Pāṭhāntara-s in Śrīkṛṣṇalīlātaraṅgiṇī of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha

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Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha is known for his opera Śrīkṛṣṇalīlātaraṅgiṇī. The advent of this advaitic sanyāsin, believed to have been born in Kaza village in Guntur district of Andhra Pradesh, to Bhupatirajapuram in Tamilnadu following a boar (varāha), gave this place the name Varahur, with which it hails at present. The conflicting views of many a scholar on the life history of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha have been compiled by Śrī B. Natarajan in his book 'Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini' on the opera, and in this work, Śrī B. Natarajan postulates 1675-1745 A.D. as the life span of Tīrtha. Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha has other works on philosophy and drama ascribed to him, the Haribhaktisudhārṇava[1], a work in verse form describing the sports of Kṛṣṇa and Pārijātāpaharaṇanāṭaka[2], a Telugu drama being amongst them.

The opera Śrīkṛṣṇalīlātaraṅgiṇī (SKLT henceforth) (Śrīkṛṣṇasyalīlāyāstaraṅgiṇī) indicates a work which has the ocean of Kṛṣṇa's sports and 'taraṅgiṇī' refers to one that has taraṅga-s, implying the cantos of the work, twelve in number, that have been termed taraṅga-s by Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha. The songs in the opera have come to be termed taraṅga-s and this is a misconception. The songs themselves are mentioned in the manuscripts of SKLT as only daru-s, kīrtana-s or gīta-s and not taraṅga-s. Śrī Upaniṣad Brahma Yōgin of Kanchipuram, senior contemporary of Śrī Tyāgarāja, on the inspiration drawn from Śrī Jayadēva and Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha, composed aṣṭapadī-s and 'taraṅga-s' on Lord Rāma. However, Dr. V. Raghavan, in an article in the Journal of the Music Academy of 1956, states that the composition of Śrī Upaniṣad Brahman styled 'taraṅga' is not exactly an imitation of the work of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha.

Following the episodes related in the daśamaskandha of Śrīmadbhāgavata about kṛṣṇāvatāra, Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha has composed this opera SKLT in lucid Sanskrit, relating events from Śrīkṛṣṇa's birth till aṣṭamahiṣīpariṇaya, differing in certain places regarding the details of events and averring Śrīmadbhāgavata, in yet others to the extent of reproducing even the same wordings as in the latter. The opera is styled in the format of yakṣagāna-s popular in Tajore during the Nāyak rule of the 17th century, though the word 'yakṣagāna' cannot be found anywhere in the work. The opera consists of daru-s for character entry, śloka-s and gadya-s to carry the story through, besides dvipada-s and kīrtana-s. The Rukmiṇīkalyāṇa paddhati described herein has formed the basis for the performance of Rukmiṇīkalyāṇa in bhajan-s and the bhajan repertoire includes scores of kīrtana-s from SKLT. In fact, it was the tradition in Marudanallur maṭha to sing only compositions from SKLT in their uñcavṛtti bhajan.

1 Unpublished paper manuscript R. No. 5545 in Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Chennai.

2 The Journal of The Thanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Saravati Mahal library – 1997 – p. 13-30

The Bhāgavatamēḷanāṭaka of Mēlaṭṭūr Śrī Vēṅkaṭarāma Śāstrī is said to have been inspired by Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha and the exponents of Bhāgavatamēḷanāṭaka today say that Mēlaṭṭūr Śrī Gōpālakṛṣṇa Śāstrī, father of Mēlaṭṭūr Śrī Vēṅkatarāma Śāstrī, was a direct disciple of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha.

To prove Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha's identity as a vāggeyakāra, the kīrtana-s themselves have the composer's mudra in the last caraṇa of the kīrtana. Many of the kīrtana-s have interval evidence to show that Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha sung them himself for e.g., in the kīrtana 'Rakṣa Rakṣāsuraśikṣa' in the 1st taraṅga, the mudra is present as 'Nārāyaṇatīrthagītam', enabling us to conclude that Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha himself composed the tune as well, for this song. It is however unfortunate that manuscripts contain neither the notations nor any other clue regarding the tune of the songs.

