
Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār

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MĀRGADARŚI ŚEṢAYYAṅGĀR was one of the lesser known composers of karṇāṭik music, who lived during the pre-trinity days. Very little is known about this scholarly composer, and it is a pity that only very few of his compositions are currently available.

Subbarāma Dikṣitar, the author of “*saṅgīta sampradāya pradarsini*” (telugu edition) gives a brief biographical sketch of Śeṣayyaṅgār, and states that he was known by the title “*mārgadarśi*”, since his works were a beacon light, or path finder for future composers. According to him, Śeṣayyaṅgār was a *vaiṣṇava brāhmin*, a devotee of Lord raṅganātha, and a profound scholar of sanskrit language and music. He used the *mudra* “*kōsala*” in all his compositions, and the reason may be that he hailed from ayodhya. Most of his compositions are on Lord raṅganātha, but a few are also on Lord varadarāja of kāñcīpuram, Goddess lakṣmi, rāma, sīta, and saint rāmānuja. It is believed that he collected all his compositions in a palm leaf manuscript form, and one day, left it at the feet of Lord raṅganātha during the *ardha yāma pūja*. The next morning, when he went to the temple, he found, to his surprise, that only sixty songs were left in tact, and the remaining were obliterated. According to Subbarāma Dikṣitar, these sixty songs, perhaps accepted by Lord raṅganātha, are supposed to be in vogue.

But, contrary to this observation, till recently, only three of these songs were either well-known, or sung by musicians. These three are listed in the mammoth index to south Indian songs, compiled by Professors Gowri Kuppaswamy and Hariharan. Earlier, in 1902, nine *kīrtanaṁs* of Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār were published in “*gāyaka locana*” by Singaracharyulu, but the book was not readily available. Two specimens of his compositions appear in the “*Oriental Music in European Notation*” by A.M.C. Cinnayya Mudaliyār. In the Palace Library at Trivandrum, there is a paper manuscript known as “*śeṣayyaṅgāru kīrtanaṁ*”, containing 19 of his compositions. Also, there is a palm leaf manuscript in the Kerala University collections procured from the Cirakkal Palace, containing 13 of Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār *kīrtanaṁs*. This manuscript has a remark in malayalam, stating clearly these are the compositions of Śeṣayyaṅgār. All these *kīrtanaṁs* bear the *mudra*, “*kōsala*”. But there is an overlap of 8 songs among these manuscripts. What happened to

the remaining songs?

The Manuscript

By a turn of luck, things became a bit rosy. A *saurāṣṭra brāhmin*, by name Ananthu Gopala Bhagavathar, who lived in Madurai, had in his possession, a manuscript of Śeṣayyaṅgār compositions. This was passed on to him by his grandfather, who learned them from his *guru*, Wallajapet Venkataramana Bhagavathar, the famous disciple of Saint Tyāgarāja. He prepared them in a manuscript form, and worshipped it in his daily *pujas*. This manuscript was later passed on to his grandson, Ananthu Gopala. Again, after keeping it in his *puja* for many years, in 1978, Ananthu Gopala Bhagavathar handed over this manuscript to one T . R. Damodaran, a Sanskrit scholar at the Tanjore Maharajah Serafoji Saraswati Mahal Library. Since the script was in telugu, he sought the help of Dr. Kothandaramiah, a telugu professor at Madurai Kamaraja University. He read the entire work, and presented the material in a paper at the Music Academy's Annual Conference.

The manuscript has 114 folios, each folio containing half a dozen lines, and contained many interesting and rare material. The following were discovered in the manuscript:

- A long list of *sāhityaṁs* that were popular during his lifetime, along with the names of the various composers.
- Text of 36 *kīrtanaṁs* of Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavathar (these are in telugu, sanskrit, and his mother tongue saurāṣṭra).
- Commencing with a title “Śeṣayyaṅgāru Kīrtanalu”, a collection of twenty six compositions, with the attestment , “Śeṣayyaṅgār Sāhityaṁ at the top, and concluding with the note “kōsalaṁ kīrtanlu sampūrṇaṁ.
- some of the Koyampurivaru *sāhityaṁs*.
- three *kīrtanaṁs* in saurāṣṭra bhāṣa of Kavi Venkatasuri.
- seven of Sadāśiva Brahmendra *kṛtis* in Sanskrit.

The *kīrtanaṁs* of Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavathar were published in 1981 by the Ayyampettai Venkataramana Bhagavathar Jayanthi Committe, and again re-issued in 1983 with corrections. The 26 compositions of Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār that appear in this manuscript (along with an additional five songs

by him) are also published in 1983 by the Tanjore Maharaja Serafoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library (series No. 197). The songs appear in both Sanskrit and Tamil.

