

The Untold Rāgās: Unveiling Kozhikōde's Forgotten Carnātic Composer-P.K. Sankaranārāyanan

Author: **PS Ajithkumar**, Research Scholar, Department of Music, Sree
Sankarāchārya University of Sanskrit, Kalady, Kerala.
email: ajithputhenmaya@gmail.com

Abstract

This research article delves into the significant contributions of Kozhikode P.K. Sankaranārāyanan, a lesser-known, notable composer hailing from Kozhikode, Kerala. Though relatively lesser-known compared to some of his contemporaries, Sankaranārāyanan's compositions and musical innovations have enriched the Carnatic music landscape. This article aims to explore his unique musical style, scrutinise his notable works, and assess his eternal impact on the sphere of Carnatic music, shedding light on the contributions of this talented yet often ignored composer from Kerala. The primary intention of this article is to comprehensively examine the musical contributions. The scope of this research will encompass a detailed study of his compositions, focusing primarily on his publicly available work 'Sangītha Pushpānjali'. The work includes 37 compositions, including many musical forms like varnas, kritis, bhajans and tillana-s.

No other review has been published on the specifics of the works in 'Sangītha Pushpānjali'. Therefore, this is a very useful review for Carnatic musicians, music students, and music lovers. He created a new musical form called Svaramāla. He invented and introduced a new raga named 'Indeevaram' or 'Nava Valachi'. His works are a perfect example of the creation of new ragas and how they can be beautifully integrated into works, transforming them into a beautiful work without artificiality or overcomplication. Another feature of his work is the simplicity with which he has written and structured his works so that they can be easily learned and passed on to the next generation. This article concludes that PK's unique contributions, including the genesis of 'Nava valachi' and the incorporation of less common ragas and tālas in 'Sangītha Pushpanjali,' were pivotal in shaping and advancing the landscape of Carnatic music in Kerala.

Keywords: Kozhikode PK Sankaranārāyanan, lesser-known composer, Nava Valachi, Sangita Pushpanjali, Carnatic Composer, Vaggeyakara.

Introduction

Kerala is a land of many musical talents. The golden age of Kerala music was the era of Svāti Tirunāl Rāmavarma, the Maharāja of Travancore. Despite Svāti Tirunal's profound influence, the period following him saw a notable decline in the emergence of new Carnatic composers (vaggeyakaras) in the region. The entry of other genres of music and the publicity that comes with it have led to the contributions of many Carnatic composers being obscured. One such person is PK Sankaranārāyanan, born on May 12, 1941, is an outstanding, lesser-known Carnatic composer and musician from

Kozhikode, Kerala. While working as a former South Indian Bank officer, his intense devotion to Carnatic music resulted in the creation of approximately 100 excellent compositions, exhibiting his extensive knowledge of the art form. Furthermore, he published his 37 compositions with notation in 'Sangīta Pushpanjali,' which reinforces his reputation as both a vaggeyakāra and a contributor to the preservation and spread of Carnatic musical knowledge.

He was an exponent in Carnatic Music, Hindustani Music, Devotional Songs, Light Music, Marathi Abhang, Folk and Gazals as well. Hailing from a musical family, his mother Janaki Krishnan, who was also a Carnatic musician and his first guru, influenced him a lot in his early childhood. She used to teach him the verses of Njānappāna by Poonthānam in the traditional tune, which also deeply motivated him to study music more. He often says that if he has any talent in music, it is only from his mother. Later, he learned music from many famous musicians such as Karamana Srīnivāsa Iyer, Kozhikode Viswanatha Iyer, Ramanāthapuram Venkitāchalam, GN Sreekrishnan, K Rāghavan (famous music director, Kerala), etc, and learned Hindustani from Sharad Chandra R Marāthe. (Sangīta Pushpanjali, P 18, 2011).

He has composed nearly 100 compositions, which include 65 kritis, tillānas, varnas, bhajans and devotional songs. Out of this, 37 compositions available in 'Sangītha Pushpānjali' are mainly focused on this study.

