

An Article on contribution of Devulapalli Krishna Sastri and Balantrapu Rajanikanta Rao to Yakshaganas (Krishna-Rajani) Through AIR HYD

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Abstract:

Between 1960 and 1962, Balantrapu Rajanikanta Rao, a renowned music composer, collaborated with famous poet Devulapalli Krishna Sastri to create three influential Yakshaganas for All India Radio, Hyderabad. These compositions, titled "Ksheera Sagara Mathanam," "Vipranarayana," and "Malavika," showcased the rich blend of classical music, storytelling, and Indian mythology. Rao's music direction and Krishna Sastri's lyrical depth brought these narratives to life, making a significant impact on South Indian classical arts.

Introduction:

"Ksheera Sagara Mathanam" depicted the mythological churning of the ocean by gods and demons, symbolising cooperation and divine intervention. "Vipranarayana," based on the life of Thondaradipodi Alwar, explored themes of devotion, temptation, and redemption, while "Malavika," inspired by Kalidasa's play, captured the romance and intrigue of royal life. The Yakshaganas featured a variety of classical ragas, adding musical richness to the performances. This collaboration played a pivotal role in promoting traditional South Indian music and dance-drama. The success of these Yakshaganas also led to notable stage performances, including contributions from luminaries like Banda Kanakalingeswara Rao and eminent Kuchipudi artists. Their work remains a lasting contribution to Indian classical music and cultural heritage.

From 1956 to 1960, Sri Balantrapu Rajanikanta Rao (fondly called 'Rajani') served as a 'program executive' in Vijayawada, working closely with Pingali Lakshmikantam, "Sahitya program coordinator," who was his esteemed guru. After his transfer to Hyderabad in 1960, he had the privilege of collaborating with Devulapalli Krishna Sastri, the Sahitya program coordinator there, who was like a mentor for him by virtue of his profound knowledge and thus inspired him a lot. Under the Music Direction of Balantrapu Rajanikanta Rao, three Yakshaganas based on the writings of Krishna Sastry were composed and broadcast from Hyderabad. These compositions showcased the blend of traditional and classical elements. Rajani was the Executive in-charge of the program. He was not only composing music for the same but also used to accompany many a time with vocals.

Yakshaganas are a form of Indian classical dance-drama, and these compositions reflect Rao's expertise in this art form.

Yaksha Gana is a traditional folk theater form originating from Karnataka, India. It is a unique blend of music, dance, and drama, typically performed by male artists. The name "Yaksha" refers to supernatural beings from Hindu mythology, while "Gana" means song or music. Performances are usually staged outdoors, under the light of a full moon. The stories are often based on Hindu epics, such as the Ramayana and Mahabharata. The art form is characterized by elaborate costumes, ornate headgear, and vibrant makeup. Artists wear colorful attire, adorned with intricate designs and patterns. Yaksha Gana performances are highly energetic, featuring dynamic dance movements, acrobatic feats, and powerful vocal renditions.

The music is provided by traditional instruments like the maddale, chimta, and harmonium.

The songs are composed in various ragas, including:

1. Hindola: Often used for dramatic and emotional scenes.
2. Kapi: Typically used for romantic and devotional scenes.
3. Mohana: Used for scenes depicting heroism and valor.

Talas commonly used in Yaksha Gana include:

1. Adi: An 8-beat cycle, often used for narrative songs.
2. Rupaka: A 6-beat cycle, typically used for dramatic scenes.
3. Triputa: A 7-beat cycle, used for scenes depicting action and heroism.

Yaksha Gana has been recognized by UNESCO as an Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This ancient art form continues to thrive, entertaining audiences and preserving India's rich cultural heritage.

1. “**Ksheera Sagara Mathanam**”:

This Yakshagana narrates the story of the churning of the ocean of milk (Ksheera Sagara), a significant episode in Hindu mythology. It depicts the collaboration between gods and demons to obtain the nectar of immortality (Amritham), highlighting the themes of cooperation and divine intervention.