From one of the folios, the date of the manuscript was deciphered as *śukla year, āvaṇi month, daśami, utrāṣāda star, Wednesday*. The date roughly corresponds to 1869 AD. Śeṣayyaṅgār lived several years before the trinity. In *Saṅgīta Saṁprādaya Pradarśini*, Subbarāma Dikṣitar places his biography after Jayadeva, and before Giriraja Kavi and Shahaji. He lived before Ghanam Seenaiyah, and was perhaps a contemporary of Shahaji, who ruled Tanjore during 1684-1710. His style resembles very much that of Shahaji in the usage of *prāsaṁ*, rhythm etc. His fluency in Sanskrit, and devotion to the Lord are both landmarks in all his compositions. Later on, perhaps, Muttusvāmi Dikṣitar and Tyāgarāja adopted his style, as is evident from many of their compositions.

Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār's mudra

The *mudra* (signature) "*kōsala*" was used by Śeṣayyaṅgār in all his compositions, with the variations *kōsalapurīśvara, kōsalapurānilaya, kōsalapurisadana*, and so forth. Regarding his *mudra*, "*kōsalam*", even though Subbarāma Dikṣitar suggests that he hailed from ayodhya, there is no reference to this city in any of his compositions. He mentions Vipranārāyaṇa in one of his songs, and Vipranārāyaṇa definitely lived in South India. Further, he was a staunch follower of Rāmānuja, and mentions about Nammālvār and other *vaiṣṇava* saints in his work. Some of his songs are on Varadarāja of Kāñci. So one tends to believe that he may not have any association with ayodhya, and there may be other reasons to adopt the *mudra* "*kōsalam*".

Svāti tirunāl and Śeṣayyaṅgār

There is an interesting relationship between Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār and Svāti tirunāl. Attracted by the style of the compositions of Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār, Svāti tirunāl wrote a treatise in Malayalam, known as "*muhana prāsanāntya prāsa vyavasta*", dealing with the principles of proper usage of *śabdālankāra, muhana, prāsa, antyaprāsa* in musical compositions in Sanskrit. Svāti tirunāl points out at the commencement of this work that he gathered the material for this work from the compositions of Śeṣa Rāmānuja and Śeṣayyaṅgār. There are two manuscripts of this work, both in Malayalam, in the Palace library in Trivandrum. In the Kerala University manuscript collection, there is a Sanskrit version of the same work. Some of the quotations of this work can be traced in the manuscript, "*Śeṣayyaṅgār Kīrtanam*", mentioned earlier. While the Malayalam version of *Muhana Prāsanāntyaprāsa Vyavasta* clearly reveals that Svāti tirunāl was the author, there is some doubt as to whether the Sanskrit version was his work. There is no mention of

him anywhere in this version. The fact that several musicians from Tanjore lived in his court might explain the existence of such a manuscript.

Svāti tirunāl followed the compositions of Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār as a model for composing, and for introducing embellishments like *muhana*, *prāsa*, *antyaprāsa* and *antarukti*. *Muhana* is a *śabdālankāra* by which the same letter in the beginning of an *āvarta*, (or any of its substitutes in according to some definite rules) occurs in the beginning of the next *āvarta*. *Prāsa* is the repetition of the second letter (or a group of letters) in the first *āvarta* in the same position in the subsequent *āvartas*. *Antyaprāsa* is a *prāsa* that occurs at the end of the *āvartas*. *Antarukti* is the usage of one or more syllables between two words which are in *muhana* or *prāsa* for the sake of *tāla*. Svāti tirunāl's compositions abound in these verbal embellishments (Most of Dīkṣitar compositions have these features). The similarity of the compositions of these two personalities is so striking that a few compositions of Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār have crept into some of the editions of Svāti tirunāl. As examples of this, the *kīrtanam* “*jayasugunālaya*” in bilahari appears in the “*Svāti tirunāl Saṅgīta Kīrtanaikal*”, compiled by K. Chidambara Vadhyar (1916). But Svāti tirunāl himself cites this as a work of Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār, in his *Muhana Prāsanāntyaprāsa Vyavasta*, Another example is the *kalyāṇi kīti* “*yojaya padanalinena*” found in the same book. It does not bear the *mudra* of Svāti tirunāl, but included the phrase “*kōsalam*”. The *kīti* “*kōslēndra māmava*” in *madhyamāvati* is found in the Sarasvati Mahal Library Publication. By a strange coincidence, the same *kṛti* appears in the collection of Svāti tirunāl compositions, compiled by Semmangudi Srinivasayyar. I am unable to decipher the correct authorship. It has the *mudra* “*kōsalam*”, and not *padmanābha*! (This *kṛti* is featured in the recent Malayalam Film, “*Svāti tirunāl*”, and was rendered by Neyyatinkara Vasudevan. It is available in one of the Tarangini Cassettes.)

