

# THE MUSIC OF THE TIRUPPUGAZH

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India had a magnificent system of art music at a time when in other parts of the world, the art was still in the stage of folk song. Music with the Indians has been a resource to which they always fly in joy or grief, for prayer or praise.

But there is hardly any secular music in India. Music was never looked upon purely as a form of entertainment and not even as a fine art but as a means for attaining eternal beatitude (*moksha*, *apavarga*, *svarga*, etc.). This accounts for the large number of saints and devotees among its best exponents and composers. The origin of Indian music is traced to the *Sama Veda* and music itself is styled as the *Gandharva Veda*, one of the *Upa Vedas*. God is conceived as the *Nada Brahman* (embodiment of sound) and the practice of music as *Nada Upasana* (Worship through sound.)

## The Music Of The Tamils

Among the ancient systems of music in India was the musical system of the Tamils. Most of its musical forms later merged into what came to be known as Karnatak music, but valuable references to the old music of the Tamils are available from Tamil works like the *Silappadhikaram* (2nd century A.D.), *Tolkappiam* and *Kalladam*, from inscriptions and individual treatises on music. These show that the Tamils were a highly musical race, had a limited but fairly well-developed system of music and were familiar with the 'solfa' method, concordant and discordant notes and other acoustic phenomena. Their scales or modes were known as *palais* and their equivalent of the modern *raga* as *pann*.

## Karnatak Music

Till about the 13th century, there appears to have been practically a single system of classical music followed throughout the length and breadth of India, with natural local variations. The *Sangita Ratnakara* of Sarngadeva, one of the most authoritative works on Indian music written in Central

India before 1250 A.D., does not mention the bifurcation of Indian music into the two systems: *Karnatak* (South Indian) and *Hindustani* (North Indian). These terms are found for the first time in *Sangita Sudhakara* of Haripala Deva written in the 14th century. The *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva (12th century), the first Indian opera containing the earliest regular musical compositions now extant, is a work written before the bifurcation of the two systems. The cleavage came into vogue after the advent of Muslims at Delhi and *Hindustani* music became more pronounced during the regime of the Moghul emperors. The music of the South continued to proceed along its traditional lines, undisturbed by exotic influences.

### Early Forms

There were several varieties of ancient musical forms in Karnatak music like the *prabandhas* which gradually disappeared with the efflux of time giving way to modern compositions. The *dasa kuta* composers of Karnatak were perhaps the earliest to write *kriti*-like compositions in addition to other types like *suladis* and *ugabhogas*. Narhari Tirtha (circa 1330) and Sripadaraya (1442) were the early composers of this tradition and the great Purandara Dasa (1484-1654) was veritably the Father of Karnatak music. Tallapakkam Annamacharya (15th century) was a senior contemporary of Purandara Dasa and was the earliest known composer of *kritis* in Telugu with a *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and *charana*. The other composers of *kritis* like Margadarsi Sesha Iyengar, Narayana Tirtha and Bhadrachala Ramadasa lived between the 16th and 18th centuries. The *kriti* form, however, reached its acme of perfection at the hands of Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri, the immortal trio of Karnatak music. Cultivating the 72 *melakarta* scheme by Venkatamakhi (1650 A.D.), Tyagaraja and Dikshitar invented many new *ragas* and composed *kritis* in them.

Although the *lakshanas* of the present day *ragas* of Karnatak music are described in Sanskrit works written after the 14th century, there is no doubt that many of them have their basis in the *oalais* and *panns* of the old *Tevaram* music. The earliest record of such a transformation of the *panns* into *ragas* is the Kudumiyamalai inscription of Mahendra Varman (600-630 A.D.), the Pallava king of Kanchi. This inscription is invaluable as it indicates that the solfa letters of *sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni*, for the seven notes were used in Karnatak music even in the 7th century. The *palais* referred to in this inscription are those used for singing the *Tevaram* music during that time. For example, the first *raga* mentioned in the inscription, viz., *madhyama grama* refers to *Sembalai*; the *suddha mela* of Tamil music which is equal to *Harikambhoji*, the 28th *mela* of Karnatak music. Similarly, *Sikamaram* is identical with *Nadanamakriya*, *Sadari* with *Kamavardhani* and *Panchamam* with *Ahiri*.

