

KERALA CALLING

MAY 01, 2024_VOL_44_No.07

₹ 12



Ra Tha Bha
ga la va

A musical journey through the soul of Kerala

Melodies and Movements

Oppana is a traditional dance form associated primarily with the Muslim community in Kerala, and it often features Mappila Pattu as a significant element





ETERNAL ECHOES...

For six decades, Njeralathu Ramapothuval bore the Idakka on his shoulders, weaving the timeless threads of Sopana Sangeetham into Kerala's musical heritage. His mastery of the Idakka exemplified his devotion and immortalised the soulful melodies of an era.

Photo courtesy: Njeralathu Harigovindan



MUSIC!

"Music is the food of love, play on," penned Shakespeare. This edition of Kerala Calling celebrates Kerala's musical legacy.

From the primal beats of Adivasi rhythms to the refined strains of Carnatic melodies, Kerala's music is a harmonious blend of tradition and innovation. Each note, from tribal tunes to intricate Sopana Sangeetham, echoes the land's cultural essence.

Explore Kerala's unique rhythms, where Chendamelams and Panchari beats merge, creating a vibrant celebration. Discover Kerala's traditional musical instruments, each telling a story of heritage and artistry. The music of Malabar, with its mesmerizing Mehfil music clubs, showcases a blend of diverse influences, adding to the region's rich musical heritage.

Every article in this issue is crafted to take you on a musical journey. Feel the pulsating rhythms, savour the melodic tunes, and embrace the harmony that defines Kerala's musical tradition. This edition offers a harmony of words and melodies that promises to captivate your senses.

Kerala's music is a vivid blend of diverse traditions, each genre contributing its unique flavor. From classical to folk, the range is expansive. The inclusive spirit of Kerala's music is evident in every note.

The distinctive rhythms of Kerala captivate with their unique beats, inviting celebration. Instruments like the Chenda and Idakka create distinctive sounds, enhancing the musical landscape.

Malabar's Mehfil music clubs are a standout feature, blending local and global influences into a captivating mix. This fusion enriches the cultural fabric of Kerala, making its music truly unique.

This issue promises a rich musical feast, celebrating Kerala's diverse and inclusive musical heritage. Every reader will find something to cherish, as we explore the depth and breadth of Kerala's music.

Let the music play on, as we celebrate Kerala's vibrant and inclusive musical heritage. Enjoy a melodious experience, crafted to resonate with every reader. This edition is a tribute to the timeless harmony of Kerala's musical traditions.

T.V. Subhash IAS
Editor





KERALA CALLING

MAY 01, 2024_VOL_44_No.07

Editor

T.V. SUBHASH IAS

Additional Editor

SALIN MANKUZHY

Deputy Editor

K.P. SARITHA

Editor in Charge

C. RAJESH

Circulation Officer

J.N. MERLIN

Design & Layout

ANIL D. PRAKASH

Printing

AKSHARA OFFSET

Thiruvananthapuram

Photo Credits

**I & PRD PHOTOGRAPHY DIVISION,
SUBEESH GURUVAYOOR, AKASH VASANTH
FACEBOOK, FREEPIK**

Kerala Calling, MAY 01, 2024_VOL_44_No.07

Views expressed in the articles published in Kerala Calling are not, necessarily, those of the government. Kerala Calling welcomes free expression of divergent views and exchange of ideas through its pages.

ENQUIRIES

Editorial : 0471 251 8648

Subscription : 0471 251 7036

TO SUBSCRIBE

Send Rs. 120 as money order to The Director, Information & Public Relations Department, First Floor, Secretariat Annexe, Thiruvananthapuram - 695 001.

The subscription amount will also be received at the State Information Centre, Press Club Building, Thiruvananthapuram. Phone: 0471 251 8471 and at all District Information Offices.

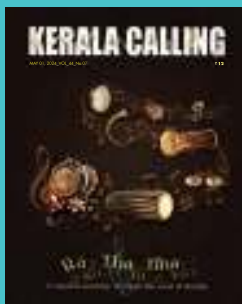
RESPONSES MAY BE SENT TO MAIL :

keralacalling@gmail.com

[facebook.com/KeralaCalling](https://www.facebook.com/KeralaCalling)

EDITORIAL MATERIALS

Articles/features appearing in this magazine are either commissioned or assigned. Nevertheless, other articles are also welcome. A maximum of 750 word is appreciated. Such items should be addressed to The Editor, Kerala Calling, First Floor, Secretariat Annexe, Thiruvananthapuram Pin 695 001.



52 Pages including Cover

NAVIGATOR

06 Songs of the Soil

14 Rhythms of Kerala

18 Heartbeats of Heritage

22 Reflections on Malabar's Folk Music

**26 Maestros of Composition in Kerala's
Musical Legacy**

30 Kozhikode's Nightlife Echoes with Music

32 Winds of Change in Kathakali Music

36 Music that Soars above Traditional Borders

38 Theatre Songs that Shaped Modern Malayali

40 The Love Who Refuses to Let Go

44 Parayan Maranna Paribhavangal...

48 From Melody to Modernity





Photograph: Subhesh Gurravayoor

Songs of the Soil

The history and evolution of the music of Kerala



Dr. Usha Raja Varier

Associate Professor
Department of Sanskrit
University of Kerala

Kerala's music has evolved from indigenous Adivasi roots to sophisticated classical forms, reflecting a rich, secular tradition that embraces and integrates diverse cultural influences. This inclusive musical landscape is a proof to Kerala's harmonious blend of tradition and innovation.

Music becomes a vehicle of human emotions only when it encompasses the spoken tongue of the people of the region where it takes birth, and reflects their lifestyles. No matter how evolved a language is, having undergone changes in accordance with the needs and desires of the community and gained widespread acceptance, it will

always retain some of the qualities of its original ancestor. Besides, even in its most refined form it will continue to reverberate with the raw power of its prototype. The musical legacy of Kerala can be seen to exhibit this self-same thread of continuity that is the hallmark of a living, throbbing tradition.

