



Veenā Krishnamāchāriar- Life and Contribution

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INTRODUCTION:

The advent of the Music Trinity, viz. Sri Tyāgarāja, Sri Muthuswāmi Dīkshitar and Sri Śyāma Śāstry has had a remarkable influence on the South Indian Classical Music. Through them, the compositional forms like the Kriti, Kīrtana, and Rāgamālika attained maturity and perfection. This had a great impact on the post-trinity composers who followed them closely in many aspects such as melody, structure, language, rhythm and the form in entirety.

This paper explores the life and contribution of Veenā Krishnamāchāriar who is a significant musician, composer and musicologist of the post-trinity period. Veenā Krishnamāchāriar was a musician of high order. He was not only accomplished in Veenā playing but with other musical instruments as well. He was a good vocalist endowed with mellifluous voice. He had a vast repertoire which included Kshetrajñā's Padams and Jāvalis. Also he had a deep knowledge on Abhinaya Shāstrā which helped him in a great way during the composition of Kutrāla Kuravanji. He was a gifted composer who created more than 250 compositions comprising Jathiswarā's, Tāna Varṇā's, Pada Varṇā's, Kritis, Jāvāli's, Tarāna, Devaranāma and Tillāna's.

Early Years:

Krishnamāchāriar was born in Kāḷathūr or Koḷathūr near Tiruvellōre, Tamil Nāḍu. His year of birth is unknown. According to Sri C. Sēshāchalam¹ of the famous Curzon and company, a close friend of Krishnamāchāriar, he might have been born around 1880's. His father was Sri Kandadai Rāmānujāchāriar who belonged to the Uttama Bhāgavatha Matham. He was a Telugu Paṇḍit and a respected Guru. Veena Krishnamāchāriar's mother was endowed with an uncommonly high musical talent and therefore the sound of good music was prevalent in their home. This illustrious couple was blessed with 3 distinguished sons destined to be famous Vidwāns and eminent personalities of their time. The three brothers were the famous 'Tiger' Varadāchāriar, Veena Krishnamāchāriar and K.V.Srinivāsa Iyengar.

Veenā Krishnamāchāriar and his illustrious brothers formed a happy trio satisfying the age old definition of the term 'Sangita' with its triple aspects of Geetam, Vādyam and Nr̥ttam.²

"Geetam Vādhyam tathā nr̥ttam trayam sangitamuchyate"

Vidwan Varadachariar, whose unique Bāni earned him the title 'Tiger' from the Maharaja of Mysore represented Geetam, Veena Krishnamāchāriar who was a specialist in playing several instruments apart from Veenā represented Vādhyam and Srinivāsa Iyengar, a pioneer musicologist and an authority on Bharata Sāstra represented Nr̥ttam.

Veena Krishnamāchāriar's family constantly migrated from one Sri Vaishnavite place to another owing to lessening of harvest or reasons unknown. After several years of wandering Veena Krishnamāchāriar came to a place called Collect Pēttah or Kāḷāḍipēttāh near Chennapattānā (Madras/ Chennai), set amidst a quiet agrahāra with the prominent shrine of Lord Kalyāṇa Varadarāja. This place was frequented by Chettiār's from Madras.

Krishnamāchāriar was musically oriented right from young age. He used to stay close to the temple complex and sang in front of the almighty daily. On one such occasion, Krishnamāchāriar's music talent was noticed by the Chīmāta brother's – Ramanujam, Namberumal and Alavandar, familiarly known as the Wenlock and Curzon Chettiār's. These Curzon brothers were themselves a fine connoisseur of music and specially, Namberumal himself was a Vainika of great merit. These brothers were talent scouts of their time and were responsible in bringing out eminent musicians to the public including Poochi Srinivāsa Iyengar, Krishna Bhāgavathar etc³. Among these stalwarts, Veena Nilakanta Shastry was an acknowledged leader. His full mastery over the instrument and rhythm earned him the title "Pancha Tala" Neelakanta Śāstry. Therefore, the Curzon Chettiār's had no difficulty in entrusting Krishnamachariar's musical training to the great Vidwān Neelakanta Śāstry, in whose hands, Krishnamachariar's talent blossomed and matured.

Krishnamāchāriar was ever loyal to his patrons and almost became a family member of the Chimata family. He used to be very meticulous in all his habits be it Pooja or his music practice. Krishnamāchāriar accompanied the Chettiār's in most of their tours and Pilgrimages. One such pilgrimage was to the Triplicane Pārthasārathy swāmy temple at Madras. The Curzon Chettiār's were great devotees of Sri Pārthasārathy swāmy and used to spend long durations in the temple. During one of their Sevā's Krishnamāchāriar for reason unknown entered the Kitchen area of the temple and took an active hand in the preparation of the Prasādam which happened to be 'Puliodharai'. The prasādam turned out to be more delectable than ever before. The same evening Krishnamāchāriar gave a performance before the Sannidhi. His debut as a musician made quite a stir as the local Rasikas were eager to know the identity of the debutant. One of the Rasika pointed out to the rest that the musician was the same cooking enthusiast who prepared the Puliodharai that was enjoyed by one and all in the morning! This incident also earned Krishnamāchāriar the title 'Puliodharai'.

