthi among people. Earlier there were several difficult traditions to be followed to seek the blessings of Gods. Later on, people failed to follow them due to practical difficulties. At that period of time instead of giving up the tradition, great saints introduced the tradition of Nama Sankeerthanam or Bhajana. For this, they composed different bhajanas (small songs) and set congregational singing as medium. Thus, came the tradition of bhajana. Firstly, people of different areas and traditions had their own way of Bhajanas. Later on, all these traditions were brought under one roof and a tradition was followed where people would sing Jayadeva Ashtapadi, Abhang, Telugu compositions of Bhadrachala Ramdas, Annamacharya, Kannada compositions of Purandara Das and Vijaya Vittal Das, Dravida keerthanam (Tamil compositions). Thus, came the Bhajana Sampradaya. Sornakkadu is a village in Tamil Nadu where one such tradition is followed. It is said to be one of the ancient traditions.

Aim: The main aim is to throw light on one of the ancient Bhajana Sampradaya.

Key words: Bhajana Sampradaya, Sornakkadu

1. Introduction:

'Bhajanas are the greatest form of worship' said Rabindranath Tagore. To please anybody, we have to praise and sing their glory. The same way we have to sing the glory of God and praise him to seek his blessings. To do this, we have to follow a pattern and procedure. Only then we would get the desired results. We have different traditions in India which would guide us to this path of Bhakthi. In North people sang Ashtapadis, Meera bhajanas, Kabir bhajanas, Abhangs etc. In South, people sang Tharangams, Dasara Padagalu, Bhadrachala Ramdas Keerthanas and Annamacharya Keerthanas. But after some point of time, there came a tradition where all the bhajanas were compiled and a Paddhathi (tradition) was formed. This included almost all the compositions and bhajanas of great saints of India.

People were enlightened about the importance of bhajana and were made sing and chant the holy names of different Gods. One of the singers would lead and all others would follow him. Instruments like Harmonium, Dolki and Mrudangam and Jalra were used to accompany the congregational singing. Some of the bhajanas were done throughout the night and a specific pattern was also followed to perform this. Different books with the songs and bhajanas were published to enable the common people to follow the singing and participate with the group.



2. Bhajana, meaning and essence:

In simple term Bhajana means to praise. Here we praise the God to seek his blessings. For that there is a procedure to be followed. As a lame person, when we don't know to sing the glory of God by ourselves, we sing the songs and bhajanas composed by great saints who already had the experience of the blessings. It is said that Swaroop dhyana (God in a form) is easier compared to Aroopa Dhyana (formless). So, we pray to the Gods of different forms like Rama, Krishna, Devi etc. The main intention of this bhajana is to inculcate Bhakthi in each and every person and make everyone participate in the congregational singing.

