

MUSIC IN RAMA NATAKAM OF ARUNACHALA KAVI

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தமிழ் , உலகின் பழமையான மொழிகளில் ஒன்றாகும். மேலும் மக்களுடன் தொடர்புகொள்வதற்கும் கலையை தமனி சார்ந்த வழியாகக் கருதும் சமூகங்களில் ஒன்றாகப் போற்றப்படுகிறது. தமிழிசையின் மும்மூர்த்திகளில் ஒருவரான அருணாச்சல கவி, கம்ப ராமாயணத்தால் ஈர்க்கப்பட்ட இராமாயணத்தின் நாடகப் பிரதிநிதித்துவம் மட்டுமின்றி தமிழின் பொக்கிஷமாகவும் திகழ்ந்த ராம நாடகத்தின் மூலம் தமிழ்க் கலை அரங்கில் தன்னை நிலைநிறுத்திக் கொண்டார். இலக்கியம் மற்றும் கர்நாடக இசை. ராமாயணத்தில் வரும் ஒவ்வொரு கதாபாத்திரத்தின் சாரத்தையும் வெளிக்கொணரவும், பொது மக்களைச் சென்றடையச் செய்யவும், சமுதாயத்தின் வாழ்க்கையை மேம்படுத்தும் உன்னத நோக்கத்துடன் அருணாசல கவி தனது வாழ்க்கையை அர்ப்பணித்தார். அவரது கலைப் படைப்பை பல பரிமாணங்களில் அலசுவதன் மூலம் தலைசிறந்த படைப்பில் பொதிந்துள்ள இசை நுணுக்கங்களை வெளிக்கொணர விரும்புகிறேன்.

Music an undercurrent in Tamil Natakams

The Tamil language is divided into three components of Iyal, Isai and Natakam. The presence of the word 'Natakam' in this list, is itself an indication of its antiquity. The word 'Natakam' is also found in the Tholkaapiyam. Expressing a song or incident in the form of gestures, is dance. Telling a story with action and proper costumes, is drama. Even though Isai Tamil is a separate classification in this list, Isai as such takes a very important role in Natakams and had been instrumental in defining the success of a Natakam. If we do a subtle study, we can see and feel the undercurrent of music flowing in dance and drama all through.

Nadakath Thamizh, the acting and dancing version of Thamizh, has included four parts namely:

Thaalam (தாளம்) - means rhythm,

Bavanai (பாவனை)- means various expressions,

Alankaaram (அலங்காரம்) - means decoration, and

Irasam (இரசம்) - means continuous flow of expressions and music.

The musical version of Thamizh combined with art and dance form and evolved as Nadakath Thamizh. Ex: music instruments like nagaswaram, mrudangam, thavil joined with the art form Seviyal aadal (professional version of folk dance), nattuppura aadal (folk dance) and created art form like Kuchipudi, oyilattam, Mayilattam, Bharathanaatiyam, Kalari, etc.

Evolution of Tamil Natakam

There has been a continuous and progressive evolution of Tamil Natakams over many centuries, with peek and troughs in its sustenance and development due to various environmental, religious, and geo-political changes in the region.

Early and Medieval: The art flourished till Sangam period but did see a decline during Kalaprara period.

Development stage: The art of drama was revived again during the Pallavar period.

Chola period:

After the ninth century AD, drama became well-respected during the Chola dynasty. Drama got a good development during the period of 17th and 18th centuries. Many poets with training in Tamil grammar literature and musical training wrote plays.



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Sirkazhi Arunachalak Kavirayar: Rama Natak Keertana and Asomukhi Natak. Gopalakrishna Bharatiyar: Nandanarsaritra kirtan.

Trikudasappa Kavirayar: Tirukkutalak Kuravanji.

Ennainap Pulavar: Play Mukudpallu.

These plays were read by the poets and watched by the common people and as these dramas were set in musical form, these dramas greatly attracted the readers and viewers.

The Poet- Arunachala Kavirayar

The three Tamil composers Arunachala Kavi, Muthu Thandavar and Marimutthu Pillai are considered the Tamil Music Trinity, who contributed to the evolution of Carnatic music. Tamil Trinity lived before the Trinity of Carnatic Music (Syama Sastri, Tyagaraja and MuthuswamiDikshidar) and they introduced several innovations that led to the evolution of the Carnatic Kritis.

Arunachala Kavi hailed from the place called Seerkazhi in Tanjavur District. Arunachala Kavi was born in the year Vijaya corresponding to 1711 A.D. He composed the opera Rama Natakam in his sixtieth year and died in the 67th year—having seen his compositions quite popular in the land.