There are long gaps in the history of Karnatak music, particularly from the 7th century till the 14th century, after which Sanskrit treatises came to be

written by South Indian authors like Ramamatya, Venkatamakhi and Tulaja. The only interesting and useful historical account is the story of how Srīman Nathamuni (circa 823 A.D.), the great Vaishnavite Acharya, collected the 4,000 verses collectively known as the *Divya Prabandham* and set them to music. This account is found in detail in the *Guruparampara Prabhavam*, *Koīl Olugu* and other Tamil works. Nathamuni rendered for the *Divya Prabandham* the service which Nambi Andar Nambi rendered for the *Tevaram*.

Nathamuni, who was a native of Kattumannar Koil near Chidambaram, once heard some verses of Nammalwar being recited by some Vaishnavites and finding that they were part of a thousand, proceeded to the birth place of Nammalwar and collected the verses of that Alvar and those of others. He brought them to Srirangam where he discovered that during the time of Tirumangai Alvar (7th century) the verses used to be sung in what was known as the *deva gana* style of music. Nathamuni himself had a sound knowledge of music and with the assistance of his two nephews, Melai Ahattalvar and Kilai Ahattalvar, he set them to *raga* and *tala*. As Vedanta Desika says that it was Nathamuni who first set the verses to *tala*, we may infer that before the latter's time they were being sung as *viruttams* or *suddhanga* as it is called in *Tevaram* terminology.

From early printed editions of the *Divya Prabandham*, we find that 19 *panns* and 5 Tamil *talas* have been employed. Later editions, however, show *panns* and Karnatak *ragas* for the various decades of verses. The system of singing the verses of the *Divya Prabandham* with *raga* and *tala* by the temple minstrels at Srirangam and other centres, called *arayars*, fell into disuse after the invasion of the South by Malik Kafur around the year 1327 A.D. and his sack of Srirangam in particular. The *Pra'andham* is now being recited in temples in the chant method.

There is little doubt that our saint-composers originally composed their devotional outpourings in a musical garb. It is well-known that even the Valmiki *Ramayana*, a purely poetical work, was set to music by its author and sung by Lava and Kusa. In the fourth *sarga* (canto) of the *Bala Kaṇḍa*, Valmiki himself says that he composed his epic in seven *suddha jatis* and three *kala pramanas* in the *margi* style of *deva gana*.

In the Tamil country, the *Pasurams* of Alvars, the *Padikams* of Nayanmars and the *Tiruppugazh* of Arunagirinatha are representative specimens of sacred music. There is evidence to show that they were set to music even as they were being composed. All the saint composers might not have been competent musicians but some of them were good vocalists and instrumentalists. The Guru Parampara Prabhavam says that when Periyalvar, the author of the *Periyalvar Tirumozhi*, was taken in procession on an elephant at Madura by King Vallabha Deva he sang the *tiruppallandu* using, as cymbals, the bells tied to the elephant's neck. Saint Tiruppanalvar was a professional musician

who sang the praises of the Lord at Srirangam with a *Vina* in his hands. When Tiru Jnanasambandha, the Saivite boy-prodigy, was singing a *padikam* at Sirkali keeping the time with his hands, the Lord presented him with a pair of golden cymbals. Tirunilakantha Yazhpanar used to accompany Jnanasambandha on his *yazh*; on one occasion, when he was unable to play a certain *pann* sung by the latter due to the limitation of the strings in his instrument, he wanted to smash the *yazh* on the ground. All these anecdotes show that many of the writers of our religious songs were able musicians

### Arunagirinatha

Arunagirinatha lived during the early years of the Vijayanagar empire and was the contemporary of a king whom he mentions as Praudha Deva Maharaja in more than one *tiruppugazh*. The Vijayanagar kings were great patrons of art, literature and music. Bharata's system of music had reached its zenith during this time and the patronage extended by Deva Raya II (1421-1448 A.D.) to Chatura Kallinatha encouraged the latter to write his monumental commentary on the *Sangita Ratnakara* of Sarngadeva around the year 1420 A.D. The Vijayanagar rulers patronized not only Sanskrit, Telugu and Kannada poets but also Tamil poets and Arunagirinatha was obviously the recipient of patronage from Praudha Deva Raya.

