

Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Mārār - A study

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Abstract

There are many known and unknown Karṇāṭik music composers in Kēraḷa. Among them, Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Mārār is a prominent and multi-talented music composer in Malayāḷam. He was born and raised in Rāmamaṅgalam, a small village in Muvāṭṭupuzha Tāluk, Erṇākuḷam District. He used to sing Sōpāna Saṅgīta, formerly known as Tyāṇi, in the temples around his birthplace. Gōvinda Mārār was blessed with an amazing voice and his range was extraordinary. Although the number of compositions is limited in his repertoire, he was known as Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Mārār because of his distinct singing style. He was one of the singers in the court of Svāti Tirunāl Mahārāja of Tiruvananthapuram along with other court singers Kaṇṇaiyya (a disciple of Saint Tyāgarāja) and Haripāḍu Rāmasvāmi Bhāgavatar. They taught Mārār the famous Kṛti-s of Tyāgarāja. After learning some Kṛti-s, he travelled to Tiruvaiyyār to meet Tyāgarāja in person and he had sung ‘Candana Carcita Nīla Kaḷēbara’, an Aṣṭapati by Jayadēva in Rāga Pantuvarāḷi, in 6 kāla-s or speeds. Saint Tyāgarāja, realising the talent of Mārār, honoured by making his students sing the evergreen Pañcaratna Kṛti ‘Entarō Mahānubhāvulu’ as a mark of respect to him.

Key Words

Ṣaḍkāla

Eḍakka

Rāmamaṅgala

Sōpāna

Pāṇḍuraṅga

Puṛanīr

1.0. Introduction

The origin of the legendary Karṇāṭik music composers of the past were in different ways. Some of them were court musicians. They pleased both the kings and the lords, making music as mere entertainment, while some embraced music as a source of divinity, walking through the streets singing in praise of the Lord and teaching their disciples, bringing about the evolution of the guru-śiṣya parampara.

Apart from that, there were people, part of the royal court and later wandered from one holy place to another like pilgrims seeking divination. One such composer whose compositions are still rarely heard and unsung is Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Mārār. This article aims to bring to light his unexplored legacy, works, and his forté Ṣaḍkāla technique, and to provide a study of his contributions to the Karṇāṭik music realm.

1.1. Literature Survey / Review of Literature

The sources are mostly referred to in websites like indiartreview.com, e-journals and other articles published like ‘The wandering singer of Kēraḷa, who impressed Saint Tyāgarāja’ from The Hindu and ‘The Saint who was a Mahānubhāvulu’ from Indian Express. Although it discusses the composer’s historic details and the contributions, the original tunes or the basic notations are not mentioned. Also, it is said that the artiste used to sing the compositions in Ṣaḍkāla style, the technique used to sing this is not explained in any of the articles. Therefore, with the help of videos found in streaming platforms and other social media, an attempt is made to discuss the tunes of the compositions sung today and the techniques used to perform Ṣaḍkāla by other present day artistes.

1.2. Methodology/Approach

The research problem focuses on finding the original tunes. As the composer used to wander a lot, no information is available of having disciples or records of the original tunes of his compositions. Although, it has stated the composed Rāga-Tāḷa, the exact tunes are missing. Since it is a Qualitative based research, this lists the details of the songs and their respective Rāga-Tāḷa, praise on the deity, etc. Analysis was done by listening to the compositions of various artistes ranging from prodigies to music students live performances streamed in social networking websites, documentaries and other special videos on Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Mārār and Ṣaḍkāla technique. Since this research relied primarily on hearing skills, no experiments were conducted.

1.3. Analysis, Results & Discussion

1.3.1. Early Life

Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Mārār was a Carnatic classical musician, a composer and singer. He was born in 1798 in Puḷikkal Mārāttu house in the village of Veṇṇimala in district of Kōṭṭayam. His father's place is situated in the village of Rāmamaṅgalam in Muvāttupuzha tāluk of Erṇākuḷam district, Kēraḷa. His family belonged to the Mārār community, always staying around temples and hindu shrines. They earned their livelihood through their ritual duties for the temples and deities, especially through traditional singing - Sōpāna Saṅgīta in the temples of Kēraḷa.