2. “**Vipranarayana**”:

This tells the story of Vipranarayana, a devout Brahmin known for his deep devotion to Lord Ranganatha. This narrative explores themes of devotion, temptation, and redemption, focusing on Vipranarayana's spiritual journey and unwavering faith in God.

3. “**Malavika**”:

This Yakshagana is based on the classical Sanskrit play "Malvikagnimitram" by Kalidasa. It centres around the romance between King Agnimitra and the beautiful Malavika, exploring themes of love, courtly intrigue, and the complexities of relationships in a royal setting.

These compositions reflect Balantrapu Rajanikanta Rao's skill in integrating traditional Indian music and storytelling, contributing significantly to the preservation and promotion of Indian cultural heritage through the medium of Yakshagana. Sastry was able to complete the writing for the Yakshagana presentation of 'Ksheera Sagara Mathanam' only after Rajani had completed composing music for three-fourths of the piece, which speaks highly of the versatility of Rajani as a music composer.

Rajani and Devulapalli Krishna Sastry joined their voices in harmony to sing the common prayer together, as follows:

Ambā heccarika aparṇa heccarika
Sāmbaśivuni prēmādhāni heccarika
Kuntī mādharma kūrmi sōdari
Kukkaṭārdēndu sēkharuni dēveri heccarika!
Muggurammalaku mulamaina talli!

Muktiniccē kalpavalli heccarika
Śrīkr̥ṣṇa dāsa cakōra pūr̥ṇima,
Rajinīkāntodaya, dayārāśi heccarika.....

They sang the same prayer together, which was used in all three Yakshaganas.

The ending of the prayer used to end with both their names as janta kavulu (poet-duo) when Rajani started with “Sri Krishna dasa chakora poornima”, sastry concluded “Rajanikatodaya, Dayarasee Hecharika”. The raga in Rajani's voice is as captivating as the full moon to Krishna Sastri's eyes, symbolising the grace of Amba.

Vipranarayana Alvar's life history:

Thondaradippodi Alvar or Vipra Narayana was one of the twelve Alvar saints of South India, who are known for their dedication to Vaishnava tradition of Hinduism. The verses of Alvars are compiled as “Naalayira Divya Prabandham”. There are 108 temples revered as Divya Desam. Thondaradipodi is considered the tenth in the line of the twelve Alvars.

‘Guruparamparabavam’ by Pinbaragiya Perumal Jiyar, ‘Periya tirumudi Adaivu’ by Kovil Kandadai Appan, ‘Yatindra Pranava Prabavam’ by Pillai Lokam Jeeyar, commentaries on ‘Divya Prabandam’, ‘Guru Parampara (lineage of Gurus) texts, temple records and inscriptions give a detailed account of the Alvars and their works. According to these texts, these saints were considered incarnations of some Form of Vishnu. Thondaradippodi of Vanamaalai (Vishnu's garland)

As per Hindu legend, he was born as Vipra Narayana and got devoted to Ranganatha of the Srirangam Ranganathaswamy temple. Since he worshipped even the dust from the devotees of Ranganatha, he attained the name Thondaradipodi.

His works are ‘Tiruppallieluchi’ having ten verses, and ‘Tirumālai’ having forty verses, both of which are counted among the 4000 stanzas in the ‘Naalayira Divya Prabandam’. The works of Thondaradipodi and other Alvars contributed to the philosophical and theological ideas of Vaishnavism. Along with the Saiva nayanmars, they influenced the ruling Pallava kings of the South Indian region, resulting in changing the religious geography from Buddhism and Jainism to the predominant sects of Hinduism.