Review of Literature

There are not many in-depth studies and research that have been done about contemporary composers, ie post-Svati period in Kerala. Some of the composers are still not very popular. Mohana P, (2017) in his research work 'Carnatic Music of Kerala in the Post-Svati Tirunal

Period', mentioned the list of Modern Kerala Composers like Iravivarman Tampi, Nurani(Palakkad) Parameswara Bhagavathar, Kuttukunji Thangachi, Neelakanta Sivan, Nagarcoil Kalyanikutti Ammachi, K.C. Kesava Pillai, T.Lakshmana Pillai, Ennappadam Venkataramana Bhagavathar, Mahakavi Kuttamath Kunju Kurup, C.S. Krishna Iyer, V. Dakshinamoorthy, Lalitha Dasar, Meenakshi Suthan, M.D. Ramanathan, Pudukkode Krishnamoorthy, Kasargodu Madhav Upadhyaya, N.P. Ramaswamy, Meenakshi Subbaraman, Mangalam Ganapati, Sundara Narayanan, Thulaseevanam, Jenumoole Krishnamoorthy, P.K. Sankara Narayanan, Kilimanoor Tyagarajan, B. Sasikumar, C.S. Subbaraman, Thiruvananthapuram R. Mahadevan, G. Hari Sundar, Dr.G. Baby Sreeram, Tripunithura Jayaprakash, etc. She stated that P.K. Sankara Narayanan the age of 23, started his career as a composer. He wrote Kriti's in both Malayalam and Sanskrit. In his first Kriti, Sankaranārāyanan created the rāga "Indeevaram" in adoration of Lord Ganesha. He has written in Tamil, Telugu, Malayalam, and Sanskrit. (P145)

In the online Article, 'Great composers of Kerala Desham', Asok Madhav mentioned the name of PK Sankaranārāyanan, in which Devim bhavaye'(Hamsadhvani) and 'Sri Mahaganapathim'(Hindolam) as his famous compositions. Other composers who have made significant contributions to Kerala music include Paravur Krishna Bhagavatar, Palkulam Subbarama Bhagavatar, Karamana Venkateswara Bhagavatar, Varkala Janardhana Bhagavatar, Puliyurkurichi Padmanabha Bhagavatar, Suchindram Hariharā Bhagavatar, Parakkav Narayana Bhagavatar, Kadayam Kasi Bhagavathar, Tanjavur Kathirkamadasan, T. Srinivasa Iyer, and others.

AK Ravindranath (2004) in his book 'Dakshinendyan Sangeetham' mentioned many Kerala composers. He explained the contributions of Iravivarman Tampi (1782-1856), and wrote about the rare ragas of his like Jangla, Mānji, Kakubha. 'Prananathaneniku' is a famous Sringara Pada written by Tampi. Another Kerala composer in this book is KC Kesavapilla (1868-1914). He was also a known poet. 'Sadārāma' was his famous musical-drama, which was very popular in his time. T Lakshmanan Pilla(1864-1950) was born in Kerala, but most of the compositions were in Tamil. He innovated a new raga –Amarasenapriya. Palakkad Anantharama Bhagavatar (1867-1919) was also a famous musician from Kerala, also Astana vidwan of Mysore Krishanarajawodayar.

Methodology

This research is primarily based on Qualitative methods, in which the work enlightens the

composer's style, artistic choices, and unique contributions, rather than focusing on numerical data. It is a single-case study, providing in-depth insight into their creative output. The primary data collection source is the notation book. This compositional analysis is further contextualised through a review of relevant historical and musicological literature, allowing for an in-depth understanding of PK's exclusive contributions and their impact on the regional Carnatic tradition.

Research Gap

PK Sankaranarayanan's compositions are noteworthy gifts to the Carnatic music tradition, comparable to those of other renowned Kerala composers such as KC Kesavapillai, CS Krishna Iyer, Puthukode Krishna Murthy, and Tulasīvananam Ramachandran Nair. Unfortunately, his compositions have not received the same level of recognition as those of his contemporaries. His disciples, especially his daughter Sangeetha Jayaram and famous musician Vignesh Iswar, used to sing many compositions in their concerts. This right away draws attention to a crucial gap: there isn't much thorough academic writing or audio collections about his life and music. In general, there is a lack of scholarly publications.

Analysis, Results & Discussion

- Musical features

The intricate micro-nuances observed within the dhātu and mātu of PK Sankaranarayanan's works underscore his meticulous approach to compositional craftsmanship. He espouses a holistic view of music, rejecting the conventional compartmentalisation into Carnatic, Hindustani, Western, or folk genres, positing instead a singular, primal source rooted in Svāra, Sruti, Tāla, and Nāda. This philosophical perspective informs his compositional practice, resulting in a diverse repertoire spanning multiple musical genres. He used 'Sankara' as vaggeyakāra Mudra in his compositions.

