

An Introduction of Ancient Tamil Granth Silappadikaram

Abstract

The present article deals with a rear ancient Tamil granth Silappadikaram (the period between 2nd to 5th century A.D.), an epic of ancient Tamil music. This almost resembles like Ramayana epic which contains several chapters dealing with poetry, drama, dance, music etc of ancient Tamils written by Ilango. Silappadikaram stands as a contemporary granth of Bharata's Natyasastra. This epic dealt with many musical works, especially '*Pancha marabu*' **focused more on music and their concepts.**

Silappadikaram is a Tamil word originates from ancient Tamil music culture. Surprisingly there are many important concepts and great facts relating to music in this work. Therefore the objective here is to explore the various important facts and musical works with a clear analysis of the concepts discussed in this granth on both systems of Indian music i.e. Hindustani and Carnatic music systems.

Introduction

Carnatic Music

There are many definitions and descriptions to the word CARNATIC music:

Some of the artists opine that the word Karnataka if split into two i.e. Karna+Ataka, comes out into two words with valuable meaning in it, Karna = the ear; and Ataka = moving head rhythmically listening to the sweet sound, is KARNATAKA.

Origin of the Name Carnatic Music

The name Carnatic music refers to the Traditional music of a region called CARNATIC. All books on recent Indian history note that before British rule, the kingdoms in South India were:

The word Carnatic/ Karnataka/ Karu Naadu Agam

Today Tamil 'nadu' is also often called as Tamil 'agam'

'Karu' means black and also means central.

'Naadu' means country and 'agam' means home.

Thus "Karunaadu" meant central country, as well as black (people) country. The name 'Karu naad agam' got anglicized to 'Carnatic' state. In Tamil, the word Karunaadagam is still used. The British renamed the territory as Madras. The music of Karunaadagam was called as Karunaadaga isai. *-Encyclopedia of Indian Music¹*

3. A traditional definition given by elders "Karai in Tamil and Malayalam means Sea Shore or Riverside Shore. Naadu means Region or Country side. So the music prevailing in such shore region is called Karnadu Sangeetham which later became Karnataka Sangeetham".

Hindustani and Carnatic Music

"Indian music is very old. Its literature dates from the period prior to the beginning of the Christian era. References to music are contained in the *Vedas*. *Upanishads*, *Ramayana*, *Mahabharata* and the *Puranas*. There was a time when a single system of music prevailed throughout the length and breadth of India. The division into North -Indian (Hindusthani) and South Indian (Karnatic) systems came later on and became more pronounced during the reign of the Mughul Emperors in Delhi. We come across the terms: *Karnatic music* and *Hindusthani music* in the work, *Sangita Sudhakara* of Haripala, written between 1309-1312 A.D":-

Binathi.G.

M.A., M.Phil

Persuing Ph.D. in Hindustani
Vocal music from Dept of Music,
Dayalbagh Educational Institute
(Deemed University), Agra
under the stewardship of
Prof. Emeritus. V. Prem Kumari
and Prof. Ravi Kumar Bhatnagar

"In Tamil, Karnataka means tradition, purity, sampradayam and suddham. People who are wedded to ancient ways of living are ever now referred to as *Karnataka manushya*"³

It has been acknowledged almost by all historians, that the Vedas are the oldest scriptures of this Universe. The development of classical music took its origin from Vedas only. Earlier history of Indian music is like a pillar and a path to the present culture. The study of ancient history of music enabled to know the fact that apart from the great works on music from pre-vedic and post vedic period like Narada of the shiksha, Bharata's Natyasastra etc astonishingly, there is an another great segment in Southern music history contemporary works to Bharata, is the ancient Tamil Music which was brilliantly explored in the granth or epic Silappadikaram.

Through this initiative I would like to introduce the main concepts and traditions of Silappadikaram granth (an earlier granth or Tamil epic give mine information relating to the music and dance of ancient Tamils) that are prominently followed in their times and make a brief analysis of this epic.

Silappadikaram

In the ancient period, the native Dravidians of the South had their own style, which is generally called Tamil music, owing to the native regional language of the area works like *Silappadikaram* of Ilango Adigal (an important contemporary Granth of Natya sastra in South India) period 2nd Cent. A.D. and some scholars opine 5th century A.D. throws light on the music of the ancient Tamils also it is an authoritative work on poetry and drama of the Tamilnadu. Adiyarkkunallar wrote a gloss and gave a finishing to this epic, and it is regarded as an earlier one. Its commentaries, describe the logical derivations of the important scales through the modal shift of tonic. The Tamil names of these notes have also been mentioned. Other works like *Tolkappiam*, *Pattupattu*, etc. also give musical references. Some of these descriptions and references correspond to contemporary Carnatic music concepts also the **Tamil Music**.⁴

It is said that Bharata in his *Natya sastra* testifies to the high musical culture of the peoples who inhabited South India even in his time.

The **Arangetrukadai** and **Aychchiar kuravai** are two of the cantos (one of the sections into which some long poems are divided) in this Tamil epic.