Mārār started singing Sōpāna Saṅgīta at Śrī Perumṭṛkōvil temple, where he became the lead singer later. He also used to play the 'Eḍakka'- a musical percussion instrument mainly used for Sōpāna Saṅgīta - while performing.

These songs are special hymns called Tyāṇi-s, which are sung by the singer standing by the side of 'Sōpānam', the steps leading to the shrine sanctum sanctorum. The rendering of Tyāṇi-s is done while a priest called Pūjāri performs a ritualistic worship of the deity. It used to be known as 'Koṭṭi pāḍi sēva' as it combines singing and percussion for the deity. Koṭṭi pāḍi sēva is a combination of three arts, where 'Koṭṭi' - drumming, 'Pāḍi' -singing and 'Sēva' - offering. The artiste sings and plays the percussion instrument at the same time and offers the Sēva to please the God or Deity who abides in the particular temple.

One of his relatives from Tiruvananthapuram gifted him with a Tambura. He was very much excited and impressed to receive this valuable gift. Through experimentation, he transformed it into a seven-stringed instrument. All the strings, except the mandram were doubled with the result it had two paṅcama-s, two sariṇi-s, two anusariṇi-s, and one mandram. Mārār used this Tambura throughout his life. At the age of 18, he suffered a severe attack of rheumatism, but he cured it by what we now call music-therapy, constantly playing some kind of music.

Some family members still live in his birthplace, and the information they have passed on reveals that since childhood he was an outsider, a loner with a passion for music, always playing Eḍakka and singing at home and in the temples.

Gōvinda Mārār left home at the age of 21 with his Eḍakka and Tambura as he was not satisfied with staying at home and singing in temples around. He had felt that his amazing musical talents, marvelous and wonderful voice range should not be confined to a local temple, but must be exhibited in front of elite audiences and stalwarts in royal courts and temples all over.

He travelled a long way by foot from temple to temple and evidence of his presence is available in the records of many holy shrines. Wherever he went, he sang Sōpāna Saṅgīta, Tyāṇi stuti-s, Aṣṭapadi-s and other light classical music for deities in temples, stayed under the banyan trees, and ate whatever his listeners offered him.

According to accounts related to many temples in Kerala, Mārār performed Koṭṭi pāḍi sēva with the accompaniment of Eḍakka during daily pūjā-s.

An incident narrated from the Ambalapuzha Śrī Kṛṣṇa Temple is that when Mārār reached the shrine, he lost his Eḍakka stick and played using an ezhuttāṇi, (a writing quill) given to him by a devotee. He sang the entire Gīta Gōvinda in this manner, mesmerizing the sabha (audience) with the flow of his music.

He travelled all over the state and sang in almost all the important temples of Travancore. His wanderings temporarily ended up at the court of Svāti Tirunāl Mahārāja.

Gōvinda Mārār, a contemporary of the musical trinity and Svāti Tirunāl Mahārāja, received a warm welcome at the Travancore Palace, where he met luminaries of various arts. They were like stars in the sky of art. Great artists like Pālakkād Paramēśvara Bhāgavatar, Mērusvāmi, Ananta Padmanābha Gōsvāmi, the Tanjore Quartet brothers including Vaḍivēlu, and Kaṇṇaiyya Bhāgavatar, a disciple of Tyāgarāja, adorned the galaxy of the royal court.

Svāti Tirunāl Mahārāja was a great musician and a dedicated patron of various arts and artistes. The Mahārāja was well versed in Sōpāna Saṅgīta, as his Maṇipravāḷa works were set in Sōpāna Rāga-s. Moreover, the songs of Kathakālī, a famous art form that was performed almost daily in the Travancore palace, were based on Sōpāna Saṅgīta.