- Three Varna-s

PKS composed two Ādi-tala varna-s, 'Gana Nayakam' in Mohana, 'Padasārasa Yugaḷam' in Pantuvarāli and one Ata tāla varna 'Svāra Rāga' in raga Hamsadhvani.

The Mohana Varnam-'Gananāyakam', is a ganapathi stuti, owing to its inherent melodic elegance and structural conciseness, presents a student-friendly musical composition, thereby rendering it suitable for introductory Carnatic music instruction, particularly when paired with the famous 'Ninnukori Varna'. The beginning note is GPG,DPGR, and the lyric is Gananayakam, the composer begins with a

Svaraksharam, ie GA. The charana svaras are arranged in arohana order, ie first charana svara Ga, second Pa, third Dha, and last one with Sa.

The second varna ‘Padasarayugalam’ is the praise of lord krishna written in the Malayalam language. There are not so many Malayalam varnams in Carnatic music. Like the mohana varna, he begins with a svarakshara note, ie ‘Pada’sarasa-‘PD’P PMGM. In the last charana swara, he included some beautiful svara prastaras, ie ‘SSRS-NRSN-NNSN-DSND-DDND-PNDP-PPDP-MDPM’.

The third varna, set to ata tāla, and hamsadhwani raga beginning with ‘Svararāga’ is a worship of the goddess Sharadamba. The simple svar patterns in this are worth noting. The last charana svara starts with SNS-PNS-GPNS-RGPNS-SRGPN is the best example for his style of creating non-complicated, simple svara patterns even in ata tala varnas.

● Rare Ragas and Innovations

He invented and introduced a new raga named ‘Indeevaram’ or ‘Nava Valachi’ inspired by the raga Valachi. The arohana–avarohana of the raga is SGPDNS- SNPGS. The Avarohana-dhaivata svara is omitted in the ‘Nava Valachi’, different from traditional Valachi. He composed a kriti that begins with ‘Bhaja Bhaja Nandakumaram’, in this raga where he used the word ‘indeevarekshanam’ to depict the raga mudra and ‘Sankara gāya’ as vaggeyakara mudra. In a discussion with Prof. Mavelikara P Subrahmanyam, Rtd Principal of Govt RLV College of Music and Fine Arts, at the time of the creation of his new raga Nava Valachi, Mr Subrahmanyam appreciated him for the innovative approach. (Sangita Pushpanjali P.19,2011)

He used ‘SamudraPriya’, which is a rare raga, janya of Hemavati (SGMPNS-SNPMGS), and the composition itself begins with raga mudra ‘Samudra priye Sarasanilaye’. His Guru, K Raghavan, stated that the thillana in Sindhuramakriya was an outstanding composition among all his compositions. (Sangita Pushpanjali P.03.,2011)

The composer demonstrates exceptional mastery by employing the difficult and rarely performed ragas Sallāpam, Gāvati, Janasammōhini, Nirōsta, and Hamsavinōdini. Sallapam is the Janya raga of 14th melakarta raga Vakulabharana, the arohana-avarohana is SGMDNS-SNDMGS. The kriti ‘Bhagare Saketaramam’, composed by PKS, is popularised by the famous Carnatic young musician Vighnesh Iswar on YouTube. There is a beautiful chitta svara attached to this kriti ie S,,G,MD, MDNS,. Gāvati is the Janya raga of Harikamboji; the arohana-avarohana is SGMPNS-SNSD,PMPG,MRNS. The vakra avarohana is the speciality of this raga. PKS composed a Tamil Bhajan ‘Mayileri Vilayadum Muruka Kumara’ in Gavati raga. He used the Janasammohini Raga, which is the janya raga of Harikamboji, in his Neenamasmaranamu

kriti. In the 'Bhargavi' kriti and its virutha slokam, he applied Patdeep raga (SGMPNS-SNDPMGRS) instead of Gourimanohari. This indicates his true affection towards Hindustani ragas. The skilful integration of these rare ragas is a testament to the artist's profound understanding of our musical tradition.