In South-Indian Vishnu temples, Thondaradipodi Alvar has images and festivals associated with him too. The ‘Vasantha Utsavam’ festival is celebrated in Srirangam temple and for nine days in the garden, believed to have been maintained by him. The verses of Thondaradipodi and other Alvars are recited as a part of daily prayers and during festive occasions in most Vishnu temples in South India

Vipranarayana, a deeply devoted follower of Lord Ranganatha, resided in an ashram on the banks of the Cauvery River at Srirangam, accompanied by his disciple Rangaraju. His life was dedicated to serving the Lord, and he remained unaffected by worldly temptations. One day, Devadevi, a beautiful and proud devadasi, passed by the ashram after performing a dance recital at the Chola King's court. Used to adoration and admiration, Devadevi was offended when Vipranarayana didn't even glance at her. Her vanity hurt, she vowed to break his unwavering devotion and win him over using her charm. Determined Devadevi, pretending to be in distress, entered the ashram under the pretext of needing help. Despite his initial resistance, Vipranarayana eventually falls to her allurements, abandoning his spiritual path. Once Devadevi's ego was satisfied, she began to regret her actions, realising the gravity of the offence what she did. She returned home, leaving Vipranarayana heartbroken and desperate. Out of his infatuation, Vipranarayana follows her, but when he reached her home, Devadevi's mother, disgusted by his condition,

drove him away. Viparanarayana's life spirals downward as he loses his spiritual grace and becomes a shadow of his former self.

Seeing His devotee in such despair, Lord Ranganatha decided to intervene. Disguised as Rangaraju, The Lord presented a golden vessel to Devadevi, claiming it was sent by Viparanarayana. However, it was soon discovered that this vessel was stolen from the temple. The Chola King, enraged by the sacrilege, ordered Viparanarayana's hands to be amputated, as punishment.

Before the punishment was carried out, Lord Ranganatha revealed Himself and spoke the truth in detail. He explains that Viparanarayana is not an ordinary human but was actually the human form of Vyjayanthi, the divine garland that adorns Him. Devadevi too, was revealed to be a Gandharva-kanya, a celestial being. With the truth thus uncovered, Viparanarayana returns to his true form as the garland and returned to his position to Ranganatha's neck. This story illustrates the themes of devotion, temptation, and divine grace, and shows that true devotion may be tested and will ultimately lead to Divine revelation and redemption.

The Characters in Vipranarayana yakshagana:

1. Vipranarayana -Thondaradippodi Alvar,or the main character
2. Rangaraju - Disciple of Vipranarayana
3. Devadevi - the female lead (devadasi)
4. Madhuravani - bestie of Devadevi
5. Srinivasudu (Lord Srinivasa) - Lord Ranganatha
6. Veshya Mata - mother of Devadevi
7. Srirangam Nayakudu
8. Vatuvu
9. Dandanathudu
10. Raja Parivar
11. Devadasis

Ragas used in Vipranarayana Yakshagana by Rajanikantha Rao are :

Nata - opening sloka,

Nata(madhyamam) - Vanalona tadavundi

Kambhoji -Amba hecharika

Saurashtra - Indu Ravinetra

Ramapriya - Koluvaiva ranga sai(a very famous and popular song in Dance performance worldwide)