3. Bhajanaa Paddhathi or procedure:

- **Thodaya Mangalam:** Every bhajana is started with Thodaya Mangalam. It is like invocation of God. We sing his praise and elaborate his qualities or gunas and surrender to him. This starts with Hari Narayana namavali. After that there are specific bhajanas that are sung like Jaya Janaki Ramana, Saranu Saranu, Murahara Nagadhara, Devesa Ganaradhitha and Madhava bhavathu they.
- **Guru Keerthana:** Guru is the one who shows us the path to reach God. Just as there is musical trinity, there is a trinity for sampradaya bhajana too. They are Bodhendral, Sridharayyaval and Sadguru Swami. So, the songs on great gurus are sung in this section. When in short of time, one 'Guru thraya dhyanam' is sung in praise of all the three gurus. Later on, few songs on other gurus like Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Raghavendra, Meesu Krishna and Gopala Krishna Bhagavathar were also added to the choice of the lead singer and place of bhajana. Some of the Meera and Kabir bhajanas are also included in the Santh section.
- **Ashtapadi:** Geetha Govindam comprises of twenty-four Ashtapadis narrating the divine love between Radha and Krishna. They include their short separation, their pining for each other, efforts of sakhi to unite them and their reunion. They are called Ashtapadis as they have eight stanzas in each of them. These are composed by Jayadeva (12th Century) and introduced to the South in 16th Century by Chaitanya Mahaprabhu.
- **Tharangam:** Krishna Leela Tharangini is Geya natakam written by Narayana Theerthar. The compositions in Krishna Leela Tharangini are called Tharangams. One of these tharangams is sung immediately after Ashtapadi.
- **Panchapadi:** As the name says they are songs of five great saints Bhadrachala Ramadas, Purandara Das, Sadasiva Bramendral, Gopalakrishna Bharathi and Sadguru Thyagaraja swamy. But earlier it was only Ramdas keerthana, Purandaradas and Dravida keerthanam. In this Dravida keerthanam, Bhagavathas used to sing Tamil compositions mostly Tevaram. Gopalakrishna Bharathi compositions were added later.
- **Puja:** This is a blend of Vaidika method and Bhajana tradition. God is invited to accept the puja and offerings. Abhinayam or dance is performed to enact the offerings. After Harathi, there will be recitation of Vedas, slokas of various shrines from Himalayas to the South. Shodasopacharamu, Sixteen types of offerings like Chathra (umbrella), Chamara (fan) Vyajana are offered.
- **Dhyana Keerthanas:** Songs on different deities starting from Ganesha, Sarawati, Muruga, Siva, Ambal, Rama, Krishna etc are sung along with suitable namavalis. A song on Panduranga is must before concluding. A song on Anjaneya is sung in conclusion of this section.



- **Divyanamam or Deepa Pradakshinam:** Lord Hari is invoked into the lamp and set in the centre. Then the Bhagavathas move around the lamp in circular motion and sing different keerthanas. There are many divyanama keerthanas written by Thyagaraja swamy in Telugu and Sanskrit.
- **Gopika Geetham:** These are the verses taken from Tenth chapter of Bhagavatha. This depicts the sorrow of gopikas parted from Krishna. After listening to their prayers, Krishna re-appears before them and then again, they joyously sing and dance to the verses of Kummi and Kolattam.
- **Deepa Samaropanam:** After few more slokas, songs and abhang, a Harathi is performed and the lamp is taken back to the deity.
- **Dolotsavam:** This is the process of putting the divine couple to sleep. Thyagaraja keerthanas like Heccharikaga ra ra, Koluvaivunnade, Aaragimpave, Vidamu seyave, Uyyalalooogavayya and Jo Jo Rama are sung. A screen is put before the deity for privacy. Silence is maintained signifying sleep. Suprabhatha is sung and the couple are gently woken up. Offerings and harathi performed while the curtains are removed.
- **Vasantha Kelikkai and Pavalimpu:** When kalyana utsavam for the divine couple is performed, Vasantha kelikkai and Pavalimpu are conducted in the evening in some places. Vasantha kelikkai is invocation of vasantha ruthu and indicates Hari's consort and her friend (sakhi) singing the glory of God describing the natural beauty etc. Pavalimpu is again putting the divine couple to sleep.

4.0 Propagation of Bhajana:

During Bhakthi movement, Jayadeva composed Ashtapadis and propagated bhakthi in the middle east region. In North, Meera bai, Kabir Das strived hard to inculcate bhakthi among people. Through their bhajanas they educated the poor with the essence of Vedas. People who couldn't chant Vedas or do Pujas sang these bhajanas and found easy way to divine bliss.

In Maharashtra, there were great saints like Samartha Ramadas, Gnanadev, Thukaram, Namdev, Janabai who composed various Abhangs in Marathi. This involved many common people into Bhakthi movement. Almost 500 years ago, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu started propagating the Bhajana sampradaya by introducing the Ashtapadi to South Indian Bhajana Sampradaya. Thus, these were adopted in South Indian Bhajana sampradaya. Great composers like Annamacharya, Bhadrachala Ramdas composed numerous keerthanas and conducted bhajana in their own way. Purandara Das, Vijaya vittal das, Kanaka das are some of the dasas who strived hard to pull the normal crowd into bhajana sampradaya.