The traditional music of Kerala originated

from Adivasi (indigenous) music, drew sustenance from folk music, gradually took on a structured form, and grew more sophisticated before it reached the heights of its present 'classical' status. In fact, it is possible to observe a step-by-step and natural growth pattern in this phenomenon.

Even the music of Vedic chants, that was subjected to continuous modification, borrowed elements from Adivasi music, and was fed by the wellsprings of Vedic music of other regions. The variety we see in the curricula of the Vedas is proof of this fact. If we dig deep, we will be able to trace the roots of the desi or regional musical tradition of Kerala back to this ancient Adivasi-Vedic link. After the regional musical tradition acquired form and spirit, it gave birth to several offspring, each with its own unique features – Sopana Sangeetham, Kalathil Pattu, Theyattu Pattu, Mudi yettu Pattu, Padayani Pattu, Bhadrakali Pattu, Sarpam Pattu, Ayyappan Pattu, Kanyarkali Pattu, Cherumangala Pattu, Deivakolattu Pattu, Vadakkan Pattu, Pakkanar Pattu, Bharani Pattu, Bhagavata Pattu, Onavillu Pattu, Kathirvela Pattu, Chinthu Pattu, Chattu Pattu, Paanar Pattu, Thuyilunarthu Pattu and many, many more. Some of them were inextricably connected with temple rituals; others with classical art forms like Koodiyattom, Kathakali, Thullal, Mohiniyattom, Ashtapadiyattom

and so on; yet others with folk dance forms like Thiruvathirakali, Chimmanakali, Kurathiyattom, Vilpattu, Dappukali, Porattukali, Kalankali, Mangalamkali and so on.

Some were patronized or practised by certain specific castes. Others developed a more scientific technique of rendition and evolved into classical music. Simultaneously, a 'Margi' musical tradition came into being, and struck roots deep into the Kerala soil. With the arrival of Carnatic music, many more musical streams took birth like drama songs, film songs, light music and so on, each with its distinct attributes. The evolution of all these branches has made the musical tradition of Kerala rich and varied on an unprecedented scale.

The Musical Structure of Koodiyattom

Among all the extant theatre forms in Kerala, Koodiyattom is considered the oldest. Estimated to be nearly 2,000 years old, this art form gained UNESCO recognition in 2001. Most of the classical art forms of Kerala are known by the generic term Attom. Koodiyattom, Ramanattom, Krishnanattom and Mohiniyattom are examples. Attom is the desi or regional version of what was known as Natyam in the Margi tradition.

"Kerala's music legacy reflects the region's vibrant cultural mosaic, evolving from indigenous Adivasi roots, enriched by folk influences, and achieving classical sophistication, showcasing an enduring and dynamic tradition."



Swati Thirunal



Irayimman Thambi



Koodiyattom



Mudhyettu



Njeralathu Ramapothuval



Ashtapadiyattom

It denotes a harmonious blend and performance of four components – Geetham (lyric), Vadyam (instrumental music), Nrittam (dance) and Abhinayam (acting). Natyam involves an imitation of an action. But Attom encompasses all the four aspects of Abhinayam – angikam (body gestures), vachikam (utterances), sattvikam (mental states) and aharyam (costume, make-up and scenery) – and all the main aspects of Natyam, namely Geetham, Vadyam and Nrittam. Thus, Koodiyattom is a complete art form that is derived from tribal culture but built on a classic framework.

Among all these components, vachika abhinayam enjoys the pride of place because of its unique features. It is also known as Swarikkal, that is, it is composed on the solid foundation of certain tunes with prose and verse (the two components of vaachikam) intermixed and presented in a specific style. (What needs to be emphasized is that this has absolutely no connection with either the manner of enunciation that is followed in Vedic chants or the rule-based configuration of swaras in Carnatic music.) The stylization involved in the linking of conversational bits and verses in Koodiyattom is markedly different from that followed in other art forms. The suggestive power of this kind of stylization makes acting very nuanced and sophisticated. And there are twenty-

three different types of stylizations used in Koodiyattom!

Ashtapadiyattom - The Singing of Couplets

It was during the time of Swami Chaitanya Mahaprabhu (15-16th century CE) that India witnessed the resurgence of Vaishnavism. As a result, the stories of Lord Vishnu and Lord Krishna began to get presented on various stages throughout the country. Among them, the most famous is Gita Govinda by Jayadeva. The huge popularity it enjoyed in Kerala is evident in the emergence of a whole new art form called Ashtapadiyattom. It epitomised the beautiful confluence of lyric and instrumental music, dance and acting, centuries before even Kathakali came into being in Kerala.

The central focus of Ashtapadiyattom is the love between Radha and Krishna. It is a work that presents bhakti (religious devotion) and shringara (romance) in equal proportions, and imparts great aesthetic pleasure to the spectators. Gita Govinda is written in 12 cantos which contain a total of 24 ashtapadis (each ashtapadi is a stringing together of eight [ashta] couplets [padas]) and 92 verses [shlokas].

Three other art forms followed in the footsteps of Ashtapadiyattom in Kerala – Ramanattom,

Krishnanattom and Kathakali. All of them are auditory and visual treats that give equal importance to vocal and instrumental music as well as dance.

Krishnanattom

Krishnanattom is an artform that combines the techniques of Ashtapadiyattom and Koodiyattom. It is a theatrical performance based on Krishnageethi composed entirely in Sanskrit by Manavedan, one of the Zamorins who ruled the Malabar region of Kerala. The training sessions of Krishnanattom are entirely different from those of Kathakali. It has a distinct identity as a ritual art form and is performed only within the precincts of the famous Guruvayoor temple in Thrissur.

In Krishnanattom, the players of instruments – maddalam (percussion instrument), chengila (gong) and ilathalam (small cymbal) – occupy the background while the actors take the centre stage. The musical instruments are the same as those used in Sopana Sangeetham. The vocal music of Krishnanattom and Sopana Sangeetham exhibit considerable resemblance in terms of Akaraalaapanam [singing by using the vowel sound /a/] as well as a detailed rendition of the ragas. The patterns of rhythm that are used exclusively in Kerala – chemba, chembada, adantha, ekam and so on – and the ragas used in Carnatic music are used in Krishnanattom.

