

Karnataka Music - The Story of its Evolution

The broad division of Indian music into Hindustani and Karnataka types that obtains at present amongst the writers on the subject is capable of further subdivision from the evolution view-point. The main stream of musical tradition that originated from Bharata underwent many changes with the changing years. New influences were brought to bear upon the two branches of the main stream, so that each acquired a characteristic peculiar to the cultural tradition of its part of the country. It is a long way from the classic purity and restrained beauty of Dhrupad to the imaginative intensity of the Thumri in the history of North Indian music, which was subjected to Arabian and Persian influences. But South India here as elsewhere stands to-day as the rigid custodian of more or less traditional forms. Not that there were absolutely no changes whatever, for music was always a "live" art and is still so in spite of the scant attention it receives from the so-called educated classes. No vital art can be static and so we find that certain changes and improvements were effected from time to time.

Karnataka culture in this as in other branches of its activities presents a synthesis of forms and symbols of apparently alien cultures. It reconciles the northern Samskrta tradition with the Dravidian forms of the far south. Modes indigenous to the country were assimilated into the scientifically evolved forms of the north in such a skillful way that it is usual to find in ordinary parlance an impression that mathematical rigidity of form characterises Karnataka music. It is a symbol of Karnataka culture and presents picture of involution, subjective in its criteria, introspective in its media and emotive in its material. It stands apart even as the Hoysala temple does from the huge gopurams of the South and the slender minarets of the Taj.

The Samskrta Influence

In the early stages the Samskrta influence was apparent in the chanting of the Vedic hymns. Even among the Sama hymns of Southern India three or four distinct schools are clearly discernible. Further, while the Pada and Krama Pathas of the Riks as aide to memory were common to all India, Jatapatha and Ghana Patha seem to have been the monopoly of the South. Though not so elaborate in music scales as the Sama hymns yet Jata was something of a favourite and recited on festival occasions. From the Udatta Svarita and Anndatta grew the heptatonic scale of Sama chants Prathama, dvitiya, tritiyu, chaturthe, mandadi, Svarthakha and Utkrishta though these do not necessarily equate with Shadja, Rishabha, Gandhara, Madhyama, Panchama, Dhaivata and Nishradha. Mr. Fox Strangways believes that

Karnataka Sama scale corresponds to the B to b of the white notes of the piano, the mixed Lydic of the Greek mode and the doctrine of the ecclesiastical.

Indigenous Modes

Of the indigenous modes we have no exact information. There must have been some, for we find numerous allusions in literature and epigraphs to the fact that Kannadigas were naturally a musical race. Rajasekhara (c 900) tells us that Kannadigas used to recite poetic compositions in a sonorous, sing-song fashion. Nripatunga Amoghavarsha, the Rashtrakuta emperor (c 375) says that the language of music came naturally and spontaneously to the people. His guru and older contemporary Jinasena in his Mahapurana gives a description of acting and good music of his time. Saigorta Sivamara (c 850) the Ganga King is described in inscriptions as well-versed in music and dramaturgy and as the author of a Gajashtaka which was so popular that it was sung by women while husking paddy. The capital of Kadamba Kakusthavarman (c 400 A. D.) is said to have resounded with music at all hours of the day. Pallava Mahendravarma was not only a great poet and painter but also a musician. His Kudimiyamalai inscription gives the symbols of Rishabha as Re and Ru, the exact values of which it is hard to determine. Early Sangam literature (c 300 A. D.) mentions a species of song and dance that was executed by Kannadigas about the region of the Nilgiris. In a Greek drama of the 2nd century A.D. found in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri a "barbaric" song and dance executed by the King of Malpi is mentioned.

Narada seems to have been the earliest expounder of the Bharatiya school of music. "Gandharvakalps" a work attributed to him, is said to be an authority on Sama Gana. "Naradiya Siksha," a late work probably of the 10th century expounds the saptasvaras, three gramas, 21 murchanas and eighty-three tanas. But there is no specific information as to the number and exact nature of srutis. The commentary on "Naradiyasiksha" by Acharya Subhankasa belongs to the 12th century. The Bharatiya school that prevails in the South had many exponents, chief among them being Bahulaka who wrote a karika about 400 A.D., Harsha, Bhatta, Lollata, Sri Sankuka son of Bhatta Mayura, Rudrata (possibly the Rudracharya of Kudimiyamalai inscription) Battodbhata, Sri Ghantika Kohala, Sardula, Durga, Matanga author of Brihaddesi, Umapati, Nakkakutti etc. Mahamaheswara Abhinavagupta and Bhatta Nayaka wrote on Abhinaya and expounded the theory of Bharata about the genesis of Rasa not only in Drisya but also in Sravya Kavyas.