The Mahārāja asked Mārār one evening to sing a Sōpāna Rāga Puṛaṇīr. Though Puṛaṇīr is usually sung only for early morning pūjā-s, Mārār still recited a Kṛti in the Rāga, playing the Tambura with his right hand and the Kañjira with his left hand, holding and balancing it on his toes. Due to the incredible nature of his singing, he left the gathering feeling as if the dawn had broken. Svāti Tirunāl

was impressed by the amazing performance. As a token of respect for the artiste, he presented Mārār with a royal flag named ‘Vaijaiyanti’. Mārār proudly tied it to his Tambura.

He had learned some Kṛti-s of Tyāgarāja from Kaṇṇaiyya and also from Haripād Rāmasvāmi Bhāgavatar, after getting fascinated by the rendition of Tyāgarāja Kṛti-s by both of them. With the permission of Mahārāja Svāti Tirunāl, Mārār set out from Travancore for Tiruvaḷḷiyāru. He could not stop himself from visiting Tyāgarāja at Tiruvaḷḷiyāru, and on foot he reached Tyāgarāja's house on an Ekādaśi day in 1837. When the weary traveler arrived there, a bhajana ārādhana was going on led by Tyāgarāja and his disciples. Mārār was allowed to sing in front of the composer and his disciples - a custom followed to respect the guest.

Mārār started singing Aṣṭapadi 'Candana Caṇṇita Nīla Kaḷēbhara' in the Rāga Pantuvarālī, beginning with Ati Ati Viḷambita Kāla. People astonished and puzzled about singing at such a slow pace, the accuracy in the duration between counts amazed them. He then sang in Ati Viḷambita (second degree), Viḷambita (third degree), Madhyama (fourth degree), Druta (fifth degree) and Ati Druta (sixth degree). As he approached the fifth degree of speed, the entire audience was mesmerized, and when he sang at the sixth degree of speed, Tyāgarāja himself was amazed at his rare brilliance in rhythmic flow, accurate musical time and harmony.

Tyāgarāja asked his disciples to sing his great Pañcaratna Kṛti in Śrī Rāga 'Entarō Mahānubhāvulu' in praise of Mārār. With this incident, Gōvinda Mārār became Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Mārār. As per the wishes of Mahārāja Svāti Tirunāl, Mārār invited Tyāgarāja to the palace. But the virtuous musician politely declined the invitation.

After a long period of wandering, he reached the Pāṇḍuraṅga temple in Pāṇḍharipur, Mahārāṣṭra. He was honored with the name Paramahamsa Gōvinda Dās and attained Samādhi while singing Bhagavat Līla-s and Aṣṭapadi-s in 1843 according to the temple records. His Tambura is still preserved in Viṭṭōba temple in Pāṇḍharipur.

1.3.2. His Works

1.3.2.1. Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Pañcaratnam

It is not evident of how many Kṛti-s did Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Mārār has composed, although only a group of Kṛti-s known as ‘Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Pañcaratna’ is sung in the annual Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda

Mārār Saṅgītōlsavam. His mudra was 'Rāmamaṅgala', his birthplace which he used in his compositions.