It is not clear what exactly were the compositions sung in music concerts in Tamil Nadu during this period. Many varieties of *prabandhams* are mentioned in treatises and an artificial language known as the *bhandira bhasha* appears to have been used in the *sahityas* or compositions. Great emphasis was being laid on the *alapana* of *ragas*, some of them being rendered for hours.

It was in this atmosphere that Arunagirinatha composed his *tiruppugazh* songs in the style known as the *chitra kavita*. So far as the Tamil language is concerned, he was the originator of this style of composition. As he himself mentions in a *tiruppugazh* as *Aparimita Viddaikalum*, Lord Subrahmanya had blessed him with a profusion of learning in so many branches of human knowledge that he was veritably a *sarvatantra svatantra* (A Master of all Arts and Sciences.)

### Chandam Metre and Music

"Chandap-pavalap-peruman" is one of the many appellations conferred on Arunagirinatha by Tamil scholars who were astounded by the breath-taking rhythm of the *tiruppugazh* songs. *Chandam* is a Tamil word derived from the Sanskrit expression *chhandas* which has many connotations. It means the *Vedas*, a particular Sanskrit metre, prosody and one of the six *vedangas* or auxiliaries to the *Vedas*, the other five being *siksha*, *vyakarana*, *kalpa*, *nirukta* and *jyotisha*. The word was later adopted in Tamil prosody to mean metres which conformed to beats or rhythm as different from *viruttams* which can

be sung without *tala* or as *suddhanga*. The *chanda viruttam* has an advantage over the other metres in that it is more suitable for being set to music and the words to be remembered by singers. In fact, many composers of *kritis* in Karnatak music adopted the *chandam* style in the *charanas* of their compositions, particularly when they changed over to the *madhyama kala*.

The first Tamil poet to compose in the *chandam* metre was Tiru Jnana-sambandha. In a decade, he himself mentions that he was a competent composer in that style. The *Tiruchchanda Viruttam* of Tirumazhisai Alvar, so named because of its metre (120 verses) is a fine example of *chanda viruttam*. In the eleventh *tirumurai* of the Saivites, the *Koila Nanmani Malai* of Pattinattar (10th century A.D.) includes some verses in *chandam* metre and it is believed that Arunagirinatha drew inspiration from this *Nanmani Malai* when he commenced composing his *Chandam Tamizh* as he calls it. The *Tak'ayagap-parani* of Ottakkuttar (12th century) also contains *talasai* verses in *chandam* metres and Arunagirinatha must have been fully familiar with Ottakkuttar's classic.

In music, words set in the *chandam* metre sound euphonically more pleasing than those in ordinary metres. The *ashtapadi* songs figuring in the *Gita Govinda* of Jayadeva are good examples of how jingling verses add to the beauty of the tune to which they are set. There are many Sanskrit compositions set in metres similar to the *chandam* metre. The *Sjva Stuti* of Patanjali and some compositions of Uttukkadu Venkatasubbier, Tyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar have been composed in this style with pleasing alliteration.

While it is comparatively easy to acquire a knowledge of music, it is difficult to master *laya*. *Tala* often proves a stumbling block to many an aspiring musician. Training in singing *tiruppugazh* songs early in life will secure one an unshakable foundation in *tala*. 'The *tiruppugazh* is thus a unique amalgam of poetry, *bhakti*, philosophy and *tala*' says the *Tala Dipikai*. The mixed (*sankirna*) *chandams* found in some *tiruppugazh* songs lend themselves for separating the *angas* of the *talas* and forming new *chandams*. The late Vallimalai Swami, of revered memory used to sing *tiruppugazh* in intricate *talas* like *lalita* and *sankirna jita dhruva* and spell bind savants in percussion instruments who used to accompany him.

