

SOME MINOR COMPOSERS IN SOUTH INDIAN MUSIC

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In the field of Karnatak music, apart from Purandara Dass, the Trinity, Tyagaraja, Syama Sastri and Muthuswami Dikshitar, stand out as the creators of the Karnatak system. Contemporary with the Trinity, at Trivandrum on the southern tip of the country, lived the famous court composer, Swati Tiruunal, Maharaja of Travancore who within a very short span of life composed classical works of a high order in several languages and mostly in Sanskrit.

There were also many other minor composers who enriched the wealth of Karnatak Music. They can be called 'minor' only in the sense that the quantitative output of their compositions was small comparatively; but in quality the works of some of these composers attained great heights in musical excellence.

Pallavi Duraiswami Iyer

A contemporary of Tyagaraja, Duraiswami Iyer's maternal grandfather was Nayam Venkata Subbier who was *Veena Vidwan* in the Tanjore Court. The prefix 'Nayam' to his name refers to the excellence of his style of playing the *veena*. Pallavi Duraiswami Iyer was brought up by this maternal grandfather who, after his return from Tanjore, settled in Madras. Perhaps this explains his education in Telugu as well, and is probably the reason for the excellence of poetry and diction in his Telugu compositions. He was born in the year 1782 and is believed to have died in the year 1816 A.D.

At the time of his death he left two sons Sabhapathi Sivam and Govinda Sivam still quite young. They later became the disciples of

Saint Tyagaraja. Govind Sivam also composed many songs which are found in palm leaf manuscripts in the family archives at present.

For generations the family members were wedded to music. Sabhapathi Sivam's son was Sambasivam who was a violinist and often used to accompany Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer in his concerts. His son Vidwan Sabesa Iyer was the disciple of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer a great *vidwan* of his days. He was chosen as the Principal of the Music College at Annamalai-nagar, Chidambaram, when it was started in 1929 by the munificence of the late Rajah Sir Annamalai Chetti.

Pallavi Duraiswami Iyer composed in all about fifty *kritis*. He was not only a gifted composer but also a painter of no mean order. After composing a song he would paint a picture to express the feelings of the song he had composed and below the painting the text of the song was written.

There is a tradition that Pallavi Duraiswami Iyer met the famous Bobbili Kesaviah, in Madras, in a *pallavi* contest and won. Shri C. S. Aiyar, retired Accountant-General and one of the disciples of Vidwan Sabhesa Aiyar took great pains in collecting material to publish some of the songs of Pallavi Duraiswami Iyer under the auspices of the Madras Music Academy.

Ramaswami Sivan

Ramaswami Sivan was the elder brother of the famous Maha Vaidyanatha Aiyar. He was a great Tamil scholar, musician and composer. Maha Vaidyanatha Aiyar owed much of his success to Sivan's paternal care. Sivan's compositions are of a high order, both from the standpoint of *sangita* and *sahitya*. His *varna* in *Kambodi* abounds in musical beauties. His *Periya Purana Kirtanas* and other compositions are masterly contributions. The rhythmic beauty which characterised most of his compositions is very striking. Several of his compositions are current. *Pahimam Sri* in *Janaranjani* is a very popular piece. His Tamil compositions such as *Muthukumaraivane* in *Sankarabharanam*; *Ekkalathilum Maravene* in *Nattakurinji*, *Kadai Kan Vaithu* in *Begada* are striking examples of his skill in the use of *prasas*.

Kavi Kunjara Bharati

Bharati was born in Petungarai, in Ramnad District. He was a scholar in Tamil and Sanskrit and began to write poetry when he was very young. He was also given training in music. He was devotional by temperament and early in life began to sing the glories of the Lord.

His compositions became so popular that the then Raja of Sivaganga invited him to his Court and honoured him. He was appointed as one of the *asthana vidwans*. The raja's brother was himself a great Tamil scholar and admired Kavi Kunjara Bharati. It was at his request that Bharati wrote the story of Skanda in the form of an opera somewhat on the lines of Arunachala Kavi Nayar's *Ramanataka*. His *Skandapurana Kirtanas* are a distinguished contributions to our music. He lived to the age of 66.

Gopalakrishna Bharati

Gopalakrishna Bharati's name is a household word in South India. He was a prolific composer. His *Nandanar Charitram* has won for him everlasting fame. He was born in a village near Tiruvarur. He was a linguist and studied Hindu scriptures under Govinda Yati. That he was a great *yogi* is evident from many references to *yoga* in his *Nandanar Charitram*. His compositions are very well known and many of them are sung in present-day concerts, for example *Sabhapathikkku* in *Abhogi*, *Tiruvadi saranam* in *Kambodi*, *Innamum Oru Taram* in *Yadukual Kambodi*.

