



ISSN: 2582-9513

PRANAV JOURNAL OF FINE ARTS

Influence of Dēvi Kṛti-s in Rabindra Saṅgīt

Dr. Umamaheshwari¹ & Kasturi Sarkar²

¹Associate Professor , ² Ph.D Research Scholar

Department of Vocal Music,

Kalai Kaviri College of Fine Arts,

Benwells Road, Tiruchirapalli - 620 001

Abstract

Rabindra Saṅgīt of Bengal, also known as ‘Rabindranath Tagore’s Music’ is one of the most outstanding part of Bengali music. It embodies a fusion of Tagore’s musicianship and poetry. It is considered to be a unique and intellectual genre of Indian Music culture that has an influence of other genres like Indian classical music (Hindustāni and Karnāṭaka) and Folk music, semi-classical music, various other regional musical forms and western music.

This genre is an amalgam of these different music genres with diverse themes. The compilation of these songs is named as the ‘*Gītabitān*’ meaning “Garden of songs” - a collection of nearly two thousand songs.

This paper is a study of how Rabindranath Tagore was influenced by one of the Dēvi Kṛti-s of Karnāṭaka music that made him to compose a composition in Rabindra Saṅgīt based on the kṛti.

Keywords: Rabindra Saṅgīt, Rabindranath Tagore, Dēvi Kṛti-s, influence, Karnāṭaka music, Indian Classical Music, Genre, Seasons, Nature.

1 Introduction

Rabindra Saṅgīt or ‘Tagore music’ - the most defining expression of Bengali music focuses on different subjects or themes that is categorised under six groups - Pūjā(worship), Swadeś (motherland), Prēm (love) and Prakṛti (nature) that are major ones and Bicitra (variety) and Anusthānik (occasional) are considered to be minor groups. This paper is about one such composition that comes under the ‘Prakṛti’ or Ritu Parjāy – (Songs on Nature and Seasons).

Tagore has depicted his intense love for nature and its beauty through all his songs on Prakṛti Parjāyī. Tagore’s songs on nature are highly motivating and have touching words and inspire people to love nature and Mother Earth. He had composed nearly three hundred songs on nature that are known as seasonal songs. It is said that he also communicates the corresponding states of human mind. The existence of human element in Tagore songs on nature is, therefore, very deep.

The six seasons travel their pre-designed paths: Grīśma - scorching summer gets submerged in downpours of the rainy season Barṣā. The rains give way to the early autumn Śarat of blue skies. Then comes the late autumn Hēmanta when fleecy cloud, laze in the sky, bright in radiant sun. Then it is the turn of sun-warmed winter, Śīt. Finally, it is the time for the Bengali spring Basanta, the season of flowers and love. He composed sixteen songs on summer, one hundred fifteen on rain, thirty on autumn, five on late autumn, twelve on winter and ninety-six songs on spring.



One such melody of Tagore on the spring season (Basanta) is 'Bāsanti hē bhubonomōhini' which is an inspiration from the Karnāṭik music composition 'Mīnākṣī mē mudam dēhi' that is being taken up for study.

2. Influence of Karnāṭik music on Tagore - An Overview

There are three main sources that influenced Tagore to compose in Karnāṭik style.

He was first introduced to Karnāṭik music and its many composers and compositions by his niece Sarala Devi, who had resided in Mysore for several years and had taken the 'Mohisuri' tunes from there. She was one of his close followers. Harmonizing Tagore's songs, preparing notations were to her credit. She used to collect local musical tunes whenever she had gone anywhere and Rabindranath used to compose new songs applying those tunes.

In 1919, during his extensive tour of southern India, Tagore stayed with Mrs. Annie Besant at Adyar for some time where he met Savithri Govinda Krishnan who was just 14 years old. Tagore requested her to sing a pure South Indian song for him and she obliged with a Karnāṭik composition. She later travelled to Shanti Niketan for her studies and talked about many of the other Karnāṭik classical songs. As a student at Śāntinikētan, Karnāṭik musician Savitri Govinda Krishnan performed and introduced many of the well-known Karnāṭik kṛti-s to Tagore from which he actually picked up some of the Karnāṭik music songs and based on them, composed some of the well-known songs that will be discussed in the following section.

Yet another source was his elder brother Satyendranath's daughter, Indira Devi.

"During Tagore's extensive travels within India, he was often attracted by the distinctive styles of regional music which he then adopted for his own songs. He, during his stay with his civil servant brother Satyendranāth in Western India, has adopted the music of Karnāṭik school for his compositions from his niece Sarala Devi, who had not only learnt the song of Tyāgarāja, but also learnt the specialized South Indian musical instrument the Rudra Vīṇā. Tagore discovered the particularities of South Indian music in 1919, while visiting Madras, he had heard with pleasure the instrumental recitals on the Vīṇā in South Indian style.