Though the tradition of performing SKLT as a yakṣagāna in its entirety has been lost[3], there are authentic traditions in bhajan sampradāya in Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh so far as the different compositions in SKLT are concerned. The paddhati followed in the rendition of some of the kīrtana-s in SKLT, in the present day karṇāṭik music concert circuit and in kūcipūḍi recitals has the songs being set to tune in rāga-s sometimes different from the ones mentioned in the printed editions and manuscripts of the text. The traditions represented by Śrī Ramakrishna Bhagavatar of Tiruvisainallur, a follower of the Marudanallur bhajan tradition systematized by Marudanallur Sadguru Svamigal, and by Śrī Ghorakavi Sampathkumar of Andhra Pradesh who claims authenticity, having learnt SKLT from his father Śrī Ghorakavi Viraraghava Rao who was a disciple of Śrī Bommarāju Sītārāma Dās, who was a disciple of Śrī Pālaparti Nṛsimha Dās, a direct disciple of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha, are two traditions that have preserved the music of SKLT almost entirely. Śrī Ramakrishna Bhagavatar sings the entire opera in Tiruvisainallur twice every year, once during the month of March in a span of 2-3 days, to commemorate Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha's ārādhanā and once during Gōkulāṣṭamī, distributing the opera over 7 days.

As regards the various musical forms in SKLT, the daru-s which have been used by Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha only for the announcement of the entry of characters, have the rāga and tāla mentioned in the printed editions of SKLT and in some manuscripts, while some other manuscripts like those collected from India Office, London, Bharat Kala Bhavan, Banaras and Asiatic Society, Kolkata mention just 'tālabheda' before the lyrics of the daru, without mentioning any rāga or tāla. Following the grantha edition of SKLT of 1946, Śrī Ramakrishna Bhagavatar (Śrī RKB henceforth)renders the daru-s in the rāga-s mentioned in this edition, without the accompaniment of tāla. Śrī Ghorakavi Sampathkumar (Śrī GSK henceforth), following the Vuyyur edition of SKLT of 1948 says that some daruvu-s are rendered with tāla whereas some are not.

3 B. Natarajan, Sri Krishna Leela Tarangini, p.121

There are two dvipada-s in the opera – 'Hē Kaṃsa Rājasuta' in the 1st taraṅga and 'Sakalalōkādhāra' in the 2nd taraṅga. Śloka-s are sung in the rāga of the succeeding related kīrtana, in both traditions. The gadya-s are sung in ārabhi by Śrī RKB and in madhyamāvati or ārabhi by Śrī GSK.

The kīrtana-s in SKLT, 120 in number, have a structure consisting of a dhruvapada or the refrain that is repeated after each caraṇa, the caraṇa-s being more than one in number. The kīrtana-s in SKLT do not contain the anupallavi section as mentioned in the printed editions of the text that are extant, and consist of only the dhruvapada and many caraṇa-s. Some manuscripts show the kīrtana's lyrics beginning with the first caraṇa, with the lyrics of the dhruvapada following this caraṇa, to indicate that the song is sung, beginning with the caraṇa, as is the tradition with the aṣṭapadī-s of Śrī Jayadēva. Such a method of rendition has led to cases where some traditions give the song as beginning with a specific lyric, while another tradition would give the first caraṇa as the beginning of the song. For e.g., 'Avalōkaya Bhaiṣmīvadanam' in the Varahur edition of SKLT in the 12th taraṅga is given as beginning with 'Kalyāṇaṃ Bhavatu Sadā in the Kaza edition. There are more instances similar to this in SKLT. It may be noted that though no manuscript collected mentions an anupallavi section in the kīrtana-s of SKLT, both traditions represented by Śrī RKB and Śrī GSK sing a separate anupallavi in many kīrtana-s.

Comparing the rāga specified in the manuscripts and printed editions for the kīrtana-s, it is found that more than 35 out of 120 kīrtana-s have the same rāga mentioned in all sources. From this, it may be possible to state that rāga-s like mukhāri, saurāṣṭra, nāṭa, bhairavi, kalyāṇi, kāmbhōji, nādanāmakriya, kēdāragauḷa, mōhanam, madhyamāvati, sāvēri, kāpi, punnāgavarāḷi, dhanyāsi, śaṅkarābharaṇa, ānandabhairavi, āhiri, bilahari and tōḍi definitely figured in SKLT. Apart from these, the manuscripts procured from India Office, London; Bharat kala Bhavan, Banaras; Asiatic Society, Kolkata; Orissa State Museum, Orissa and Government Oriental Manuscripts Library, Chennai mention rare rāga-s like pālī, gummakāmbhoji, māruvadhanyāsi, gaurī and maṅgaḷakāpi. Of these, pāḍi (equivqlent to pālī) is known today through Śrī Muttusvāmī Dīkṣita's 'Śrīguruṇā pālitosmi' in rūpaka tāla and gaurī though Śrī Muttusvāmī Dīkṣita's 'Gauri Girirājakumāri' in tisra eka tāla, both janya-s of the 15th mela. Saṅgīta sampradāya pradarśinī mentions under mecabhauḷi that this rāga is also known as gummakāmbhodi[4].

