

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture – 53
Tamil composers before the trinity

(Music Starts: 00:22) (Music Ends: 3:33)

The Tamil culture, is one of the oldest, with a long history of literary and musical traditions. In many of these literary and technical treatises, the date even before two millennia ago, we find references to and descriptions of music of those times. We find what “Pun” for instance, which is regarded as the equivalent of raga. If you look at Ilango Adigal master piece, Silappatikaram, we find in it descriptions of dance and music of those times, from all accounts they seem to be highly evolved and sophisticated.

Now, the Tamil culture, it is being pretty indigenous, in the sense that, most other languages, for instance in India, are derived from Sanskrit. But Tamil had origin and development of its own. The music of, carnatic music traces its roots back to the Vedas on the one hand. It is said, it is certainly Barathas Natya Sastras, which in turn traces its existence back to the Vedas. So, carnatic music has definite connections with the Sanskrit traditions. But it also has links, with the Tamil musical traditions.

And here we have already spoken of the music of the Alwars and the Nayanmars. Their musical out pouring’s and that how even today we sing these compositions, in concerts or in other religious context, even in daily prayer. Now, another important Tamil composer, who also belong to the very much to the bhakthi tradition was Arunagirinathar.

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Arunagirinathar probably lived sometimes around the fifteenth or sixteenth century and he wrote songs, he sang songs, addressed to the Tamil god Murugan or Karthikeya or Subramanya, these compositions are collectively called Tiruppugazh.

Arunagirinathar has a legend goes, lead a life of the debauchery, until he found Muruga Bhakthi, devotion to Murugan. And in many of his compositions, we find him admonishing people and himself, to choose the right path, to take to devotion to Murugan. And it is the most, it is from literary point of view it is very rich, very dense with Tamil word. So, to say, the compositions are packed with words.

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The compositions that you heard in the beginning “apa hara nindhe pattulaladhe” if you have noticed the different kind of tala (Singing Starts: 07:36) (Singing Ends: 07:53) now this is the tala which does not belong to the Suladi Sapta Talas. It is generally called Cchanda tala, because the tala, just follows the cchanda or the meter of the poem. So, we have (Singing Starts: 08:10) (Singing Ends: 08:18) and so on. And reputedly, cchanda of each of the Tiruppugazh is different or at least there is a great variety of cchanda’s in the Tiruppugazh.

So, cchanda tala is, essentially as I said the tala movement simply follows the meter of the poem. Now, this can get pretty complex, as you will see in the clip that you will just hear, Ramakrishnamurthy performs the Tiruppugazh. Now the cchanda of that is, first there is a seven takkitta takka dhimmi, then you have a nine takka takkitta takka dhimmi, you have another nine takka takkitta takka and then you have takka dimmi takka dimmi.

So, this is the meter of the song and that is the tala, the way it is. Tala is also performed to simply following the meter of the poem, the composition is in Thodi ragam.

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Now just his way, of the carnatic trinity, who are Thyagaraja, Muthusamy Dikshitar and Syama Sastri. We also speak of the Tamil Moovar, or the Tamil trinity, these were three important composers, who lived before the trinity actually. Before the Thyagaraja and Dikshitar Syama Sastri. They lived sometimes in the seventeenth century. They also lived in and around Tanjavur and they composed in Tamil.

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These are Muthu Thandavar, Marimutha Pillai and Arunachala Kavi, their compositions are still sung in concerts today. They were also Bhakthi composers. Now Arunachala Kavi “Rama Natakam” it is very popular even today. The name itself suggests story of, the Ramayana told in songs. So, for every episode of the Ramayana, we have a song composition and it is very interesting, how Arunachala Kavi’s mind has worked, to create little-little details of each episode and it can be an exercise itself, to look at the poet’s imagination in this work.

And it is, Arunachala Kavi only wrote this song. The music was set by the disciples, but these songs are still quite popular, especially few of them from this pick set of compositions. This large, rather larger set of compositions, some of them are particularly popular and still sung.

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Pallavi
kAlai tUkki ninDRu ADum deivamE ennai kai tUkki AL deivamE

Anupallavi
vElai tUkkum piLLaitanai peTRa deivamE
minnum pugazhsEr tillai pon ambalattil oru

CharaNam
senkaiyil mAn tUkki sivanda mazhuvum tUkki
angattil oru peNNai anudinamum tUkki
gangayai tingaLai gatirta sadamEl tUkki
ingum angumAi tEDi iruvar kanDaRiyAda

Translation

Pallavi
You, o Lord, who dance with your foot raised, won't you lift me up to reign over me?

Anupallavi
You bore that son who held the spear, In that golden hall of Chidambaram, (you who lift your foot, wont you lift me?)

charaNam
Holding a deer and also a reddish battle-axe in your beautiful hands, He also always holds a woman on his body or half his body as **Ardhanareeshwara**. He holds Ganga and the Moon on his thick locks He is unknown even to those who search here and there as did Brahma and Vishnu

Marimutha Pillai, a few of his compositions have come down and this composition is particularly it very poignant, it is set in a very great rakthi raga yadhukula kamboji. Composition goes like this “kaalai tukki nindruadum deivame ennai kai tukki al deivame”. So, you who had its foot lifted and you dance, with you are foot lifted, won’t you lift me and rule over me. That is the gist of the song.

And as you can see on your screen, the word “tukki” means to lift, that is used in many senses, in this composition. And in, itself is a very-very simple idea, that you who lift so many things, in

your hand, you have your, there is on the one hand, there is deer, on the other hand, you have the damaru, you have lifted so many things, you lift your feet in dance, can you not life me up. And this is a very simple and poignant play on the very word” tukki”.