The former Visva Bhārati student Savitri Devi Krishnan recounted how on one of his visits to Adyar, Tagore had heard her sing and promptly decided to bring her and her sister once to Śāntinikētan for studies. Inspired by her music, he has made a few unique compositions using South Indian music on Bengali lyrics to create songs which were sung by Savitri Devi.

This story of how he had written this song had been narrated by Savitri herself and well-documented in a book. Tagore had mentioned that this would be the first song of the dance drama Nobin and had to be staged in Kolkata, also that it would be sung by Savitri..

The Calcutta Doordarshan interviewed Ms. Savithri Krishnan (niece of Tagore) many years later. She was seventy years at the time. A large part of the interview deals with the Karnāṭik tunes Tagore picked up from Savitri Devi to compose some of his most well-known songs.

3 Study of the composition - Textual and Melodic Analysis

The following details are the background of the song 'Bāsanti hē bhubonomōhini' that was composed in 1931 in Śāntinikētan in Rāga Basanta Pañcam set to Keherwā tālā. that corresponds



to the song Mīnākṣi mē mudam dēhi' in rāga Purvikalyani set to ādi tāla of Karnāṭaka music composed by composer Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar.

Karnāṭaka music composition - Mīnākṣi mē mudam dēhi'

Pallavi

Mīnākṣi mē mudam dēhi, Mēcakāṅgi Rājamātaṅgi

Anupallavi:

Mānamāṭṛmēyē māyē marakatacchāyē śivajāyē

Mīnalōcani pāsamocani mānini kadambavana vāsini

Caranam

mathurāpurinilayē manivalayē malayadvaja pāṇḍyarāja tanayē

viduvidambana vadanē vijayē vīnā gāna daśa gamakakriyē

madumadamōḍita hṛdayē sadayē mahādēva sundarēsapriyē

madumuraripu sōdari śātōdari vidiguruguha vaśaṅkari śaṅkari

Meaning

Dīkṣitar directly addresses the Goddess Mīnākṣi to him with bliss. He describes Her as the one who wears golden ornaments and the one who exists in the form of Rāja Mātaṅgi.

Dīkṣitar gives the ultimate description in the Anupallavi. He describes the Goddess as the concept/knowledge or the one who knows the ultimate truth and the measurable/ known part of the ultimate truth. He continues to describe Her as the one who creates delusion, the one who has the color of emerald, and the one who knows Śiva. Dīkṣitar continues to describe Her as the fish-eyed Goddess, the one who destroys the bond of worldly attachment, the venerated one and the one who resides in the Kadamba forest. Dīkṣitar pays huge respect to the Goddess in these few lines. He clearly states that She is the embodiment of ultimate truth, and that by worshipping her, one can be liberated from all the worldly attachments.

In the Caranam, He describes the Goddess as the one whose abode is the city of Madhura (Madurai) ; as the one wearing gem-studded bangles ; as the daughter of the king Malayadvaja Pandya ; as the one whose face mocks the moon (in loveliness); as the victorious one; as the one who creates the ten kinds of oscillations while playing the Veena ; as the one whose heart rejoices in the exhilaration caused by mead ; as the compassionate one ; as the one who beloved of Lord Śiva (the great god, the handsome lord) ; as the sister of Vishnu (slayer of the demons Madhu and Mura); as the one with a slender midriff ; as the one who subjugates Brahma and Guruguha and as the wife of Śiva (Śankara)!

Rabindra Saṅgīt Composition - 'Bāsanti hē bhubonomōhini'

Source	Savitri Govinda Krishnan, a 12year-old girl who was in a school run by Annie Besant in 1928 when Tagore had visited the school. Later when she went to Śāntinikētan for her studies, Tagore made her sing and composed the song.
Song	Bāsanti hē bhubonomōhini'
Parjāy	Prakṛti
Rāga	Basant pañcam
Tāla	Kaharwa (Tāl-pherta)



Year of composition	1931
Collection	composed for the dance-drama 'Nobin'
Svarabitan	Volume V
Notation	Dinendranath Tagore
Based on	Muttusvāmi Dīkṣar's kṛti-Mīnākṣi mē mudam dēhi

4 Textual Analysis – Text, Transliteration and Translation

The text and translation of the song is given here. The relevant transliteration has been given for the text. Each line has been translated into English. A word to word translation would distort the grammatical meaning of the line.