- Thematic Approach

The thematic breadth of PK Sankaranarayanan's compositions is evidenced by his works dedicated to different deities, such as Ayyappa, Sāsta, Brahma, Nagarāja, Mookambika, etc and composed works honouring composers, philosophers, and gurus.

Sankarāchāryam āradhaye ham' in Sankarabharana Raga features a portrayal of Sankarāchārya, the great Vedic philosopher. In his composition 'Namāmi Sree Tyagarāja Swāminam' in Malayamārutha rāga, PKS employs the term 'māmaguruvaram,' indicating his conceptualisation of Tyagaraja svāmi as his manasa guru (spiritual mentor). In this work, Tyagaraja Svami is described as having 'amānushatara vaibhavam', meaning someone with a type of vaibhav that is not possible for humans.

The composition beginning with 'Abheesta Sidhi Pradāyaka' is a Nāgaraja stuti (snake worship) in praise of Mannarasāla Nāgarāja temple, Haripad, which is a famous temple for snake worship in Kerala. The selection of Punnaga Varali rāga for this composition is extraordinary, as the inclusion of 'nāga' within the raga's nomenclature aligns thematically with the composition's subject matter, suggesting a purposeful choice by the composer. The composition's third charana incorporates a mention of the Noorum Pālum vazhipādu, the primary ritualistic offering associated with Mannarasāla Temple.

There are very less compositions about Brahma deva in Carnatic music. His 'Brahmadevam Bhavayeham' in Vakulābharana rāga is a special composition praising the Brahma dēva. According to Hindu dharma, Brahma deva is believed to be the creator of this world. In this kriti, he mentions Nāradamuni also. One of his interesting compositions, 'Namo Nama Namo Nama guruganaya nama', is a homage to all the gurus in the Carnatic music world. In this, he mentions the names of many vaggeyakārās in Carnatic music such as Purandara dāsa, Kshetrajna, Annamāchārya, Nārayana thīrtha, Tyagarāja, Diksita, Syama Sāstri, Svāti tirunal and Shatkala govinda mārār. It is doubtful whether there are any works in Carnatic music praising such Vaggeyakaras.

In his composition 'Manasā Sirasā Namāmi Devam,' a devotional piece dedicated to Tali Mahadēva (the deity of Tali Mahadeva Temple is lord Siva), PKS utilises the Nalinakanthi raga, incorporating it as a raga mudra within the work and mentions the upadēvatas in this temple, such as Srikrishna, Narasimha, etc. It is customary to worship the main deity and the sub-deities according to the ritual of a temple.

However, in Carnatic music, there are not many compositions that praise the main deity of a temple and then describe the sub-deities.

The four kritis in the Malayalam language are also noteworthy. ‘Aparādhameḷam Kshamikkenam, ente akathāril ennum nee vazhenam Shastha’ in raga Kamboji, ‘Aararivoo nin Mahimanam, Ananda chithanam Ayyappa swāmiye’ in raga Subha Panthuvārāli, Anandamaya deva in Vagadheeswari, Svararāgamāy in Renjini are some examples. The Ayyappa-Shastā concept in Kerala is very famous. It is mentioned in the book Kerala History by Prof. A. Sreedhara Menon that with the spread of Buddhism, many Ayyappa temples in Kerala converted to the Shastā concept. The words Sharanam Charanam are also evidence of the Buddhist concept. PK's Shastā work also contains the words Sharanam Charanam. It is clear that this work describes the Sabarimala Shasta through the term Sabarigiriṣha.

- 'Navagraha Ragamalika'

His 'Navagraha Ragamalika' starting with ‘Navagraharoopam TatvaSwaroopam’, stands as a remarkable composition centred on the Navagraha theme. Within this work, he employs a selection of ten ragas: Bilahari, Bhoulī, Janasammohini, Panthuvārāli, Syama, Keeravani, Saraswati, Gāvati, Subhapanthuvārāli, and Madhyamāvati. There are a lot of Prāsa applications in the lyrical portions like ‘Navagraha-Navarōopa-Navagraharoopam’, ‘Sarvapāpaharam-Sarvārogyakaram’, ‘Prabhakaram-Divakaram’ etc. He didn't use the same ragas of Diksitar's famous Navagraha kriti. It should be examined whether there were other Vaggeyakaras who composed Navagrahakritis after Dikshita.