Pantuvrali - Ranga ranganatha rangeswara- a padyam

Anandabhairavi - chekonavayya rangayya, bichamettuka

Kedaragoula - vedalera vayyarulu,Mrokkina

Husseni - kommapaini poolu

Sankarabharanam -padyam -hari kinkarudate

Madhyamavathi - Emimatale sari sari, Jaata rupamani

Bilahari - ee ayyavari binkamu- padyam

Hindola -kesapasa dhrita

Abhogi - vande brindavana - padyam,Paarijata patra lochana

Saranga - e vuri daanavu

Saindhavi -vedalenide daasari
Darbar - padyam and -induku neeve manduve
Sahana - Okavela taruvekkanopnemo, tagana swami tagana
Mukhari - Paraga Kanchipura
Varali - itlu kramamuga,vaddu vaddu suma
Kaanada- Swami idi emi vedamu,mundu telise, Ila tagunu prabhuvulaku
Devagandhari- tuluva manasayena tandri
Khamas - toyaja bhavakulu,Itu setura kutura
Ghanta - akka toda poolatota, bhaktagresarundaina
Behag-Vipravarulu,Bhaktavaradundaina, Vachenadugo,
Athana - Evvari vaadavayya
Simhendramadhyamam - Vipranarayanuni, Swami koluvu
Vijaya nagari - Hari hari idi eti
Saama - Maya ghatinchi
Bhoopalam - Pahi sri rama manohara
Hamsanadam - Neela megha
Suddha Dhanyasi - Rangadhama
Surabhi - mangalamiha tavaranga
MadhKhous - Ma aparadham kadandi
Some of the notation for the Vipranarayana Yakshagana by Dr. Rajanikantha Rao are given in the appendix:
Madhyamavathi
Devadevi:
Emi matale sari sari-evade ee dasari?
Swamulana Vinayakudo? Sakshat hanumantudo Mari ||Emi
Momethi chudagane poyano niyamalu
Tamu kasta chirunavvina taraleno tamanishtalu
Kamini maigali sokagane chesukonu lahiri
Swamivari Dhyanamulu saapatutone sari || Emi
Malleteega maatuna elamavitoda penagulaada
Allana eladeti tammi ullamu pulakimpa paada
Ollu marachi Jhallu manado pilli seelamo mari
Kallu terichi choodado? Perumaallameedanemo guri || Emi
Madhyamavati-Roopakatalam
Pallavi:
; , + R m P N S || r m r s s n p n s n p m ||
E mi mA- Ta lE - - - sa - ri - sa - ri -

r s s m r s n P n S || R ; p m R R S ||
--- e va rE - - - - nI dA - sa - ri - -

; R , r R , r R || S r m S r s S ; ||
svA mu la -na vi nA - - yak u - DO-

n s r m r s n p P N || s r s n p m r M s R ||
sAk- - - shAt - - - ha nu man- - - tu - DO- ma ri

; m P P , P ; || m p n p N p m P P ||
mO - metti- - jU - - - Da gA - - nE

; m p n p m r R S || R M P ; P P ||
pO - - yE - - vO - ni ya mA- lu -

; ; M p n p m R R S || R M P N N N ||
ta ra - lE - - vO- ta ma nish Thalu

p R s R s n S || n p N P M ; p n ||
kA - mini vai- - gA - - li sO - ka -

p m R M ; p N s || R S R S r s N ; ||
gA - - nE pai - ko nu lA - gi ri - - -

, R r R ; R || S r m S R S S ||
svAmivA-ri dhyA-- nam-mulu

n s r m r s n p P N || s r s n p m r m r s R ||
sA - - - pA - - - Tu la tO - - - nE - - - sa - ri

; m P p P ; P || m p n p N P , p P ||
Mal - le tI - ge tO - - - Ta nu ye la

M ; p n p m R R || S s R m P ; P ||
mA - vi - tO - - Da - pe nagu lA - Da

; N , n N , n N || P N s r s n P p m ||
al - la na ye la vE - Ti - kam—mi -

M p n p m R , r S || R ; M P N N ||
Vul - - la - mu pu la kim- pa pA - Da

; ; ; p R s R s n S P N s r s n P p m ||
ol - luma ra- ci jal - lu - ma - na Do -

M p n p m r m p n S r m s R s S S ||
pil li - SI - - - la - mE - - mO—mari

p R r R R R || S r m S r S s S ||

kal – lu te ra ci cU - - DaDo-peru

n s r m r s P ; N || s r s n p n p m r s R ||
mA - - - lla – mI- da nE - - - mO - - - gu – Di

Rajanikanatha Rao's Vision : Sringara as an Expression of Madhurabhakti

He wrote with Sringara as a main theme in expressing madhurabhakti (devotion to the supreme). Sringara is a motif where the mundane sexual relationship between a Nayaki (woman) and a Nayaka (man) is used as a metaphor, denoting the yearning of jeeva (usually depicted as the Nayaki) to unite with the divine (usually depicted as the man). It is a similar composition like a javali Or a padam.

The devadasis traditionally possessed the musical/poetic interpretations of his work for a long period till the devadasi system was abolished and the compositions became more accepted in the musical community as valuable works of art.

Summary:

This composition reflects on the challenges faced by a devotee in maintaining spiritual discipline in the face of worldly distractions, particularly sensual desires. The speaker questions their own behaviour, comparing their distracted state to a vine swayed by the wind, or a cat that acts stealthily. Ultimately, the speaker seems to conclude that focusing on the divine—whether Vinayaka (Ganesha) or Hanuman—through meditation and devotion will bring them back to the right path.