Vocal Training:

Apart from learning Veena from the famous Panchatala Neelakanta Shastry, Krishnamāchāriar along with his brother also learnt vocal music from the legendary Patnam Subramania Iyer who belonged to the sishya parampara of Sadguru Tyāgarāja.

Krishnamāchāriar as a Musician:

Krishnamāchāriar was both a musician and Musicologist. Apart from being an excellent Vainika, Krishnamāchāriar was also adept in playing several instruments like Mr̥danga, Nāgaswaram, Sitar, Dōlu, Flute etc. He had a mellifluous voice and was an expert in singing Padam and javali which he had learnt from his Guru Sri Neelakanta Shastry. Also Krishnamāchāriar was a master of Apoorva Ragas and Hindusthani Ragas. Though he was physically handicapped, this made no impact on his musical genius and performances. He used to play the Veena in the upright position with utmost clarity brimming with Bhava. He was easy to accompany as a concert Vidwan⁴. He apparently gave a concert along with Vasudevacharya, Tiger Varadachariar, Mazhavareyanandal

Subramania Bhagavata at Kalakshetra organized by Smt Rukmini Arundel which is still remembered by the alumni's of Kalakshetra.

Veena Krishnamāchāriar as a Teacher:

Krishnamāchāriar was a teacher par excellence. He was a strict task master and a perfectionist in teaching. Any student who underwent their musical foundation training under Krishnamāchāriar was bound to have an unshakable basic. He spent one year (1944) at Kalakshetra, Chennai and during his tenure, he taught young and old students and laid strong foundation in vocal music. During his later years, he established a music school in Bangalore called 'Arya Gana Vidhyalaya' at Basavanagudi (which is now obsolete) and trained several students. He was loved by all his senior disciples and was known as Lakshana Vidwan. Gānakōkilē. G.Chennamma, Krishnamāchāriar's pupil has brought out a book containing the composition of Krishnamāchāriar titled 'Karnataka Gana Vidhya Pradeepike'.

As a Composer:

Krishnamāchāriar has composed more than 250 Composition in 7 different musical forms. He has composed Jathiswarams, Varnams, Kriti, Tarana, Javali, Tillana and Devaranama. His compositions indicate an affinity for well known Rakti Ragas. He has also created new Ragas like Divya Malathi, Shudhakamboji.

Brief introduction about the lakshana of the Raga will highlight the shape of the Raga:

1. Rāga Divyamālathi.

This is a Janya of 8th Mela, Hanumathodi. This is a Shādava Rāga with the following Arohana and Avarohana.

Aro : S G2 M1 P D1 N2 S
Ava : S N2 D1 P M1 G2 S

The kriti composed in this Rāga is 'Panula Māni' set to ādi tāla. The Pallavi of the kriti begins thus;

1. **;; p M p** G M G | S G S g s | n s G G M || m g M M -
;; pa nu la mā . ni | pa ru la ka pa | . kā . . ra mu ||
2. **;; p M p** g m p m m g | g s G S g s | n s G G M || g m
p m g m;; pa nu la mā.....ni...| pa. ru la ka pa | . kā .
.mu||

Another example is a krithi in the Raga Shuddha Kamboji.

This is a Upanga Janya of the 28th Mela, Harikamboji. The arohana and Avarohana is;

S R2 G3 M1 P D2 S
S D2 P M 1 G3 R2 S

He has composed a Krithi in this raga which is on Lord Rama set to Khanda Chapu Tala. The pallavi begins thus-

1. **P D | P - P | M G | R G R | S R | G M , | M G | R G M || I na** |ku
lōt |ta ma|rā..ma |in -- |dubim |ba . |vadana||
2. **P D | P , M P D , | P D S , | D P M G G R | S R | G M , |**
GMPM|MGGRR,|| I na |ku....lōt....|ta....ma|rā.....
ma..|in..|dubim| ba.....|va...dana||

Here we can see that the raga is established very clearly in the first two sangathis just as in the Kriti of Sri Tyagaraja.

