

Compositions of Kshetragna

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Kshetragna, an illustrious Uaggeyabava lived in 17th Century. (1600 - 1680). He was born in Andhra Pradesh and hailed from the village Movva of Krishna district. He was a Telugu Brahmin and he was named as Varadayya. He travelled and composed padams visiting temples and sacred places earning the name Kshetrayya or Kshetragna. His Mudra Movvagopala appear in any section of padam as opposed to the general norm in the last section in the krithi forms in charanam. Kshetrayya's padams have rich musical content besides their lyrical beauty with Madhura Bhakthi.

The padams bestow aesthetic pleasure on the listener even if not presented visually because of their musical richness. The Padam has three sections Pallavi, Anupallavi and charanam. The padam is sung often from the Anupallavi to bring out the Arthabhava of sahitya. Kshetrayya padams belong to the tradition of Madhura Bhakthi which is the highest form of Bhakthi as it is based on the ultimate oneness of man with God through the total surrender of the devotee to the God. He has depicted various aspects of Raga and Rasa.

The Padams of Kshetragna have occupied a unique place in the realm of Carnatic Music. Kshetragna was a scholar well versed in philosophy, Sanskrit and Telugu literature which made him equally great in the Sahitya of the padas. Though Kshetragna occupies an outstanding position among the composers of Carnatic music, we do not get much authentic account of life history. Subbarama Dikshitar has given that he was a Telugu Brahmin known as Kshetragna lived in Movvapura. The original name was Muvva Varadayya. Varadayya had been known later as Kshetragna and his original name was forgotten. He was known only as Kshetrayya or Kshetragna. In Andhra he was known as Kshetrayya and in Tamil Nadu he was known as Kshetragna, Subbarama Dikshitar refers his name as Kshetragna. As defined in the 13th Chapter of Bhagawat Gita the term Kshetragna connotes a great person of adhyathmic eminence. Kshetrayya attained such eminence through his Madhura Bhakthi to Movvagopala Kshetragna – the word, has been defined by Lord Krishna in the verse as follows in Bhagawat Gita.

“Idam Shareeram Kounteya
Kshetram Ithi Abhideeyate
Etad Yo Vetti tam
Kshetragna Iti tadvidaha”

This body, Oh Kounteya (Arjuna) is called the Kshetram, He who knows it (body) is called Kshetragna (the knower of Kshetra by those who know them) that is by sages (Kshetra and Kshetragna)

Thus defined Lord Krishna what is Kshetra and who is Kshetragna in the thirteenth canto while imparting the hidden secrets of Bhagawat Gita to Arjuna. The very fact that he was called Kshetragna itself reveals the spiritual knowledge of the great composer.

Kshetrayya's appearance has been described as his hair grown long and left uncombed after bath, donning the neatly sketched V shaped Sinduv on his forehead, wearing a silk yellow Dhoti and a white upper garment. The first to bow down to him is Mohanangi who was intimate friend in his Purvasrama. But the society at his village did not respect him and began to call Kshetriya which means seducer of other wives. He did not want to stay in his native place and visited all Kshetra and sang the Lord's glory and became Kshetragna.

The pilgrimage started around 1620. We can trace out the route of the journey placing together names of towns and presiding deities of each place whom he sang

1. Chakkerapuri – Bellamkonda
2. Bhadrachalam – Sri Rama temple. He describes the pangs of separation of Rama because of Sita's abduction
3. Golkonda from Bhadrachalam – Yedugiri of the present North Karnataka – The deity was Cheluvarayana
4. Mallikarjuna of Srisailam – the deity Mallikarjuna – two padas are sung

In most of the padams composed by Kshetrayya, we find a dichotomy of psyche haunting Kshetrayya like two streams running parallel to each other one being his genuine and natural affection for his faithful wedded wife Rukmini – portrayed as a Sviya type of heroine and the other his love for Mohanangi – depicted as Parakiya type of heroine.

After visiting and singing on the love Hemadrinilaya is Hampi ruins of Vijayanagar Kshetrayya went to Palagiri where Chenmakesava's love was depicted in the lyrics and then he stayed for sometime in Cadappah. The Padam in Punnagewarali

“What shall I do for this, who will bring him here
How far away is Venkatesa of Cuddappah”

Later went to Tirupati and composed six Padams dedicated to Lord Venkateswara, couple of padams on Adi varaha. Rajanikantha Rao says that. He has composed Padams on Parthasarathi of Triplicane, Madras (p122).