Madhyamavathi raga is suitable for elaboration due to spacing of notes, and it can be sung at any time of the day. Due to the versatility of Madhyamavati it allowed composers to convey deep emotional and spiritual nuances. In the story of Vipranarayana, here the composer chose this raga to reflect Devadevi's complex emotions and spiritual insights into Vipranarayana's character. Madhyamavati, with its auspicious and serene feel, highlights the blend of devotion, love, and spiritual transformation in their story. Its adaptability makes it perfect for expressing divine perspectives and the nuanced relationships depicted in such compositions.

1. Ksheerasagara Mathanam - The Churning of Ocean of Milk:

The Churning of the Ocean of Milk (Ksheera Sagara Mathanam) is one of the most captivating tales from Indian mythology, vividly described in the Bhagavata Purana, Vishnu Purana, and other ancient scriptures. This epic story symbolises the eternal struggle between good and evil, the pursuit of divine wisdom, and the rewards of perseverance and unity. Long ago, the Devas (gods) found themselves weakened and vulnerable, cursed to lose their celestial powers. Desperate to regain their strength, they turned to Lord Vishnu, who devised a plan to churn the Ocean of Milk to obtain amrita—the nectar of immortality. However, such a colossal task required immense strength, so the Devas sought the help of their rivals, the Asuras (demons), forging a temporary alliance.

The Story Unfolds in three stages:

1. The Preparation:

The majestic Mount Mandara was chosen as the churning rod. The mighty serpent Vasuki became the churning rope. To steady the mountain, which threatened to sink, Lord Vishnu assumed his Kurma (tortoise) avatar, supporting it on his colossal back.

2. The Churning Begins:

As the Devas and Asuras pulled Vasuki back and forth, the ocean began to churn violently. Out of this cosmic churning emerged wonders and terrors, each carrying profound significance: Halahala (the deadly poison): A toxic substance capable of destroying all creation.

The characters involved in this story are :

Lord Shiva, in his boundless compassion, swallowed the poison, which turned his throat blue, earning him the name Neelakantha (the blue-throated one).

Goddess Lakshmi: The radiant goddess of wealth and prosperity, who chose Lord Vishnu as her eternal consort.

Kamadhenu: The divine, wish-fulfilling cow.

Airavata: A celestial white elephant, later ridden by Indra, the king of gods.

Kalpavriksha: The wish-fulfilling tree.

Dhanvantari: The divine physician, who emerged holding the coveted pot of amrita.

3. The Conflict:

As soon as Amrita appeared, greed overtook the Asuras, who tried to seize it for themselves. In response, Lord Vishnu transformed into Mohini, a stunningly beautiful enchantress, who beguiled the Asuras and cleverly distributed the nectar to the Devas. Deprived of immortality, the Asuras were ultimately defeated. A tale of eternal lessons, the story of Ksheerasagara Mathanam is not just a myth but a profound allegory. It teaches us that great rewards often demand patience, teamwork, and resilience. Even adversaries can work together for a higher purpose. The emergence of challenges (like the poison) is an inevitable part of any noble endeavour, but they can be overcome with courage and sacrifice. This tale, brimming with divine drama and cosmic significance, continues to inspire art, music, and storytelling across generations, offering timeless wisdom about the nature of life and the universe.

2. "Malavika and Agnimitra: A Tale of Love and Royal Intrigue"

The story of Malavika is a classic tale of love, intrigue, and drama, immortalized in the ancient Sanskrit play Malavikagnimitram by Kalidasa, one of India's greatest poets and playwrights. This romantic comedy revolves around the love story of King Agnimitra and the beautiful maiden Malavika, set against the backdrop of royal life and courtly politics.

The Story:

1. The King and the Court: Agnimitra, the king of Vidisha, was a wise and noble ruler. One day, he hears of a new dancer in his court named Malavika, who is said to possess extraordinary beauty and talent. Though he has never met her, he becomes curious and captivated by the descriptions of her charm.

