

DIVERSITY OF KARNATAK CLASSICAL MUSIC IN CHRISTIAN THEMATIC KRITI-S OF GEORGE PANJARA: A STUDY

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Abstract

As a consequence of the widespread practice of Karnatak classical music among practitioners in South India, the Christian music community in Kerala does not possess a comprehensive historical connection to Karnatak music in comparison to the timelines documented for traditional Karnatak music. Nonetheless, its development can be traced back to the post-trinity period. The Christian community originating from South India has adopted Karnatak music as a means of connecting their faith through their musical traditions. This adoption has resulted in the emergence and evolution of a distinctive style of Christian Karnatak music that integrates elements of the classical tradition with Christian themes and lyrics. In this study, the contributions of George Panjara, one of the Christian composers and lyricists from Kerala, have been examined. Additionally, this paper analyzes two selected compositions by George Panjara to illustrate his contributions to this field, highlighting his brief biographical sketch, the wisdom of raga bhava, various classical elements, diversity, and the innovative application of the knowledge of the composer.

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Introduction

Karnatak classical music, predominantly practiced in South India, is renowned for its structured compositions, intricate yet refined rhythmic patterns, and a pronounced emphasis on Bhakti (devotion) as the central theme of its lyrical content. The notable contributions of distinguished composers such as Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar, and Shyama Shastri exemplify a harmonious integration of innovation and tradition within the Karnatak music framework. The use of distinct Ragas and Talas across various regions further enhances the musical diversity inherent in this unified musical tradition. The influence of regional languages and literary traditions adds an additional layer of richness to this art form, with compositions crafted in languages such as Sanskrit, Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam. This effective synthesis of unity and diversity renders Karnatak music a vibrant and continually evolving art form, firmly rooted in tradition while embracing contemporary influences. The Christian community in India has embraced Karnatak music as a means of practicing and connecting to their faith and cultural heritage. Musicians and composers have periodically endeavored to showcase their excellence to promote the musical culture within their circles. Among these, the Kerala-based composer and lyricist George Panjara's initiative to create Christian Karnatak Kriti, along with his musical insight and creative contributions, has been critically examined in this paper.

Research Methodology: The life sketch and contributions of the composer have been examined through primary and secondary sources. Two compositions in audava ragas, namely Karnataka Sudhasaveri and Hamsadwani, have been selected and analyzed to understand the notation and the relevance of the lyrics, thereby supporting the objectives of this study. Furthermore, other aspects of these compositions – including background context, musical notation analysis, concert setting, and overall melody – have also been observed to draw comprehensive conclusions.

Aim and Objective: This study seeks to explore how the concept of unity in diversity is upheld within the realm of Indian Classical music. Specifically, it aims to examine how the Karnatak style of musical elements is employed in the composition of songs centered on Christian devotion.

Materials and Methods: An extensive review of existing literature has been conducted to explore the composer's biography and contributions. To attain a comprehensive understanding of the composer's life and the musical intricacies of the kriti, consultations with experts such as Dr. Fr. Paul Poovathingal CMI (Director, Chetana Sangeeth Nataka Academy, Thrissur, Kerala), interviews with family members, and exploration of online resources have been undertaken. A composition has been selected from online sources for detailed analysis.

Background Context: The Practice of Karnatak Music and Christianity in India

Karnataka Music stands as one of the prominent musical traditions within India. Its historical origins can be traced to the Vedic period, where musical notes were integrated into prayers and rituals. This development reflects a gradual evolution of musical notes and the poetic expression of language combined with melody in acts of devotion. The multifaceted practice of music and culture is profoundly embedded and has significantly contributed to India's rich heritage.

Christianity is believed to have originated in India with Saint Thomas, one of the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ. It is reported that he arrived in Kerala in 52 A.D. at Kodungalloor, where he established the seven churches, representing seven communities. Subsequently, various missionaries travelled to India to propagate the Christian faith. These missionaries engaged actively with local populations and established educational institutions, hospitals, printing presses, and other facilities. In the early stages of Christian ritual practice in India, founders incorporated indigenous methods of worship. Consequently, significant contributions were made to literature, as well as cultural and social reform. Notable organisations such as the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and the Church Mission Society (CMS) exemplify this development.