Subramanya of Tiruttani “Chirutanivasudu in Maname Bhooshanam” in Aananda Bhairavi and three Padams dedicated to Thiruvallur Veeraraghava Swami. He also composed on Chevvandilinga of Rameswaram. It is interesting that he visited Kshetras

from Andhra State to Tamil Nadu in 17th Cent. Having named Varadayya by his parents, when he reached Kanchi, where the presiding deity is Varadaraja, he stayed (around 1625) for a long time as he felt that it is his home Kanchi was then a seat of traditional learning with a highly developed temple culture. This offered ample scope to him for giving full vent to his intellectual, emotional and aesthetic propensities and compose Padams, Kshetrayya witnessed the Ekanta Seva and when he was sitting in the pavilion opposite the sanctum after the sanctum door was closed, he had a Darshan of the Goddess and composed a Padam in Mohanam ‘Maguva tana Kelika’. Making Kanchi as his headquarters Kshetrayya visited other shrines Chidambaram, Vedapuri and Thirukkoilur. “Three of four padams of Kshetrayya appear in the published anthologies as dedicated to Thilla Govinda” (p 123 Kshetrayya and his padams). His lyrics which are composed in the courts of the rulers of Tanjore, Madura and Golkonda. According to Meruvapadam “Vedukato Nadasukonna” his padams exceed 4000. Around 1655 he visited Movva and might have composed the Meruvapadam.

His careful choice of ragas to depict various degrees of Soka or grief reveal his musical talent. He has used ragas like Mukhari ghanta Nadanamakriya, Punnagavali and Aahini for different grades or soka. Even the grief or soka is enjoyed in the Art only and not in real life with the melodic patterns of the different ragas which produce the rasa bhava.

The bulk of padas are set in Tiriputa tala which is more suited to dance with the syncopation 3+4. This shows that Padams were composed for dance and the Court dancers performed before the King in the Court with Court musicians and dancers.

They were not performed in public concerts as there were no dance concerts for public. Therefore the question of erotic sentiments in the content of the sahithya was not taken as an issue. The rich and superb contents of the sangeeta in Padams made the form padam as a Musical Form to be sung at music concerts.

The tempo or Kalapramanam plays a vital role in bringing out the beauty of ragabhava in Padams.

The melodic content of the different rakthi ragas of the Padas is followed in the Kritis of Trinities (Demo) in the compositions of the Trinities.

If the Kritis composition which requires the Pada Kalapramana is performed in that tempo, the ragabhava is more explicable in the Kritis.

The subtle gamakas and nuances really need a special kind of Rasika, a sahrudaya and a special kind of voice production to sing Padams. (Taleem) Padam playing in the Vina was instrumental in the Tanjore style of veena playing with less Meettu.

The Madhurya is enhanced when padams are played in the instrument veena or voice, bringing out their essence of ragas of Carnatic music. Kshetrappa was also known as Kshetragna Kavi and the other as Kshetrappa Kavi.

It was in Manda Lakshminarayana kavis work on poetics "Andhra Koumudi" that we find one of the earliest references to the name Kshetragna, in 1700 A. D as Muvvagopala Bhaktena Kshetragna Kavina uktavaccha" and Muvvagopala Bhakthena Kshetrakavina" is another version.

Kshetrappa's visit to the courts of Tanjore Madura and Golkonda and the honours he received are acknowledged by the Composer himself in one of his padas.

His visit to Tanjore during Raghunatha's time is given by a Kandapadya ascribed to Kshetrappa himself and quoted in Andhra Koumudi: The King seems to have asked him the reason for his visit. Then Kshetrappa gave a reply in a Kandapadhyam

Tamu dame Vatturarthulu
Karma merigina data kadaku rammanava
Kamalambul unnachotiki
Bhramarambulan Achutendra Raghunatha Nrupa

"Those who need something
go out of their own volition
to discerning benefactor
does anyone invite the bees
to come to a place where lotuses thrive
oh! King Raghunatha, a successor of Achutendra"

Earlier a contemporary of Kshetrappa and a Court poet of King Vijayaraghava Nayak, Kamarasu Venkatapathi Somayaji, lifted a lyric of Kshetrappa and inserted the lines in his drama (B. Rajanikanta Rao p. 115, Journal of the Music Academy).