2. Malavika's Mysterious Origins: Malavika, though serving as a court dancer, was not an ordinary maiden. Unknown to many, she is actually a princess in disguise. Circumstances beyond her control had led her to Vidisha, where she lived a humble life, hiding her true identity.

3. A Budding Romance: When Agnimitra finally sees Malavika, he is instantly enamored by her grace and beauty. However, their growing affection does not go unnoticed, especially by the queen. The queen, jealous of Malavika's influence, schemes to keep her away from the king by placing her under strict confinement.

4. Courtly Intrigue: The palace becomes a stage for political games, secrets, and strategies. The king, determined to be with Malavika, employs clever tactics to outmaneuver the queen's schemes. Meanwhile, Malavika's true royal lineage begins to surface, adding a layer of complexity to the story.

5. The Revelation and Happy Ending: Through a series of twists and dramatic events, Malavika's identity as a princess is revealed. Her royal status makes her a suitable match for the king, and the queen, realizing the sincerity of their love, ultimately accepts their union. The play concludes with a joyous celebration of love, truth, and harmony.

Themes and Significance:

Love and Devotion: The story portrays love as a force that transcends barriers, whether of class, status, or circumstance.

Courtly Drama: It captures the dynamics of palace life, filled with rivalry, loyalty, and intrigue.

Kalidasa's Genius: Through poetic language, humor, and vivid imagery, Kalidasa brings to life the emotions and aspirations of his characters.

Malavika's story is not just a tale of romance but a reflection of timeless human emotions, making it a cherished classic in Indian literature.

In the period between 1960 and 1962, an article published in the Delhi Academy's Dance Special Souvenir highlighted the progress of dance in Andhra Pradesh. The article also mentioned the presentation of Indian historical and mythological stories through dance. Specifically, it referenced the staging of the ancient Indian epic, the Adikavya of Bharatamuni, by Rishis with Apsarasa dancers in the 'Amrita Mathanam' drama. Additionally, the life history of the South Indian devotee Vipranarayana Alvar was presented as a Nrityanataka (dance drama) on both radio and stage. It was indeed a great success broadcasting these Yakshaganas. The famous dramatist Sri Banda Kanakalingeswara Rao travelled all the way from Vijayawada to Hyderabad to meet the station director. He expressed his appreciation for the poets and took a copy of the Yakshaganas tape with him. When these Yakshaganas were planned or aired, Kuchipudi people had no participation or involvement in it initially.

These Yakshaganas were staged and arranged by stalwarts who were associated with the Kuchipudi dance masters. Thus Banda Kanakalingeswara Rao played a key role in the arrangements as well as overall coordination of the performances. When Banda Kanakalingeswara Rao, and the then Vijayawada radio station director invited Rajani and sastry, from Vijayawada and from Hyderabad, for the Hyderabad Radio Vipranarayana Yakshaganam was performed or recorded with notable artists such as Mangalampally Balamurali Krishna, Srirangam Gopalratnam, and Vinjamuri Lakshmi, in lead roles with Rajani's music and Krishna Sastry's composition in Vijayawada Studio. Thus it was a noteworthy collaboration in the realm of classical South Indian performing arts.

Contract for the Darus and Konnakol for these Yakshaganas was given to the eminent Kuchipudi Dance Exponent Natyacharya Chinta Krishnamurthy (musical compositions or verses) in these Yakshagana performances, which included elements of Kuchipudi natyam. The required sound effects for this were provided by him. This indicates his significant role in contributing to the musical and artistic elements of the Yakshagana.

That recording was taken by Banda and a meeting of a group of Kuchipudi Natyacharyas was held regarding the stage program of the Yakshagana. This meeting perhaps focused on discussing the stage presentation and various aspects of the Yakshagana performances. The collaboration of these esteemed dance masters might have been crucial in planning and refining the artistic and technical details for the stage program. Between the period 1960 and 1962, the collaborative efforts of prominent artists and scholars played a significant role in the production and presentation of traditional South Indian dance and music in good numbers.