The legend of Rama Natakam

Arunachala was fascinated by the Ramayana so much that he wanted to impart the story and the good lessons preached by it to a large number of persons who could not obviously read that epic in original. His disciples requested him to compose songs from Kamba Ramayanam. Arunachala set about composing keertanams regarding the various incidents of Ramayanam. He first composed a few songs from the Balakanda and these were sung by his disciples. Encouraged by the good response received, Arunachala completed his full-length music-drama Rama Natakam in 1772 A.D.

Arunachala wanted his work also to be officially noted and released in Srirangam. The temple authorities agreed to this after Kavi composed a very beautiful song “En Pallikondeeraiyaa” in Kedaragowla, set to Aditala. The ceremony took place in the same Mandapa from which Kamba had sung his Ramayana. Arunachala was honoured suitably by the temple authorities.

Structure and Analysis of the work—Rama Natakam

Rama Natakam has 278 poems split into six cantos Bala, Ayodhya, Aranya, Kishkindha, Sundara and Yuddha, prefaced by an introductory verse called Paayiram.

The poems are in various types of metres:

Kochagam, Venba, Vachanam, Kalithurai, Virutham

The two main structures used by the Kavi are Dipadis and Dharus, which are used to establish and explore different mood and scene types in the epic.

Dipadis songs are used whenever a battle scene is to be described; or whenever the grief of a particular character is to be portrayed; or when a conversation between two characters or a soliloquy is to be detailed. All the other scenes are depicted in Dharus structure.

The split-up of the songs according to this structures is as follows:

Thodayam, Dipadais & Dharus

Musical Analysis

Arunachala Kaviraya has utilised 36 ragas for the 198 Dharus. Saveri, Mohana, Madhyamavathi, Asaveri, Sowrashtra, Mukhari, Surali, Atana, Begada, Nadanamakinya are some of the Rakti ragas used.

Major Ragas Used in Dipadais are Shankarabharana, Ghanta, Neelambari, Kambhoji etc.

Nine talas have been used, the most frequent being the Aditala of eight matras. He has used Atatala Chapu talam a number of times.

Many conversations have been dealt with under Dipadais structure. To mention a few:- Rama and Parasurama; Kooni (Manthara) and Kaikeyi; Kaikeyi and Dasaratha; Bharata and Dasaratha; Ravana and Sita; Rama and Sita.

Literary Analysis

Rama Natak Keertana were composed in the keerthana form to appeal to the common people. Rama Natakam keerthana are songs in praise of Rama. Kaviraya had to compose many stanzas called Dharus with lot of messages in them. Geya Natakas, kuravanji, Pallu had great influence and inspired the kavi.

Kavirayar has used proverbs given by the common people in his book because it is sung by the common people as literature. There are more than one hundred and seventy-five proverbs in Rama Natak Kirtan which emphasizes principles of life, and are applicable to all times.

Proverbs regarding the facts of life- 'Kaikkul vilakkai pidhittukkundu Kinatril en veezhgirai..'

Thought provoking proverbs- 'Kannileennai karikkum pidariyil...'

Proverbs for anthropological study- 'paalum padakkumorum...'

Proverbs according to situation- 'Malai thangum bharathai...'

Two proverbs describing the same meaning-

' vennai irukka nei thedovoma ?

Vilakku irukka thee thedovoma?'

Proverbs instilling lofty ideas- ' Thai kayir pasum ponnum....'

Idioms denoting the qualities admired by Tamil people.

Poetic proverbs-

' Seidharkku seivadhu setha pigago..'

' pithu piditharpol pidithadai pidiyaadhe Thayariyum....'

Proverbs that exemplifies ignorance- ' Idikkun thalaivalikku...'

Proverbs that exemplifies timeless truth- ' Vidiyun thannaiyum..'

Proverbs that justify the way of life- ' Thavaru seivadhan dandanai...'

Proverbs that are timeless- ' kinaru vetta poodham...'

Humorous Proverbs- ' aanai kettavan kudathile..'

Self-explanatory Proverbs - ' Vidhivazhiye madhi', ' aarai vittadhu sani'

Proverbs explaining facts of life- ' Ezhuthum ezhuthinpadiyee...'

Counselling through the Masterpiece-

Due to his experience of lecturing the Ramayana for a long time, Kavirayar did not compose the Rama Natak Kirtan just to get across to the story of Rama but took advantage of the opportunity to give a lot of advice in the middle of work here and there as admonitions, virtues, morals, and sins to be avoided.

Life enhancing advice- ' Pamaranai unnai...'

Emphasis on honor and glory- ' patthu mugathullabavisellaam..'

The truth about impermanence- ' Dhidukkenru pomindha pamum...'

