



KUTTYKUNJU THANKACHY- THE FOREMOST WOMAN COMPOSER OF KERALA

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Abstract

Kerala has produced illustrious sons and daughters who shone as composers, musicians, musicologists and patrons of arts. Among them there were a few women composers. Their contribution to the cause of arts especially music is splendid. The heyday of artistic and musical effervescence can be traced during the Royal rule of Dharmaraja (AD 1758 – 1798) after that, from AD 1931 to 1949 during the time of Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma Maharaja. The golden age of music in Kerala was the period of Swathi Thirunal. During these halcyon days lived outstanding woman of great talent Kuttykunju Thankachy, daughter of Irayimman Thampi (the most illustrious musician and composer and the court musician of Swathi Thirunal court). Kuttykunju Thankachy, a member of Royal dynasty, has contributed to music world priceless gems of work which are unique in their own respects. It is her splendid and incomparable dedication, devotion and determination to her literary activities are interesting and fascinating excursion into the realm of research. She was in fact an asset to Malayalam language by virtue of her varieties of compositions unparalleled during her time. All her Kirthanas, Padas, Tillana, Devotional Forms, Attakkatha, Drama, Thiruvathira Pattu, Kummi Pattu, Kurathi Pattu, Vathilhura Pattu, Tharattu Pattu and many Ottaslokas show that there was never a poetess like her till 19th century.

Kerala has been famous from very early times for her music which is an integral part of people's Social and religious life. This is also a repository as well as the expression of many of the central features of south Indian culture and Tradition. Many historical works bear eloquent testimony to these facts. For example, the first and foremost literature that stood the test of time is Tamil Epic "Chilappathikaram" in 2nd century AD by Elango Adikal, brother of the celebrated Chera King Chera Chenkuttuvan. The innate taste of people in music and dance is evidenced by musical works, musical instruments and many other compositions.

The Royal family of Travancore in Kerala has been noted for its righteous rule, progressive outlook and unstinted patronage to arts and letters. The period which saw the rise of modern Karnatic music in Travancore begins from the latter half of 18th century.

Then arose in the musical firmament, a unique star "Swati Tirunal" whose reign was rightly called the Augustan Era for music in Travancore. He was a patron of music, and composer who gave tremendous fillip to the flourishing of music. He invited to his court talents from all parts of India and enriched the domain of music. Next to Swati Tirunal in eminence was Irayiman Tampi, Whose lullaby "Omanathinkal Kitavo" is sung in all houses even today. He was the most distinguished person in the court of Maharaja Swati Tirunal.

Irayiman Thampi's daughter, KuttyKunju Tankachy is the foremost women composer of Kerala. She was born in AD 1820 in the month of Kumbam in the resplendent Star Anizham in Pakodadhikarathil Edakkottu Puliylathara veetil, in Kanyakumary District. Her mother was Kalipilla Thankachi. Her father and mother belonged to Royal family. Thankachy had relations with the Royal family on the paternal as well as maternal sides. A couple of months after the birth of Thankachy, her family shifted to their ancestral house Kizhakkemadam inside Fort, Trivandrum. She lived there till her death and came to known as Kizhakkemadathil Kuttykunju Thankachy. This name of endearment was given to her, though her real name was Lakshmi Pilla.

She had her primary education at the age of seven within one or two years, she mastered Tamil, Sanskrit, Malayalam and Arithmetic. Thereafter she began picking up poetry and music. Her first Guru was Haripadu Kochupilla warrior- the Royal tutor of Maharaja Swati Tirunal. It was from him that she learnt Sanskrit. But soon Irayimman Tampi became her sole guide and teacher of music. Even in her teenage, she developed extraordinary interest, talent and genius for poetry, music and drama. By unremitting toil, sustained reading, coupled with innate taste in artistic subjects, she developed a goldmine of knowledge in literature, logic and music.

Only those who have innate taste in literature and music can compose songs of substance and merit. In the case of Kuttykunju Thankachy she had not only the gift for music inherited from her eminent father Irayiman Tampi but also hard work to develop her knowledge and talent. Their proximity to Royal family facilitated her blossoming as a great composer like her father. Her poetic pieces, Songs, Attakkatha, Thiruvathirappattu, Kilipattu, Kurathippattu, Kummipattu,



Vathithurappattu, Thullal, Plays and Tharattu pattu, all these bear out the fact that there was no versatile genius like her in the Malayalam literature during the 19th century.

Her musical compositions are in Malayalam, Sanskrit and Manipravalam, which is a beautiful combination of Malayalam and Sanskrit. She has written Kirthanas, Padas and Thillana in different ragas and it has to be noted that all ragas and talas that are rakthi ragas. She used ragas and talas that are very popular and heart touching. They reveal that they came out spontaneously when her heart overflowed with devotions. The specific indication to the presiding deities in various temples about which songs were composed give intimate knowledge about Sthalapurana through Sthala mudra.

A list of the contributions of Kuttykunju Thankachy in the field of Music and Literature.

Classical Forms

I. Keerthanas

1. Karthyayanimam-Kamboji-Adi.
2. Samajahara hare-Kalyani-Adi.
3. Pahimohana –Khamas-Rupaka.
4. Anandarupahare-Panthuvarahi-Chapu.
5. Suryakoti Samaprabha-Natta-Chapu.
6. Sripavanapuresa-Suruti-Adi.
7. Karunyamennodu-Sourashtram-Chapu.

II .Padas

1. Balike Pakaruthedo-Sankarabharanam-Chapu.
2. Bandurangi-Husaini-Chempata.
3. Intal Valarunnithayyayyo-Bilahari-Adi.
4. Ha ramananayi- Kamboji-Adi.

III. Thillana

1. Kulasekhara Maharaja-Darbar-Rupaka.

Devotional forms

IV . Sankirthanam

V. Vandanaslokas

Theatrical forms

VI. Attakkatha

1. Srimatiswayamvaram
2. Parvathiswayamvaram
3. Mithrasahamoksham

VII. Drama

1. Ajnatavaasam

VIII. Ottanthullal

1. Gangasnanam

Folk musical Forms

IX. Thiruvathirappattu-4

X. Kilippattu-4

XI. Kurathipattu-1

XII. Tharttupattu-1

XIII. Vathilhura Pattu-5

XIV. Kalyanaghosham Manipravalam

XV. Unjal Pattu-1

XVI. Kummi Pattu-1

XVII. Vanchi Pattu

XVIII. Ottaslokas



KuttyKunju Thankachy was an asset to Malayalam language by virtue of her varieties of compositions unparalleled during her times. All this establishes beyond doubt that the honour that Keralites have bestowed on Kuttykunju Thankachy as the first woman composer of Kerala is well deserved.

References

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