In some of the kīrtana-s of SKLT, if the hrasvākṣaras in the sāhitya are given one mātra and the dīrghīkṣaras are given two mātras, the lyrics fall into a gait set by the sāhitya itself. This concept of yathākṣara (akṣarānanatikramya) is observed in the madhyamakāla sāhitya-s of Śrī Muttusvāmī Dīkṣita. Such a gait is seen in many kīrtana-s of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha 'Jaya jaya ramānātha' in the 1st taraṅga (gait of 5), 'Śaraṇaṃ bhava karuṇāṃ mayi' in the 1st taraṅga (popularly rendered in Hamsavinōdini rāga nowadays) (gait of 6 –

4 Subbarama Dikshitar, Sangita Sampradaya Pradarsini Vol I, p.139

however, both traditions render this in the ādi tāla, giving kārvai-s in between to fill the gap), 'Śrīnilayam' in the 8th taraṅga (gait of 4), 'Dēvadēvaṃ kvēti tam', in the 8th taraṅga (gait of 7) to name a few. The tāla adopted for such kīrtana-s closely follows this gait suggested by the lyrics.

Śrī RKB has in his repertoire a Telugu kīrtana beginning 'Śṛṅgārakṛṣṇuḍu' in Ānandabhairavi rāga, ādi tāla, ascribed to Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha with the composer's mudra, not part of the opera SKLT. For the kīrtana-s of SKLT, Śrī RKB follows a simple and elegant style of rendition enabling easy repetition of the lyric by the congregation. The bhāva of the lyrics is given importance. For e.g., in the kīrtana in kāmbhōji in the 2nd taraṅga sung by the gopī-s of Vraja on the birth of Śrīkṛṣṇa, 'Śrīpatimiha', Śrī RKB sings the lyrics in a variety of ways, mixing them as 'āgatamākalaye', 'ayē sakhi āgatamākalaye', 'Śrīpatimāgatamākalaye', 'ihāgatamākalaye', 'nandagōpagṛhē āgatamākalaye', 'paramāgatamākalaye', 'śrīpatimiha nandagōpagṛhē paramāgatamākalaye' so that the bhāva of the sāhitya is brought out.

'Maṅgaḷāḷaya māmava deva' in the 1st taraṅga sung by the Bhāgavata in kēdāragauḷa rāga, Miśra Cāpu tāla with atīta eḍuppu can be rendered as a main piece in karṇāṭik music concerts. Such pieces in vilamba kāla are many in Śrī RKB's tradition whereas Śrī GSK's repertoire does not have kīrtana-s in this slow tempo. 'Āyāhi mādhava mādhava' in the 2nd taraṅga sung by Śrī RKB with atīta eḍuppu in ādi tāla tisra naḍai is sung daily by the Bhāgavata during pūjā at the Tiruvisainallur Sridhara Ayyaval maṭha.

Śrī GSK's pāṭhāntara involves many laya intricacies in the rendition of kīrtana-s, suggesting that this style must have been accompanied by dance. It is common practice in this tradition to sing the last caraṇa in every kīrtana in three speeds, an exercise that is called 'pañjara ettukkaḍa' Śrī GSK follows rāga-s like śuddhanyāsī ('Jaya Jaya Svāmin', 1st taraṅga), tilāṅg (Mādhava mādhava – 2nd taraṅga), sindhubhairavī ('Ēhi mudaṃ mama dēhi' 2nd taraṅga, 'Jaya jaya gōkulabāla' – 3rd taraṅga, 'Dēvadēvaṃ kvēti tam' – 8th taraṅga), haṃsanādam ('Ālōkayē śrībālakṛṣṇam' – 3rd taraṅga), aṭhāṇā ('Kalayata gōpīkāruṇyarasa' – 3rd taraṅga), rañjanī ('Paramakaruṇayā mām' – 3rd taraṅga), kānaḍā ('Bandhanānmōcaya' – 4th taraṅga, 'Āyāhi vrajayuvatībṛnda' – 5th taraṅga), hindōla (Śrīnilayam – 8th taraṅga), śahāna (Bhūyō bhūyō yācē – 6th taraṅga), bēhāg (Mṛgayata rādhāmādhavam – 8th taraṅga) etc, which have not been mentioned in any manuscripts or books of SKLT. Śrī GSK says that even from the time of his father, these kīrtana-s have been changed to be sung in these rāga-s.