In Tamilnadu, composers like Ootthukkadu Venkata Kavi and Gopala Krishna Bharathi established Bhakthi cult through their compositions. In down South, some three hundred fifty years back, great saints Bodhendral seated in Govindapuram and Sridharavenkatesar of Thiruvisanallur involved themselves in Nama pracharam. After 100 years of their period, Sadguru swamigal of Marudanallur compiled all the songs in the bhajana and formulated a procedure of bhajana sampradaya. His book 'Bhakthi sandeha dwaantha Bhaskaram' throws light on Bhagavatha sampradaya and describes bhakthi in detail.

Gopalakrishna Bhagavathar of Pudukkottai also propagated bhajana and bhakthi cult. The bhajana sampradaya we have today is the collaborate efforts of all these great saints and composers. This evolution in Bhajana sampradaya brought national integration in the minds of



the people by including the compositions of all states, languages throughout India.

5.0 Sornakkadu Bhajanaa Paddhathi:

Bhajanaa Paddhathi is the procedure followed by the bhagavathas to perform the bhajana. While performing Radha kalyanam and Sita kalyanam, Bhagavathas perform the kalyanam (marriage) of the divine couple. There is certain order and specific songs to perform. The bhagavathas used to follow the procedure adapt to the region and language. One such paddhathi is that of Sornakkadu. It is one of the ancient paddhathis that is carried on till date.

5.1 History about Sornakkadu: In 17th Century, in a tank called Haridra nadi in Mannarkudi of Thanjavur, idols of Sri Rama, Sita, Lakshmana and Anjaneya were found. They are Panchaloha idols (alloy of 5 metals) of one feet height each. The idols were handed over to then King Prathapa Simha who in turn gave those idols to a bhagavatha named Harikantam and asked him to stay in Sornakkadu and perform puja, abhishekam etc. He belongs to Harithasa Gothra of Mulakanadu sect of Telugu brahmin. The bhagavathar was also provided enough facilities to conduct daily puja and rituals. Later on, he handed over these to his only son in law Rangachari to continue the rituals. His eldest son Venkatnarayana bhagavathar took charge after his father. From then, the idols are being prayed by his descendants. Now 9th generation is conducting the festivals like Sri Rama Navami.

5.2 Narasimha idol: While digging the ground to construct a house for Lord Rama, the workers found a Panchaloha idol of Subramanya Swami. Though the bhagavathar family followed Vaishnavism and their family God is Narasimha, he placed the idol in puja.

Coincidentally, while taking bath in a tank, a saivaite brahmin of nearby village Arasarkulam found a panchaloha Narasimha idol. God appeared in their dreams and instructed them to exchange the idols. From them, Narasimha idol is also placed in Puja and Narasimha Jayanthi is also equally celebrated.

5.3 Location: Sornnakadu is a village situated 8 km from Peravurani of Thanjavur District of Tamilnadu and 18 km from Aranthangi of Pudukkottai District. It is also called as Saravana vanam and Suvarna vanam. This is one of the ten small villages (called as Dasagramam) Maangudi, Puvatthukudi, Vallavari, Ayangudi, Sornakkadu, Seriyalur, Thirunalur, Mookkudi, Nelladikaadu and Mannakudi.