The song 'Kṣīra Sāgara Vāsa' is composed in Kēdāra Gauḷa and set in Ādi Tāḷa. This song is in praise on Narasimha in Rāmamaṅgala. In some other texts, It has been set to Cembada (8 beat) and Muṛi-Aḍanta (7 beat) which is commonly used in Kēraḷa art forms like Kathakali, Sōpāna Saṅgīta, etc. This Kṛti contains three Caraṇa-s. It starts from Mukkāl Iḍam. According to one version, the song commences from the line Kṣīra Sāgara Vāsa along with the next line of the Pallavi 'Rāmamaṅgala nātha janārdhana'. And after singing the Caraṇa, it ends with Rāmamaṅgala, a similar style can be seen in Tyāgarāja's Aṭhana Kṛti 'Ila nī daya rādu'. The three Caraṇa-s, Yōgi mānasa, Paṅkēruha and Kaitava gōpa is composed in the same to that of a Divya Nāma kīrtana of Tyāgarāja. In another version, It is composed in the same Rāga but in a different tune and set in Khaṇḍa Tṛpuṭa Raṇḍu Kaḷai, starting from Mukkāl Iḍam. Compared with the first version, here, the Pallavi is sung using the two lines (Kṣīra Sāgara... Rāmamaṅgala) and after singing the Caraṇa, it ends with from the starting line of the Pallavi. In this version, The last Caraṇa, Kaitava gōpa is sung in Madhyama kāla Sāhitya, adapting the composing style of Mutusvāmi Dīkṣitar. Another version of this can be found in a Sōpāna saṅgīta genre set in Cembada Tāḷa and tuned to same Rāga but again, in different tune. The last Caraṇa is composed in Sāraṅga.

The song 'Pālayamām Pārvatīśa' tuned in Rāga Ānanda Bhairavi set in Ādi Tāḷa. In one version, the song has a Pallavi and two Samaṣṭi Caraṇa-s. The second line of every Caraṇa is similar to the tune of Pallavi. In another version, the song has a Pallavi and three Samaṣṭi Caraṇa-s. All the three Caraṇa-s are composed in different tunes. The Rāga used here is Ānanda Bhairavi but composed in a different tune. Here, Bhāṣāṅga side of Ānanda Bhairavi is clearly seen in this version where the word Pārvatīśa is sung in Śuddha Daivata and the phrase 'g g m' is used where Antara Gāndhāra is used. The second line of the Pallavi 'Pālita sakala lōka' is sung in Madhyama kāla. A Ciṭṭasvara passage is found in both Caraṇa-s 'Mada danubhava' and 'Paṇḍarītha Puravāsa' only. The other Caraṇa starts with 'Mañjutara mahi', but Ciṭṭasvara is not seen.

The next composition is 'Tuṅga piṅga jaḍa kalāpavum' which is composed in Rāga Bhūpāḷam. The language is in Malayāḷam. This song is sometimes called 'Candramaulē' which is the first word of the second line. In one version, The song, set in Rūpaka, starts from Vīcu of the Tāḷa making the Eḍuppu coming under 'Anāgata Graha'. the Pallavi has two Saṅgati-s and the second line of the Pallavi is rendered as Madhyama kāla Sāhitya. This song has four Caraṇa-s, 'Vyākhaḥcarma',

‘Kuṇḍaliśvara’, ‘Adrirājakumāriyum’ and ‘Mithilata’. Here, the last two Caraṇa-s are sung in Madhyama kālā. And each Caraṇa ends with ‘Candramaulē.. Jaya Candramaulē’ before entering to Tuṇḍu Pallavi. Another versions of this song is composed in a Bharatanāṭyam recital, which is in Rāga Rēvagupti and set in Mīśra Cāpu or Trpuṭa Tāḷa. The song starts with Candramaulē Śambhō’ and after each Caraṇa ends with this phrase instead of the first line of the Pallavi.

The next composition is Śrī kurumbē pāhi’. In some texts, it is mentioned that this Kṛti is composed in Rāga Mōhanam. But the available source is composed in Rāga Yadukula Kāmbōji. This song is in praise on Koṇḍuṇṇallūr Dēvi. Sometimes this song is also named after the second line of this song, ‘Lōkapālāne’. This song has only one Caraṇa. Like every song, the second line of both Pallavi and Anu Pallavi is rendered in Madhyama kālā.

