

BOOK REVIEW

Gita-Kusumanjali. Author H. Yoganarasimham. Pub: Smt. H.Y. Saraswathy, 63, IV T Block, Jayanagar, Bangalore 560 011. PP: 126. Rs. 20/-

Gita Kusumanjali is the collection of musical compositions by Sri H. Yoganarasimham and contains 36 compositions belonging to Karnatak music. They comprise Swarajathi-1; Varnam-5; Kirtana-17; Pada-1; Javali-2; Tillanam-5; Ragamalika-4 and Mangalam-1, and published in sargam notation. Their text is given in Kannada and Nagari scripts. Wherever necessary brief notes about the noteworthy points in the raga or Sahitya etc. are also given.

The late Sri Yoganarasimham was very much a part of the old Mysore culture especially the music culture. He was born during what is known as the golden age of Mysore's music. And his formative years were also spent during times when the city resounded with the music celebrities, (both from Mysore and other parts of India), who came there to seek recognition and patronage from the Maharaja. Those were the times of Vina Seshanna, Vina Subbanna, Bidaram Krishnappa, Vasudevacharya, Hafiz Khan, Bashir Khan, Barakatullah Khan, Vilayat Hussain Khan and others who graced the court of Mysore. Inevitably the people of the city were highly music conscious and developed as much a critical sense as a sensitivity for the positive aspects of the art. Yoganarasimham's musical faculties developed in such a congenial atmosphere. Initially he came under the influence of Sri H. P. Krishna Rao, the eminent Musicologist and author of several books on the subject including the well known 'Psychology of Indian Music.' Later on Yoganarasimham studied under the eminent composer Mysore Vasudevacharya.

A very close understanding developed between the two even from the early days. Vasudevacharya was as much a deep scholar in Samskritha as he was an eminent composer and performer in Karnatak music. Yoganarasimham was also a student of Samskrit and held a Masters degree in the subject from the Mysore University. Even from his early days he had a taste for music and was singing intuitively. And this faculty only needed a direction and proper shaping. Yoganarasimham was shaped not only as musician and performer but his creative ideas possibly germinated at that time.

But Yoganarasimham could not make music as his career. He was an educationist and also worked as an officer in the Education department. But his first love was certainly music. He was invariably present where good music was heard. And as an esteemed connoisseur, his appreciative nod, if not word was awaited by the musician. Yoganarasimham was a man of few words. He was shy by nature and was not given to self promotion. That is why though he started composing long back, the fact was known only during the last decade of his life. Generally he sang before small and intimate groups. He had a soft voice and his music was more lyrical due to the emphasis on Sahitya and Bhava than mere display of skill. He had admirers in the intellectual circles of Mysore.

In Indian music, a composer is called as a 'Vaggeyakara' that is one who could transform speech into a song. Numerous qualifications have been prescribed for a Vaggeyakara, the most important one being that he must be both a singer and an expert in Sahitya. In this light Yoganarasimham was a Vaggeyakara in the real sense. His scholarship in Samskrit enabled him to give proper form to the literary contents keeping in view the beauty of word, rhyme and metre, of course adapted to the needs of music. Thus his compositions contain some interesting ideas in melody, structure and rhythm.

Yoganarasimham has availed not only the time honoured and familiar ragas of Karnatak tradition like Mayamalavagaula, Begada, Mukhari, Sankarabharanam, Kalyani, Natakuranji, Kambhoji etc. but also some ragas of comparatively recent origin like Valaji, Ranjani, Sundavinodini etc. In addition he has employed rare and exotic ones like Latanatapriya, Revati, Nadavarangini, Pranavakari etc. Similarly he has composed in three languages Samskrit (22), Telugu (6) and Kannada (8) and has adopted the signature Deva.

The compositions start with a Swarajathi in raga Mayamalavagaula. In view of the fact that the preliminary training in Karnatak music is always in this raga, this Swarajathi in Mayamalavagaula is an imaginative start for the series. But the composer has also a point. He states that because there seem to be no Swarajathis in Mayamalavagaula raga, he is trying to correct the omission. The swarajathi has also a Sahitya describing the child Krishna.