5.4 Heritage of Sornakkadu bhajana paddhathi: According to the authentic information available, Mookkudi Sivarama iyer led the bhajana at Sornakkadu from 1780 to 1830. He was succeeded by Poovatthukkudi Lakshminarasimha bhagavathar from 1830 to 1875. After him Venkatakrishna iyer (brother-in-law of Gopalakrishna Bhagavathar) led the bhajana from 1875 to 1920. Under his guidance Gopalakrishna bhagavathar, Arasarkulam brothers (Sethurama iyer, Swaminatha iyer and Panchapakesa iyer) and Ayingudi Sivarama Avadhanigal learned the bhajanas. Further they started leading the bhajana. After them Sornakkadu S. V. Narayanan (second son of Arasarkulam Swaminatha iyer) led the bhajana from 1967 to 2019. Presently, Sri. S. Venkatesan (grandson of Sri. Venkatakrishna iyer) and Sri. S. Seetharaman (paternal grandson of Sri. Seetharama iyer – brother of Sri. Venkatakrishna iyer) along with their descendants are leading the bhajana.



5.5 Eminent personalities:

- Adi Sankarar visited this place.
- In 1941, Kanchi Mahaperiya witnessed the Sarada Navratri festival conducted here.
- Oothukkadu Venkatasubbaiyer hails from Sornakkadu. This is published by Indian Express in one of the articles published in 1994.
- The above mentioned Venkatnarayana bhagavathar's youngest brother is Vengobha Bhagavathar. His son Vengadya Bhagavathar's brother-in-law Gopala kavi was a poet in Chola Kingdom. As per elder's instructions, he wrote some songs that are very important to this sampradaya. They are suvvi songs (sung while beating akshada), thalantu sobhane songs (sung during applying oil onto head before marriage), a prarthana song for Sita kalyanam.
- Pudukkottai Gopala Krishna bhagavathar started his bhajana from here. His brother-in-law Venkatakrishna iyer led bhajana here for 40 years. Thus, he included sornakkadu paddhati songs in his daily bhajana and kalyana utsavam. This is evident from the bhajana book 'Srimath Bhajanaamrutham' published by his son Sanjeevi bhagavathar and K.S. Sarma in 1950.
- Ramanathapuram Asthana Vidwan Meesu Krishna iyer also participated in sornakkadu bhajana.

5.6 Special features of Sornakkadu Bhajanaa Paddhathi:

5.6.1 Nithyotsava bhajana:

- In dhyana slogam, the order is Guru, Bodhendral, Devatha and then Nama mahima slogams.
- Thodaya Mangalam order would be Jaya Janaki, Saranu Saranu, Devesa, Murahara and then Madhava bhavathu.
- Only one guru keerthana on Bodendral (Sathamani) was being sung. Now, other guru keerthanas are added.
- Ashtapadis and Tharangam is sung. Geetha govindam should be completed before Kotnothsavam.
- Only Purandara das followed by Bhadrachala Ramdas were sung. This will be succeeded by puja.
- In puja, neivedyam is elaborated. Sobhane is sung for deeparadhanai.
- Then prarthana abhangam, kattiya vachanam, padyam, gadyam, churnikai, hechariga and samaya keerthanam are sung. There is a muthaypu at this point.
- In Jagannatha pradakshinam, there will be no deepam in this paddhathi.
- For Divyanam, five keerthanas of Bhadraridasar, Vijaya Gopala tharangam, Krishna leela tharangam, Ramadas and Purandaradas were sung. Only now, Thyagaraja keerthanams are added.
- Gopika geetham is not in practice.
- Kummi, kolattam, sidhargal padal, five slogams with namavali (Govinda, Narayana, Rama, Krishna and Siva), Daaro Jagannatha, Nama mahima slogam and mangala harathi.
- After completion of Jagannatha Pradakshinam, Sri hari Pada theertham is sung. During this the poojaka distributes abhisheka theertham.
- In Dolotsavam, nalangu, unjal, sayana varnanai, melukolupu, mangalam and mangala slogam are sung in order.