Text – Transliteration

Bāṣonti hē bhubonomohini - Dikprāntē, bonobonānte
 Śam prāntorē, āmrochāyē - Śorobor tīrē nodinīrē
 Nīl ākāśē, moloye bātāśe, Byāpil ononto tobo mādhuri (Bāṣonti hē bhubonomohini)
 Nogorē grāmē kānon, dīne nisithē, Pikoṣongite nṛtto gīto kolonē biśwo ānondito
 Bhobonē bhobone bīnātān roṇo roṇo jhonkrito.
 Modhumodhomōdhito hridoye hridoye rē, noboprāṇ ucchosilo āji
 bicholito chito uccholi unmādhonā, jhono jhono jhonilo monjirē. (Bāṣonti hē bhubonomohini)

Meaning – Translation

Great season of spring, you are beloved of this world!
 In all directions, in forest and in glade
 In the green expanse of the field, as well as in the mango leafed shade,
 The banks of lakes, and in the currents of rivers,
 In Azure skies and in the pure gentle breezes,
 All the world is immersed in your delightful sweetness.
 Across town, hamlet and garden, in the bright day and by starlit night
 In the song of birds, with dance and music the world rejoices.
 People celebrate in their dwellings with the rich tones of the beena.
 Sweetly intoxicated are the hearts and souls of all
 New life springs forth in your praise,
 The heart sings out in happy confusion, senses drunk with your beauty
 The rhythm of life that you awaken resonates through all nature.

Tagore addresses the spring season (vasanta ṛtu) as Bāṣanti, and he goes on to describe the beauty of the the different elements of nature during the spring season thus focusing mainly on the Spring season. The term "Basonti" refers to the spring season, which is personified as a goddess with particular attributes.

4 Melodic analysis

Rāgā:

Tagore has composed this song in the Rāgā Basant Pañcam that corresponds to Pūrvi Kalyāṇi of Karnāṭik music. The lyrics used is in ancient Bangla language – classical style Bengali.



Tālā;

This song comes under the Bhāṅga Gān genre (which means that which is broken from original structure) and is set in the Tāl Pherta style, which involves employing several tempos of the same tāla or many tāla-s in a single melodic composition.

Tāla Kaharawa is utilized in several tempos, which resembles the Karnāṭik music performance methods of first, second, and fourth pace in one melody.

The first part and the first half of the second part of the composition does not fit to any perceptible Tālā; gradually the next part of the song fits to the Anupallavi of the Kṛti that is in Ādi Tālā (2 kalai).

The Madhyama kalam starts in the second part of the two lines as in the Anupallavi of the Kṛti and the song.

Melodic range of the composition:

The Grahā of the composition is Śādja and the Nyāsa of the first phrase in Gāndhara which eventually moves to Pañcamam. Janta Prayōgam-s are found at the ending words of the first section lines.

The Caranam Madhyama Kāla sāhityam Madhumayo mōdita hrdayē is used in Tagore's melody also in the same pace in the concluding part of the song as in Dīkṣitar's kṛti.

Tagore's notation:

s , nrs , sṇḍ....srg,.... g..... pmgr.... gmp, , , , |
Bā.....,sō.....n.....tī.....|
P,,,,, mdpp,m g m g rr...gdpp, m g r g ,,,g r r s |
Bhu.....bō.....no .mō.....hi.....ni....|

The second part of the song resembles exactly the Madhyama Kalam Sāhityam of Dīkṣitar's kriti-Mīnalōṇani pāsamoṇani....

ś , ś ś ś ś.....n d d n , , , d n p... ..g r gg n , d p m g m g...r g mr s
nīlōākāśē .moloyo , , , bātāśē....byāpilo..ononto.....tobo....mādhuri

The last part of the song also sounds similar to the Caranam Madhyama Kalam part of the Karnāṭik composition.

g m g r	r s , sṇḍ ,	s r g ,	m r g ,	
Modhumoyo	mō...ditto	hṛdoyē	hṛdoyē	
g p , ,	p , ,ś	śn p , d	, śnd	
no bo	prā..ṇo	ūchho...	sīlō	
ś ,n r ,	ś , ,	ś r ġ ġ	r ś n d	
ā.....	jī...	biṇolito	çi to u chh	
p d r ,	, r ś n	ś , , ,	, , , ,	
oli rē..				
ś r ġ ġ	r ś n p	d ś n d	d ś ś ,	
Biṇolito	çi to u chh	oli un ..mā	donā	



ś n d d p p m g g r g m g r g m ||
Jhono Jhono jhōnilo mon..jire ||

Dikṣitar's notation:

Pallavi

s,,, s,,r rsnd s r g , g r g m |
Mī... nāk śī |
p,,, , , m , m g , , , g r r ||
mē..... mu dam.. hi ||

Anupallavi Madhyama Kālam

ś , ś , ś , ṛḡṛśś śnd, d,ndn, d , p,,m |
Mī na lō...ṇa.ni pāsa.....mō ṇa ...nī |
g m r g , g n d | pm gdp m gr , , r,pm ||
Mānini ..kadam | ba vana...vā sini ||