Another composition Bālacandra Vibhūṣini is set in Rāga Ārabhi and set in Ādi Tāḷa. The song has three Caraṇa-s namely ‘Binduvil’, ‘Bālaviṇṇa’ and Kanyākubja nivāsini’, and all these three of them are tuned differently. Only the Caraṇa starting with ‘Binduvil’ has Madhyama kālā Sāhitya. The Ciṭṭasvara is used in first and the last Caraṇa-s. Another version of this song is heard in a Sōpāna saṅgīta genre set in Cempaḍa and tuned to same Rāga but again, in different tune. Compared with his other compositions having two or more tunes, this song has only one tune available so far.

1.3.2.2. The technique to sing Ṣaḍkāla and the Ṣaḍkāla Pallavi

The word Ṣaḍ is derived from the Sanskrit language which means six (Ṣaḍāṅga, Ṣaḍāṇana, etc). Therefore, Ṣaḍkāla, as the name suggests, means six speeds or tempos. There are two ways of singing Ṣaḍkāla. Basically, the students learn the scale of four speeds in Saraḷi Variśai as per follows;

1st kālā (speed) - 1 svara per beat

2nd kālā (speed) - 2 svara-s per beat

3rd kālā (speed) - 4 svara-s per beat

4th kālā (speed) - 8 svara-s per beat

If there was a 5th speed, naturally you have to sing sixteen svara-s per beat. Although Mārār didn’t use the above said speeds to sing Ṣaḍkāla. The point is that it all depends on the initial (base) speed. If the initial speed is more, singing faster becomes more difficult. The students are used to singing

the first kāla in not-so-slow speeds. It is according to the initial speed that we determine the rest of the tempos. Therefore, if we reduce the initial tempo, it might be possible to sing at a high end speed. Singing at slower speeds requires a lot of concentration, brain power, patience and a lot of skills (Kālapramāṇa, timing) too. Selecting the base speed will help to sing the Ṣaḍkāla effortlessly. So the speeds are Ati-Viḷambita kāla, Viḷambita kāla, Madhyama kāla, Druta kāla, Ati Druta kāla, Ati Ati Druta kāla.

In summary, The Pallavi starts with Ati-Viḷambita kāla till it reaches Ati Ati Druta kāla. The Svāra-s per beat for each tempo to sing these speeds are:

Ati-Viḷambita kāla - 0.25 Svāra per beat (1 Svāra + seven gaps)

Viḷambita kāla - 0.5 Svāra per beat (1 Svāra + three gaps)

Madhyama kāla - 1 Svāra per beat

Druta kāla - 2 Svāra-s per beat

Ati Druta kāla - 4 Svāra-s per beat

Ati Ati Druta kāla - 8 Svāra-s per beat

Like this, it is technically possible to sing in any speeds like 10th speed, 12th speed, 16th speed, nth speed, etc. The only thing is that as the number (10,12,16, n..) increases, the ‘slowness’ of the slower kāla-s (1, 2, 3..) also increases drastically. Hence it will be incredibly difficult to sing kāla-s. In those kāla-s, the singer and the listener need to wait for minutes to complete one Svāra and even hours to complete one line of the song patiently.

Another way to sing Ṣaḍkāla is used in a RTP (Rāgam-Tānam-Pallavi) called Ṣaḍkāla Pallavi. It suggests the usage of Tisra ṇaḍai (triplets) that is division of 3 akṣara-s in one beat in all three speeds along with the basic speeds. While singing Tisra ṇaḍai, the singer needs to sing the line thrice to cover an āvartana of the rhythmic cycle whether it is in slow speed or faster speed. Therefore, the kāla-s or speeds used in a Ṣaḍkāla Pallavi will be:

Viḷambita kāla (Slow speed) - 1 Svāra per beat

Tisra Viḷambita kāla (triplets in slow speed) - 3 notes per beat

Madhyama kāla (Medium speed) - 2 Svara per beat

Tiśra Madhyama kāla (triplets in medium speed) - 6 notes per beat

Druta kāla (Fast speed) - 4 Svara per beat

Tiśra Druta kāla (triplets in fast speed) - 9 notes per beat

The Ṣaḍkāla Pallavi has recently been sung by Dr. M. Bālamuralīkr̥ṣṇa, G. Dēvarājan, Dr. K. Kṛṣṇakumār, etc. This technique later has been used in a Malayāḷam movie song named Citraśalabhamē from the movie Karayilēkku Oru Kaḍal Dūram.