5.6.2 Kalyana Sampradayam:

- Vasanthotsavam starts with abhishekam of idols in the morning along with bhajana. This is followed by Nithyotsavam.
- Geethagovindam is completed. Next comes Tharangam, Panchapathi and Puja.
- By this time abhishekam, archanai and vasantha Madhava puja is completed by Pujakar (priest).
- This is followed by sangraha dhyanam and jagannatha pradakshinam (without lamp) ending with five slokas.
- Kotnotsavam (Mutthu Kuthhal) is begun. Songs like 'Allo neredillo', 'Suvvi ramabadra suvvi' (Mutthu kutthal) and 'Suvvale' (Mutthu samarpanai). Thalantu sobhane with 'Dasaratha thanayudu rama' and Chiluka sobhane with 'Gananathuniki Mrokki' (gingelly oil will be given to a couple). All these songs are written by the above-mentioned Gopala Kavi.
- Churnikai, Pravaram and Mangalya dharanam are not in practice. Now a days Mangalashtakam is included before Harathi. With noon meals, day time function is completed.
- The same night bhajana starts with Nithyotsavam. Then comes 'Chandana charchitha' of Ashtapadi, Tharangam, Panchapadi, dhyanam, puja, jagannatha pradakshinam upto five slokams and namavali.
- On the night of Vasanthotsavam, the idols are covered with sandal paste.

5.6.3 Vasantha kelikkai and Pavalimpu:

- This contains more than thirty songs written by Thallapaakam Chinnamayya.
- One churnigai is in vogue.
- A Hanumath vinnapam is in practice.
- Prakaara rakshanam is lengthy with mention of many ragas for Purva prakaram, many vaadyam for Dakshina prakaram, many Rishis for Paschima prakaram, many flowers for Utthara prakaram.
- Pavalimpu concludes with konangi. By this time day breaks.

5.6.4 Grama pradakshinam:

Paada prachalanam (cleaning of bhagavathars feet) is done by every house and head of the house gives thambulam (betel leaves, betel leaves and coconut). All this thambulam is placed in the center of bhajanaa matam in front of sanctum sanctorum and jagannatha pradakshinam is done along with singing 'daaro jagannatha', Vairagya prathaana songs and 'Rathna jaditha' (prarthana abhang). This concludes with namaskaram. After sitting down, Pradhana or Lead bhagavathar takes one thambulam with two coconuts in the hand. While the poojekar sits in front of him, the bhagavathars sing 'Narasimha nammithi' written by Gopala kavi. After completing the song, thambulam is given to pujakar.

5.6.5 Anjaneya Utsavam:

After saligrama abhishekam, Anjaneya sahasranamam is done. In the evening, bhajana starts with nithyotsavam. This is followed by Ashtapadi, Dhyana slokas, Parthasarathy geetham, Tharangam, panchapathi, dhyanam (five songs on Anjaneyar in five different languages), puja



and jagannada pradakshinam. Before singing 'Daro jagannatha', one person is asked to stand in the center and act as Anjaneyar. 'Kantalu kajjalu is sung followed by 'Anjaneya Churnigai'. Pradakshinam concludes with 'Daro jagannatha' followed by sangraha dolotsavam.

In Sornakkadu Paddhathi, Vadai garland is not adorned. Only samarpanam is done.

5.6.6 Poojakaar niyamam:

The poojakaar should have undergone Manthra upadesam and Sakthi panchakshari. During festival days, he should not take meals. On the afternoon of Anjaneya Utsavam, during neivedyam a separate plantain leaf is placed in front of sanctum sanctorum and food is served. This is for poojakaar who eats after receiving aaseervadam from bhagavathars after their meals.

6.0 Conclusion: This is one of the bhajanaa sampradayam as old as 250-300 years. This is proved by the palm leaf inscriptions which are preserved till date. This is certified as 250-year-old one by Saraswathi Mahal Library of Thanjavur. The only guru keerthanam on Bodendral says that this sampradayam is earlier to other two gurus Sadguru swamigal and Sridarayyaval. Mainly, there were compositions of Purandaradas, Thallapaka composers and Ramdas only. Thyagaraja keerthanas were added later on. So, this signifies that the tradition is earlier to Music Trinity.

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