The Christian community in India has embraced Karnatak music to incorporate their faith into their musical tradition. The history and development of Karnatak music are constructed alongside the backdrop of Hindu rulers. Thanjavur was the main seat of Karnatak music under Maratha rule. This period is regarded as the golden era of music, during which the trinities—Tyagaraja (1767-1847), Muttuswami Dikshitar (1775-1835), and Syama Sastri (1762-1827)—lived and made significant contributions.

Although the Christian community in South India does not possess an extensive historical connection to Karnatak music when compared to the traditional Karnatak background, its evolution can nonetheless be traced back to the era of Mayuram Samuel Vedanayakam Pillai (1826-1889). He was a Catholic poet and composer. His contributions have led to the development of a distinct style of Christian Karnatak music that seamlessly integrates elements of the classical tradition with Christian themes and lyrics. His renowned Kirtana book, 'Sarvasamaya Samarasa Kirtanaikal,' exemplifies the universal aspect of faith. Furthermore, there are other notable contributors such as 'The Music of India' and 'The Sacred Kural' by H. A. Popley, Fr. Ignatius Irudayam ('Tirumarai Tenaruvi'), T. Ayyadurai Bhagavatar (1884-1948), among others, who have documented the historical background of Indian musical traditions.

Inculturation

According to Dr. Michael Amaladoss, a contemporary Indian theologian, inculturation is something beyond acculturation. It is our human response to the faith, a free and spontaneous rooted in the local culture. Inculturation is the encounter between faith and culture. It is an ongoing process in the church in India. Music is the main area which we see certain amount of flow in inculturation.

According to Prof. R. Venkataraman, "Inculturation is an informed and enlightened adaptation of the cultural elements of the neighboring culture into one's own local culture, but not a blind adoption" (as mentioned in the thesis of Paul Poovathingal). Inculturation facilitates the integration of the Gospel's transformative power into the very fabric of cultures (*Catechesi Tradendae*, no. 53; *GDC*, no. 109, 202). It acknowledges that each culture possesses its own values, codes, practices, and often its own language, music, and other cultural expressions. The Catholic Church permits the dissemination of the Gospel message in the native language and cultural context of the people. Stories, laws, and customs from a culture serve to aid the understanding of Christian values. The book "Kristu Sahasra Namam" exemplifies this inculturation effectively. This work is the visionary project of Sri I. C. Chacko, aimed at integrating it into the devotional life of Indian Christians. It comprises a compilation of a thousand names of Christ—epithets and titles rendered in exquisite biblical lore and captivating poetic form, all presented in Sanskrit lyrics.

Brief Life Sketch of George Panjara³

Vidwan George Panjara was born on 11th November 1938. He inherited his musical talent from his mother. At a young age, he began attending the Karnatak classical concerts performed by eminent Vidwans during the Vaikom Temple festival. He was profoundly inspired by the concerts of Ariyakudy, Semmamkudy, and Madurai Mani Iyer. At the age of 17, he commenced his music education under the guidance of Vidwan K. G. Balakrishnan Nair, a disciple of Cherthalai Padbhanabhacari. In 1960, he performed at Arrengettam at Vaikom Church. His first Kriti, titled 'tava caraṇam divayame caraṇam,' was composed in Raga Ritigowla in 1977. To date, he has composed over 150 works, including 50 Kritis with notation and 100 without. His compositions encompass a variety of ragas, including melakartha, audava, shadava, vakras, and rare ragas. He has performed in Kerala, Chennai, Ooty, and numerous other locations.

Two of his compositions in the audavas ragas Hamsadwani and Karnataka Sudhasaveri are analyzed below-

Kriti No:1 Ninpadakamalam⁴

Ragam: Hamsadhani

Tala: Adi

Pallavi

Ninpada kamalam Bhajaneya Vimalam
Anpezhumakhilādeshwara Thanaya

Anupallavi

En papa makhilam Pokhiduvanay
Nin nina makhe chindhini isho

Charanam

Ninkrupayalla thilloru sharanam
Vindala raja kavadam pookan
Nin Thiru simhasan dharshaname
Enpriya lochana bhagyavishesham

Meaning

Your lotus-like feet are the only shelter for us in this world.

