

SAINT THYAGARAJA'S NAUK CHARITHAM

The Boat Journey

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Abstract : The study is an analysis of a South Indian Opera, 'Nauka Charitham', composed by the prolific composer Saint Thyagaraja. Operas in South India are called Sangeetha Natakam or Geya Natakam or Isai Natakam. Nauka charitham is one of the two available Geya Natakams composed by Saint Thyagaraja in Telugu Language. The play describes a boat journey by the Gopis and a 7 years old Krishna on the Yamuna river. Krishna creates an illusory storm to challenge the pride of the Gopis. Saint Thyagaraja portrays the surrender of the Gopis, to Krishna and shows us how a devotee absolutely surrenders to god. The play has 21 Kritis with the first and the last kriti in the same Raga 'Suratti'.

IndexTerms - Saint Thyagaraja, Nauka Charitham, boat journey, Gopis, Lord Krishna.

I. INTRODUCTION

Saint Thyagaraja's Nauka Charitham focuses on 'Madhura and Sringara Bhakthi'. It is a one-act opera which portrays a boat journey of the Gopis with Lord Krishna. It is not based on any true story. Saint Thyagaraja has improvised his imagination on a small incident explained in Srimad Bhagavatham. This Geya Natakam is a combination of verses (Padyas), proses (Vachanas) and songs (Kritis). There are 47 padyas, 51 vachanas and 21 kritis (set to 13 ragas) in Nauka Charitham. A few of them are explored in this article.

II. NAUKA CHARITHAM- THE BOAT JOURNEY

This Geya Natakam begins with a few prayer verses, invoking the deities Vinayaka, Saraswati, Rama and Krishna. Then comes the Phala Sruti, which explains the benefits bestowed by listening to the Nauka Charitham,

“dharalO hari kRta naukA caritambunu vinnavAru san-mArgamucE
cira jIvulai celangucu vara suta dhanamulanu paDasi vardhilludurE”

Meaning: Those who heard 'Nauka charitham' enacted by Lord Hari on the Earth, will tread path of highest good, be long lived, and flourish by attaining good children and wealth.

After this, the Charitham has a few padyas as prologue of the natakam, which narrates the way the damsels (Gopis) of Gokula get attracted to the music played by Krishna on his flute and rejoice with Him. The prologue also briefs that the Gopis adorn themselves with beautiful saress, ornaments and flowers and proceed to the banks of the Yamuna river in ecstasy. Being in a state of euphoria, the Gopis sing and dance with Krishna. Here comes the first kriti 'Sringarinchukoni vedaliri' set to Suratti Ragam and Adhi Thalam. This kriti describes the excitement of the exulting Gopis. The composer narrates that the Gopis laugh, shake, comb the curls of Krishna, kiss Him and lot more.

The Charitham continues with a few padyas describing the entire surrounding of trees, birds, swans and the river Yamuna. 'Chudare chelulara' is a beautiful madhyama kala ((medium tempo) kriti, set to Ragam Kamavardhini and Misra Chapu Thalam, which portrays the beauty of the Yamuna river through the voice of Gopis, followed by the kriti 'Adavaramella' set to Ragam Yadukula Kambhoji and Misra Chapu thalam.

Then appears an alluring stone studded white boat on the black coloured Yamuna river after this kriti, which is followed by vachanas between the Gopis and Krishna, where the Gopis propose not to take Krishna with them on the boat journey. Krishna however convinces the Gopis and joins them on the journey. Here begins the sail with the kriti 'Odanu Jaripe' in madhyama kalam set to Ragam Saranga and Adhi Thalam, describing various gestures of the Gopis and Krishna on the boat.

The delighted Gopis slowly begin to pride themselves and fail to remember that Krishna is an Omniscient Almighty. He perceives this attitude of Gopis and asks them to paddle the boat towards west. Blinded with hubris the Gopis begin to mock at Krishna which is expressed in the madhyama kala kriti 'Evaru manaku' set to Devagandhari Ragam and Adhi Thalam. Krishna creates a storm in the river to humble the Gopis.

It begins to rain and hail-stones lash down from the sky, creating holes in the boat. Water enters the boat through these holes and the distraught Gopis sing the kriti 'Unna tavuna' in Ragam Ghanta set to Misra chapu thalam. Gopis begin to realize their mistake and blame themselves for their unpleasant situation. Looking at the confused and grieving Gopis, Krishna asks them to remove their clothes and plug the hole in the boat. The Gopis lament that their beloved Krishna has uttered such words. The situation is described in the kritis- 'Krishna makemi' set to Ragam Punnagavarali and 'Indukemi' set to Ragam Varali.

The Gopis take Krishna's words to be that of the Veda and obey, but their clothes are washed away. The Gopis cry pitiably and hug Krishna as their mouths start drying up. The distressed and desperate Gopis surrender themselves completely to Krishna as elucidated in the kriti- 'Veda vakyamani' set to Ragam Mohanam in Misra Chapu Thalam and 'Hari Hari nee okka' set to Ragam Punnagavarali and Adhi thalam. Krishna asks the Gopis to stop crying and meditate on Him. He also asks them to close their eyes and sing songs praising Him. Here the composer uses a few metaphors to explain the position of the Gopis accepting the words of Krishna :

vyAdhula galavAru vaidyuni mATalu viSvAsamutODa vinina(y)aTula
Meaning : Like a patient heeds advices of a doctor.

pUrNa garbhiNul(ai)na polatul(e)llanu mantrasAni ceppina mATa salpin(a)Tlu
Meaning : Like a pregnant women following the words of an accoucheuse.

paricArak(A)dulu bhAgyavantuni mATa tappaka vinn(a)Tlu
Meaning : Like a maid obeying the orders of her master

taruNul(e)lla param(E)Svaruni mATa bhaktitO vini kanul mUsi bhajinciri vAsi merasi
Meaning : The Gopis listened to the words of Krishna (Parameswara)

The down pouring rains stop and the weather returns to normalcy. The submissive Gopis begin to worship and adore Krishna again. He blesses them with golden sarees and shining ornaments and the Gopis celebrate their reunion with the Lord. The Gopis offer their prayers to Krishna as described in the kriti 'Gandhamu Puyyaruga' set to Ragam Punnagavarali and Adhi thalam. The delighted and rejoicing Gopis continue their boat journey with Krishna as in the kriti 'Ghuma Ghuma' set to Ragam Sourashtram and Misra Chapu Thalam.

The Nauka Chaitham ends with the Gopis taking Krishna back to his house with a Mangala kriti 'Ma kulamunaku' set to Ragam Suratti and Misra Chapu Thalam.

III. CONCLUSION

The composer Saint Thyagaraja compares the Nauka (boat) to the life of the people on Bhoologa (earth). The boat journey is the journey of a human life from birth to death which is called Samsara Sagaram (Ocean of Life). Bhakthi (portrayed as Nauka or boat) is the medium which succors the humans to cross the ocean of life. The utilization of the ragas for the kriti is apt for each and every situation. Written in the inherently musical telugu language, Nauka Charitham is sweet to the ear and soothing to the heart of the devotee.

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