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The Navaratnamala- Unique Group Kritis As A Tribute

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Abstract: Bharatha natyam was not performed in the present format in the earlier days. It is in the eighteenth century, the four brothers of Tanjavur had designed a very structured format and they are Chinnayya, Ponnayya, Sivanandam and Vadivelu popularly known as Tanjai Nalvar. They are the pioneers who systematically organized Bharathanatya in to a concert form. These four brothers –collectively known as Tanjai Nalvar/ Tanjavur brothers / Tanjavur quartette- were primarily performing musicians and composers. They have composed many musical pieces for dance in addition to the musical forms used in Carnatic music. They lived in the early 19th century in Tanjavurv where the culture and tradition was rich enough for the artists to flourish. The “Tanjavur Quartette”, refers to a tradition.

Key words: Bharata natyam, Tanjai nalvar/Tanjavur quartette, kritis, Brhadiswara, dance, music

Tanjavur brothers, have made an enormous contribution to the field of dance and music. Prior to the time of “Tanjai nalvar”, dance was in the form of “Kudakoothu” (pot dance) Kavuttuvams etc. in temples. The Tanjavur quartette systematically composed the fundamental elements like Adavu, Jatis etc. There is hundred and twenty adavus altogether for which the corresponding hand and feet movements have also been systematized. They composed Melaprapti, Allarippu, Jatiswaram, Sabdam, Svarajathi, Chauka Varna, Ragamalika, Padam, Javali, and Thillana and brought dance performance as a “Kacheri”.

Along with music, they also learnt ‘Bharathanatya’ from their father, Subbaraya and grandfather Gangaimuthu. A well-planned scheme of dance items, Alarippu, Jatiswaram, Sabdam, Padavarnam, Svarajathi, Padam, Ragamalika slokam, and Tillana was brought out by them. They have also composed musical forms like Tana varna and Kirtana, in which the sahithya is on various Gods. The “Sarabhendra Bhupalakuravanji”, written by Kottaiyur Sivakozhundu Desikar was tuned by these illustrious four brothers and it was enacted in the Thanjavur Brhadisvara temple during the Brahmotsava celebrations as a regular feature.

These musicians are fortunate to have received royal patronage from the rulers of Thanjavur, Mysore and Trivandrum or Travancore. The four brothers must have acquired rich competency in music, as they were blessed as the contemporaries of the great Musical Trinity, Thyagaraja, Muthusvami Deekshitar and Syamasastri. Had the golden chance to learn music directly for seven years under the tutelage of the great Vaggeyakara Muthusvami Deekshitar.

“The Navaratna mala” of Tanjai nalvar, are a set of nine compositions as “Gurusthuthi” . These group kritis are composed in nine different ragas, either in praise of Lord Brhadisvara or Brhannayaki, the presiding Deities of Brhadiswara temple. All the kritis are in Telugu. Like their guru Muthusvami Dikshitar, they also, used the mudras like “Guruguha”, (“Guruguhadasa', Guruguha bhaktha', ‘Guruguha murthi’) expressing their reverence for him. It is believed that since Dikshitar was the blessed child of Lord Subramanya, the “Thanjai brothers infused the relative identity in the mudra “Guruguha”. The usage of madhyamakala sahitya, which is a common feature of Muthuswami Deekshitar kritis and chittaswaras are seen in some of these group kritis. .

THE “NAVARATNA MALA”

| | Composition | Raga | Thala |
|----------|------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| 1 | “Mayateeta swarupini” | Mayamalavagaula | Rupaka |
| 2 | "Sri guruguha” | Bhinnashadja | Rupaka |
| 3 | “Sri karambu” | Kamboji | Khandachap |
| 4 | “Sarasakshi” | Sailadesakshi | Adi |
| 5 | "Paramapavani” | Varali | Rupaka |
| 6 | “Nitupadame” | Pantuvarali | Rupaka |
| 7 | “Sri rajarajeswari” | Ramapriya | Adi |
| 8 | “Satileni guruguha” | Purvikalyan | Misrachapu |
| 9 | “Sarekuni padamule” | Shanmukhapriya | Rupaka |

“Mayamalavagaula” is an auspicious raga and Muthusvami Dikshitar Composed his first composition “Sri Nadadi guruguhajayathi” in this raga set in Adi tala. It is worth mentioning that these brothers have also composed their first piece in this raga. The first composition is “Mayatheetha svarupini” in Mayamalavagaula raga on Goddess Brhannayaki. Just like the kriti, ‘Sri nadadi...’which starts with the Madhya stayi shadja, ‘Mayatheetha...’ also starts with the same shadja. "Ma guruguha svamiki ne dasudaiti”, in the latter part of the charana of this kriti, clearly reveals that they were the disciples of Muthusvami Dikshitar. Samashti charana, which is seen in most of Deekshitar kritis, is also noted in this kriti. As in Deekshitar kritis, the raga mudra finds a place in this kriti. ‘Mayamalavagaula’ is found in the anupallavi

followed by a samashti charanam, which is also special to Deekshitar. They have adopted the vaggeyakara mudra as “guruguha dasa”, which occurs only in the “navarathnamala” kritis.

Their guru, Muthuswami Deekshitar praised them and honoured with the title “Sangeetha Sahithya Bharatha Sreshtar” and proudly stated that just as Sri. Purandaradasa was the pioneer in the field of music; his disciples (The Thanjavur Quartette) are the pioneers in the field of Dance.

Though the mudra ‘Guruguha’ is identical with Muthuswami Deekshitar, there are other composers too, who have used the same mudra in some of their compositions. Subbarama Deekshitar and Ambi Deekshitar seem to have used this mudra in some compositions. All the prosodic as well as rhetorical beauties add an extra flavor to the compositions of the “Thanjavur brothers”. These set of nine kritis are given in the book “Thanjai Peruvudaiyan Perisai” with notation.

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