- New Musical form -Svaramāla

He innovated a new musical form and named it as Svaramāla. Nirosta and Kunthalavarali Svaramālas are notated in his work. There is no sahitya in Svaramāla. After Pallavi, two or three charanas are included.

In his composition ‘SRGDD’ in Nirosta Raga, he entitled the form as ‘Svara māla’, which is like a practice model composition. It includes many Janta-dhatu-prayogas and porutha svara prayogas like G,S,- R,N,- S,D, etc. Nirosta, the Janya raga of Sankarabharana, the arohana avarohana of this raga is SRGDNS –SNDGRS. There is no Madhyama and Panchama in this raga, and the speciality of this raga is

that when it is sung, the lips can't touch each other. He depicted the composition as a svaramāla and brilliantly omitted the sāhitya, which proves his musical brilliance too.

Kunatalavarali Svaramāla is set to Adi tisra gati. Eg:- //S,,/M,P /D,D/ N,D/D,P/M,,/M,,/M,,// . It is a very useful and practise model for students to understand the notes of Kunatala varali raga. It can be studied before 'Bhogeendrashayinam', a famous kriti in this raga.

Svaramāla is very similar to the 'Jatisvara' musical form of Carnatic music. Although there are no noticeable changes from this, it will only be clear through further studies why the new name Svaramāla was given to this musical form instead of the traditional name Jatisvara. The arrangement of Svaramāla is in such a way that the svaras are strung together like a garland. It is worth noting whether he has incorporated any innovative ideas in this.

He used Madhyamakāla sāhitya, Svarākshara Prayōga, and chitta svara-s in most of his kritis.

PKS consistently employs both vaggeyakāra mudra and raga mudra techniques across the majority of his compositions. Beautiful Prasa prayoga-s like- Karnaranjini-karnapeeyusha, kalyani-kalyanakarini, simhendramadhyama-simhadi are noteworthy. The one Tamil kriti in the rare raga Gāvati, janya raga of Harikamboji, is a bhajan, praising lord muruka. He favoured Adi tala, utilising it in the vast majority (30 out of 37) of his compositions. Although there is a variety of rhythms, the simplicity of it is something to highlight.

Conclusion

PK Sankaranārāyanan, a distinguished yet relatively obscure Carnatic composer from Kerala, left an indelible mark on the musical landscape despite his professional career outside of music. His dedication to Carnatic music resulted in a prolific output of approximately 100 compositions, demonstrating a profound understanding of the art form. His commitment to preserving and sharing his work is evident in 'Sangeetha Pushpanjali,' which provides meticulously notated compositions, including innovative raga creations and explorations of rare ragas. Beyond technical mastery, his compositions reflect a broad thematic range, encompassing deities, composers, and philosophers, and showcase a unique philosophical approach to music that transcends genre boundaries.

Though his compositions have not achieved widespread acclaim, PK Sankaranārāyanan's contributions are significant. His thematic diversity and skilful employment of musical techniques like mudras and prayoga-s highlight his artistic ingenuity, and the continued performance of his compositions by his daughter, disciples, and other Carnatic musicians ensures his legacy will endure. His work warrants

further scholarly examination and performance, solidifying his place as a notable contributor to the Carnatic music tradition.

Future scope

The classification of music into Hindustani and Carnatic, Eastern or Western, is not necessary, according to him. Svāra, Tāla, Sruti and Nāda are all derived from a single source. Therefore, Music is considered universal. He says that he has been composing works for almost 50 years. The suggestions, comments and support of his wife, Prema and his children, Veena Manoj and Sangeetha Jayaram, are behind the writing of this book. His daughter Sangeetha Jayaram is at the forefront of popularising his works by singing them. Carnatic music in general also changes with the changing times. Many musical forms become obsolete and lose their relevance. But the compositions and creations that reflect the soul of music are always valuable. His works are yet to be rediscovered. Around 60 of his works have not yet seen the light of day. Only a few of his works have been published through the media. They need to be promoted more so that they do not become gems that sleep only in books.