The compositions its, it starts with a what you call “gambhira” very dignified sedate way.
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Another, Tamil composer, who predates the trinity is Oothukkadu Venkatakavi. He lived in Oothukkadu, again near Tanjavur, and his ista deivatha, his he sang on Krishna. On Krishna of Brindavan, many of his compositions, have extremely beautiful and graphic details of Krishna’s sport in Brindavan and many of his compositions are very popular.

He composed mostly in Tamil, also in Sanskrit and the rhythmic complexity and sheer dexterity with the words and how he brings them together is, makes him a remarkable composer. For instance, we have this composition a very popular composition “Alaipaayudhe Kannaa En Aanandha Mogana Venu Gaanamadhil.

So, here he is saying, your flute, the magic of your flute it is enveloping me, as if its waves of your flute music engulfing me. “Alaipaayudhe Kannaa” and “Thaye yesodha” is another a very-

very famous composition, in which Gopis are depicted as complaining to Yesodha, about the pranks that Krishna is up to all the Time.

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Pallavi
Asaindhadum mayil ondru kandaal,
Nam azhagan vandhaan endru solvadhu pol thondrum
When I see a dancing peacock it is as if it is heralding the arrival of our
beauteous one.

Engagilum enadhu iraiiva, iriva ena,
Mana nirai adiyavidam thangu manathudayan,
Arul pongum mugathudayan,
Oru padam vaithu, maru padam thooki nindarada,
Mayilin iragada makara kuzhayada mathi vadanamada,
Mayakkum vizhiyaada malar anikal aada malar magalum pada,
Idhu kanavo nanavo ena mana nirai munivarum magizhndu kondada

He who stays with devotees of firm mind, those who cry out his name,
face brimming with grace, planting one foot and lifting the other, the
peacock feather dancing, the ear rings swirling, his face swaying, his
bewitching eyes darting, his flower ornaments dancing, the goddess
Lakshmi singing; sages who beheld this sight cry out: is this a dream or is
it real...

Again, there is another composition “asaindhadum mayil ondru kandaal asaindhadum mayil ondru kandal nam azhagan vandhaan endru solvadhu pol thondrum” this is again a very interesting, very beautiful, poetic imaginative work here.

When I see a dancing peacock, I feel that the beauty is one has come, the beautiful one here is obviously Krishna. Now, why does a dancing peacock, sight of a dancing peacock seem as if it is lord Krishna, the beautiful Krishna who has come. That can be so interpretation of one is that, Krishna puts the feather of the peacock on his head gear. So, the sight of a peacock would naturally remind of you as Krishna.

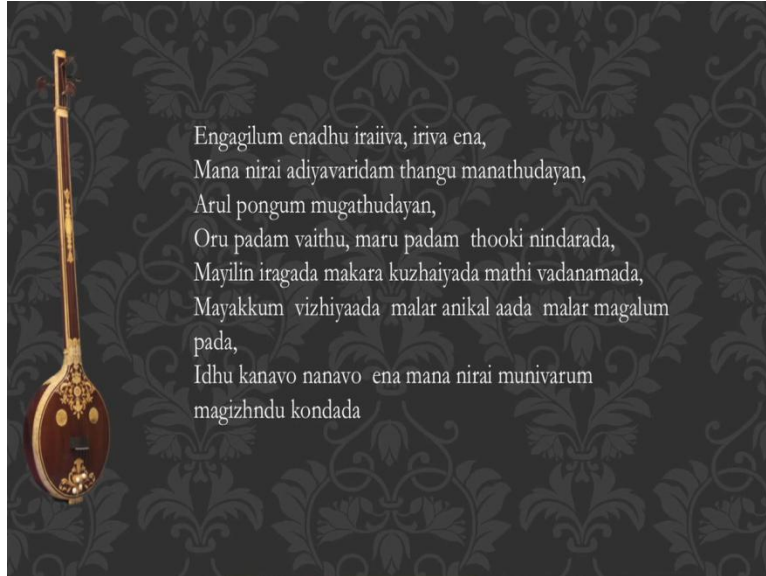
Another is possible that, Krishna is “meghashama” is the colour of the clouds and peacock dance at the sight of the clouds, well that is another association. There were interpretations are possible. But here the sudden jump from, there is an incorporation of “madhyama kala sahitya” also which is full of, it is full of wordy actually. But it is still very exciting and charming to listen to.

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And I will just demonstrate one the site the link to the composition is here. You can listen to the full composition (Singing Starts: 22:55) (Singing Ends: 18:55)

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“Mayilin iragada makara kuzhaiyada mathi vadanamada mayakkum vizhiyaada malar anaikal aada malar magalum pada” a complete prasha, again of the word “ma” and a very rich description of the dance of Krishna. He says, as the peacock feather dance, his eyes were dancing, earrings were dancing and it is as if, is it a real or it is a dream, that is the kind of experience, when you witnessed the dance of Krishna.

So Oothukkadu Venkatakavi, not only composed on Krishna, he also composed a Navavarna set of compositions on Devi. He also as a srividya upasakar, just like Dikshitar, after him. So, this Oothukkadu, also come. He just referred often as Oothukkadu in musical circles. Oothukkadu Venkatakavi also composed tillanas, very interesting tillanas with “gati bedas”. But the main feature of his composition is, the word play and an elegant setting of music.