1.3. Conclusion

The article aims at bringing out the identity of Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Mārār and his importance in the field of Karṇāṭik music. His creations such as the Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Pañcaratnam which includes a group of five Kṛti-s, the technique to sing Ṣaḍkāla and the Ṣaḍkāla Pallavi should also be used in the platforms in order to restore his underrated and unnoticed talents which was noticed and respected by the legends like Tyāgarāja and Mahārāja Svāti Tirunāl. Therefore, this article acts not only as research but both a tribute and humble salutation to this legendary composer and his immortal compositions.

1.4. Future Scope

The researchers can still search for the original tunes or perhaps other compositions of the composer that were long lost. It is said that he used to sing Sōpāna Saṅgīta, therefore possibilities are there that he might have sung his compositions in that genre, the researchers can select that path also. The other languages the composer might have written or any other complex Tāḷa structures he might have used are some of the topics for further research.

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| SUNG BY KOTTARAM SANGEETH MARAR

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Hamsavinodhini ShadkAla RTP (late 60s early 70s)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0R0uSxJp97E>

Appendix: 1

Reference Key to the Diacritical Marks used

□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□	□
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū	ṛ	e	ē	ai	o	ō	au	aṃ	aḥ	

□	□	□	□	□
ka	kha	ga	gha	ṇa
□	□	□	□	□
ca	cha	ja	jha	ṇa
□	□	□	□	□
ṭa	ṭha	ḍa	ḍha	ṇa
□	□	□	□	□
ta	tha	da	dha	na
□	□	□	□	□
pa	pha/fa	ba	bha	ma
□	□	□	□	□
ya	la/zha	ḷa	ra	ṇa

□	□	□	□
ya	ra	la	va
□	□	□	□
śa	ṣa	sa	ha
□□□	□□□	□□□	□□□
nna	tta	ṇṇa	ṇṇa
□□□	□□□	□□□	□□□
lla	ppa	kṣa	ṇṇa
□□□	□□□	□□□	
tta	jja	ddha	

Appendix: 2

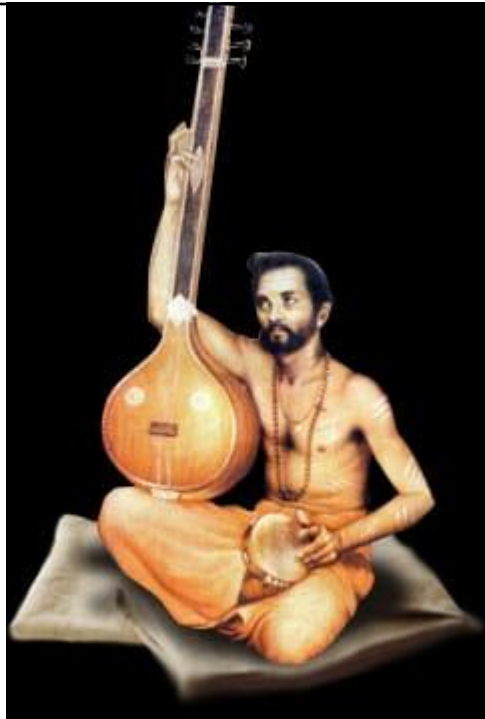


Fig 1. Ṣaḍkālā Gōvinda Mārār



Fig 2. Ṣaḍkālā Gōvinda Mārār Smāraka Kalāsamiti



Fig 3. Ṣaḍkāla Gōvinda Mārār's house in Veṇṇimala



Fig 4. Śrī Perumṭṛkōvil temple in Rāmamaṅgalam