Reference

- Ashok Madhav, *Great Composers of Kerala Desham* Online Article, https://www.carnaticcorner.com/articles/kerala_composers.htm
- Iswar, Vignesh. (2023) *Tributes to PK Sankaranarayanan*. Swathi Soft Solutions, Video YouTube
- Jayaram Sangeetha, *PK Sankaranarayanan compositions*, *Sangeetha Jayaram channel*, Video Youtube
- Rama, Pantula. *Shaping of an Ideal Carnatic Musician through Sadhana*. Gyan Publishing House, New Delhi, 2008
- Ravindra Nath AK (2004) *Dakshinendyan Sangeetham*, Cultural Publications Department, Govt of Kerala.
- Śankar, Vidya. *The Art and Science of Carnatic Music*. The Music Academy, Madras, Chennai, 1983
- Sankara Nārāyanan PK, (2011) *“Sangīta Pushpanjali”*, Pink Books. Sreedhara
- Menon Prof (2016) *Kerala Charithram*, DC Books

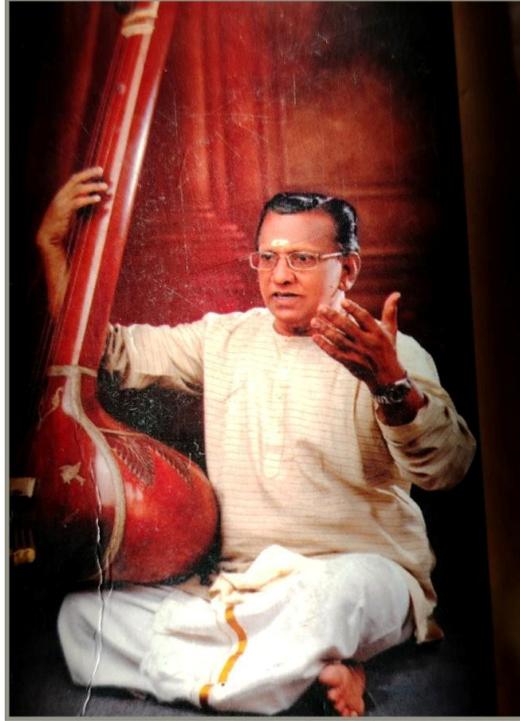
Appendix

List of compositions in Sangita Pushpanjali of PKS

1. Gananāyakam (Varnam)-Mohanam-Adi
2. Padasārasayugalam (Varnam)- Panthuvarali-Adi
3. Svararāga (Varnam)-Hamsadwani-Ata
4. Aparādhmellam-Kamboji-Adi
5. Ārarivu- Subhapanthuvarali-Adi
6. Ānandamaya-Vagadheeswari-Roopakam
7. Ānandadayike-Reethigoula-Adi
8. Abheesta Sidhi Pradayaka- Punnagavarali-Adi
9. Brahmadevam-Vakulabharanam-Adi
10. Bhajabhaja nandakumaram-Indeevaram-Adi
11. Bhajare Sahetha-Sallapam-Chappu
12. Bhargavee Manohari-Patdeep-Adi
13. Dhyayami Gurupavana-Bhouli-Adi
14. Deena Bandhavam-Mayamalavagoula-Adi
15. Jagadambike-Hamasanandi-Chappu
16. Kamaladhavam- Karnarenjini-Adi
17. Kalaye Kaladharam-Amritavarshini-Jampa
18. Kalyana kārini-Kalyani-Adi
19. Mayileri Vilayadum-Gāvati-Adi
20. Māta Mahishasuramadini-Abhogi-Roopakam
21. ManasaShirasa Namami-Nalinakanthi-Adi
22. Navagraharagamalika-Adi
23. Namāmi sri Tyagarāja-Malayamarutham-Adi
24. Namonama-Sindhubhairavi-Adi
25. Neenamasmaranam-Janammohini-Adi
26. Parameswari Pahimam-Sindhubhairavi-Adi
27. Pranathabhiramam-Bilahari-Adi
28. Renumamariyamam-Simhendramadhyamam-Adi
29. Sankarācharyam-Sankarabharanam-Adi
30. Samudra priye-Samudrapriya-Adi
31. Svararāgamay-Renjini-Adi
32. Svaramāla- Neerosta-Chappu
33. Svaramāla-Kunthalavarāli-Adi-tisra
34. Sangamesham-Rāmapriya-Adi
35. Sri Mahaganapathim-Hindolam-Adi

36. Thillana-Sindhurāmakriya-Adi

37. Varadāyike-Hamsavinodini-Adi



PK Sankaranarayanan