Perhaps, the Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār *kīti* “*śrīraṅgaśāyīnam sakalaśubhadāyakam*” was an inspiration for Svāti tirunāl to compose his “*bhōgendrasāyīnam kuru kuśalsāyīnam*” in *kuntaḷavarāḷi*. Again, Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār has a lengthy *rāmāyaṇa kīti*, “*pāhi mām śrīrāmacandra*” in *punnāgavarāḷi*. Maybe Svāti tirunāl followed this idea, and composed his famous *rāmāyaṇa kīti*, “*bhāvayāmi raghurāmam in sāvēri*”

The association of Svāti tirunāl with the works of Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār was through Ṣatkalā Govinda Mārār, a great name associated with Svāti tirunāl's patronage of music. He was adept in such percussion instruments like *ceṇḍa*, *maddalam*, *eḍakka*, *timila*, but above all, he had the remarkable ability in singing a *pallavi* in six degrees of speed, which earned him the title *ṣatkalā*. It was Mārār who brought to the court, a vast number of Tanjore compositions, that also included Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār's. The structure, language and theme associated with these *kīrtanams* attracted Svāti tirunāl, and he adopted them as models for his own compositions.

A list of available kītis

The following is a complete list of all the 31 kīrtanms that are featured (in both Sanskrit, and in Tamil) in this Sarasvati Mahal Library publication of 1983. Those *kīrtanams* that appeared in the 1902 edition of Singaracharyulu are identified with an asterik symbol (*). The list contains songs on *āñjanēya*, *kāñci varadarāja*, *gōvindarāja*, *śrīraṅgam raṅganātha*, *sīta*, *rāma*, *viṣṇu*, *kṛṣṇa*, and the saint *rāmānuja*. The rāgam employed are majestic *rakti rāgams*. There is no mention of any *tāla* structure for many of these compositions. Each has a *pallavi*, followed by lengthy *caraṇams*, numbering anywhere from 3 to 8. None has an *anupallavi* segment.

<i>āñjaneya paripālaya</i>	mōhanaṁ	āñjanēya
<i>kamalanayana yaduvāra</i>	pūrvikalyāṇi	kṛṣṇa
<i>kalaye tāvakīna caraṇam</i>	sāveri	raṅganātha
<i>kalayāmi daśaratha*</i>	suratī	rāma
<i>kōsalendra māmava</i>	madhyamāvati	rāma
<i>gōpāla pāhi*</i>	dhanyāśi	kṛṣṇa
<i>jayajaya śrīraṅgēśa</i>	bhairavi	raṅganātha
<i>jānakīmanoharāya</i>	dhanyāśi	rāma
<i>devadevānupamaprabhāva</i>	bhairavi	kṛṣṇa
<i>nāthavānasmin</i>	tōḍi	raṅganātha
<i>pāhi gōpaveṣa harē</i>	kalyāṇi	kṛṣṇa
<i>pāhimām śrī raghunāyaka*</i>	bēgaḍa	kṛṣṇa
<i>pāhimām śrī rāmacandra</i>	punnāgavarāḷi	rāma
<i>pāhi śrī raghuvara</i>	tōḍi	rāma
<i>pāhi śrī ramāramaṇa*</i>	athāṇa	viṣṇu
<i>bhajēham vīrarāghavam*</i>	gaḷipantu	rāma
<i>māmava raghuvīra</i>	asāveri	rāma
<i>raṅganāyaka*</i>	kēdāragauḷa	raṅganātha
<i>raṅgapatē pāhimām*</i>	darbār	raṅganātha
<i>rāma pālayamām</i>	bhairavi	rāma
<i>re mānasa cintaya</i>	kalyāṇi	rāma

— continued in the next page —

<i>vande govindarājam*</i>	śaṅkarābharaṇam	gōvindarāja
<i>vande vakulābharaṇam</i>	mukhāri	rāmānuja (?)
<i>vandeham kariśaila</i>	dvijāvanti	varadarāja f kāñci
<i>śrināyaka māmava</i>	punnāgavarāḷi	kṛṣṇa
<i>śri raghukula varaśubha*</i>	sāveri	rāma
<i>śri raghuvara suguṇālaya</i>	ghanta	rāma
<i>śrī raṅgaśāyī jaya</i>	kēdāragauḷa	raṅganātha
<i>śri raṅgaśāyinaṁ*</i>	dhanyāśi	raṅganātha
<i>sārasadalanayana</i>	suraṭi	rāma
<i>sītē vasumati sañjātē</i>	asāveri	sīta