As regards *tala*, the *tiruppugazh* songs are the only authoritative *lakshyas* for most of the *talas* in our system of music, named and unnamed. No music scholar has yet been able to analyse all the *talas* used by Arunagirinatha and equate them with those described in standard works on *tala*.

Since the original music of the *tiruppugazh* songs has, irretrievably, been lost to posterity, it has been the practice among 'Oduvars' and others to sing them in improvised tunes. There is no doubt, however, that Arunagirinatha composed his songs in the *ragas* and *panns* current in his time. But due to the

absence of a system of notation to write down the music and the lack of a continuous tradition in singing them, the tunes have been lost to us. In fact, the music of Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri swept the music world like a great deluge, leaving little trace of the musical forms that were in existence before their time. The *tiruppugazh*, however, continued to be sung in improvised tunes by Oduvars in temples and by others in *bhajans*.

### Tiruppugazh — Present Tunes

The following were the *ragas* and *talas* of 25 popular *tiruppugazh* songs as they were being sung during the early years of this century.

|                     |                          |                     |
|---------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|
| Eru mayileri        | <i>Mohanam</i>           | Khanda Chapu        |
| Nadavindu           | <i>Kuranji</i>           | Adi                 |
| Maruve seritta      | <i>Harikambhoji</i>      | -Do-                |
| Tondisariya         | <i>Anandabhairavi</i>    | -Do-                |
| Karivinuruvagi      | <i>Chenchuruti</i>       | Khanda Chapu        |
| Padi Madi Nadi      | <i>Sindhubhairavi</i>    | Adi                 |
| Sinattavar mudikkum | <i>Anandabhairavi</i>    | -Do-                |
| Tirumagal ulavu     | <i>Kharaharapriya</i>    | Adi                 |
| Valavayadagi        | -Do-                     | Khanda Chapu        |
| Naveru pamanatta    | <i>Chenchuruti</i>       | -Do-                |
| Olamitta surumbu    | <i>Sindhubhairavi</i>    | Adi                 |
| Isainda erum        | <i>Devagandhari</i>      | -Do-                |
| Vangara marbil      | <i>Sindhubhairavi</i>    | Khanda Chapu        |
| Viral maranaindu    | -Do-                     | Adi                 |
| Seer sirakkumeni    | <i>Kuranji</i>           | Khanda Jati Triputa |
| Muttaitaru          | <i>Mohanam</i>           | Triputa             |
| Avani tanile        | <i>Chenchuruti</i>       | Khanda Chapu        |
| Kaittala nirai      | <i>Nata</i>              | Adi                 |
| Battiyai unai       | <i>Navaroj</i>           | -Do-                |
| Unnaittinam         | <i>Chenchuruti</i>       | -Do-                |
| Umbar taru          | <i>Anandabhairavi</i>    | -Do-                |
| Apakara nindai      | <i>Chakravakam</i>       | Chaturasra Jhampa   |
| Sivanar manam       | <i>Yadukula Kambhoji</i> | Khanda Chapu        |
| Mundu Tamizh        | <i>Navaroj</i>           | Adi                 |
| Tullu mada          | <i>Hamsanandi</i>        | Tisra Mathya        |

While *ragas* like *nata*, *mohanam* and *devagandhari* are time-honoured ones, *ragas* like *Harikambhoji* and *Kharaharapriya* came into existence after Arunagirinatha's time. *Sindhubhairavi* and *Hamsanandi* are *ragas* that came in to existence only during the present century. *Chenchuruti*, *Kuranji* and *Navaroj* are light classical *ragas* ideally suited for singing compositions like *tiruppugazh* and *kavadichindu*.

