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LAKṢMĪ ŚŌBHĀNA - GĒYA PRABANDHA OF VĀDIRĀJA TĪRTHA

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Abstract

In the history of Indian classical music, Haridāsās of Karnataka played a very important role in setting up the Karnātak music pedagogy. They were Vaiṣṇava saints of Karnataka who followed and advocated the Dvaita philosophy of Śri Madhvācārya. They composed musical compositions that could be understood by one and all, by dexterously weaving musical elements and devotional literature together, which ushered in a cultural renaissance during and post the Bhakti movement. Sri Vādirāja Tīrtha, the most eminent yathi in the lineage of Sri Madhvācārya, was a great scholar, poet, debater, a haridāsa saint and a facile writer. A polyglot, his works pertaining to Dvaita philosophy, which he emphasized as ‘Tatva vāda’ are not confined to the Sanskrit language, but take the gist of Vēdānta and Bhāgavatha as a powerful exposition, in a poetic style, through literature in Kannada, the language of the masses. Apart from this, some of his compositions are also seen in Marathi, Telugu, Hindi, Tamil, and Tulu.

This paper will briefly present the composition Lakṣmī Śobhāne, which Vadirāja Tīrtha brings out as a *gēya Prabandha* in Kannada. A *Śobhāne* in folklore is a musical composition sung in weddings by womenfolk as a benediction to the bride and the groom. Methodologically, this paper employs a qualitative approach, analyzing a selection of the composition to bring its salient features and a descriptive narrative to briefly summarize these concepts.

Index Terms: Haridāsās of Karnataka, Dvaita, Vadirāja Tīrtha, Bhakti, Śobhāne

Introduction

In Indian music, a gēya prabandha is a well literary composition that can be sung and is bound by certain rules on its structure, the theme it portrays (*Prabadhyate iti Prabandhah*). The word ‘Gēya’ signifies “sung” or “to be sung” and denotes to be musically performed. In Indian music, from as early as the fifth century in Matanga’s Brihaddeshi, a musical composition has been called a *Gēya Prabandha*. Śārṅgadeva in his treatise *Sangeeta Ratnakara* explains in depth two hundred and sixty varieties of *Gēya Prabandha-s*. *Prabandha* in its evolution has reflected itself to be a very versatile and ever changing pattern as per regional influence. It follows definite rules of prosody, is set to a specific metre and is rendered through a rāga-melody and a defined tālā. In the medieval times, *Haridāsas* of Karnataka composed *Gēya Prabandha-s* and *Rūpakas* in Kannada, which were a prelude to many such compositions later in the vernacular languages. They dexterously weaved literature replete in cultural and spiritual values through classical music. Revival of ancient musical forms as *Prabandha* were ingeniously incorporated into newer formats such as *Gīta*, *Thāya*, *Alapa*, *Sulādis*, *Ugabhogās*, *Dandakās*, *Vruttanāmās* which as *Gēya Prabandha-s* carried forth the performance traditions of the fading *Prabandhās*. They were the followers of Dvaita¹ philosophy and were saints (yatis) and pontiffs of the highest philosophical order and their disciples who propagated good teachings on philosophy, religion, social and ethical conduct, moral values aligned to principles of Tatvavāda. Haridāsa tradition seems to have begun from Śrīpādarāya (1404-1502 CE) and flows on to Vyasarāja Tīrtha (1460-1539 CE), Vadirāja Tīrtha (1480-1600 CE), Rāghavendra Tīrtha (1595-1671 CE) among the saints and pontiff-s. Their prominent saint disciples were Purandaradāsa, Kanakadāsa, Vijayadāsa, Gopāladāsa, Jagannathadāsa, women disciples such as Helavanakatte Giryamma, Harapanahalli Bheemavva and many more. Haridāsa saints composed and surrendered their compositions with their colophon identities (*aṅkita*) to Lord Hari in his different forms as Viṭṭala, Hayavadana, Siri Kṛṣṇa and so on. Haridāsa Sāhitya (literature) was composed in Samskṛta for the scholarly and elite and in Kannada, the language of the commoners.