Krishnamachariar's compositions in general are precise, and wholly according to the Sampradaya. Most of his Varnams follow the standard pattern of other composers. His speciality is that he has composed Anubandam, which he refers to as Sampoorana Charana which is not seen in other composer's Varnam's, barring few. Anubandham is something which completes the meaning of the sahitya part of the Charanam. Some examples are given below:

He had an extraordinary knowledge of dance and understood

exactly how the dance should be musically accompanied and how the Nattuvangam should be performed. As mentioned earlier, he was an expert in Padam and Javali rendition, and this aspect can be seen in his compositions too. He has used some rare words like yenaakshi beautifully in his Varnams and Krithis that are found generally in Padam's and javali's.

Krishnamachariar was an experimentalist. He has experimented in handling prominent Rakthi raga like Bēgaḍa. In this Raga, he has composed 2 varnas and few kriti. The Bēgaḍa according to Krishnamachariar do not have Nishadam in the Avarohana which is one of the Jeeva swaras. Scholars like MD Ramanathan opine that the Nishadam is intoned. In the sanchāram found in the two books containing the compositions of Krishnamāchāriar, the Nishādam is absent. The Arohana and Avarohana given is S G R G MP DP S - S D P M G R S. This is a rare prayoga and one wonders if there are any other compositions of this type!

To the above statement Sri C.Seshachalam says⁵: "Specially noteworthy is his varnam in Raga Byagaḍa, in that though it is its very life breath, 'Nishāda' is not pronounced at all. Of course it is intoned. This ingenious, daringly uncommon bold device is designed to help the practitioner to appreciate nuances, abstracted from the bondage to swara". (According to Professor S.R.Janakiraman, the nishāda is present both in the Arohana and Avarohana. He says, the popular murchana for this raga is SGRGMPDPS – SN, DPM, GRS, but according to Sangraha Choodāmani of Gōvinda, the ārohaṇa is SGRGMPDN, DPS and the Avarōhaṇa is SNDPMGRS. Owing to the occurrence of the phrase 'pdNdps', it is better to keep the Arohana as SGRGMPDN,DPS as both 'pdps' and 'pdNdps' can be sung.)

Along with his brothers Krishnamāchāriar has co-authored several books on music like 'The Sangita Pradayini' a work in Telugu (subtitled 'A Text Book on Hindu Music' and published in Madras in the year 1916), Tyagaraja Hridayam, Sangita Bodhini, Sangita Ratnavali, Sangita Chitrambari etc. However, the subsequent editions of the Sangita Ratnavali, published by Adi and Co are attributed to Sri.KV Srinivasa Iyengar alone. The brothers have also composed some krithi's with the Mudhra "Tyagaraja". The famous krithi's in Simhendramadhyama "Natajana" and "Needucharanamule" are compositions of these brothers which were unknown to the music world for a long time. Another similar example is the Harikamboji krithi, "Vinatasutavahanudai".

Vaggeyakara Mudhra:

Sri Krishnamāchāriar has used 'Padmapurisha', 'Padmapurivarada', 'Vemanna', 'Tillai Natarāja' (for his Tamil Krithi's) or 'padmapuri' in his compositions. The mudhra corresponds to the presiding deity of Padmapuram or kaladipetah Sri Kalyana Vardaraja swamy.

Association with Kalakshetra:

Krishnamāchāriar spent one year in Kalakshetra (1944) and during his tenure he set to tune for the dance drama, Kutrala Kuravanji, which made Kuravanji's as a class. The music flows with ease and grace in a succession of Ragas which personify the emotions the dancer is expected to display. The Teermanams and Sollukattu that he has composed for the dance drama are so precise which only reveal the composer's good sense of rhythm. He has also composed a Tillana in praise of Smt. Rukmini Devi's contribution to the field of BharataNatya.

He has also composed music for Andal's Vāraṇamāyiram. This was especially composed for Smt.Sharada Hoffman who danced this piece alone for an hour! This indicates his deep knowledge about composing for dance.

He used to stay in the Theosophical society and was a Swayampāki. He used to make special tea which was liked by all including Sir Arundel who used to drive down to Krishnamachariar's cottage for drinking the tea! After his tenure in Kalakshetra, Krishnamāchāriar left to Bangalore and passed

away in the year 1947.

CONCLUSION:

Sri Krishnamāchāriar belongs to the Uttama Vaggeyakara genre. His songs are a powerful outpouring of devotion and fervor. When one analyses his composition, one is reminded of Dikshitar's Bhairavi kriti, 'Balagopala', where Dikshitar calls himself "Vainika Gayaka Guruguha". We can find this similar-

ity in some of Krishnamachariar's Kritis where his music was inseparable from the Veena. A study of his life reveals that his passion for music was so strong that serious health affliction was unable to eclipse his musical output. Surrendering himself to the Almighty, his songs are a blend of rich philosophical flavor and devotion to the Lord.

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