Illustrations — three selected kṛtis

In order to appreciate Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār’s style, we append below three of his *kīrtanaṁs*, one in *bhairavi*, and the remaining two in *asāveri*, all decorated with various *śabdālaṅkārams*. The first one is on Lord *kṛṣṇa*. Here one can observe the rhyming and alliteration beauties of the first four letters (two phrases) of each line. The second one on *rāma*, is studded with *dvitīyākṣara prāsam* on each line. The third one is a unique *kṛti*, praising *sīta*, and has plenty of *anyākṣara prāsams*. The simplicity of the expressions, lofty ideas and anecdotes, and the usage of various types of *prāsams* is a landmark in all his compositions. Sometimes these *kṛtis* remind us of *ūttukkādu Veṅkaṭasubba Iyer’s* style.

According to a *parampara* tradition, even today, during the *ēkānta sēva* for Lord *raṅganātha* in *śrīraṅgam* temple, we can hear a few selected songs on Mārgadarśi Śeṣayyaṅgār.

1. devadevānupamaprabhāva

rāgam : bhairavi

pallavi

devadevānupamapra

bhāvabhāvātītanutida

devadevakīpuṇyanidhe kṛṣṇamānavarūpa

pāvanaguṇāmbudhe

caraṇāni

nīlanīlabhaktakalpa
sālāsālakanīṭila śrī
lolālolavanamālikā rāsakrīḍa
tāl dātālavānavipālaka || 1 ||

sārāsārasākṣanirvi-
karākāraḥsahara
śurāśūrakulāgraganya yaśodāku-
mārāmārakoṭīlāvanya || 2 ||

bhīmābhīmasamaravarakavi
rāmārāmānuja satya
bhāmābhāmajagatkāraṇa yādavasarv
bhaumābhaumāghanasamīraṇa || 3 ||

dhīrādhīrāyitakeśavi
dārādārāyita vallavī-
pārāvārasamrakṣaṇasamsārakū-
pārāpāra gamakavīkṣaṇa || 4 ||

gopāgopāyitāśritaka-
lāpālāpā iṣṭānanda
gopāgopāla ārādhana *kosalapura*
bhūpābhūpodravasūdana || 5 ||

2. sītē vasumati sañjātē

rāgaṃ: asāveri

pallavi

sītē vasumati sañjātē

ramaṇīya guṇa jāte
rakṣita sarva bhūte
paripāhimām ||

carāṇam

śyāme lāvaṇya vibhava samē
vadana nirjita sōmē
āsādānugata raghurāmē
paripāhimām ||

dhīre sanmuni hrdayākārē
kara dhṛta kalhārē
āghanopamita kacabhārē
paripāhimām ||

dhanye vaidēhirājakanyē
parihṛta bhakta dainyē
āsannuta daiva mānyē
paripāhimām ||

śāntē kāruṇyapūrṇa śāntē
śrī nidāna lōcanāntē
kosala purī ramaṇa kāntē
paripāhimām ||

3. māmava raghuvīra

rāgam : asāveri tālam tripuṭa

pallavi

māmava raghuvīra mānitamunivara
bhūmisutānāyaka bhaktajana-
kāmitaphaladāyaka

caraṇāni

garvitasutrāmatanayavirāma
nīpatilālāma daśaratharāma samaroddhāma
daśamukhasāmajamṛgendra kosalapurīndra || 1 ||

dinakarakuladīpa dhṛtadivyaśaracāpa
vanajasannibhagātra yogivarya
sanakādinutipātra nabhomaṇi || 2 ||

tanuja śaraṇapavanaja mukhapari-
janajagadahitadanujamadahara
manujatanudharavanajadaḷanayana amitamuniśamana || 3 ||

bhaṇḍanoddhatadoṣa pālitaḡautamayōṣa
daṇḍitamārīca abdhigarva
khaṇḍakanārāca divyaratna || 4 ||

kuṇḍalakalitaḡaṇḍayugave
taṇḍakarabhujā daṇḍahimakara
khaṇḍadharakodaṇḍadaḷanayana aḡaṇitaḡaṇḍaḡaṇa || 5 ||

ḡaṭitanānābhūṣa kalitāśritapoṣa
taṭidhūpāmitavāsana śrīkosala
puṭābhedanānivāsana - (indranīlābha) || 6 ||

kuṭīlakacavīta nīḡalataṭamaṇi
paṭulakhacitalanīḡalasaṭamṛdu
caṭulapītanataḡaṭīlamūlaghana
darahasitavadana || 7 ||

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