Śrī GSK in the kīrtana 'Gōvinda ghaṭaya' first sings 'Gōvinda ghaṭaya paramānandamamṛtamiha śrīnandatanaya bahuyōgīndrasuravinuta' followed by 'suravinuta', 'yōgīndrasuravinuta', and finally 'bahuyōgīndrasuravinuta' He allows the violinist to repeat after each phrase. He next sings the full line in madhyama kāla which will correctly fit four

tāla-s of khaṇḍa cāpu. He does the same exercise with the first line of the first caraṇa also. He then proceeds with the next two caraṇa-s without any embellishments. For the final caraṇa, he switches over to tisra naḍai, followed by the mēl kāla of this tiśram. In tisra naḍai,one kārvai has to be given extra at the end of each tāla of khaṇḍa cāpu so that it fits the tisra beat (5+1=3*2). He then begins reciting jati patterns which he alternates with the mṛdaṅga. In this, we can see how he shows how four fits into the pattern of three (3*4=4*3). He repeats the madhyama kāla exercise with the third line of the caraṇa as well. He next moves to catusra naḍai for 'Śaradindusamavadana śatamanmathasamāna', maintaining vuśi tāla with his jālra. He then renders kiẓ kāla for this line, in catuśra naḍai, followed by mel kāla. Here too, one is able to observe that the words fit into catuśra naḍai because 4*5=5*4 – he shows this with yathākṣara kārvai-s. He ends the kīrtana by singing the pallavi also in catuśra naḍai. In many kīrtana-s, whatever naḍai the kīrtana may be in, Śrī GSK traverses to tiśra naḍai and sings these jati-s.

'Bālagōpāla māmuddhara' in the 3rd taraṅga with its jati-s composed by Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha has been well preserved in this tradition. In 'Pūraya mama kāmam' in the 6th taraṅga, Śrī GSK recites mohara-korvai resembling those figuring at the end of the tani āvartana in karṇāṭik music recitals.

Comparing the two traditions, there are kīrtana-s in SKLT for which both traditions agree on the rāga as well as the tāla – for e.g., 'Kṛṣṇaṃ kalaya sakhi' in mukhāri rāga in the 2nd taraṅga and 'Ālōkayē rukmiṇīkalyāṇgōpālam' in kāmbhōjī rāga in the 12th taraṅga and songs like 'Maṅgaḷāḷaya māmava' in the 1st taraṅga which is in kēdāragauḷa in both traditions but in miśra cāpu tāla in the Śrī RKB tradition and in ādi tāla in the Śrī GSK tradition. Yet others like 'Gōvinda ghaṭaya' figure in bhairavi rāga in the Śrī RKB tradition and in kāmbhōji in Śrī GSK sampradāya. Following the gaint of five to which the lyric falls, both schools use khaṇḍa Cāpu for this kīrtana. 'Vīkṣēhaṃ kadā' in the 12th taraṅga, is rendered in ānandabhairavi by Śrī GSK and in āhiri by Śrī RKB. The traditional toḍayamaṅgalam piece in SKLT- 'Jaya jaya ramānātha' in the 1st taraṅga – is sung in nāṭṭai rāga in the Śrī RKB tradition but is sung as a rāgamālikā in the rāga-s śuddhadhanyāsī, kalyāṇī and sindhubhairavī in the Śrī GSK tradition. The music of the in the sūlādi sapta tāla-s in the 7th taraṅga has been lost in both traditions.

The kīrtana 'Subhadrābalabhadra' in the 1st taraṅga is present only in the Andhra Pradesh repertoire and is rendered in nādanāmakriyā rāga and trīpuṭa tāla. Similarly, 'Śrīvāsudēva prabhō' sung in the śaṇkarābharaṇa rāga is absent in Tamilnadu repertoire of SKLT. Śrī GSK does not include 'Madanagōpāla tē in SKLT since it does not have the mudra of Śrī Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha.

The opera concludes with the well-heard 'Jaya maṅgaḷam nityaśubhamaṅgaḷam' The kīrtana-s of SKLT are used while conducting Rādhākalyāṇa functions in bhajan-s with the word 'Rukmiṇī' changed to 'Rādhā' in the relevant kīrtana-s. SKLT rightly forms an integral part of bhajan-s in Tamilnadu and Andhra Pradesh.

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