While they were also the founders of the classical Karnāṭak musical pedagogy, they are credited to have transformed the popular folk music forms of their times as *kōlāta* (dance with sticks), *Sōbhane* (benedictory songs), *Suvvāli* (sung while pounding corn), *Koravañji* (fortuneteller’s songs), *lāli-jōgula* (cradle songs/lullaby), wedding songs as *Urutāne* (rolling of coconut), *Uyyāle* (swing songs), *ārati* (light waved to ward off evil) which sang about to themes common to everyday life into devotional musical compositions known as *Sampradāya padās* which could be rendered by all, elite or common folk during auspicious occasions that bridged bhakti and the thoughts of plebeians together. The lyrics, composed effectively with the usage of alliterations and prosody. They made use of the refrain from the folk and then used literary meters as *tripadi*, *choupadi*, *shatpadi* and rendered them with simple dēsi tālās. Stories of Lord Viṣṇu and other celestials from various *Purāṇās* as *Padma Purāṇā*,

¹ One of most important theistic schools popularly known as *Tattva-vāda* (doctrine of real entities) also called - *Bheda-vāda* and *Bimba-pratibimba-vāda* propounded by Anandatīrtha or Sri Madhvachārya (1238-1317 CE), uphold ‘*Hari Sarvōttamatva*’ which implies that Lord Viṣṇu-is the supreme.

Bhāgavatha Purāṇā, Dvaita theology constituted the lyrics making them popular with the common folk as a way to express devotion and to propel themselves into higher social, moral and cultural values.

Among the most prominent and celebrated yatis, a mystic, haridāsa and disciple of Sri Madhvachārya is Sri Vādirāja Tīrtha, who is seen as the second highest saint in the Mādhwa hierarchy next to Sri Madhvachārya. He was a celebrated poet in the Dvaita philosophy, and composed compositions under the *aṅkita* “*Hayavadana*”. He was named Varaha by his parents. As an unflinching debater, he was named Vādirāja in his Sanyāsāśrama (ascetic order). Vādirāja Tīrtha wrote many unique, resourceful and powerful works based on Indian philosophy in general and the Dvaitavēdānta in particular such as Mahakāvya, Khandakāvya, Stotras, and Darśana kāvya with great finesse and dexterity. Among his exceptional and extant work, stands out “*Rukmiṇīśa Vijaya*” (Lord Kṛṣṇa’s victory over Siśupāla) and “*Swapnavrundāvanākhyana*”.

As much as he was prolific in Sanskrit, appealing to the elite and learned, his connect with the common folk and command over Kannada and Tuḷu language gave rise to many compositions in them. Merging the literature and his knowledge in music, he composed compositional forms as *Pada*, *Sulādi*, *Ugābhōga*, *dīrgha hāḍugaḷu* (long compositions) and folk based having the types of compositions *Dvipadi*, *Tripadi*, *Śatpadi*, *Aśtapadi*, *Daśapadi*². As a gifted poet, keeping the style simple and lucid enough to be understood by one and all, he has embellished the compositions with rhetorics.

Lakṣmī Śōbhāna

One such composition based on folk music, that Vādirāja Tīrtha composed was *Lakṣmī Śōbhāna*, which brings out the narration of wedding of Lakṣmī and Nārāyana. A *Śōbhāne* in folklore is sung in weddings by womenfolk, as a well wishing for the bride and the groom. It is seen in Indian weddings that the groom and bride are seen as personification of Lakṣmī and Nārāyana themselves.

Background

It has been documented that this composition was sung at the residence of the native leader Arasappa Nayaka, whose son, the bridegroom bitten by a cobra was dead in the wedding hall. At Nayaka’s behest, Vādirāja Tīrtha revives his son by singing *Lakṣmī Śōbhāna*³ which thematizes Goddess Lakṣmī and Lord Nārāyana’s wedding right from the time goddess *Lakṣmī* arises from the churning of the milky ocean to the time the eternal couple are united in marriage. On the outset, although it appears that Vādirāja Tīrtha has composed a ritualistic song, the composition explains in depth the Dvaita theology, concepts from Vedās, and various purānās through this composition. While the narration is presented in a simple language to be understood by all, the concepts explained can challenge even the greatest of philosophers. By just looking at the name of the composition, one might presume that it is an ode to Goddess Lakṣmī, however, this composition extolls the virtues of Lord Viṣṇu, the ever auspicious, by none other than the Goddess as a bhakta herself.