In Kannada literature we find mention of certain indigenous modes of poetic composition such as Bedande, Chattana, Madanavati, Chaupadi, Shatpadi, Gite, Ele,

Sangatya, Tivadi, Utsaba, Akkara, Akkarike, etc. Melvadu, Bajanegabhe and Padugabha were peculiarly fitted for purposes of singing. From the times of Western Chalukyas of Kalyani we have more information to go upon. Sarvagna Someswara was a cultured sovereign who took great interest in the fine arts of his time. His work Abhilashitartha Chintamani is a compendium of all arts from cookery to kingship. But what is offered to us as specimens of the Kannada songs of the day is now so mutilated by generations of unintelligent scribes that it is almost impossible to get an idea of their nature. One or two seem to be in the ordinary kanda metre. But that Someswara made certain improvements of his own might be conjectured, for we are told that "In Kalyana kataka at the festival of Bhata matri, actors dressed as Bhillis used to sing and act, Someswara improved upon it and called the new type Gonditi, which from thence spread to the Maharashtra." He was followed in about 1160 A. D. by Vira Bhalluta who wrote his Natya Sastra at the court of Rudradeva of Warangal.

Sarngadeva

The next general landmark is the Sangita Ratnakara of Sarngadeva. He was patronised by Yadava Billama of Sevagiri and seems to have been the author of another work "Adhyatma Viveka" which is no longer extant. Ratnakara is also called Saptadhyayi as it contains seven chapters dealing with Svara, Raga. Prakirnaka, Prabandha, Tala, Vadya and Nartana. Sarngdeva, professes usually to follow Bharata but did not disdain to borrow from older authors like Kohala Matanga Nandikeswara, Mahadeva, Kambala, Asvatara, etc. Raghunatha tells us that he followed Durga and Dattila also. There are many passages in Sarngdeva's work which are very difficult to interpret. He discourses upon melakartas, Janyaragams and the twelve vikrita svarasthanas but gives no adequate information about murchanas as employed in his time, perhaps trusting to oral tradition and practical exemplification of delanas, gamakas etc.

Vira Ballala II the Hoysala emperor who had the titles Pratapa Chakravarti and Sangita prasanga bhangi Bharata was evidently the author of Sangita Chudamani. The Chalukya Haribhupala wrote his work "Sangita Sudhakara." probably at the same time.

In A. D. 1236 Jayasenapati composed his "Nritta Ratnavali" at the court of Ganapati of Warangal. About 1300 A. D. Parswadeva, a Karnataka Jaina, wrote his "Sangita Samaya sara."

The Vijayanagar Empire

With the foundation of the Vijayanagara Empire a fresh impetus was given for the development of fine arts. The great Vidyaranya himself wrote "Sangita sara"

dealing with ragams and the characteristics of each. In the time of Bukka Ashtavadhani Somanatha wrote his "Natya Chudamani." Under Deva Raya II the fine arts were greatly patronised as I have pointed out in the Indian Antiquary (May 1928). At the emperor's instance Kallinatha wrote his commentary on Sangita Ratnakara. Of all the commentaries on this work by Simhabhupa - Kumbhi Karnauarandra, Hamsalibupa, Gangaram, etc. Kallinatha's alone is lucid and illuminating. During the same King's reign, Devarabhata wrote his "Sangita Muktavali, Peddakomativema his "Sangita Chinta Manidipika." Thus we find that music also flourished to a great extent under that illustrious sovereign.

Later Composers

After them there follows a hiatus in the history of Karnataka music and nearly a century passed without producing writers of great merit, till we come to Pundarika Vithala. This great musician was a native of Satanur near Sivaganga in the Bangalore district of the Mysore Province and is the author of Ragamanjari, Sadragaebandrodaya, Ragamala and Nrityanirnaya. He was the contemporary of Tanasena and Tulsidasa. He wrote his Sadragachandrodaya at the request of Burhana Khan Pharki, son of Tajakhana and his Ragamanjari under the patronage of Madhava and Mana Simha, sons of Bhagavandas, at the court of Emperor Akbar whose qualities are also eulogised in his Nrityanirnaya. He gives the following equation of Hindustani and Karnataka Ragas which is of great interest:

Hindustani Karnataka

Kalyani	Mechakalyani
Bitaval	Dhirasankarabharana
Khamaj	Harikambhoji
Bhairav	Mayamalava Gaula
Purvi	Kamavardhini
Marava	Gamanasri
Kafi	Kharaharapriya
Asaveri	Natha Bhairavi
Bhairavi	Hanumattodi
Todi	Subha Pantuvarali

Mr. Fox Strangways, however, in his "Music of Hindustan" gives Hindustani Sindhu-bhairavi as equivalent to Natha bhairavi, Jhunhoti as equal to Karnataka Harikambeji, and Iman Kalyani as equal to Kalyani.