O My Jesus, you have shed the blood to remove all our sins.

No other grace is equal to your grace to receive the kingdom of God.

Analysis of the Kriti

Pallavi, Anupallavi, & Charanam follows the conventional structure of the Carnatic kriti.

Musical Analysis

Pallavi

The raga bhava and melody are well brought out in this Kriti. The Pallavi begins with common phrases in the Ragam Hamsadwani like- s,, p,,p , r,g,s,,,. Pallavi demonstrates the Arohanam of the ragam. The step-by-step progress of the melody brings out the beauty of the composition.

1. || s, ,p ,, p, r, g, s,,, | s, s, s, ,s | r, r, g, ,, ||
2. || s, ,p ,, p, r, g, s,,, | s, ,r r, ,, | g, g, p, ,, ||
3. || s, r̄s̄ p, p, r, g, s,,, | s, ,r r, ,, | g, p, n, ,, ||

Second line begins only after ½ aksharam. Ranjaka prayogas are frequently used in this composition such as gpnn - snpp - s,,p,,p - rgs, - ggp,,.

Anupallavi

Anu Pallavi begins with the s or Tāra Shadja. Maximum range of the Anupallavi is tara stāyi g. The second line of Anupallavi starts only after ½ Akasharam. The phrase “gpn,” is used frequently in this segment. The ending note of the Anupallavi is ‘n’. Thus, it reconnects to the Pallavi. Pallavi and Anupallavi picturise the beauty of the raga.

Charanam

The Melody range touches the Svara Mandra stāyi p or mandra stāyi Panchama. Lyrics and Music are complimentary to each other. The first two lines “Nin Kripayalla thilloru sharanam...” communicates the full meaning of the entire composition and it is apt portion for improvisation (Niraval). The last two lines follow the same melody of the Anupallavi.

Lyrical Analysis

Rhetoric expression of devotion is conveyed in simple lyrical expression; however, it communicates the high spiritual values and thoughts to the common people. The Christian theme is also expressed uniquely. Even though this kriti is in Malayalam language, but there

is other influence of Tamil and Sanskrit languages. For eg, Anpezhu (Tamil Word) meaning "Love". Sanskrit words such as Bhajanam, Sharanam, Dharshanam, Lochana etc are also used.

Prosody

Dvitiyāṅsara prāsam has been mentioned below.

Pallavi Kamalam Anupallavi En Papam
Vimalam Nin Ninam

Tala Analysis

The Kriti commences on beat or Eduppu. There are many expressions of Anagatam eduppu. Eg.

1. „ gp n, n,
2. „ rġ r, s,
3. „g, r, g

Adi talam is very fitting for this song.

Kriti 2: Sadhu marthya⁵

Ragam: Karnadaka Sudhasaveri

Tala: Misra chapu

Lyrics

Pallavi

Sādhumartya vimocakā yeśu
nāyakaṁ praṇamippu pādami

Anupallavi

Bodha sarvavidhāyakaṁ martya
Pāratantra nivarāṇa devā

Charaṇam

Hīna mārgavimarśakā pari
Dīna mānava rakṣakā
Vāgmitā parikīrtitaṁ svargīya
Karūṇā pūritaṁ sarva

Meaning

Salutations to the feet of Jesus,
The saviour of the humanity

You are the embodiment of knowledge

The liberator from worldly bondage.

Oh God you are the guide for those who have strayed from the path.

The protector of the poor and the refuge of humanity.

Your divine words are renowned, and

you are filled with heavenly compassion.

Karnataka Sudhasaveri

Karnataka Sudhasaveri is an Audava raga omitting two svaras gandaram and nishadam (N, G). R and D are ragachaya svaras. It is a Moorchanakara raga. If the svaras like R M P and D are considered as Adhara Shadja other ragas like Sudhadhanaysi, Mohanam, Madyamavati and Hindolam are obtained respectively⁶.

Musical Analysis

This kriti illuminates the ample musical knowledge of the composer. The choice of the raga and approach of the composer made this kriti truly distinctive. The composition commences in the svara (s) or tara shadja. Svarakshara prayogas in the svaras s, and d are seen in the Pallavi. Svara and sahitya are having the same letters.

