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ARIYAKKUDI RAMANUJA IYENGAR (1890-1967)

Dr.DHANALEKSHMI C

Assistant Professor

Kerala

Abstract

A study of the life and contributions of great masters of Carnatic music is very informative. The following article discusses brief biography of Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar and unique features Ariyakkudi bani. Ariyakkudi is a great maestro noted for his distinct way of singing. His alapanas were short and crisp, and they revealed the essence of raga bhava. Modernizing the concert format may be considered as the greatest contribution of Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar.

Key words: Ariyakkudi, Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Ariyakkudi bani, Concert format

Ramanuja Iyengar was born in Ariyakkudi in Ramanad District, Madras State on May 19, 1890 to Thiruvengada Iyengar and Chellammal. Ramanuja Iyengar had his training under Pudukottai Malayappa Iyer for three years and maestro Namakkal Narasimha Iyengar for two years. His abilities in kedaragoula raga earned him the name "kedaragoula Narasimha Iyer", while his knowledge of complex pallavis earned him the name "pallavi Narasimha Iyer". From 1906 to 1912 Ariyakkudi was a student of Poochi (Ramanad) Sreenivasa Iyengar, the senior most disciple of Pattanam Subramanya Iyer. The foundation was rich and varied. Young Ramanujam learnt Tamil at the *Devakottai Tamil Patasala* (school) and Sanskrit under Milaganur Krishna Sasthriyal. This helped him much in setting to tunes and handling compositions in those languages in later days. It was a privilege for Ariyakkudi to learn all the varnas and krithis directly from the composer. He began accompanying his guru on concerts soon after. In 1909, Ramanujam married Ponnammal, and the couple had many children, of whom only Janaki and Lakshmi survived.

Ariyakkudi's voice was his greatest strength, and it was a powerful tool for expressing his creative ideas. In addition to his voice, he had flawless techniques, and he was widely considered a master of gamaka. Concert career of Ramanuja Iyengar began early. As he observed the concerts of his seniors and contemporaries, he identified their unique characteristics. In 1918, he was invited to perform at the Thyagaraja festival Thiruvayyar, and this was a great success.

He arrived in Madras in 1920. By 1921, he had established himself as a popular concert performer. He gave performances all around the world. By 1925, he had established himself as a senior performer. When Kanchi's Paramacharya learned of Ariyakkudi, he invited him to play at Karaikkudi when he was camped there. The saint offered his rudraksha beads to him after being impressed by his performance. He was elected as the president of the Music Academy's Annual Conference in 1938. He was the first person to win the President's award, which was founded by the Indian government in 1952. Throughout his life, he never stopped learning.

Every concert is approached with devotion by Ariyakkudi. In his white dhoti and shirt, he was usually immaculately dressed. He donned a lace angavasthram and a coat to formal occasions. He wore Diamond Kadukkans and rings all the time. He was a devout Rama devotee who credited all of his good fortune and achievement to Lord Rama by stating, "Ellam Raghavan

Sahayam" (All is due to Raghavan's favour). He had a large number of disciples B. Rajam Iyengar,

K.V.Narayanaswami, Alleppey Parthasarathy Iyengar, Gopala Swami Iyengar, K.S. Dhanammal, Kandadevi Narayanan, Devakottai Srinivasa Iyengar, are most well-

known. Others, such as S.Narayanaswamy Iyer, G.N.Balasubramanyam, and Madurai Mani Iyer, were regarded as 'Manaseeka Gurus' by Ariyakkudi. He advised his disciples about the importance *sahithyasudham* (clear enunciation of lyrics). He was very keen in tuning the *Thambura*, particularly the mandra string.

He had won several awards and recognitions like "*Sangita Ratnaka*", "*Sangeetha Kalanidhi*", '*Gaya.ka Sikhmani*'. *Sangeetha Kala Sikhmani* by Indian Fine Arts Society, *Gayaka Kandirava*, the President's Award, First performer in the Radio Sammelan, *Isai Perarignar* by Tamil Isai Sangham & *Sangeetha Sasthra Alankara* by H.H.Sringeri Sankaracharya etc. Ariyakkudi became extremely ill by late 1966. He died on January 23, 1967.

Notable Characteristic features of Ariyakkudi Bani

Ariyakkudi bani is known for its simplicity, grace, and finish. Mastery of the *laksya* and *lakshana* aspects of music was acquired by him. The *brigas* he sang were short and crisp. The tempo used by him was perfect for his voice and musical ability; his *kalapramana* was unique. His style of singing has become known in musical history as *ariyakkudi style* or *ariyakkudi bani* because it is so unique and captivating. Ramanuja Iyengar's repertoire includes more than 1000 songs. Each *krithi* is presented by understanding the meaning and *bhava* of the *sahithya*. At the beginning of the concert, Ariyakkudi was able to establish a close bond with the audience. He always began a concert with a *Varna*. To his credit, he introduced a large number of compositions of the trinity. His singing style was attractive, polished, charming, lively, and aesthetic. Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar deserves special mention for the planning, execution and balance of his concerts. Though he prioritised *madhyamakala*, he maintained a well balanced blend of *chouka*, *Madhya* and *drutha kalas*. The use of appropriate *kalapramana*, purity in *gamaka*, clarity in the enunciation of *sahithya*, the *padanthara sudham*, etc makes his style magnificent.

Concert format introduced by Ariyakkudi

Ariyakkudi is credited with inventing the modern day concert format. Variety was the key element of the newly developed concert format. The concert format introduced by him: the concert should begin with a varna, followed by a few fast-tempo krithis. A short and crisp alapana of 2 or 3 ragas of the krithis to be sung may be rendered. The pieces selected should be of varied thalas. A mix of slow and fast tempo krithis alternatively preferable. There should be a main item- either a Pallavi or a chouka kala krithi with raga alapana, niraval and kalpanaswara, followed by thani avarthanam. The post main items should comprise padam, javali, thevaram, thiruppugazh, Ashtapadi, Tharangam, Thillana, Ragamalika and sloka. He made the concert scenario vigorous, individual and mass-centred. Ariyakkudi's concert padhathi was widely followed and accepted by succeeding generations.

List of some compositions popularized by Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar

SI No	Krithi	Raga
1	Evarimatta	Kamboji
2	Karthikeya Gangeya	Thodi
3	Anupama gunambudhi	Atana
4	Parama Pavana Rama	Poorvikalyani
5	Sarasijanabha Sodari	Nagagandhari
6	Nea Bhajana Gana	Nayaki
7	Kandu Dhanyanade	Behag
8	Raju Vetala	Thodi
9	Saraguna Palimpa	Kedaragoula
10	Janani Ninnuvina	Reethigoula

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