

Mangalam: the song auspicious

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*M*angalam bhagavan Vishnu, mangalam Madhusoodhana, mangalam Pundareekaksha, mangalaya tano hari! Many would think of this as the presiding sloka to conduct a marriage, as often depicted in Hindi cinema!

‘Mangalam’ in Sanskrit means auspicious, welfare, good fortune. It is common practice in the Bharatiya tradition to wish others with “Mangalaanee bhavantu” in Sanskrit, “Mangalam undaagattum in Tamizh or “Mangalmay ho” in Hindi.

Mangalam is a musical composition that beseeches the gods to shower goodness by paying obeisance to them through a song of praise about them. Some mangalam compositions are like a namavali or garland of names, some describe the appearance of the deities, their adornments, and some hail the worthiness and qualities of the god.

Mangalam as a musical composition, occupies a special place in Carnatic music and the bhajana music tradition. Concerts almost always conclude with a mangalam; what begins with a Ganesa vandana seeking blessings for a successful show, gets wrapped up with a mangalam, praying for auspiciousness to all and everything around. Madhyamavati, Surati and Saurashtram are three preferred ragas for mangalams, as they have come to be known as auspicious ragas.

A noteworthy tradition that has come to stay is that once a mangalam has been sung, no other event follows. Especially during the Margazhi season, with back to back events, only the last concert artist gets to sing a mangalam marking the end of the show for the day. However this has

been debated by academicians who say that a mangalam is not equivalent to a stop button. It is a prayer wishing auspiciousness and there is no harm if an artist sings a mangalam with a concert to follow.

The todayamangalam, however, is an invocatory piece sung traditionally during the nama sankeertana performances and is a set of songs compiled by Sadguru Swamigal like a garland for that purpose. It comprises songs from the compositions of Annamayya, Vijayagopala Swami and Bhadrachala Ramadas. It is sung as an ‘ahvana keertanam’—propitiating the gods and welcoming auspiciousness. These songs in Telugu and Sanskrit are in ragas like Nata, Arabhi, Madhyamavati, Saveri and Pantuvarali. The todayamangalam is also performed by Bharatanatyam dancers as an invocation.

Yet another untold tradition is that the mangalam which is most often sung describes Lord Rama, though there are mangalams praising other gods in the Hindu pantheon. Carnatic concerts are also by far concluded with the famous *Pavamana sutudu pattu*—the mangalam in Saurashtram from Tyagaraja’s *Prahlada Bhakti Vijayam*. Readers may recall that many years ago, the late dancer Chandralekha had choreographed a group presentation for this mangalam at the Festival of India in the U.S.S.R., as the inaugural piece with abhinaya for ‘Rajiva nayana’ with the dignitaries and the crowd looking smilingly at Rajiv Gandhi, then Prime Minister of India, who attended the event.

Why is this mangalam on Rama so popular? One possible reason is that scholars have considered Rama a

poorna avatara—the best example of a complete, perfect being and hence auspiciousness personified.

There is no definitive source or answer as to when, why and how this particular mangalam composed by Tyagaraja in *Prahlada Bhakti Vijayam* has come to stay as the preferred concluding item, although the composer has seven mangalam compositions to his credit! In the book titled *Tyagaraja Swami Keertanaigal* by T.S. Parthasarathy, we find a variety of mangalams in talas like Adi, Jhampa and Chapu and ragas like Ghanta, Kedaragaula, Nadanamakriya, Dhanyasi, Surati and Mohanam. One plausible explanation as to why this mangalam is most popular could be because, this composition describes the complete imagery of Rama with Seeta, adorning all the jewels, being held by Hanuman in his hands and praised by Narada and Prahlada. This could perhaps be attributed to the bhajana sampradaya also where this mangalam is preferred as a fitting finale after the Anjaneyotsava—the customary conclusion of the bhajana proceedings. Tyagaraja composed all the seven mangalams as part of his group kritis for the Utsava Sampradaya, Divya Nama and Geya Nataka kritis like *Prahlada Bhakti Vijayam* and *Nauka Charitam*.

There are mangalams by other composers too. Purandaradasa, Bhadrachala Ramadas, Arunachala Kavi, Narayana Teertha, Annamayya and Swati Tirunal have all composed mangalams. Muthuswami Dikshitar’s *Sri Kamalambike* in Sree is a mangalacharana kriti in the Navavarana bouquet of compositions.

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lists six mangalams and *Hari Sankeertanamala* by Gurudasan T.S. Krishnamurthy features one more that has not been included in the previous publication. Purandaradasa has composed mangalams on Krishna, Rama, the Dasavatara, and Tulasi Devi. *Ramachandraya Janaka rajaja manoharaya*, in Navroz raga by Bhadrachala Ramadas is another famous mangalam.