² Compositions with three lines, four lines, six lines

³ Śri Lakṣmī Śōbhāna pada preface

Vādirāja Tīrtha attests this composition as an outcome of the divine revelation of Lord Nārāyana's virtues in his dreams (a 'swapnapada') as he mentions in the 109th stanza of the composition:

intu svapnadalli koṇḍāḍisikoṇḍa lakṣmī

kāntana kandanenisuva

santara meccina vādirājēndramuni

panthadi pēḷida padavidu || Stanza 109||

[Thus was praised the spouse of lakṣmī, who appeared in the dreams of his child Vādiraja, the favorite of all ascetics, who composed this poem to show the right path.]

Some sections of the composition has been analyzed below:

The composition starts with a refrain⁴ praising Lord Hari. It proceeds to describe the virtues of Goddess Lakṣmī arising from the churning of milky ocean and narrates her conviction to choose lord Nārāyana as her consort. The poet explains this conviction based on the tenets of Tatvavāda

Refrain⁵ :

Śōbhānavennire suraroḷu śubhaganige

śōbhānavenni suguṇanige

śōbhānavennire trivikramarāyage

śōbhānavenni surapriyage Śōbhāna ||Pallavi||

[Sing praises to the best amongst all in the three worlds, to Trivikramarāya who conquered the three worlds, the one who is adulated by all good souls]

lakṣmīnārāyaṇara

caraṇakke

śaraṇembe

pakṣivāhannageraguve

pakṣivāhannageraguve

anudina

rakṣisali namma vadhūvarara || Stanza 1||[I salute everyday to the feet of the eternal couple, Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa, who ride the celestial eagle, Garuda to protect the newly wed]

pālasāgaravannu

līleyali

kaḍeyalu

bāle

mahālakṣumi

udisidaḷu

bāle

mahālakṣumi

udisidaḷā

dēvi

pālisali namma vadhūvarara || Stanza 2||

[I beseech Goddess Mahālakṣmi who emerged as a young lady, out of the ocean of milk churned by, to protect the newly wed]-describes the theme of arising of Lakṣmī from the churning of milk ocean as described in Purānās.

Post this, the composition proceeds with her decking up as a bride, rejecting all others-Rishis, Indra, Bramha, Shiva and other deities as suitors based on their de-merits and acknowledging that Lord Hari is the best, flawless (stanzas 26-49),

⁴ called Pallavi in musical compositions

⁵ vide Lakṣmī Śōbhāne, "Sri Vadiraja deergha kritigalu"

ondondu guṇagaḷu iddāvu ivaralli

sandaṇisive bahu dōṣa

kundeḷḷaṣṭillada mukundane tanagendu

indire patiya nenedaḷu ||Stanza 29||

[Each of them here might have one or two good qualities, but are filled with vices. However it is Mukunda, who is flawless, the 'best' and my spouse from time immemorial, I contemplate on him to be my spouse even now] — assertion of *Hari Sarvōttamatva* and as per Dvaita other deities are only seen as iconic representatives of the Lord as unliberated souls in their respective hierarchies⁶, and not as independently authoritative figures, except for Vishnu's eternal consort goddess Lakṣmī.

śrīnārāyaṇara jananī janakara

nānemba vādī nuḍiyalo

jāṇarindariya mūla rūpava tori

śrī narasimhana avatāra || Stanza 40|| -

[Don't contemplate on who are the parents to Lord Nārāyaṇa. He has no beginning or end, think of Narasimha avatara where he manifested himself]-reflecting the principle of no beginning or end to the Lord

ākāḷisuvāga yaśōdādēviga

dēva tannoḷage hudugidda

tribhuvanavellava tōridudillave

ā viṣṇu garbhadoḷaḍaguvane ||43||

[As he opened his mouth wide, showed Yaśoda the three worlds he protected in his womb is it correct to think that such Lord Viṣṇu would be in her womb for nine months] — showcasing that he is the creator and is omnipotent

her conviction that Śrī Kṛṣṇa is Lord Hari himself, the supreme lord (stanzas 50-65), wedding of Lakṣmī and Lord Hari (stanzas 66-70), celebration through music and mantrās, Samudrarāja, father of goddess Lakṣmī welcoming Lord Hari, women folk inviting him to the wedding podium by referring to him in his different names based on his attributes(stanzas 76-91)