The five Varnams are set in Hindolam, Dvijavanthi, Mohana Dharma-vathi and Amruthavarshani respectively. Among them the one in Dvijavanthi deserves special mention. There are very few Kirtanas in this raga let alone Swarajathi or Varnam. It is in this light the efforts of Yoganarasimham are to be appreciated. The Varnam contains an authentic blend of this rare raga and some of the Chittasvaras feature lively clusters as for instance in the 5th Chittaswara which has a combination of 5 + 3 and is rounded off with triple phrases of fives each. Similarly we come across another rare and

skillful combination in the Chittaswara in the Varnam in the raga Dharma-vathi. The Chittaswara is in anuloma and pratiloma that is it is the same combination when sung in forward or reverse. Such examples are extremely rare. The famed Varnam 'Sariganidaani' of Ramaswamy Dikhsitar in raga Todi, may be recalled in this context.

The Kirtanas or Kritis as they are called on the parlance of Karnatak music follow mostly the format popularised by the trinity of Karnatak music—Tyagaraja, Dikhsitar and Syama Sastry. The first Kirtana, the customary salutation to Ganesa starting as 'Ekadanta mupasmahe' is set in the raga Begada. It is noteworthy that there are very few Kirtanas in praise of Ganesa in Begada raga. This Kirtana has pleasing ragabhava and concludes Dikhsitar fashion that is the last section of the Charanam is in the second speed and with a bouncy rhythm.

Similarly the Kirtana in Revathi raga starting as Sada Saranganayane has a good combination of melody and mood; Rajabhoga in Gourimanohari, Hematira in Kambhoji are noteworthy for the ragabhava, in harmony with their underlying sentiments. This is also true in respect of the Padam in Neelambari while the Kannada Javali evokes the mood of Vipralabdha nayika. The Tillanams also have a pleasant ragabhava, lively clusters of swara and jathi. But they have also words of Kannada which is rare, because these compositions in main employ Telugu words. Another interesting composition is the Rashtrageete that is a composition in praise of mother India which is rare in view of the fact that almost all the compositions in Karnatak music are in praise of several deities.

Now a few words about the rare ragas employed in these compositions. Firstly the raga Latantapriya. There are two kirtanas in this raga. Latantapriya is no doubt the ancient Suddha Saveri (which went out of use nearly a century ago), under a new name. The ancient Suddha Saveri was a derivative of Malavagaula raga with Suddha Rshabha and Suddha Dhaivata Svaras. But the Suddha Saveri in current use has sharper Rshabha and Dhaivata svaras. An old Geeta of Purandaradasa in Suddha Saveri is the best surviving example of the old and authentic version of this raga. Even Subbarama Dikhsitar adheres to the older form while describing the Suddha Saveri in the Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini. But he has classified it under the 1st mela Kanakangi which does not vitiate the older form of the raga. Yoganarasimham has discussed all these aspects in description of this raga and has also stated the reason for employing the new name. He states that because there was already a Suddha Saveri in current usage though in an altered form, he was obliged to adopt a new name to avoid confusion. Thus he chose Latantapriya found in the works of Tachur Singlachar brothers for an identical scale. Latantapriya is certainly exotic in name and also flavour. Pranavakari, another rare raga adopted is confined to the lower tetrachord and moves mostly between the middle and lower registers.

Gaganamohini another rare raga reminds in some respects the Kalavathi of Hindustani music. Bhanu Dhanyasi a derivative of the mela Subha Pantuvarali is confined to the middle and lower register. When sung in Madhyama sruthi it acquires a singular and exotic music appeal.

Altogether a collection of compositions which are the products of long musical experience and thought besides good taste and scholarship which enabled Yoganarasimham to invest them with the authentic beauty and values of Karnatak tradition. Gita-Kusumanjali should be in the collection of Scholars and performers of music.

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