Next we come to Ramayamatya Todaramalla (c. 1575 A. D.) author of Swaramela Kalanidhi. His scales appear to be different from Bharata's. His Chyuta Panchama seems to be a sruti above probably with a view to the tuning of the Vina. He describes twenty mela kartas and sixty four janya ragas. His Rishabha, Gandhara, Dhaivata and Nishadha tonic scales differ from those of Saranga deva. His system is styled Dakshinatya and was greatly in vogue till the rise of Chaturdandi style. In spite of recriminations of later writers he seems to have been a better custodian of tradition than those who accuse him of heretical innovations.

Venkatamakhi

The next important writer is Somanatha Pandita who in 1609 wrote his Raga Vibodha with his own commentary. He admits only twenty-two srutis into his scheme. After him come Raghunatha and Venkatamakhi. The first was the author of Sangita Sudha and patronised the latter. He relies mainly on Sarangadhara, Sangita Sam of Vidyaranya, Sangita Chandrika of Bhatta Madhava and the commentaries of Kallinatha and Kesara on the Santadhyayi. Venkatamakhi, author of Chaturdandi, was the son of Govinda Dikshita and the disciple of Yajnanarayana Dikshita. He obtained his knowledge of music from Tanappacharya, son of Honaayya, who, after the destruction of the Empire of Vijayanagara sought patronage in other lands. It is important that this fact should be remembered, because it is the Chaturdandimata of Venkatamakhi that displaced Todara malla's "Dakshinatya" style and was followed by Tyagaraja and other later composers in the Telugu and Tamil countries and even now reigns supreme in Southern India.

The Moderns

About 1650 A. D. Ahobila Panditha wrote his "Sangita Parijata". He enunciates 20 srutis and twelve swaras, seven pure and five mixed and for these swaras he lays down the precise length of wires on the vina. After him we hear of no great original writer or composer till the rise of Tyagaraja. Tyagayya is said to have perfected his knowledge of music from a book of Narada which was presented to him in person. Under him Karnataka music received its final form. The elaboration of the pallavi and anu pallavi, varnams, sangatis, dolanas, gamakas and a hundred other technical subtleties were defined and analysed with mathematical precision so that Karnataka music became a science in the sense of a systematic development of knowledge. In the development (of music) composers like Karuri Dikshitar, Muthuswami Dikshitar did not resort to become a pedantic display of meaningless forms. It acquired its vitality through Bhakti and incidentally Bhakti became the sole subject-matter of the kirtanakaras. They are primarily and necessarily the

symbols of the culture of the people; and no culture can exist without religion and faith. If the religious element is eliminated, the result will be a mere civilisation, dead, inert, lifeless as it is in the West to-day.

Popular Developments in West and North

While thus what might be called a vertical development into the realms of pure science was going on in the eastern and southern parts of the Karnataka country, a horizontal expansion in the nature of popularising the musical modes was taking place in the western and northern parts. From the twelfth century onwards the followers of Basava and Madhwa were aiming at democratization of learning. Thus Sangatya, Sataka, Shatpadi, Tripadi Ragales, Vachanas, etc. were utilised by Vira Saiva authors, while sutadis, kirtanams, devarnamams, chaupadi, etc., became the monopoly of the Dasakuta. Harikatha kalakshepams, kelikas and yaksha ganas became powerful factors in the religious life of the people. Purandaradasa, Vijayadasa, Kanakadasa and other great composers struck out for themselves a new path in the field of music. Their compositions, though not so elaborate and elegant as those of Tyagayya, are yet couched in simple and spontaneous language giving expression to those joys and sorrows that are near and dear to the heart of every mortal, so that it is not surprising that many people, disgusted with the intellectual and physical gymnastics of a songster, who mistakes the means for the end and parodies the soulful hymns of Tyagayya, prefer the simple, homely and chaste beauty of Dasakuta hymns.

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