The melody texturing of each sangatis is in a progressive manner.

- 1 || s,,,sd | p,,, | p,m, || r,,,,r | m,,, | ,,,, ||
- 2 || s,,,sd | p,,, | p,m, || r,,,,r | m,,, | d,p, ||
- 3 || s,,,sd | pd s, | d,p, || m m r,r, | m,,, | d,p, ||
- 4 || s, r s d, | p d s d | d p p m || m m r,r, | m,,, | d,p, ||

Raga sancharas:- mr,r, m,, - dpmpds - pds,d,p, - pdsd - mmr,r, s,, - sdrs p,d,.

Anupallavi commences with the svara 'p' and followed by the minimum sangatis. The range of this Kriti spans from Mandra stayi Daivatam 'd' to Tarastayi madyamam 'm'. The melody of charana brings interesting movements in madya stayi and mandra stayi. Commencing with the svara 'm'. and move to mandra daivatam or 'd'. This Kriti lent a unique character to the world of Karnatak Music.

Lyrical Analysis

This composition explores the common expressions of devotion. Various attributes of Lord are combined in this composition such as

Sadu martya = A person who is destitute

Vimochakan = The liberator

Nayakan = the guide

bhodasarva vihayaka = A person who is full of consciousness and omnipotent

marthya paratandra nivarana = the one who frees from the bondage of otherworldliness.

Hinamargavivarjaka = the one who renounces evil ways.

Dinamanavarakshaka = savior from the sickness

Svargeeya karuna pooritha = fullness of mercy

Prosody

Anuprasa:

Three-syllabic words add depth and clarity to expressions are widely used to fulfill the meaning of a sentence. Ex: Mocaka, nayaka (Pallavi), marśakā, rakṣakā, kīrtita, pūrīta (Charana)

Similar set of words have been repeated in the same segment. The words which mentioned in bold make to highlight the similar words.

Pallavi

Sādhumartya **vimocakā** yeśu

nāyaka praṇamippu pādama

Charanam

Hīna mārga**imarśakā** pari

Dīna mānava **rakṣakā**

Vāg**mita** parikī**rtita** svargīya

Karuṇā **pūrīta** sarva

Rhythmic Analysis

The composer has been used different varieties of eduppu. Mostly used sama eduppu. Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charana are on beat, however it creates the aesthetic beauty for the concert setting.

Ateetha eduppu (the song comes before than the rhythm) has been analyzed in the composition such as 'Martya', 'Yesu', 'Pari', 'Sarva'. Misra Chapu tala is very much suitable for this composition.

Observation:

1. The Bible is the primary source of inspiration communicate the Catholic themes like biblical stories and values for faith formation.
2. With his willful attempt, Vidwan George Panjara learned Karnatak classical Music and contributed the nuances in his Christian-themed compositions. He kept the composition simple and easy to grasp as a learner as well as an audience. However, the intricate nuances of one raga is cannot be demonstrated in a single composition, but the selected composition is a great example to showcase how Karnatak Classical Music and Christian-themed lyrics merge and project the unconventional outcome of diversity rooted in unity.
3. His compositions are good in the level of biblical meditation as well as performance. The performer takes a single phrase or a line to elaborating the different shades of meaning of the same phrase, with in the structure of ragam. It is the part of niraval or wider aspect of manodharma in concert but it also a deeper level of meditation.

Ex:1. Ninkrupayalla thilloru sharanam

Vindala raja kavadam pookan

2. Hīna mārgavimarśakā pari

Dīna mānava rakṣakā

4. Open up not only in traditional bhakti movements in Hindu religion but also explore the Christian themes and values. It could give wide range of scope to promote Karnatak Music in globally.

Conclusion

Karnatak Music is consistently distinguished from all other musical forms due to its scientific methods, structural complexity, and depth. Its diversity attracts a broad audience, while its innovative approach facilitates outreach. As H. A. Popley stated in his publication, "Western Music cannot open the doors of the Indian heart..."², the foundational environment of Karnatak music has significantly contributed to the dissemination of a devotional mindset throughout India, transcending religious boundaries.

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