Ramanattom

Ramanattom is the prototype of Kathakali. Covering all the major events in the life of Lord Rama – from his birth to his war against King Ravana and right up to his coronation – Ramanattom is performed through the course of eight consecutive days. It was written by the King of Kottarakkara in the 17th century.

What the padas or couplets of Ramanattom inaugurated was an entirely new and superior kind of artform, in terms of artistic and literary value. It is different from and simpler than Krishnageethi. Precisely for that reason, Ramanattom is more popular. By the time of its birth, people of all castes – from the brahmins to the rest in the caste hierarchy – had gained freedom to present their art forms. As a result, performances that were exclusively associated with temple rituals began to get staged outside the temple premises, and became accessible to all. With vachika abhinaya gaining ascendancy, and singers becoming more prominent in course of time, acting and singing climbed to higher levels of sophistication. Both performers, that is, actors and singers, used the opportunity to project their expertise, and this was instrumental in the audio-visual treat that would evolve through the magical genre of Kathakali.



Ramanattom

Koodiyattom's Musical Heritage: "Koodiyattom, a 2,000-year-old classical theatre form, harmoniously integrates lyric, instrumental music, dance, and acting, representing a complete art form with deep tribal and classical influences, recognized by UNESCO."



Krishnanattom



"Kathakali music, emerging from Ramanattom and rooted in temple rituals like Sopana Sangeetham, combines acting and singing with significant improvisation, highlighting Kerala's unique ragas and rhythmic patterns."



Kathakali Song - Kalamandalam Hyderali

Kathakali Music

The birth of Kathakali music constitutes a watershed moment in the tradition of music in Kerala. As an art form, Kathakali is famous for its acting, literary sophistication and music. Kathakali music evolved out of Ramanattom, and has been built over the foundation of the temple ritual of Sopana Sangeetham that is an offshoot of Ashtapadi music. The most prominent aspect of Kathakali is the potential it has for acting. Each word of the shlokas or songs can be performed in various tempos. And the rendition of its music, with immense scope for improvisation, gives the actors plenty of space to exercise their artistic freedom. However, it does not follow the detailed exposition of ragas as is done in Carnatic music or give importance to briga (an improvisation where more notes are packed within the same duration in which only fewer notes are usually sung). The introduction of "Manjuthara . . ." – the twenty-first ashtapadi of Gita Govinda – formed a milestone in the development of Kathakali music. The musical composition was done by the King of Kottayam, a scholar who had categorized ragas according to the time of the day or night when they should be sung. If the King of Kottarakkara, the creator of Ramanattom, gave prominence to bhakti or religious devotion in his work, the

King of Kottayam highlighted the beauty of intermingling shringara (romance), veera (valour), roudra (fury) and hasya (humour). Another significant point in the evolution of Kathakali music was the composition of the famous Nalacharitam (the story of King Nala, narrated in the Mahabharata) by Unnayi Warriar in the 18th century. The songs of Nalacharitam are known and appreciated for their simple vocabulary and mellifluous combination of phrases. Performed in four parts, the second part of Nalacharitam (called Nalacharitam, randaam divasam, in Malayalam) is the favourite of Kathakali aficionados, especially because it contains the song "Kuvayala vilochane . . ." rendered in Thodi raga, set to adantha thalam and sung in a slow tempo. Although the dominant rasa is shringara, it is further enriched by valsalya (parental affection), veera (valour), and as the story progresses, by krodha (anger) and jugupsa (disgust), accompanied by all their attendant emotional effects. A contemporary of Unnayi Warriar, Irayimman Thampi is famous for his composition of three Kathakali attakathas (dance-stories) – Keechaka Vadham, Uttara Swayamvaram and Daksha Yagam. Ragas like Thodi, Bhairavi, Sankarabharanam and others that are commonly used in Carnatic music are popular in Kathakali

music as well. However, certain other ragas, that are considered Kerala's very own, namely Padi, Maradhanasi, Puraneeru, Khandaram, Indisha and Korakuginji, are rendered meticulously. In this manner, although many ragas that had been in use in the ancient Dravida culture of Kerala have been infused into modern Carnatic music, their original identities have been retained. What is more, they continue to be used in Kerala's indigenous music genres of Sopana and Kathakali music too.

Sopana Sangeetham

Sopana Sangeetham belongs to the desi tradition of Kerala. It has been composed in such a way as to follow a structured pattern of rhythms. Also known as Nadakkal Pattu (because it is sung in front of the nada [the sanctum sanctorum] of the temple) and Kottipadiseva (drumming-and-singing in service of the deity), this classical genre draws inspiration and life from Adivasi and folk tradition of devotional music. Even as it evolved over centuries, Sopana Sangeetham always reflected the regional culture and the pulse of the people. Like gharanas in Hindustani music, there are distinct schools within Sopana Sangeetham too, called baani. Some of them are Ramamangalam, Pallashana, Pallavoor, Thirumandhamkunnu, Pazhoor, Guruvayoor, Vaikom, Chottanikkara

and so on, each with its distinct characteristics. What is significant is that they were a vibrant and rich presence in the rituals in temples until recently.

It was Kunjan Nambiar who systematized the rhythms of Sopana Sangeetham. The rhythms influence music in the form of metre. The dominance of rhythms in the Sopana songs composed by Kunjan Nambiar are a proof of this phenomenon. In fact, in this musical genre, rhythm plays a more decisive role than pitch. Sopana Sangeetham thus derives life and sustenance from its dependence on the pattern of the human heart beat.

Carnatic Music

Carnatic music made its entry into Kerala during the time of Swati Thirunal (1813-46). During his brief life, he used up 15 years for promoting and enriching it, writing 400-500 songs, composing their music, and arranging their performances by various artistes. Besides this, he inspired many talented singers and instrumentalists to come to Kerala in order to popularize Carnatic music. In course of time, this led to the evolution of a fixed format for Carnatic songs comprising pallavi, anupallavi and charanam. Padas, javalis and thillanas too became very popular.