The Tamil music has got a great classical history from pre-vedic period and wide range of ragas and great musical works. The ancient Tamils possessed a highly developed culture, The Muttamizh consisted of the divisions: — *Iyal*= literature, *Isai*= Music and *Natakam*= Drama.

There were musical works in the distant past like *Isai marabu*, *Isai nunukkam*, **Pancha**

marabou(*this especially deals with music and their concepts*), *Pancha bhariyam*. *Kuttanul*, *Perumkurugu*, *Perunarai*, *Mudukurugu Mudunarai* and dealing with the science of music. Dance was also dealt with in some of these works. Those are works living through quotations in later works. Most of the ancient works are now lost. Amongst the prominent musicians of the ancient period may be mentioned Anaya Nayanar, Tirunilakanta Yazhpanar, Tiruppan-azhwar and Banabhadrar.

The ancient Tamils, the Silappadikaram used a scale of 22 srutis. The terms *alagu* and *mattirai* were used as the equivalent of sruti. They used the scale of just intonation. Their **Suddha Mela** was the modern **Harikambhoji scale**. The values of the notes figuring in the suddha mela are given by the frequency values: — 4 4 3 2 4 3 2.

From the **Silappadikaram** and its gloss (commentary), we come to know about certain numbers of Tamil treatises on dance and music. **The Jain dictionary Tivakaram is also known as one of the ancient books that discussed about music of the Tamilnadu**.⁵

Tevarams (Hymns)

It is said that the **Tevakaram (sacred hymns) is a sacred music in Tamil** was written during the time of Silappadikaram. Prof. Sambamoorthy is of opinion that the **Tevaram** is really the earliest musical system of Indian music and an ancient evidence of **Desi sangeeta**. It is said that the **Tevaram is a collection of sacred hymns**, and they were composed mainly by three great saints, **Tirujnanasambandar**, (the youngest composer in the history of world music as a boy of three, he sang his first hymn (Tevaram) in the Pan (raag) Nattapadai equivalent to raag Gambhiranata in the present Carnatic music and **Appar or Tirunavukkarasu and Sundaramurti Nayanar**. Their dates appear to be from 7th to 9th century A.D. The Tevaram- Hymns were included in the category of Tamil music, since the Tevaram belongs to a period when there was a single system of music in the whole of India and the bifurcation into the two sub-systems, Hindustani and Carnatic had not taken place, even the musicians of North India ought to take an interest in the study of the music of the Tevaram.

The Pans (Raga)

The **pan** added to the hymns was the ragas or melody-types (**contain 7 notes, a sampurna raga; shadava raga; Audav raaga**). The Tevarams possessed Arohana and Avarohana, Varjya- Varjya krama, Graham- svaras, Nyasa- svaras, Amsha- svaras, Rakti-prayogas, Dhatu- prayogas and Characteristics of shruti and gamakas.

Raga Classification in Ancient Tamil Music

Pans are used in the Tevaram were classified into three Jatis or classes,

Audava- Shadava-Sampoorna,

Shuddh- Chhayalag- Samkirna*, and Upaanga- Bhashanga.

Again the **pans** of the *Tevaram*. A pan was not always Asampurna—Sampurna raga. Some of them were like the asampurna Mela. Each pan had a number of derivatives called *Tiram* was a varja raga and some of them were transilient scales. *Panniya Tiram* was a shadava raga, *Tiram* was an Audava raga and *Tirattiram* a svarantara raga.

The Pans were sung based on the **Time**⁶ time of singing of PANS played a very important role. The Pans were classified based on time into:

1. Pagal Pan i.e. the ragas those were sung during day time,
2. Iravuppan i.e. the ragas those were demonstrated in the night time, and
3. Poduppan i.e. ragas which were sung at all times.

Pagal pan or Pans to be sung during day time (total 12 ragas)	Iravuppan or Pans to be sung during night time (9 ragas)
Nattapadai	Takka ragam
Puranirmai	Pazhantakka ragam
Gandharam	Sikamaram
Piyandai gandharam	Kolli
Kausikam	Kollikkauanam
Indalam	Viyazhakkurinji
Takkesi	Megaragakkuranji
Sadari	Andalikkurinji
Natta ragam	Kurinji
Pazhampanjuram	
Gandhara	
Panchamam	
Panchamam	

And Senturutti, Tiruttandagam and Sevvazhi are Poduppans i.e., could be sung in both during day time and night time.

The names of such pans as Gandhara panchamam, Panjaram, Malavakausikam, Natta ragam, Kauanam, Kolli kauanam etc., reveal a Sanskrit origin.