The above mentioned tunes, however, did not last long and were being

gradually changed by eminent *vidwans* who made it a practice of singing one or two *tiruppugazh* songs towards the end of their concerts. For example, *Seer Sirakku Meni* was set in *Nalinakanti*, *Muttaitaru* in *Hamsadhvani* and *Battiyal yan unai* in *Begada* to make them more suitable for being sung in Karnatak music concerts. New songs were taken from the repertory and set in uncommon *ragas* like *Regupti*, *Muttaitaru* in *Hamsadhvani* and *Battiyal yan unai* in *Begda* to make them more suitable for being sung in Karnatak music concerts. New songs were taken from the repertory and set in uncommon *ragas* like *Regupti*, *Dipakam*, *Pushpalatika*, *Hamsanadam*, *Kamalapatapriya*, *Jalakesari* and *Kusumavichitra*. The tunes thus lost all sanctity and also relevance to the period in which Arunagirinatha lived. The *talas* were also equated to those mentioned in *tala* treatises, like *Chachchatputa* (one of the five *margi talas*), *vishama tala*, *antarakrida*, *rangadyotam*, and *simhalila* (included in the 108 *talas*); and *somadi tala*, *chalamathyam* and *nissankalila* (*apurva talas* not mentioned in texts).

### The Talas

The *tala* system is perhaps the most difficult and complicated branch of Karnatak music. There is no comparison with it in the other musical systems of the world. The time-measures used by all the nations put together will form but a small fraction of the innumerable varieties of rhythm used in South Indian (Karnatak) Music. The only musicians who make a counter claim in this respect are the 'Gurus' of the Manipuri *mridangam*, called the *pung* who aver that their ancestors used to play 116 '*desi talas* on the instrument, starting from *eka tala* and ending with the *tala patanga*.

Ancient works on music refer to the classification of *talas* into *margi* and *desi* and enumerate the classical 108 *talas*. Latterly, a system of 35 *talas* was developed and Purandara Dasa gave prominence to this simpler system by composing *gitas* and *suladis* in them. While the 108 *talas* make use of all the six *angas* (*shadangas*), the 35 *talas* use only the *laghu*, *drutam* and *anudrutam*. In addition to these, a system known as the *navasandhi talas* has been in use in South Indian Temple rituals from ancient times. There are also the *chapu tala* with their varieties and the *desadi* and *madhyadi talas*.

The seven principal *talas* give rise to 35 varieties on account of the *pancha jati bhedas*, the five kinds of the *laghu*. Each of these 35 *talas* again give rise to five varieties on account of the *gati bheda* or the change of rhythm. Thus we have in all  $35 \times 5 = 175$  *talas*. Even as there are the *pancha jati bhedas*, there are also the *pancha gati bhedas*. Therefore, each of the *sapta talas* comes to admit of 25 varieties as a result of the *pancha gati bhedas*.

In the sphere of *tala*, Arunagirinatha stands supreme as the unsurpassed master of rhythm. Although he follows the basic principles of the *sapta tala-pancha jati* scheme, many of the *talas* that figure in the *tiruppugazh* defy all

classification. There are songs which come under the 35 *tala* scheme, the 108 *tala* scheme, the 52 *tala* scheme and the *navasandhi* pattern. There are many songs which do not fall under any of these *tala* classifications. The following are some of the *talas* in which the songs have emerged when they were set up in their modern form:

|                   |                 |                    |
|-------------------|-----------------|--------------------|
| Misra Chapu       | Chacchatputam   | Misra Ekam         |
| Tisra Dhruvam     | Khanda Chapu    | Khanda Rupakam     |
| Tisra Mathyam     | Misra Jhampai   | Sankirna Tripura   |
| Chaturasra Jhampa | Vishama Talam   | Misra Rupakam      |
| Somadi Talam      | Khanda Tripura  | Khanda Jhampa      |
| Chaturasra Ata    | Adi             | Chaturasra Dhruvam |
| Tritiya Talam     | Sankirna Jhampa | Kaittalappidi      |
| Tisram            | Tisra Rupakam   | Tisra Jhampa       |
| Antarakrida       | Khanda Ekam     | Khanda Dhruvam     |
| Rangadyotam       | Magana Mathyam  | Nissankalila       |
| Simhalila         | Ananga Talam    | Chaturasra Tripura |