The forerunners of Carnatic music in Kerala were Swati Thirunal, Shadkala Govinda Marar, Irayimman Thampi, Mullamoottil

"Sopana Sangeetham, a classical genre originating from devotional folk traditions, emphasizes rhythmic patterns over pitch, drawing inspiration from Kerala's indigenous culture and temple rituals."



Unnayi Warriar



Sopana Sangeetham

Carnatic Music

"Mappila Pattu, deeply intertwined with Kerala's Muslim heritage, blends Arabic musical influences with Dravidian traditions, creating a unique genre characterized by its distinct rhythmic patterns and literary richness."



Girl in Oppana costume

Vadivelu and others. Later, Swathi Thirunal took the initiative to introduce Hindustani music into Kerala with the help of Thanjavur Rangayyer, the sarangi expert Thanjavur Chintamani, the veena expert Cholapuram Raghunatha Rao, Tyagaraja's pupil Kannayya Bhagavatar and others. Sangeetha Chandrika written by Ayoor Krishna Pisharody in the 20th century is a significant contribution to the field of music. Light music was another small genre that drew inspiration from Carnatic music.

Margamkali Pattu

Margamkali is a prominent dance form among the Syrian Christian community of Kerala, and Margamkali Pattu is the genre of songs used in its performance. This art form has a history spanning approximately 500 years in Kerala. The narrative of Margamkali primarily revolves around the historical visit of St. Thomas the Apostle to Kerala in AD 52. Many historians claim that Margamkali bears significant similarities to the Sanghakali performed by the Namboothiri community in Kerala. Over the past 500 years, this art form has undergone various changes and modernizations. Initially, Margamkali focused solely on the history of St. Thomas, but later, it incorporated various contemporary social issues. Additionally, while only men performed Margamkali in the early days,

women also began participating in this dance form later on. Margamkali is presented in stages, starting with community dance to songs, moving on to combat-focused Parichamutt, and finally to a dance akin to Kummali. Similarly, Sanghakali among the Namboothiris was performed in a comparable style. The rhythm for Margamkali songs is maintained by clapping hands, with no other instruments used.

Mappila Pattu

Mappila Pattu is one of the most significant musical genres celebrated by the Muslim community in Kerala. The connection between Arabs and India, and consequently Kerala, dates back over a thousand years. This relationship remained robust until the arrival of the Portuguese in Kerala around the 15th century. During this period, Arabs made numerous contributions to the cultural landscape of India and Kerala. It is an undeniable part of our history that many changes in India's musical sphere were influenced by Arabs. Indian classical music split into Hindustani and Carnatic music around the 13th - 14th centuries. Hindustani music developed in North India under the influence of Arabic music. Today, this music form is enjoyed not only across India but worldwide. In foreign countries, Hindustani music is commonly referred to as Indian music.



Margamkali



KS George

K.J. Yesudas

KPAC Sulochna

Regarding popular music, Mappila Pattu in Kerala boasts a history spanning almost a millennium. Mappila Pattu literature predominantly uses the regional Mappila style of the Malayalam language. Additionally, some Mappila Pattu have been composed by modifying Sanskrit meters. The rhythmic patterns of Mappila Pattu tunes are found to have foundations in the Dravidian musical tradition of the region and are known as Ishals. Similarly, the rhyming verses of Mappila Pattu are also deeply connected to this Dravidian heritage. Mappila Pattu is a significant branch of music that cannot be distinguished from our cinematic music. Although Mappila Pattu gained its name in the 20th century, this genre of songs has existed as part of our history under various names.

Drama Songs

The presence of pure music in theatrical presentations has been recorded nowhere in the world except in India. Kerala too has its tradition of drama songs, and it continues to be a strong presence to this day.

The first Malayalam drama song was sung during the staging of the KPAC (Kerala People's Arts Club) play Ente Makanaanu Sheri [My Son is Right]. The lyricist was Punalur Balan. The earliest singers for KPAC plays were KPAC Sulochana, K. S. George and P. Leela. Later, the plays produced and

staged by various companies, including the Kalidasa Kala Kendra, featured songs whose popularity equalled those of film songs. They were written and set to music by stalwarts like O. N. V. Kurup, L. P. R. Varma, Devarajan, K. Raghavan and others.

Film Songs

During its initial stages, Malayalam film industry could not boast of original musical scores. The songs borrowed heavily from Tamil, Hindi, Telugu and Kannada films. In 1948, Kerala Talkies owned by P. J. Cheriaan came into being. The first film it exhibited was Nirmala through which Malayalam playback music made its entry for the first time. Until then, actors would stand in front of the movie camera and sing, in much the same way as it was done on stage. The first Malayalam films used to have 30-40 songs each! Balan had 23; Prahaladan, 24; Jnanambika, 14!

In course of time, Malayalam film industry grew, acquired its own identity, and gave birth to a new and colourful entertainment culture. Malayalam film music was nourished by many, extraordinarily talented film directors, music composers and singers. Thousands of film songs were created, and some of the most famous names in the field are K. J. Yesudas, K. S. Chitra, S. Janaki, P. Leela and others. Today, Malayalam film music has become the virtual life-breath of contemporary culture in Kerala.



O.N.V. Kurup



L.P.R. Varma



123 Total 24 subevents

Gathi/Nadai=4 1234 1234 1234 1234
1234 1234 1234 Total 32 sub-events

Gathi/Nadai=5 12345 12345 12345 12345
12345 12345 12345 12345 Total 40 events

Malayalam poetry uses the above Nadais in lyrics by using laghu letters to mark an event and a Guru syllable to fuse two events into one or use silence in their place. For example, the Gathi/Nadai=5 (Khanda Nadai) is linguistically existent in the following lines in Adhyathma Ramayanam (the four segments have 5 laghus =5 mathraas and the last has G-L-G which also is 5 mathraas)

Ka-dha-ya-ma-ma Ka-dha-ya-ma-ma
Ka-dha-ka-la-thi Saa-da-ram

L L L L L L L L L L L L L L L
L L G L G

Ragas and Thalas of Kerala

Ragas and Rhythms are related, but distinct concepts. Kerala has its own unique tradition in both areas. However, the traditional ragas of Kerala are not much in vogue. Indalam, Puraneeru, Indisha, KaanaKurunji, DukhaKhandaram etc are not even well-defined and sadly, not recorded. The earliest description of these ragas are seen only in western notations given by Samuel Mateer and Fox Stangeways. In the absence of full details, many of these ragas are now considered as minor variations of popular Carnatic Ragas (Puraneeru is Bhoopalam, KaanaKurunji is Neelambari/

Sankarabharanam etc). Even Swathi Thirunal did not compose songs in 'Kerala ragas'.

