

Dance Musicians of 19th and 20th Century

Analyzing the Works of Composers during Mysore Wodeyar and Tanjore Maratha Period

By

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Introduction

As quoted in treatises such as *Sangita Ratnakara* and *Natyashastra*, *Sangīta* is the amalgamation of *Geeta* (vocal music), *Vadya* (instrumental music), and *Nritya* (dance). As an art, it represents the holistic knowledge of literature, dance, and music. No *vaggeyakara* composes merely for function; rather, compositions are a manifestation of fulfilled artistic devotion—often as an offering to the divine.

The contributions of composers from the Karnataka (Mysore Wodeyar) and Tanjore Maratha periods during the 19th and 20th centuries were pivotal in shaping the South Indian dance music repertoire. This study focuses on documenting and analyzing their distinctive contributions, particularly highlighting the influences they exerted on each other's compositional formats.

Although the Tanjore Quartet was patronized by Serfoji II of the Maratha dynasty, the *Margam* format—from *Alaripu* to *Tillana*—popularized during this time significantly influenced the compositions of the Mysore Wodeyar period. This paper seeks to examine unique compositions of Serfoji II such as *Sloka Varna*, *Geetha*, *Prabandha*, and *Tripata*, and trace their musical impact on later composers like Muthiah Bhagavatar.

Objective

To identify key dance music compositions of the 19th and 20th centuries.

Scope

To analyze these compositions in terms of musicality, rendering, and compositional format.

Limitations

Research is confined to selected composers due to limited documentation on other contributors to dance music post-Tanjore Quartet, primarily due to the decline of royal patronage during invasions and migrations.

The study is limited to two composers from each dynasty:

- **Mysore Wodeyars:** Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar (1794–1868) and Harikeshanallur Dr. Muthiah Bhagavata (1877–1945)
- **Tanjore Marathas:** Serfoji II (1798–1832)

Methodology

- **Qualitative Research:** Literature analysis of selected composers.
- **Comparative Analysis:** Study of specific compositions relating to dance music.

Composers and their Contributions

Mummadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar (1799–1868)

He was a prolific composer who contributed significantly to various forms of Karnataka Sangita. His compositions covered a wide range, including **Jatiswaras**, **Swarajatis**, **Varnas**, **Kritis**, **Ragamalikas**, **Padas**, **Javalis**, and **Tillanas**. Many of these works were **dedicated to Goddess Chamundeswari**, reflecting his deep spiritual devotion and connection to the royal court of Mysore, where she was the presiding deity.

One of his monumental contributions to Indian cultural heritage is the **Śrītattvanidhi**, an **encyclopedia compendium** that integrates **literature, music, iconography, and painting**. This vast and richly illustrated manuscript documents various aspects of art and culture and serves as an important source of historical and artistic information during his time.

In addition to his musical and literary achievements, he made significant contributions to the field of dance through his treatise **Sarasangraha Bharata**. This work focuses on classical dance and introduces lesser-known or regionally significant **dance forms** such as **Denki**, **Vartani**, **Jhompata**, **Lambaka**, and **Rasaka**, which enrich our understanding of the diversity and evolution of Indian dance traditions.

His **Javalis**, a genre of light classical compositions often dealing with romantic or devotional themes, are particularly noteworthy. These were structured in the **Dwidhatu Prabandha**

format—a two-part compositional structure that emphasizes both lyrical beauty and musical complexity.

Harikeshanallur Dr. Muthiah Bhagavatar (1877–1945)

Muttaiah Bhagavatar (1877–1945) was a distinguished composer and musicologist who played a vital role in shaping early 20th-century Karnataka Sangita. Under the enlightened patronage of Nalvadi Krishnaraja Wodeyar, the Maharaja of Mysore—renowned for his support of the arts—Muttaiah Bhagavatar flourished both as a creative and scholarly force. He composed prolifically across a wide range of musical forms, including *tānavārṇas*, *dāruvarṇas*, *padavārṇas*, *kritis*, and *tillanas*, each showcasing his deep understanding of raga, tala, and lyrical expression. His *tānavārṇas* are known for their technical rigor, while his *dāruvarṇas* and *padavārṇas* are rich in emotive content, making them especially popular in both music concerts and classical dance. His *kritis* reflect a spiritual depth and melodic inventiveness, and his *tillanas* exhibit rhythmic vitality suited for dance finales.

In addition to his compositional brilliance, Muttaiah Bhagavatar made a lasting contribution to musicology through his treatise "*Sangīta Kalpadruma*." This important work discusses a wide range of musical concepts and traditional forms, serving as a bridge between ancient theory and contemporary practice. The text explores elements such as *dhruvam* (a recurring section in older musical forms), *mattam* (a term with rhythmic or structural connotations), *sūladi gitas* (early pedagogical compositions based on various *talas*), and *prabandhas* (highly structured pre-*kṛiti* musical forms). He also sheds light on *tāya* and *ālāpana*.