"Sudinamayena EE Proddu
Sudinamayena yi
Madanavataruni Seva
Manaku kaligine"

"Very auspicious is today, very auspicious
Serving cupid's reincarnation is our great pleasure"

Later Subbarama Dikshitar in his S.S.P. while giving the biographical sketches of composers has given about Kshetrappa's life, that he belonged to Muvvapuri where in the temple of Gopala Swami he was initiated the Gopala mantra by a saint. After chanting the mantra for a period of time he has bestowed by the grace of Lord with

the power of composing lyrics, and that his first composition is in Anandabhairavi starting with the words "Sripathi Suta Bariki". According to Sarada tilaka, a treatise on Mantra sashtra the Dhyana sloka for this chant describes the deity as the Divine Cowherd with a waist-belt of glingling bells - Muvvagopala.

Based on the contents of what is called Muruvapadam starting with the words "Vedukato Nadachukonna" in the Raga Devagandari and also supported by the details of Kshetrappa as given by Subbarama Dikshitar, Kshetrappa visited three Royal courts Madurai of Tirumala Nayak, Tanjore Vijayaraghava Naik and Raghunatha Naik and Golkonda of Abdulla Kutubsha.

Kshetrappa in his composition has written that he sang 1000 padas in the court of Vijayaraghava and received Royal Honours in the pada Vedukato". In the manuscript "Kshetrappa Padamula" twelve padas are with the Vijaya Raghava mudra (V. Appa Rao - Kshetrappa Padamulu - Andhra gana Kalu Parishad)

The first devotional Pada of Kshetrappa reads as follows:

"Sripati Suta bariki ne Nopaleka
ninu Vedith
Kopala Muvvagopala
Ye Proddu danintilone Kapaiyundi
ni sarasa
Sallapala Muvvagopala

"When I am to bear the onslaught of cupid are you angry, Muvvagopala, that I aspire for your love? Staying in that woman's house, like a servant day and night

Does it behove you, Muvvagopala to go on with cheap chatter.

After an absence of four or five months, Kshetrappa went home and he sang the Padam "Ninnujoochi" in Punnagavarali as to how he would be received by his beloved wife Rukmini

Punnagavarli Tiruputa
Ninnajoochi Nalugaidu nelalayera
Muvvagopala
Ninnujooda galigen Innallaku
Ninnaveyi kalalona kannula gattinatlunda
Vennuda digguna lechi vedaki kanaka (Demo)

Four or five months have passed since I saw you last

It has become possible to see you after such a long time. Last night, in my dream you appeared as it were real before me. I searched with tears I pined in grief

Did you have thought of me or not

Kshetrappa composed the Padam "Vadarakapove" in Kambodi at the court of Vijayaraghawanyak to challenge the court vidwans as they were jealous of Kshetrappa's scholarship. He composed and left unfinished and asked them to complete the lines. The other vidwans were not able to write the unfinished line and realised that no one is equal to Kshetrappa in composing the lyrics of the padam. King Vijayaraghava Naik also realised Kshetrappa's greatness more than he was before.

Kshetrappa, is the greatest composer of Telugu Padams and he is the father of the musical form "Padam" which is a music / dance genre. His Padams are veritable crystals of raga bhava and rasa, bhava. The bhava and rasa bhava phrases of 'Padam compositions of Kshetrappa are found in the musical forms Kritis of the Thyagaraja, Syama Sastri and Muthuswami Dikshitar and post Thyagaraya period composes who followed the footsteps of Trinities.

The period of Raghunatha Nayak and Vijayaraghava Nayak over Tanjore witnessed the greatest amount of output in Sangita and Sahithya in Telugu. Sanskrit and Telugu scholarship reached its zenith of perfection during their period. The advent of Kshetrappa, the great composer of Padas and the work of Chaturdandi Prakasika by Venkatamakhi during the reign of Vijayaraghava Naik in Tanjore were both events of far-reaching significance in the history of Carnatic Music. The seventy-two melas, the raga alapana Paddhati of Venkatamakhi is followed up-to date in the scholastic tradition and performing tradition while in the performance tradition the music of the Kshetrappa Padas hold an elevated place in the repertoire of Carnatic music.

The Padams of Kshetrappa are exquisitely beautiful born out of the creative imagination on the sahithya and sangeetha suitable for dance and music. The Sangeetha and sahithya are complimentary with each other. The emotional content of the sahithya is set in the appropriate melodic contour which brings out the bhava of Sahithya. The inarticulate language of raga has the unique power to express the deepest and subtle feelings of different magnitudes and power of sublimation which the articulate words comprehend Raga to have any power of sublimation has to emphasise the slow movement in the background of which faster movements appear beautiful. It has to be said that Kshetrappa has done yeoman service to the field of Carnatic music through his Padams wherein is found the most appropriate music of the raga with bhava contained melodic phrases suited to the text emotional text.