Today, the Sopana Sangeetham style in which these ragas were rendered has mostly been transformed into Carnatic style. There are rare scholars/musicians like Kavalam Sreekumar who are capable of bringing out the subtleties of Sopana style over Carnatic Music.

Compared to the case of Ragas, rhythms of Kerala have survived to the present. The Chendamelams have been one the major reasons for their continuation to the present. Adantha, Muriadhantha Chempada, Panchari, Champa, Kumbha, Kundanachi, Lakshmi, Marma etc are the famous Kerala Thalaas. We have authentic details of at least some of these rhythms through their description by the great Kunchan Nambiar. He indicates their structure through linguistic rhythm. For instance, definition of Kumbha thala in "Hareneerwayanvaraa" Seethankan Thullal as follows:

laghu laghu laghu laghu laghukkalum, druta yugalvum, legu moonnu druta dwayavum, laghu guru guru laghu leghukkalum, laghu laghu laghu athumoonnumsabdamitham.

(PC: Ganga Studio, Ambalappuzha)

Kerala rhythm in Present Times

The Melam that continues to the present at Trichur Vadukkanthan temple is an example of dynamic existence of Kerala rhythms. It is



Kunjannambiar's Mizhavu



Thimila



Peruvanam Kuttan Marar

Mattannoor Sankarankutty Marar

an orchestra of five instruments viz. Chenda-Edamthala, Valanthala, Kombu, Kuzhal and Elathalam. A thani avarthanam in a Carnatic concert pales in front of the “Thala Prastharam” in these melams, which bring thousands of connoisseurs to a synchronous frenzy. Like the raga malikas Kerala percussionists are capable of performing Thala malikas in their performances.

I must hasten to add that we can find correspondence of the underlying structure of most of the Kerala Thalas with established Carnatic Thalas in the Saptha Thala scheme (7 basic patterns x 5 Jaathis = 35 Thalas. With 5 nadais/tempo for each, we have 175 thalas, Chappu Thalas are considered separately). In modern times the major Kerala Thalas are treated as equivalent to Carnatic Thalas as follows: Adantha is AtaThala; Muriadantha is Triputa Thala; Champada is Adi Thala, Sanchari is Rupaka Thala and Champa is Jumpa Thala. Even though the general structures are equivalent, how the “angaas” are defined varies subtly.

Vocalisation of Rhythm

In all musical systems, Rhythm can be represented by Vaaythaari (vocalization of rhythmic patterns). Often it mimics sounds of instruments such as Chenda, Mridangam or Tabla (In modern times it is known as “Indian Vocal Percussion” or scat singing). Kerala also has its own style in this, which varies from the Carnatic syllables. Here is a Chenda Vaythaari:

Gi... Kam...
 Na.Ka. Tha.Ra. Kaam...
 Dha.Ri. Ki.Da. Dhi.Ka. Tha.Ra. Kaam...
 Na.Ka. Tha.Ra. Kaam...
 Dhi.Ki. Na.Na. Kaam...
 Dhi.Dhi
 Dha.Ri. Ki.Da. Dhi.Ka. Tha.Ra. Kaam...
 Folk tradition also exists in this regard. Chappu Thala could be described as “Tha Ki Ta, Tha Ka Dhi Mi” in Carnatic style. Folk style in Kerala is “Thitheyyam Theyyam Theyyam”

Shadkalam

The visit of Shadkala Govinda Marar to Thyagaraja’s musical sabha is famous. He is believed to have sung the Jayadeva Ashtapathi “Chandana Charchitha” in six kaalams (tempo). There have been many interpretations on this. It would be very unlikely that 6 tempos each of which at double speed, was sung. If it were so, either the slowest tempo would have been boringly slow, or the fastest tempo would have been unintelligible. Music Director, late G Devarajan hypothesises that 3 speeds were sung, first in chathurasra nadai and then in thishra nadai. Late Sri B Sasikumar, Violinist opines that it would have been not doubling speed in each step, but increasing by small measure as done in Sopana singing, called “Paadi Murukkuka.” This is in vogue today in Bhajana singing.



Kunjan Nambiar



Shadkala Govinda Marar



Heartbeats of Heritage

Kerala's Musical Instruments

Kerala's musical heritage resonates with the captivating sounds of its unique instruments.



K.C. Narayanan

The term "Kerala music" is associated with a unique, rich musical heritage characterized by traditions observed in temple festivals and distinct musical forms. The music of Kerala prominently features wind instruments like the Odakkuzhal and string instruments like the Veena, either as accompaniment or in their own right. Despite Kerala being the land of wind instruments, a distinct musical tradition centered around the Odakkuzhal has not developed. String instruments like the Nanduni are used primarily as accompaniment for vocal music, and the Kurumkuzhal, capable of producing melodious tunes, is similarly used as an accompanying instrument in traditional

ensembles such as Pandi Melam and Panchari Melam.

Herein lies the complexity of Kerala's musical heritage and the instruments it employs. According to musicology, instruments are classified into four categories, as also described in Natyashastra. The first category is the percussion instruments, known as Vitata Vadya or Avanaddha Vadya. These are typically hollow wooden or earthen instruments with one or both ends covered with animal hide, such as the Chenda, Maddalam, and Mizhaavu.

Next are the string instruments, categorized as Tata Vadya. Instruments like the Veena and Violin fall under this group. The third category is the wind instruments or Sushira Vadya, including the Odakkuzhal, and the flute used in Nadaswaram.

