

Kalapramanam in kriti-s

This is the last article written by B.R.C. IYENGAR for Sruti. He passed away recently. He was Sruti's Correspondent and Representative in Hyderabad/Secunderabad for more than two decades.

Has kalapramanam for each kriti been set by the concerned vaggeyakara? This question is pertinent when we notice that a particular kriti is rendered in different speeds by different singers. It might not have been so in the case of compositions composed before the advent of Tyagaraja. They were always set to a designed metrical movement. The structure, design or format of a kriti gained importance with the advent of the music trinity. South Indian music was earlier essentially bhakti sangeetam set to a single octave to help everybody, both men and women, to sing in groups. In most cases the structure was simple, the lyric running basically as poetry and not necessarily with strict grammar or established components like pallavi, anupallavi or charana. The changeover came up because the trimoorti were not only competent musicians but also vaggeyakara-s.

As an illustration, compare the kalapramanam of the kriti, *Telisiramachintanato* (Ravichandrika) with *Kaaru baaru seyuvaru* (Mukhari). The former is often rendered along with solfa syllables in three minutes flat. On the contrary, even if we want to sing the kriti *Kaaru baaru* faster, there is no scope; it is simply not possible. There are kriti-s which yield to such variations in speed while a set of songs are rigid in their time measure. I have listened to M.D. Ramanathan singing



B.R.C. Iyengar

Seshachalanayakam (Varali) in vilambita kala (slower speed), while in most cases it is confined to madhyama kala.

One of the important parameters which govern the kalapramanam of kriti-s is the sahitya (lyrical content). The composer has a message or a theme to carry, in the form of music. Look at these examples from the compositions of the trinity. From Tyagaraja: *Eti janmamidiraa* (Subhapantuvarali), *Mokshamugalada* (Saramati), *Kaaru baaru seyuvaaru* (Mukhari), *Lekhana ninnu* (Asaveri). From Syama Sastry: *Maayamma ani pilachite* (Manji), *Kanakasaila* (Punnagavarali), the swarajati *Kamakshi*. Or those of Muthuswami Dikshitar: *Chetasree* (Dwijavanti), and *Sree Guruguha moortey* (Suddha Dhanyasi). These are just a few from the vast list of compositions. All these are set to a kalapramanam that cannot be altered. Even if we try; it will prove futile.

On the other hand, look at these – *Evarani* (Devamritavarshini), *Entarani* (Harikambhoji), *Dorakuna ituvanti seva* (Bilahari), or *Darini telusukonti* (Suddha Saveri), *Seshachalanayakam* (Varali) of Dikshitar or *Biraanavara* (Kalyani)

of Syama Sastry. These have a message that has to be delivered in a relatively swift version. Also they provide room for creative thinking like introduction of varied sangati-s. Some songs are meant to be presented in a super fast tempo, like *Nenarunchinamu* (Malavi) or *Ninnuvina namadendu* (Navarasakannada). Such atidruta kala songs are rarely seen in the contributions of Dikshitar or Syama Sastry.

Kalapramanam is based on the tala to which the song is set. Songs set to Desadi tala (commencing after three counts) are in plenty, perhaps because they are easier to compose and also render. Many compositions of Patnam Subramania Iyer are set to this rhythm. They run in a medium speed which is common. 'Irendu kalai' / 2-kalai (each beat reckoned twice) songs in Adi tala, commencing after three counts, similarly have a calculated and set movement, which is neither too fast nor too slow. They form the core of a concert because they provide elaborate room for creativity in manodharma sangeetam, like niraval and swarakalpana. To list only a few – *O Rangasayi* (Kambhoji), *Sadasivam upaasmahe* (Sankarabharanam).

The skill of combining two speeds in a single song is a unique technique in the art of composing. In such compositions, the speed of the charanam is twice that of the pallavi. It is in such compositions that both the rhythm as well as the melody matter. Examples are *Dorakuna ituvantiseva* (Bilahari), *Kshitijaramana* (Devagandhari), *Devijagajjanani* (Sankarabharanam). A majority of Dikshitar's compositions have a madhyama kala

TECHNICALLY SPEAKING...

sahitya which is in-built. There are extremely slow paced kriti-s (ati vilamba kala), which include every feature of classicism, melody, rhythm, bhava. Obviously expertise and scholarship are required to sing them and to bring in creativity. A good example is *Ambanannu brovave*, a composition of Anai-Ayya in Todi set to Desadi, each count (akshara) reckoned four times. That amounts to 20 counts in one cycle (avarta). Such exercises were common in the concerts of yesteryears. Experiments in variations of kalapramanam are vast in the field of RTP.

Eduppu or the commencing point of a composition is of vital

importance in the arithmetic of the kalapramanam. This is essentially based on the arudi or the pressure point in the progress of the kriti-s. Arudi is essentially followed by visranti or relaxation. This equation, in totality, influences the kalapramanam of a composition. It is this concept which forms the fulcrum of a pallavi in RTP. Innumerable tala-s in the science of Carnatic music can be used practically in pallavi-s. Indulging in trikala interpretation in pallavi-s is a unique exercise in the usage of time measure.

The duration of a concert too has enormous influence on presenting the kriti-s in a judicious manner.

If the concert is full length, the singer can adopt the traditional pattern; if it happens to be short, the artist must exercise his discretion. Communication with the audience is yet another feature that manipulates kalapramanam of kriti-s. It has a positive influence in formatting the concert with kriti-s of varied time measure and the holistic structure of a concert.

Given the above parameters, the question arises whether the artist can take liberties with the kalapramanam of kriti-s and tinker with the traditionally set patterns of the vaggeyakara-s, that are in practice?