The names of the seven notes are kural, tuttam, kaikilai, ulai, Ili, vilari and tarum. The names of the main essentials like Vadi, Samavadi, Anuvadi and vivadi are inai, kilai, natpu and pahai. The musical compositions or prabandhas have been divided into nine classes. The alatti (alapti) has also been defined in the Silappadikaram. Some are of opinion that shuddha scale of the ancient Tamil music was somewhat like Sankarabharama-Mela. However there are differences of opinions about the standard scales of the ancient music of the Tamilnadu. **It is said that the Tamil writers worked out about 12,000 pans or ragas.**

There is an another great musical works in Tamil i.e. Popley has mentioned about the book **Paripadal**, those dealt on music, dance and drama, Also **Adiyarkkunallar** mentions as the

basis for Ilango's musico-dramatic epic itself, and as basis for Ilango's own gloss. There are still many Tamil works, those dealt on music, dance and drama.

Musical Instruments of Ancient Tamils

Different musical instruments have been described in the ancient Tamil literature. Mainly three classes of musical instruments have been mentioned, and they are stringed, wind – blown and percussion. We also come across the names of different kinds of drums like **kulal, val, idakkai (Dhaka), tannumai, kudamulabu, (ghata), maddla (mardala) etc.** in them **The single stringed musical instrument (veena)** has been termed as **maruttuvaval**; the seven –stringed one as **sengottuyal**; the nine – stringed one as **Tumvuruyal**; fourteen stringed one as **Sakodayal**, seventeen- stringed one as **Makarayal** and **twenty-one stringed veena as called periyal.**

Brief Historical Background:

Brief analysis and study on the early historical background of South India, various facts related to South Indian music are delineated. The Deccan was ruled by many powers like Pallavas, Cholas, Chalukyas, Satavahanas etc in 4th century A.D. The art forms were developed by all the Deccan powers especially, in the Pallava period, the culture of fine arts like sculpture, painting and music was much developed. Pallava king, Mahendravarman, who himself was an accomplished Veena player bear testimony to this fact.

It was already discussed that the **Kudumiyamalai** inscription from Padukottai region, inscribed seven Grama Ragas which are even depicted in Naradishiksha of 1st century A.D., also Bharat muni described some of them. This inscriptions show that during the Pallava period the Grama ragas were in practice. Also it is said that the King Pallava later invented an 8th new Grama raga.

The devotional hymns of classical type of the Nayanars were also composed in Pallava period. They use to sing along with Mridangas and Veenas. From South Indian Music evidences and inscriptions it is found that the music system of South India is also related to the Psalms (hymns) of the Alvars theVaishna sects.

Dr.V. Raghavan mentioned some of the new raga names of present Carnatic music with old names⁷

Kaishika	-	Bhairavi,
Nattaraga	-	Pantuvrali.
Panchamam	-	Ahiri
Takkesi	-	Kambodi or kamboji,
Palam	-	Sankarabharanam,
Sevvali	-	Yadukula- kamboji,
Senturutti	-	Madhyamavati, etc.

Analysis

Thus, the Ancient music and Ancient Tamil music reveal many evidences to compare the present culture of Carnatic music system as well as Hindustani music.

- Especially the tradition of time of singing the Pans or Ragas show that the time theory exists from ancient period i.e. the period from 1st century A.D. but, the exceptional thing is the time theory which was more in practice in South Indian system is not considerably used in the present Carnatic system. Where as in Hindustani system, Time theory is strictly followed and ragas are sung even now based on the Time theory. The rule of singing ragas is however *not* of a *mandatory* nature but of an *advisory* character in the present South Indian music system.
- Apart from this, the above information shows that the South Indian arts are influenced by Tamil literature and Tamil works, especially Music and Dance even now are more influenced. The instruments like Veena, Ghatam, Mridangam etc which were quoted in the ancient Tamil works are now very important and classical performing instruments to the present Carnatic musicians. All the performances and the tradition of Carnatic music is explored through these instruments only. Veena is like Sitar in Hindustani music system and Mridangam is like Tabla in the present Hindustani music. The classical performances in Carnatic music are given with these instruments only. This would be the nucleus of Carnatic music system and the Tradition might have authentically started during the Pallava Rulers and even before.
- The classification of Pans into three Jaatis i.e. Audava- Shadava-Sampoorna, Shuddh-Chayalag- Samkirna, and Upaanga-Bhashanga, shows that the ancient Tamil works paved way to the North Indian music also as the Hindustani music follow the Shuddh-Chayalag-Samkirna jaati raga classification even now in their theories. But this kind of classification do not exist in the present Carnatic music system.
- It is to be noted that theoretical concepts might be adopted or trasfered from South to North or from North to South since there was only a single music system before 13th century. But the practical aspects always differ with each other. The South Indian and North Indian music systems and its culture is influenced by the ancient Tamil music materials and even now the practical and theoretical aspects introduced by great Vaggeyakaras, Musicologists after 15th century shaped the system of present Carnatic music system.

In the end, I would like to conclude that these two streams of Indian music (Hindustani and Carnatic music) have some similarities but several differences. However, the soul of both forms of music system is one i.e. the raga system. Hence both the forms of music will keep influencing each

other and both forms of music system will keep on evolving and developing in new dimensions.

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