The final category comprises the metal



Veena by Shuweltha Premkumar

instruments or Ghana Vadya, which produce sound when struck against metal. A distinctive aspect of Kerala's sonic culture is its emphasis on percussion instruments. These rhythm instruments, used for maintaining tempo, hold much greater prominence and authenticity compared to melodic instruments, which are designed to produce notes and melodies. In both popularity and significance, percussion instruments in Kerala surpass their melodic counterparts. Beyond the well-known percussion instruments like the Chenda and Para, Kerala boasts several lesser-known traditional instruments such as the Uruthudi Virana, Panchamukha Vadyam, and Maram. Kerala is a living museum of percussion instruments, creating unique and grandiose sound sculptures with these instruments, which often overshadow the melodic aspects of our music. Many instruments, which could have evolved as melodic musical instruments, are predominantly used for rhythm. The Kurumkuzhal is a prime example. Though ubiquitous in Kerala, we have not developed a standalone Kurumkuzhal concert. Instead, it is used as an accompanying instrument to enhance the grandeur of the Pandi Melam

and Panchari Melam.

The Villu is a ubiquitous string instrument, yet our children primarily use it for the Onavillu ritual. Even on the Villu, we have incorporated the rhythmic elements of Thayambaka. Another string instrument, the Pulluvan's Idiyara, is more often used for rhythm than melody. The conventional role of rhythm as an accompaniment to raga has shifted here, with the swara now serving to enrich the rhythm. This underscores the extraordinary significance and authenticity attributed to percussion instruments in Kerala.

In Kerala, there are two instruments that exemplify the harmonious blend of melody and rhythm: the Idakka and the Kuzhal. The Idakka, known as "Dakka" in Sanskrit, is mentioned as "Dakka Mridanga" in Harinama Keerthanam. Rather than being purely Keralite, the Mridangam is integral to all of South India. However, the Idakka, a regional variant of the Dakka, is distinctly Keralite. The Idakka, similar in category to the Udukku, has a slender middle with larger ends. It is crafted by stretching cowhide over its frame and tightening it with ropes. Sound is produced by striking it with a thin stick, creating a unique auditory



Idakka

The charm of Thullal songs lies not only in their melodic variety but also in their distinctive rhythmic patterns, which are both unique and extraordinarily energetic.

experience.

When it comes to sound, experts can even produce the seven musical notes on the Idakka. Many have heard Pallavur Appu Marar play pieces like “Thechimandaram Tulasi” on the Idakka. Additionally, the Idakka serves as an accompanying instrument to music. It is an ancillary instrument for the Ashtapadis sung in Sopana music. Sopana Sangeetham involves singing the Ashtapadis, composed by the poet Jayadeva, in a distinctly Keralite style, accompanied by the distinctly Keralite instrument, the Idakka.

Sopana Sangeetham involves singing the Padas composed by Jayadeva. Kathakali Padas also belong to this genre. Irayimman Thampi, a poet and playwright who lived during the 18th and 19th centuries, composed numerous Padas apart from those for Kathakali. His famous Pada, “Prananathan Enikku Nalkiya Paramananda Rasathe,” is well-known. However, it is unclear what specific instruments were used to accompany these compositions during that era.

Kathakali Padas form a vast repertoire,

conveying various emotions through different ragas and talas, with a unique style of rendition that has spread throughout Kerala. When these Padas are performed for female characters, the Chenda is not used. Instead, the Chengila and Elathalam are employed for rhythm. However, the singer might face a dilemma: should they sing in tune with the Chenda or the Chengila? Despite being musical, maintaining a fixed pitch is challenging. The instruments on stage must complement not just the music but also the dancer's movements and expressions. If a grand instrumental flourish suddenly stops, the stage would become still.

In Kathakali, the swara and rhythmic elements are not merely accompaniments but the very lifeblood of the performance.

Another visual art form where rhythm, music, and dance are seamlessly intertwined is Thullal, created by Kunchan Nambiar. Listening to Thullal songs sung in beautiful ragas is a delight. The charm of Thullal songs lies not only in their melodic variety but also in their distinctive rhythmic patterns, which are both unique and extraordinarily energetic. As the Thullal performer



Thakal & Nadaswaram



connects this melodic sweetness with the rhythmic patterns, embodying them through dance, the accompanying instruments like the Mridangam and Kuzhithalam provide support. In Kerala, these musical instruments too can serve as accompaniments. Their purpose is to complement and enhance the performance.

The story goes that Koothu originated from a dispute with the Chakyar. The performance of Koothu employs a heightened language that, while not quite music, transcends ordinary speech. Although the term Koothu means dance, there is minimal dancing involved; it is primarily a vocal performance. The Chakyar's recitation of verses, presented musically, defines Koothu. This can be considered a unique melodic rendition. The Mizhavu is played either at the completion or midway through the verse, accompanied by the Kudam. This creates a distinctive auditory pleasure, though it is not synchronized with the sloka but follows its recitation, transitioning into storytelling.

Koothu originated from the theatre of Koodiyattam. As part of Koodiyattam,

there are four days of Koothu, focusing on themes such as Ashanam (feasting), Rajaseva (service to the king), Vinodam (entertainment), and Vanchanam (deception). These performances are carried out by the Vidushaka, who dons the role of the Chakyar in Chakyarkoothu. While characters in Koodiyattam are adorned with elaborate face paintings and headdresses, their dialogues are delivered in a melodious, unique style. The Mizhavu and Kuzhithalam serve as accompaniments, enhancing the performance.

Koodiyattam, Kathakali, Vadyamelams, and Panchavadyam are the structured and organized classical arts of Kerala. These forms utilize instruments that can be classified under musical instruments. However, unlike the solo improvisations heard in a Kacheri during Thanivarthanam, these instruments are performed in a manner that stands alone. Moreover, they have achieved prominence, often overshadowing traditional music concerts. In these classical arts, musical instruments primarily serve as accompaniments.

Kathakali Padas form a vast repertoire, conveying various emotions through different ragas and talas, with a unique style of rendition that has spread throughout Kerala. When these Padas are performed for female characters, the Chenda is not used.