śēṣaśayanane bā dōṣadūrane bā

bhāsurakāya hariye bā

bhāsurakāya hariye bā śrīkṛṣṇa vi-

lāsadindemma hasege bā | Stanza 77||

kañjalōcanane bā mañjulamūrti bā

kuñjaravaradāyakane bā

kuñjaravaradāyakane bā śrī Kṛṣṇa ni-

rañjana namma hasege bā ||Stanza 78||

⁶ tāratamya

enalu naguta bandu haseya mēle

vanite lakṣmiyoḍagūḍi

ananta vaibhavadi kuḷita kṛṣṇana nālku

dinadutsavava naḍesidaru ||Stanza 91||

[One who resides on Sēśanāga, the viceless, resplendent, lotus eyed, pleasant in demeanor, one who protected the elephant, O lord Śrī Kṛṣṇa please ascend on the podium. Thus invited, Śrī Kṛṣṇa ascends the podium with his consort Lakṣmi]

While the celebrations are on, Lord Hari takes the form of Mohini and serves nectar to the guests(stanza 100), with conclusion of the festivity's, Samudrarāja builds a mansion to the newly wed couple on the ocean, followed by benediction (Stanza 107) :

hayavadana tanna priyaḷāda lakṣumige

jayavitta kṣīrāmbudhiyalli

jayavitta kṣīrāmbudhiyalli śrī Kṛṣṇa

dayadi nammellara salahali ||Stanza 07||

[May the victorious Hayavadana(horse faced lord) as Lord Kṛṣṇa and his consort Lakṣmi protect us all through their kindness]

The composition concludes with Phalaśtuti (stanzas 108-112) which promise the newly wed eternal happiness, bliss and longevity of marriage if the song is performed in the wedding:

śrīyarasa hayavadanapriya vādirāja-

rāya racisida padavidu

āyuṣya bhaviṣya dinadinake heccāguvadu ni-

rāyāsadinda sukhiparu ||110||

[May the one who sings this composition, composed by Vādirāja, who is very dear to the consort of Śrī be blessed by health,wealth, long life line and prospetity without any struggle]

maduveya maneyalli ī padava pāḍidare

madumakkaḷige mudavahudu

vadhugaḷige ōle bhāgya dinadinake heccuvadu

madananyana krpeyinda ||112||

[When sung in marriage spaces, this composition would surely bring happiness to the newly wed, through longetivity in relationship blessed by the father of Madana]

- The composition is a well knit *gēya prabandha*⁷. Composed as a quartette, it has a well known tune and defined rhythm. It has been composed in *Rāga Pantuvarāli*, set to *Dhruva tāla*⁸, and is a lengthy composition⁹ consisting of 112 stanzas.
- The pallavi is repeated as a refrain after the last stanza, however *Śōbhāna* as a refrain is sung after the completion of every stanza. The composition has been signed by him in his name in stanza 109 and through his ankita ‘Hayavadana’ in the stanzas (107-112).
- *Yamakālankāra* is seen as a prosodical excellence on the second and third lines of every stanza, here. Also, this *Śōbhāne* mentions the instruments *tāḷa*, *maddaḷe*, *chande*, *tammate*, *bheri*, *śankha* and *dundubhi*, the celestial musicians Nārada and Tumburu and also Marathi folk musical forms *ovi* and *dhavaḷa*¹⁰.
- The composition has been composed as an amalgamation of two musical forms as Sāngatya and as Tripadi both of these native to Kannada language and have remained the most suitable metrical format to express even the smallest of emotions. Generally, these are rendered in a folk format.

Conclusion

“*Jayavitta kṣīrāmbudhiyalli Śri Kṛṣṇa dayadi namellara salahali*” — concludes saint Vādirāja seeking blessings to one and all from the ever victorious Śri Kṛṣṇa who as Lord Viṣṇu and his consort Lakṣmi resides in the ocean of milk. *Lakṣmī Śōbhāna* reflects the magnanimity of the saint to have brought out the principles of Tatvavāda and the greatness of lord Hari as a folk music adaptation to be sung everyday and in auspicious occasions by one and all, making it available to one and all, not confining these principles to only the elite. This musical composition seamlessly weaves together Dvaita philosophy (as a tatva pada) and folk musical elements of a *Śōbhāna* into a *sampradāya pada*, sung even today in weddings.

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⁷ a well knit literary composition that can be sung and is bound by certain rules on its structure, the theme it portrays (Prabandhyate iti Prabandhah)

⁸ rhythm indicator

⁹ also called deergha hādugalu

¹⁰ Sampradāya songs performed by women during wedding celebrations

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