Ṣaranam - Madhyama Kālam

md , pmg , r s , śnd , | s r g , m r g , ||
madhumaya mō...dita | hṛdayē Sadayē ||
g gp,, p, p,pm mg, | m g m d p ś ś,,n ||
Mahā dēva...sun | darē.... sa..priyē ||

Notation - Bāsonṭi hē bhūbonomohinī

s , ṇrs , śnd....srg,.... g..... pmgr.... gmp, , , , |
Bā.....,sō.....n.....tī.....|
P,,,,, mdpp,m g m g rr...gdpp, m g r g , , , g r r s |
Bhu.....bō.....no....mō.....hi.....nī....|
ś , ś ś ṛ ś.....n d d n , , , d n p... ..g r gg n , d p m g m g...r g m r s |
nīlōākāśē....mōloyo , , , bātāśē....byāpilo..ononto.....tobo....mādhuri |
s , ṇrs , śnd....srg,.... g..... pmgr.... gmp, , , , |
Bā.....sō.....n.....tī.....|
s , s , s , , , ṇrss śnd , p d , p..... | sr g, g , , , pmgr pmgr , , s , , , |
Diko...prā.....ntē | bōnō..... Bō...nān...tē |
P , , m , dpp,,m g rs srg,rg g , , , , | p , pmgr, | g p , , m d , , p , , m gr, g |
Śa....mo ...prāntorē ... | ām...ro |chā... yē..... |
G , , g p , , p | p d , , , n d,nddp m p , , , p... | p , d , ś , ś , , n ṛ , , , ś.....|
Śo...robo..ro tī.....rē... | no.dī.....nī.....rē...|
g m g , r , s , s ṇ d , srg, r g ||
no go rē grā mē kāno nē.... ||
g p m r g m p d p , , , , , , , ||
Dīnē Nīśī thē..... ||
g m p , p , mpd p , , , g , m , ||
Pikośon gī.... tē..... nṛit ||



g , g ,	r , g ,	, g m g	, r , s	
to..gī	to	..ko lo	..nē....	
g m p ,	p , <u>mpd</u>	p , , ,	g , m ,	
Pikośon	gī....	tē.....	nṛit	
g , g ,	r , g ,	<u>pmg</u> , <u>pmg</u> ,	r , , s	
to..gī	to	..ko lo	..nē....	
pmg p ,	n d n d	d , <u>śnd</u>	d , p ,	
Biśso	ā...no.....	<u>n</u>	di tō	
d p d ,	ś , , ś	ś n ṛ ,	ś , , ,	
Bhobonē	bho	bonē		
ś , , <u>nd</u>	ś , ṛ ,	ś , , <u>nd</u>	<u>d</u> , <u>n</u> d , p	
bī....	nā....	tā...	nē	
g , m ,	d , p ,	g r p m	g r , s	
ro ...no	ro ...no	jhon....kr	tō.....	

g m g r	r s , sṇḍ ,	s r g ,	m r g ,	
Modhumoyo	mō...ditto	hṛdoyē	hṛdoyē	
g p , ,	p , , ś	śn p , d	, śnd	
no bo	prā..ṇo	ūchho...	Sīlō	
ś , n ṛ ,	ś , ,	ś ṛ ġ ġ	ṛ ś n d	
ā.....	jī...	biçolito	çi to u chh	
p d ṛ ,	, ṛ ś n	ś , , ,	, , , ,	
oli rē..				
ś ṛ ġ ġ	ṛ ś n p	d ś n d	d ś ś ,	
Biçolito	çi to u chh	oli un ..mā	Donā	
ś n d d	p p m g	g r g m	g r g m	
Jhono	Jhono	jhōnilo	mon..jire	

5 Observation

1. From this study, it is interesting to find that the Karnāṭik composition features about Devi Mīnākṣi of Madurai and based on this composition, the song composed by Tagore depicts Spring (Bāśanti –from the season name Basanta) - as a goddess who enchants the world with her beauty.

2. It is also fascinating about how Rabindranath Tagore, a composer of Bengal belonging to the early-twentieth century has composed a Bengali composition by being much inspired by a composition written in Saṁskṛt by the South-Indian composer Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar who belonged to a far early period.



ISSN: 2582-9513

PRANAV JOURNAL OF FINE ARTS

Conclusion

Though the genre Rabindra Saṅgīt has a separate section on Bhakti or devotional songs, there are no such mentioned or references of any particular deity or deities as such. As far as this composition is concerned, only the spring season is being addressed to as Bāśanti and nothing else is found related to the name of a female deity.

Although there are several words or elements being used in common, there may be few factors that makes the Bengali composition sound different from the original source.

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