The charm of his padas lies in the sentiments of Nayika-Nayaka bhava in the text in portraying the spiritual love. The Padam composition of Kshetrappa were intended for use in dance by court dancers at the King's court with a private audience of scholars, musicians and sahcudayars. Subbarama Dikshitar in his Sangeetha

Sampradaya paradarsini gives four padas and in Prathama Abhyasa Pusthaka gives four more padas. Are these eight padas were well known at his period and sung by musicians at their performances is not clearly known.

The structure or format of the Padams of Kshetrappa is with three sections – Pallavi, anupallavi, one or more charanams similar to Kritis. The term "Padam" was used also for the compositions of Prandaradasa as Dasarapadas though they are also called as Devaranama.

Annamayya's Sringeri Sankeertanulu stands as the fore runner for Kshetrappa's Sringeri Padas, where the God is conceived as Nayaka Annamayya lived between 1408-1503 AD where as Prandaradasa lived 1484 – 1584 AD and Kshetrappa's period was between 1595 – 1660 AD or 1600 – 1680 AD.

The lyrics of Nammalvar, Ashtapadis of Jayadeva, Padavali of Chandidas and those of Vidyapati of Mithila or Bihar have the Madhurabhakthi before the Sringeri padas of Annamayi.

The sentiments of Ashtanayikas and three types Nayakas are portrayed in his padams in such a way that gives scope for dance performers where as the melodic progressions of the raga, the subtle gamakas and slow tempo gamakas extracts the essence of bhava laden Carnatic music. The vocal inflections, modulations of the voice and the continuity of the voice which requires a lot of breath control help to communicate to the audience what the sahithya conveys through music. Because of the rich music content many performers of yesteryears sang padams in their music concerts.

The sahithya content is expressed through the music and the main charm of the sahithya is Nayaka-Nayika bhava which gives scope for Abhinaya. T. Brinda and T. Muktha, Dr. T. Viswanathan (Flute) included Padam in their concert programme.

Of the ragas employed by Kshetrappa, Mohana Kalyani, Pantuvary, Sriraga, Surati and Kedargawla have been used to depict Sambhoga Sringeri. A few of these ragas are used for portraying vipralamba Sringeri as well. The maximum number of padas are found in Kambodi raga which is about 40 in number and equally good number of them are in Mukhari, Bhairavi, Kalyani, Saveri, Thodi, Anandhabhairavi, Madhyamavti, Sankarabharanam, Ahiri, Useni Punnavali, Sourashtra, Begada, Navaroj Saindhavi, Nilambari, Kannada, Dhanyasi, Surati and Athana. A few padas are in Vasanthabhairavi Sriraga, Kedara, Gouri and Goulipantu.

Since the slow tempo of the padas can be effectively rendered in the Veena with an emphasis on ragabhava and long drawn out gamakas, rendering of padas was appreciated. The legendary musician – unsurpassed Veena Dhanammal made the Padas as a musical

forms by playing on the Veena. It is more of a dance form because of its content of the sahithya. She has highlighted the rich exquisite music and brought them to musicians as an inimitable musical form. The melodic content of the Padas were rendered by her in such a way padam became the superb form of raga bhava rasa filled musical form.

The Kshetrappa's favourite deity was Muvvagopala. We find the names of the deities Kanchi Varada Tilla Govinda and Chevvanda Linga in his compositions. His Nayakis are addressed as Neelaveni Aliveni, Sannutangi and Mohanangi.

Kshetrappa is credited with composing more than 4100 padams and the legend has it that he composed 1100 padams in four days. The text of only 382 padams are available and 128 padams are available with music. The present generation Carnatic music has practically very few opportunities to listen to Padams in the Concert Hall. In the yesteryears Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer, K.V. Narayanaswami, M.S. Subbalakshmi, T. Brinda and T. Muktha, Dr. T. Viswanathan (Flute) included Padam in their concert programme.

Mylapore Gowri Ammal, the legendary dancer has told in an interview with T. Sankaran that Kshetrappa Padas repertoire was with Ponnuswami and Balakrishna Dass who were the direct descendants of Kshetrappa's disciples. (Souvenir of the Music Academy, 1973). Balakrishna Dass taught many padas to Veena Dhanammal and from their family of musicians, the padams of Kshetrappa were learnt by yesteryears' musicians and of today.

