

Kalpitham and Kalpanam in our Music

Music in general can be divided into two categories.

Set pieces and improvised music. Much of the great music in the world comprises of notes set by the composers themselves where the performers act merely as mouthpieces for their ideas.

This is true in forms of music as diverse as Western Classical, Indian Film Music and Tango from Argentina. Individual artists have the freedom to improvise in forms of music such as Jazz and Indian Classical Music. In Indian Classical Music, South Indian Classical Music.....in it's ideal form....is a happy amalgam between set compositions and improvisation.....or Kalpitha Sangitham and Kalpana Sangitham.

We have a treasure trove of great compositions by great masters such as Purandara Dasa, Annamacharya, Thyagaraja, Dikshithar, Shyama Shastri, Maharaja Swathi Thirunal and others handed down from generation to generation by practisioners of the art. And we have the freedom to bring in our own individual creativity in virtually every area of our music. It wouldn't be surprising if one were to come to the conclusion, after exploring various kinds of music from all over the world, that South Indian Classical Music is one of the most sophisticated and ideal forms of music in existance anywhere in the world.

Yet, in the present world scenario, our music can hardly be said to be making waves.....at least the kind of waves it surely is Capable of making. The major responsibility for this goes to musicians themselves. Things could improve drastically if more people had a better idea about Kalpitha Sangitham and Kalpana. One of the most Classic forms of Kalpitha Sangitham is the Varnam. Though Varnams are taught as basic lessons, many Varnams in fact are much more complex and difficult than Keerthanams in the same Raagam. A good Varnam gives us a compact and clear picture of the Raagam in which it is composed. Adiappa Iyer's Bhairavi Varnam

Viriboni may give us a better picture of Bhairavi than many or most of the other compositions in this Raagam with the exception perhaps of Shyama Shastri's Swarajathi "Amba Kaamakshi."

It lies with the practisioners of music as well as the teachers to make their listeners as well as their students Aware that each phrase of these compositions touch the very Nerve of the Raagam.....and will help them in getting a complete picture of the Raagam if they absorb these compositions consciously and with awareness. If

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a student of music is made to sing entire Varnams in Akaaram it will help them greatly for future Raaga Alapanas. A good Varnam can act as a reference point to see whether such and such a phrase can occur in such and such a Raagam at all. The same applies to many other set pieces too, especially Thyagaraja krithis. It is generally accepted that the Swaropams....or the Pictures....of the Raagams as we know them now have been given largely by Shri Thyagaraja. One could.....and should....make the most of the knowledge.....musical, literary and spiritual, that the Great Vaggeyakaras have left us.

This becomes possible only if one takes the trouble if not to learn an entire language (Which would be ideal), at least to learn the word by word meanings of the songs one sings. Many of the great compositions are either in Telugu or in Sanskrit.

This is because in Telugu, every single word ends with a vowel and thus lends itself gracefully to being sung. For example even a proper noun like Raaman.....or Ram in Hindi....would become Raamuni in Telugu. (And Raamudu, Raamulu and other vowel ending variants in other situations).

And one can sustain Ramuneeeeeeee much more musically than Raamannnnnnn as you can see. At present, less than 5 % of Classsial musicians and less than 3 % of music teachers seem to have any idea about the meanings of the words they sing.....and teach. The listeners listen and the students learn.....passively and mindlessly. And this strikes death blows to the art at it's very root itself. For one can't feel anything at all if one doesn't have any idea about what one is singing about. Though this is such an Obvious fact, people seem to be happily ignoring this and allowing themselves to sink into greater and greater depths of ignorance. Our music loses much of it's glory when stripped of 1) Bhakthi (Devotion) and 2) Manodharmam (Creativity). And one can feel Bhakthi only if one knows what one is singing about.

Apart from a basic grasp of the language itself, one needs to have some knowledge of the Puraanaas too. If one doesn't know the story of Gajendra Moksha when Lord Vishnu saved the life of King Indradyumna who, under the effect of a curse, was transformed into an elephant and was being pulled into a river by a crocodile, the description of Lord Vishnu in a song as "One who saved the elephant" may make no sense at all. The same goes with the description of Lord Krishna as "Giridhara".....or as "One who is adorned with a mountain" unless one knows the story of how He lifted Mount Govardhana with a single finger to protect his village from the wrath of Lord Indra who had unleashed a

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thunderstorm on them.

To take a look at Kalpana, the officially recognised areas where one is allowed to improvise are:

- 1) Raaga Aalaapana
- 2) Thaanam
- 3) Pallavi
- 4) Neraval
- 5) Manodharma Swarams and
- 6) Virutham or Shlokams.

Improvisation cannot be "Taught". It must happen naturally and in due course when a student of music reaches a certain level of competence and involvement with the art, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually. All the teacher can do is to show the way and point the student in the right direction.....ideally speaking that is. For a student to be able to sing Kalyani for instance, he or she must LISTEN.....to hundreds and hundreds of hours of Kalyani sung and played by various musicians.....and learn dozens of standard compositions in the Raagam till Kalyani literally starts to pour out of the student. And the ideal teacher would help the student give a disciplined structure to his or her creativity.

What happens these days is that many teachers who themselves may not be able to sing Manodharmam in any form, give Set patterns of Swarams, Neraval and Raaga Aalapanas to students whose sole desire would be either to win prizes at some competition or to get a degree + job + Phd in music. And Manodharmam goes out of the picture completely. To reach anywhere at all in music, one has to surrender to the art completely and keep one's life aside for the art. I once read a quote by Tennis Legend Martina Navratilova who said

"I am not just Involved with tennis. I am Committed to it. When we make ham and eggs, the chicken is involved.....but the pig is Committed." Because of which while dozens and dozens of bright young stars appear in the field of tennis.....and fade away into oblivion within the matter of a few years and half a dozen titles.....the Lady Herself marches on from strength to strength at the age of nearly 50.

One can only pray that at least a few fortunate souls will realise before it is too late, that our music, stripped of it's Bhakthi and Manodharmam, and reduced to mere dry grammar, Lakshanas and numbers, is worth very little indeed. In his composition "Sathyavandarigidu Kaalavalla" our Sangitha Pithamaha Shri

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Purandara Dasa said, nearly five hundred years ago "These are not the best of times for honest people. These are good times for Dushtas or wicked people. Those whom we help will turn around and hit us back" and so on.

This gives one hope, knowing that there was really no Glorious past as such and that there was good as well as evil always. And it is manifested in different ways during each epoque. By the same token I am sure there must be enlightened souls among us at present, when things look bleak, who will do their bit to try and restore our Glorious music to the place and form it deserves. As with everything else in life, only time will tell.