Arunachala Kavi has composed one mangalam at the end of the *Rama Nataka* kavya. *Sree Ramachandranukku jaya mangalam* in Madhyamavati is a popular Tamizh composition that is sung till date in most houses during functions and marriages. Annamayya's *Marali marali jaya mangalam* often sung in Madhyamavati, has been rendered by M.S. Subbulakshmi in a ragamalika comprising Saurashtram, Mohanam and Sree.

Narayana Teertha has composed four mangalams as part of his compositions. The popular *Vijayagopalate mangalam* in Surati is often sung at the end of a bhajana rendition. The others are *Mangalam Rukmini ramanaya sreematey*, *Madana gopala te mangalam* and *Jaya mangalam nitya subha mangalam* which are sung in different ragas by different artists. Swati Tirunal's *Bhujagasayino nama mangalam* in Yadukulakambhoji is also rendered in concerts.

Many artists prefer to sing compositions from their region. Harikatha artists of Andhra sing *Nee nama roopa mulaku* or *Ramachandraya janaka* while artists from Kerala love to sing *Bhujaga sayino*. There is also a tradition of singing a mangala sloka after the composition and the oft heard ones are *Mangalam Kosalendraya mahaneeya gunabhdaye*, *Sreeyahkaantaya kalyana nidhaye* on Chakravarti Rama and Srinivasa of Tirupati respectively. There is a theory that if the mangalam is sung in a raga with madhyama sruti,

it has to be concluded with a sloka in a raga like Madhyamavati, Sree, Surati or Saurashtram. Many households too have their favourite mangalam that has been handed down as a family song. I have heard my grandmother sing the following composition on Devi in Ghanta raga:

Jayamangalam nitya subha mangalam

Syamalamba Sive Sankari Parvati Somartha Sekhari Sundaresi

Samaganapriya satchitanandine chinmayanandamaya chitroopini

Jayamangalam nitya subhamangalam

Yet another one that I have heard in my in-laws' house, on Krishna in Tamizh in Pantuvarali raga, goes as follows:

Mangalam mangalam sada, mangalam Sree Kannanukku

Maragada vannanukku, Engal kula thinnanukku, ezhil bhujaga vannanukku (Mangalam)

Aalilai mel paduttavarkku, Achuta nandanukku

Kundrai kudaiyaai pidittavarkku, Koormavataranukku (Mangalam)

There could be many more such compositions which are family treasures, without much knowledge about the composer or its provenance.

Tyagaraja's disciple, Walajapet Venkatramana Bhagavatar, has composed a mangalam on his guru in Madhyamavati, which begins as *Srimad Kakarla vamsabdhi chandraamala tejase*. There is a tradition of singing this as the concluding piece after the rendition of the Utsava Sampradaya kritis.

All in all, though the mangalam is sung as a concluding prayer of auspiciousness at the conclusion of an event, it occupies a unique place in the singing traditions of this country where every effort is considered a divine gift, and praying for auspiciousness to pervade the universe is an untold tradition and practice.

(The author is a Carnatic vocalist, writer and management professional)

A list of mangalams

TYAGARAJA

From Utsava Sampradaya

Janaki nayaka - Dhanyasi - Adi

Mangalam avanisuta nathuniki - Nadanamakriya - Adi

Karunarasakshaya ... Jaya mangalam nitya subha mangalam - Ghanta - Adi

Ma Ramachandruniki jaya mangalam - Kedaragaula - Adi

From Nauka Charitam

Makulamunakina pramosagina neeku mangalam - Surati - Chapu

From Prahlada Bhakti Vijayam

Nee nama roopa mulaku - Saurashtram - Adi

Mangalam ma Ramachandranuku - Mohanam - Jhampa

ANNAMAYYA

Marali marali jaya mangalam - Madhyamavati - Adi

PURANDARADASA

Akroorakolita Trivikramage - Saurashtram - Adi

Mangalam ma ramanage, mangalam bhu ramanage (Dasavatara mangalam) - Saurashtram - Adi

Mangalam guru ananda teertha guru rayanige - Bhairavi - Ata

Vanrendrana roopava tali - Mukhari - Ata

Jaladhiyalankisitavage jaya mangalam - Poorvi - Adi

Mangala Sree Tulasike - Nadanamakriya - Chapu

Kasturikatilaka shobita mukhabja - Punnagavarali - Adi

BHADRACHALA RAMADAS

Ramachandraya janaka rajaja manoharaya - Navroz - Adi