#### Arunagirinatha On Music

Fortunately for us, Arunagirinatha has himself mentioned a few *talas* and some *ragas* in a section of his composition called the *Bhuta Vetala Vaguppu* and these give us a clue to the *ragas* and *panns* popular in his time. It is strange that he chose this section for presenting the list of *ragas* and *talas* because the *vaguppu* describes how the *bhutas* (devils) and *vetalas* (ghosts) performed a terrible dance in the field of battle between Lord Muruga and Soorapadman. In the beginning, Arunagirinatha mentions the *talas* thus :

- (1) *Kaichchadiyina murai vidittava murghatita*  
*Chachchaputa Chachaputa Chatpita puttrika*  
*Kandachchampatip padamambala*  
*Kanchap panchakattala mambadi*

The *talas* enumerated here are the five *margi talas* known as the *pancha talas*, viz., *Udghatita*, *Chachchatputa*, *Chachaputa*, *Shatpitaputrika* and *Sampadveshtaka*. These are stated to have been born from the five faces of Lord Shiva, viz., *Isana* (*Udghatita*), *Sadyojata* (*Chachchaputa*), *Vamadeva* (*Chachaputa*), *Aghora* (*Shatpitaputrika*) and *Tatpurusha* (*Sampadveshtaka*). The *lakshanas* of these *talas* can be found in any treatise on *tala*.

Later in the same *vaguppu*, Arunagirinatha lists more than 15 *ragas* and *panns*, thus:

- (2) *Kalamarada Varali Sikhandikai*  
*Pala Sikamara mana Vipanchikai*  
*Gauda Bhairavi Lalitha Kaisikai*



*Gauli Malahari Bauli isaivana  
 Ghana Varadi arum Patamanjari  
 Tana Dhanasi vidambadu Panchami  
 Kaichchuluvu kon murai viditta ragattadalyil  
 Uchchamadu sadikam eduttu mel ettuvana  
 Kanjak kanja Natresi Ranji Ku-  
 Rinjippann kurittiyazhai yenduva'*

The *ragas* and *panns* enumerated are as follows :

1. *Varali*, the 39th *melakarta raga*, is an ancient *raga*. Arunagirinatha says that it should be sung only at the appropriate time (Kalamarada).
2. *Sikhandikai* or *Sikhandi* is a Tamil *tiram* (*audava raga*) of the *Palai Yazh* variety.
3. *Sikamaram* or *Kamaram* is a *pann*, the equivalent of the *raga Nadanamakriya*.
4. *Vipanchikai*, a Tamil *tiram* of the *Kurinji Yazh* variety.
5. *Goud* and *Goudi* are unfamiliar Hindustani *ragas*, falling under the *Kharaharapriya* and *Sankarabharanam melas* respectively.
6. *Bhairavi*, is the popular *Bhashanga raga* of the 20th *melakarta*.
7. *Lalitai* is the *raga Lalita*.
8. *Kaisikai* is the *pann Kaisikam*.
9. *Gauli* is the *raga Gaula*.
10. *Malahari* is a *janya raga* of the 15th *melakarta*.
11. *Bauli* is a *janya raga* of the 15th *melakarta*.
12. *Varadi* is a Tamil *tiram* of the *Palai Yazh* variety.
13. *Patamanjari* is probably another name of the *raga Phalamanjari*.
14. *Dhanasi* (*Raga Dhanyasi*) is a Tamil *tiram* of the *Palai Yazh* variety.

15. *Panchami* or *Panchamam*, is an equivalent of the raga *Ahiri*.
16. *Desi raga*.
17. *Ranji* or the *pann Kurinji*.

The fact that Arunagirinatha was fully acquainted with the art and science of music can be gleaned even from a casual perusal of his *Tiruppugazh*. He mentions a number of musical instruments like the *yazh*, flute, *kombu*, *udukkai*, *tavil*, *dol*, *bherigai* and *ven kombu*. In addition to the ragas already enumerated in the *Bhuta Vetala Baguppu*, he mentions *Indalam*, *Gavadi* and *Sriraga*. He refers to dance with the accompaniment of golden anklets, *nupuram* and *salangai* made of pearls.

Arunagirinatha was thus a rare musical genius and his *Tiruppugazh* songs will continue to influence musical thinking for centuries to come. Several hundreds of them have already been printed with notation and are spreading fast among musicians and music lovers.

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