Serfoji II (1798–1832)

He composed a wide range of classical dance compositions, showcasing his deep knowledge in dance forms. His repertoire included foundational and intricate compositions such as *Alaripu*, *Jatiswara*, *Shabdam*, *Pada*, *Kautvam*, *Sloka Varna*, *Prabandha*, and *Sollukattu Swarajathi*, each demonstrating rhythmic sophistication and expressive depth. These compositions not only reflect technical brilliance but also a profound understanding of musicality, devotion, and storytelling through movement.

In addition to these widely practiced forms, he also contributed to the preservation and revival of several rare and nearly forgotten dance styles. Notably, he composed compositions in *Jakkini*, a dance form influenced by Persian traditions; *Perani*, an ancient temple ritual dance once performed in temples of South India; and *Dhraupad*, based on the Dhrupad tradition of classical Hindustani music. He also explored and composed for *Desi Navadadam*, *Kuravai*—a traditional group dance found in Tamil epics—and *Nirupanas*, which are musical compositions rich in narrative content. His efforts to revive these rare forms not only enriched the classical dance landscape but also ensured that these historically significant art forms continued to thrive in contemporary performance contexts.

Comparative Analysis and Observations

1. **Tripura format** used by Serfoji II appears in Muthiah Bhagavata's *Daru Varnas*.

The swara structure and the Sahitya for that swara in tripura composition can be seen in the Swara pattern and Sahitya of a Daru Varna

2. **Valliparinaya Kathakalakshya** by Bhagavata exhibits structural similarities to Tanjore Maratha compositions.

Compositional format of Kriti from **Valliparinaya Kathakalakshya** by Muthiah Bhagavata made great impact on Maratha rulers of Tanjore in early 19th century.

3. **Geeta and Prabandha** rendering styles by Serfoji II parallel Bhagavata's *Tanavarnas*.

As the name suggests Tana Varnas have more of Akara, Ukara and sustain of lyrics. Similarly, the Geetha and Prabandha has the same format,

4. *The Musicality of swara composition by Serfoji II is similar to the Swarajathi of Syamashastri*

Key Findings

- *Abhinava Bharatasarasangraha* of Mumtaz Ali Khan and *Chaturdandiprakashika* of Venkatamakhya reflect regional musical practices.
- Rare forms like *Denki*, *Vartani*, and *Jhompata* found in Mysore's treatises.
- Western influences observed in Tanjore Band and Muthiah Bhagavata's composition "Note".
- Hindustani influences are present in both traditions.
- *Tillanas* and *Jatiswaras* during Mysore Wodeyar era show Tanjore Maratha influence.
- Serfoji's *Nirupanas* and Shahji's *Niti Padas* resonate with Mysore traditions.
- Unique Mysore forms: *Nagma*, *Javali*, *Churnike*, *Taya*.
- Unique Tanjore forms: *Dhraupad*, *Desi Navada*, *Kuravai*.
- *Kanda Padya* (Mysore) vs. *Vrutam* (Tanjore) as preludes.
- *Nirupanas* composed by both Serfoji II and Muthiah Bhagavata.
- No significant post-Tanjore Quartet compositions found in dance music repertoire.

Conclusion

The Mysore Wodeyar and Tanjore Maratha dynasties played a pivotal role in shaping the landscape of South Indian dance music. Both courts emerged as vibrant centers of artistic innovation, nurturing musicians, composers, and dancers whose creative outputs continue to

influence the classical traditions today. Their mutual cultural exchanges and artistic patronage led to the development and refinement of richly structured compositional forms such as Tillanas, Padavarnas, and Nirupanas—each characterized by intricate rhythmic patterns, lyrical beauty, and dynamic energy, making them particularly well-suited for dance.

The contributions of key composers such as Serfoji II of Tanjore and Muthiah Bhagavatar of Mysore exemplify the depth of musical sophistication that flourished under royal patronage.

Serfoji II, with his deep interest in the arts and scholarly inclinations, encouraged the synthesis of various regional styles, while Muthiah Bhagavatar introduced innovative rhythmic structures and melodic frameworks that enriched the Karnataka Sangita repertoire. Their compositions, marked by exceptional musicality and rhythmic brilliance, are ideal for enhancing the expressive and technical dimensions of classical dance performances.

Despite their artistic value, many of these compositions remain underexplored in contemporary practice. Greater recognition and integration of these works into present day dance repertoire of Bharatanatya would preserve this rich musical heritage.

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