Reflections on Malabar's Folk Music



V.T. Murali
Singer and Music Critic

Extensive studies and scholarly work have been conducted on Kerala's folk arts and culture, with the University of Calicut even hosting a dedicated folklore department. Numerous academic and non-academic studies and books have emerged in this field. Many non-academic scholars, who may not possess formal degrees or PhDs, have diligently identified and preserved traditional songs, contributing significantly to the understanding of these art forms. These scholars have focused on the collection and study of folk songs. However, research specifically targeting the musical and rhythmic aspects of these songs remains relatively underexplored. There seems to be an opportunity for music scholars and students to deepen their awareness of the cultural value and extensive influence of folk music. This presents a promising area for further academic inquiry and appreciation within the broader scope of Carnatic music and traditional art forms.

In the study of Carnatic music, traditional folk music has not been prominently featured. While some exceptions may exist, they are not widely

recognized. Early poets did not incorporate certain songs, and similarly, classical musicians have largely excluded folk music from their repertoire. Even compositions based on specific ragas were often dismissed as simplistic and not integrated into mainstream Carnatic music. This exclusion highlights a need for comprehensive study and discussion on the topic.

In contrast, North Indian classical music has seen prominent vocalists incorporating folk music into their performances, using it to innovate and create new styles. However, in South Indian classical music, folk music has generally been subject to significant restrictions and has not been widely embraced within the classical tradition.

When discussing North Kerala, it is essential to explore its folk arts and the musical elements inherent in them. There are numerous cultural and ritualistic aspects from this region that warrant thorough study. One of the prominent features of North Kerala's musical heritage is the genre known as "Vadakkan Pattu" or Northern Ballads. Notable collectors of these

ballads include M.C. Appunni Nambiar and T.H. Kunjiraman Nambiar. Scholarly research and discussions on the linguistic, literary, and narrative aspects of these songs have been conducted for many years.

The first film to feature a Vadakkan Pattu was “Unniyarcha,” released in 1961, with music composed by K. Raghavan Master. This film brought the musical style into the mainstream. Following this, the 1964 film “Thacholi Othenan” featured music composed by Baburaj. Both composers successfully extracted the essence of the musical elements embedded in Vadakkan Pattu, using it to create new musical compositions. The tunes commonly sung today as Vadakkan Pattu are a result of their efforts to redefine the musical identity of this genre. Raghavan Master and Baburaj discovered the potential to develop a new musical tradition in Malayalam based on these original tunes. This endeavor was not a formal research project but a creative exploration of the genre’s musical possibilities.

Each song within the Vadakkan Pattu repertoire has been individually studied. While the literary world has explored figures like Unniyarcha, Thacholi Othenan, Kunhithalu, Poomathai Ponnamma, and Mathilerikkanni, scholars have not delved into the musical and lyrical aspects of these ballads. Currently, groups performing under the banner of “Nadan Pattu Gana Sangham” have popularized these folk songs by leveraging their inherent rhythmic structure,

garnering widespread appeal.

Another significant contribution from the Malabar region within the folk song tradition is the Mappila Pattu. As the name suggests, these songs originated from the Muslim community in Malabar and were initially tied to their religious practices. Over time, Mappila Pattu evolved to encompass a broader range of subjects. In Malabar, the term “Mappila” specifically refers to Muslims, while in southern Kerala, it can also denote Christians. This musical tradition is distinctly associated with North Kerala, or more precisely, the extreme northern region of Kerala. Mappila Pattu specifically refers to the songs of the Malabar Muslims.

When discussing the musical aspects of Mappila Pattu, it is often simplistically linked to Arabian or Hindustani music. However, it is crucial to examine whether these are indeed its foundational elements. Noted Mappila Pattu singer and author V. M. Kutty has asserted that the true source of this tradition is Kerala’s indigenous folk songs. This perspective invites a deeper exploration of its musical roots, challenging the conventional associations and recognizing its local heritage.

Folk songs, traditionally passed down orally, are generally referred to as “Nadan Pattu.” Over time, even written songs have integrated into this tradition, becoming well-established. When discussing Mappila Pattu, the most prominent poet is Mahakavi Moyinkutti Vaidyar, who



M.S. Baburaj



P Bhaskaran



P Leela



Sathyan-Thacholi Othenan



V.M. Kutty



Sheikh Muhyidheen
Abdul Qadir Jilani



Balakrishnan Vallikkunnu

enriched this poetic genre significantly. Many poets followed, further enriching the tradition. In other folk song genres like Vadakkan Pattu and Pulluvan Pattu, the authors of the songs are unknown, as these were orally transmitted through generations and only later documented.

However, Mappila Pattu stands apart. The earliest known Mappila Pattu, “Muhyidheen Mala,” has a known author. We now know that this poetic work, praising the Sufi saint Sheikh Muhyidheen Abdul Qadir Jilani, was written by Kadi Muhammed Ibn Abdul Aziz. This distinct characteristic of Mappila Pattu has led to arguments that it does not belong to the category of folk songs.

Renowned scholar Balakrishnan Vallikkunnu, who has extensively studied Mappila art and literature, has remarked:

“In a technical sense, Mappila Pattukal are neither folk songs nor traditional folk songs. They cannot be categorized as social compositions or works aimed at social collectiveness in terms of their creation or reception. The inherent spontaneity and dynamism of folk traditions are rare in these songs. It is not plausible to consider their composition as either meticulously crafted or loosely structured to the extent that the author

or reciter can make additions or omissions according to the context of the same social setting. Even though a social limitation can be observed, it is inconsistent to consider them products of a homogeneous social tradition. Hence, categorizing Mappila Pattukal as Nadan Pattu is not an appropriate approach.”

Mappila Pattu has evolved and refined itself over time, assimilating various influences from other traditions. It has transcended its local origins, embracing a wide range of human emotions and themes. From nature, love, and sensuality to revolution and freedom, Mappila Pattu addresses an extensive array of subjects, possibly more than any other song tradition. It encompasses all aspects of human experience and has significantly contributed to mainstream light music in Malayalam, enhancing it with its rich heritage. Composers like K. Raghavan Master and Baburaj have enriched Malayalam’s light music by drawing from this art form.