Parables

Literature is popular among the people only when the message is told in a tasteful way. Kavirayar uses all the mountains, rivers, rivers, seas, appearance and disappearance of Katiravan as the subjects of parables mentioned in Perungappiya grammar. The parables in the book are not only for beauty but also thought provoking.

' Alavaaith thurumbenave...'- Parable under different names of sea and ocean

'Sooriyan munne....'- Parable about fire

' sooriyanai kandathoru raghu..'-parable about eclipses

' Neeyilla naadidhellam..'- parable about moon

' Uppuneer megham...'- parable about rain

' Malayitru maritime..'-parable about mountain

' kodai idi vizhundhar..' - parable about lightning

' ' Vazhai adi vazhai..'-parable about plants

' Paruthi podhikkundu..'- parables on the Destruction of War

Similies-

‘ kootruvan Pol ...Angadhanukku angadhan Ena vandha sandalan’

Kavirayar's mastery of language is evident from these similes where he has used delicious series such as "Andagankum Andagan, Sandalala

Tired Similies-

Similies are told to emphasize something that has been said. We find several songs in which Kavirayar sings a series of similes of three or four consecutive beats to emphasize a point.

‘ izhandha Mani... Uzhandha....otharal’ Here he has told a similie at every step.

Subtilties and finesse in parables-

The meaning of the parables may be the same but the way they are said may be different. Eg - ‘ kooda irunndhu kuzhi parithal’ - this is told by kavi more colloquially as ‘ tholile irunndhu seviyai kadithar pol’

Puns-

‘ Sadi satti oru kaale....’ Sadi is a form of textured pottery. It also has the meaning of cursing. This comes in the narration of how Hanuman curses Akampana.

Language style

Kavirayar is the one who composed the text in Aet and simple style as a colloquial language. The first spoken language hymn literature in the form of Isaippa was the work of Kavirayar.

Sandhi (conjunctions)

We can observe innumerable examples of Sandhis especially dheera sandhis -

‘ vedhagamam’ ‘ mogaanthakaaram’ etc..

Kochai tamil, infantile tamil, slang words-

Since it is colloquial literature, raw word forms are sparsely found. Eg- ‘ kekkali’ ‘ sandali’ etc.Kavirayar, who mentioned the spoken languages, went a step further and in the book, he also included the infantile language of a child.- ‘ paachi’ ‘chochi’ etc.The kavi has made the slang words appear in the song as well as in the speech- ‘ pazhaipona’ ‘ kamatti’ etc..

A source of Obsolete vernacular words -

We can find it as a source for many words were in vogue in the vernacular at his time-’ ponpallayam’ - Ponpallayam may mean on a golden disc, which is an inferred meaning based on the context. This word has become obsolete now.

Verbatim

It is normal in the world of literature that poets themselves create new words by combining intermediate and idiomatic words with some root words. It can be made clear from some evidence that Kavirayar also created some words here and there in this way.’ Uttharippan’ derived from sanskrit meaning ‘ answered’.

Rhyming words

In many places, knowingly or unknowingly, Kavirayar slang terms can be found to have been combined with rhyming words - ‘ paadhagi - thodhagi’ in the kaikeyi kooni conversation. It can be seen that the words that come out of the mouth match the characteristics of the character.

Popular compositions of Rama Natakam

Some are still popular today like Annai Jaanaki vandale (Saveri), Enpalli kondir iyya (Mohanam), Yaro ivar yaro (Bhairavi), Kanden Kanden Sitayai (Vasanth), Ramanai Kannara Kandane (Mohanam), Ramanukku mannan muDi (Anandabhairavi) and many more. The song Ramanukku Mannan Mudi (A song from the Bala Kandam of Rama Natakam) was sung by Actress P. Bhanumathi in the Tamil movie called Pathu Madha Bandham taken in 1974. Vishakha Hari a Carnatic music vocalist and proponent of Harikatha has performed several concerts with several dedicated to Rama and Ramayanam on the view of Arunachala kavirayar with his Rama Natakam. The Keerthanas of Rama Nataka are sung by many other great singers like M. S. Subbulakshmi, D. K. Pattammal, Nithyasree Mahadevan, Bombay Jayashri, Bombay Sisters and many other Classical Carnatic singers. It has even inspired composers including Saint



Thyagaraja. There are even 20th century composers like Subramanya Bharati and Vaggeyakara like Srimathi Padma Veeraraghavan and many others whose work takes inspiration from the Rama Natakam in the lines of keeping it technically rich but at the same time simple and thus reaching out to a wider audience.

This Arunachala Kavi lives beyond his life span through his jewel Rama Nataka, which has not only brought out the essence of Rama's life but also been an inspiration to many Tamil composers, and thus living through their art works.

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