In this opera Bharati introduced many of the old musical forms which had by that time become almost obsolete, such as *Dandakam*, *Takadandakam*, *Kadukka*, and also used some folk tunes from Maharashtra, such as *Savai* and *Lavani*. He also composed songs in rare *ragas* like *Sarasangi*, *Amritakalyani*, *Kannada Behag*, *Jingala*, *Manji* and *Surayakantam*.

He himself used to perform *kalakshepams* and thrilled the audience. When Bharati performed *Nandanar Charitram* at Karaikal, a French official, Sesayya, who heard it, was so impressed by it, that he undertook its publication. That was the first edition of his opera.

Bharati was a contemporary of Vedanayakam Pillai, who was then a District Munsiff. Mr. Pillai became a disciple of Bharati and adopted his *guru's* style in his own compositions.

Bharati is supposed to have composed more than a thousand *kirtans*. He also wrote other operas, *Iyarpagai Nayanar*, *Tiruneelakanta Nayanar* and *Karikal Ammaiyaar*. The well known *Gnana chindu* was also his composition. He lived to the age of 70 and passed away in 1881.

Vedanayakam Pillai

I have already referred to Vedanayakam Pillai in connection with

Gopalakrishna Bharati. He was in Government service as a *munsiff*, in Mayavaram. He was a great Tamil scholar and wrote the well known classical novel *Pratapa Mudaliar Charitram*. He had also composed a number of classical songs under the name of *Sarva Samaya Samarasa Kirtanams*. About 200 of these compositions are in print, though not in notation. It is worthy of note that he composed in rare *ragas* such as : *Kalgada; Kanaka Vasanta; Kannada Gowla; Ganga Tarangini; Supra deepam; Saindhavi; Dwijavanti; Nagadwani; Bandhu; Poorna Gowla*, and *Manoharam*. Several of his songs have gained great currency; for example : *Inthavaram Tharuvai* in *Kahrahara-Kharaharapriya; Iniyakilum* in *Kalyani; Imnamum Thamathamyen* in *Devamanohari; Karunakara Murti* in *Purikalyani; Karunalaya Nidhi* in *Bilahari*—but nowadays sung differently—*Chitham Eppadio* in *Paraju ; Vazhvai Nambade* in *Kapi*.

Neelakanta Sivan

Neelakanta Sivan (also called Neelakanta Dasar) was a great *Bhakta* and prolific composer. He was born at Padmanabhapuram, in South Travancore, in the year 1839. His real name was "Subrahmanyam". From his very early age he showed marked religious and musical tendencies and would often go into some kind of retreat and forget himself. Early in his life he had a mystic vision of God Neelakanta and Goddess Anandavalli Ambika. This entirely changed the course of his life. He gave all his time to devotional practices such as *bhajana*. It was after this mystic vision, that he called himself "Neelakanta Dasar", by which name he has been known since. His compositions are varied in form and ideas. A volume of his compositions under the name of *Tiruneelkanta Bodham* was published as early as 1901. Later on about 130 of his classical compositions were published at Trivandrum, in 1929. In addition to verses and songs on different shrines which he visited, he has written the lives of several of the great saints in song. Among these are :

Dheera Nishadar Charitram; Somayara Mahatmyam; Sivaratri Mahatmyam; Sundarar Charitram; Sambandhar Charitram; Manikkavachakar Charitram; Thiruneelakantar Charitram; Siruthondar Charitram; Chandesarwarar Charitram; Kalikamar Charitram; Lalita-puranam; Gowri Charitram.

Neelakanta Dasar's compositions are characterised by over-flowing devotion and utter surrender to God. His diction is exceedingly simple, and his songs will touch the heart of every Tamilian. Who has heard and not felt the thrill of the following heart-moving songs ?

<i>Yenraikku Sivakripal,</i>	<i>Mukhari</i>	<i>Chapu</i>
<i>Ihaparam Tarum</i>	<i>Khamas</i>	<i>Roopakam</i>
<i>Orunal Orutaram</i>	<i>Khamas</i>	<i>Adi</i>
<i>Navasiddhi</i>	<i>Karaharapriya</i>	<i>Chapu</i>
<i>Sambho Mahadeva</i>	<i>Bowli</i>	<i>Roopakam</i>
<i>Dayavu Seyya Innum</i>	<i>Surati</i>	<i>Chapu</i>

Neelakanta Dasar passed away in 1900 in his 61st year calling out "Mahadeva, Mahadeva, Mahadeva".

Musiri Subramanya Ayyar comes from a family well-known for its contribution to Karnatak music. He is a grand-son of the great Pallavi Duraiswamy Iyer, a composer and contemporary of Tyagaraja's and has been a disciple of Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer. He became the first Principal of the Music College of Annamalai University where he combined traditional musical education with contemporary requirements. He is an authority on both theory and practice of Karnatak music and often broadcasts over A.I.R. He is closely associated with the Sangeet Natak Akademi and was the Principal of the Central College of Karnatak Music, Madras.