The rhythmic structures of Mappila Pattu’s melodies warrant detailed study. This genre is expansive, including Kolkali, Duff Muttu, wedding songs, lullabies, and war songs. Despite this diversity, there appears to be insufficient scholarly focus on its musical and rhythmic aspects. The instruments used, their rhythmic applications, and comparisons





Theyyam and Thira

with instruments from other cultures deserve attention. The acoustic variations can indeed be recreated using electronic devices, yet we often overlook analyzing the original forms of these sounds. There is a lack of exploration into how our ancestors developed these musical traditions, which could reveal the depth and breadth of this culture's roots.

Examining the construction and history of a single instrument could provide profound insights into our current position and its evolution. This exploration could lead us towards understanding the multicultural exchanges and the rich diversity within our cultural heritage.

Theyyam and Thira are ritualistic art forms from Malabar, particularly from the districts of Kannur, Kasaragod, and Kozhikode in North Kerala. Although these art forms combine dance and elaborate costumes, the "Thottam Pattu" (songs) used in Theyyam deserve serious attention from classical musicians. These songs often contain the primitive applications and original forms of the ragas that have been refined in our classical music. Studying the vocal renditions in Theyyam can reveal these early musical expressions, offering valuable insights into the origins and evolution of our musical traditions.

Numerous songs and their musical structures are prevalent in North Kerala, with Mappila Pattu breaking through religious barriers to reach a broader audience, transcending its origins within the Mappila community to become a part of the wider Malayali culture. Discussing such a vast heritage within the confines of a short article is challenging; we can only touch upon the surface of this rich tradition. We have meticulously preserved oral traditions through written works, leading to the creation of books. Over time, we have lost the unique singing styles of great artists from this field, which is indeed a significant loss.

In his study of the Prakrit language, V.T. Kumaran says:

"The expanse of the Prakrit language, much like the ocean, encompasses an immense collection of common people's emotions and thoughts. Ignoring Prakrit would render any study of Indian culture incomplete."

Researchers studying folk songs from any region must understand the area's myths, geography, historical inhabitants, labor practices, social relationships, and social conditions. It is crucial for new scholars to explore these aspects with fresh perspectives and strive to complete the research comprehensively.



V.T. Kumaran



K Raghavan Master

Maestros of Composition in Kerala's Musical Legacy



When we explore the legacy of composers from Kerala in carnatic music, we can find a list of amazing talents as poets and 'vaggeyakaras'. They have provided many kritis and other forms of compositions to nourish the tradition of Carnatic music in Kerala.



Dr. Bindu K.
Professor, Department
of Music, Maharajas
College, Ernakulam.

Kerala boasts a legacy of diverse art forms, including folk songs, classical music, and devotional compositions by various state composers. Music has been integral to the social and religious life in Kerala for many years. The state has produced many musicians, composers, scholars, and poets who have contributed greatly to the art. Notable figures from the Pre-Swathi Thirunal period include Sri Sankaracharya, Prince Aswathi Thirunal (1756-1788), Her Highness Rani Rugmini Bai (1809-1837), Kulasekhara Varma Devan (14th century), Manaveda Raja (17th century), Kunchan Nambiar (17th century), Kottayam Kerala Varma (1645-1696), Unnayi Variar, Ramapurathu Variar (18th century), and Maharaja Ramavarma of Travancore (1758).

Travancore, the southern part of Kerala, was historically referred to as "Sreevazhumcode," meaning a 'Prosperous land.' Blessed with natural beauty and rich culture, it developed under various eminent rulers from the Royal family of Travancore, who were great patrons of art, literature, and music.

The second quarter of the 19th century is considered a golden period for Carnatic music globally and particularly in Kerala. This era saw the contemporaneous presence of the Carnatic music trinity—Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Deekshitar, and Syamasasthri—and prominent composers like Swathi Thirunal, Irayimman Thampi, Kuttikkunju Thankachi, Vadivelu, Palakkad Parameswara Bhagavather, and Shadkala Govindamarar. Maharaja Swathi Thirunal (1813 – 1846), a king among composers and a composer among kings, significantly contributed to this period. His reign marked the zenith of Carnatic music in Kerala, fostering music by bringing various musicians and composers to his court, thereby exposing the people of Kerala to diverse musical styles. Carnatic music evolved from the

Sopanam style to its broader and more eminent contemporary form. The works of Advaita philosophy exponent Sree Sankaracharya, such as 'Soundarya Lahari' and 'Bhajagovindam,' mark the beginning of Kerala's refined musical legacy.

Kottayam Kerala Varma (1645-1696)

Kottayam Kerala Varma, a pre-Swathi Thirunal composer, authored two significant works: a Ragamala, "Kalaye Gambodhirasanalaye," dedicated to Goddess Parvati with 32 ragas, and the kirtana "Dhyayemanisam Sree Padmanabham," addressed to Lord Padmanabha, featuring Pallavi, Anupallavi, and six charanas.

Aswathy Thirunal Ramavarma (1756-1794)

Aswathy Thirunal, an early composer before Swathi Thirunal, created Sanskrit prabandhas and five Kathakali plays. His kirtanams are still performed daily at the Sree Padmanabha Swami Temple in Thiruvananthapuram.

Maharaja Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma (1813-1847)

Swathi Thirunal, Kerala's most celebrated composer, authored numerous works in Sanskrit, Marathi, Telugu, and Malayalam, blending literary and musical beauty. His notable pieces include Navaratri Kritis, Navavidha Bhakti Kritis, and various Prabandhas. His compositions for temples in Thiruvananthapuram reference historical events, like "Jaya Jaya Padmanabha," celebrating the tradition of lighting temple lamps. Under his patronage, Carnatic music flourished, with extensive support for musicians and dancers.

Iravivarman Thampi (1782-1856)

Iravivarman Thampi, known as Irayimman Thampi, is recognized as the first composer of Malayalam kirthanams, enriching Malayalam literature and Kerala's musical traditions. His lullaby "Omanathingal Kidavo" for young prince Swathi Thirunal was translated into English by Fox Strangways in "The Music of Hindustan."

Contributions and Features of His Compositions

Irayimman Thampi's works span Carnatic

music, folk music, Kathakali, Mohiniyattam, and Thiruvathirakkali/Kummi. He authored three Attakkadhas and composed Varnas, Keertanas, and Padas, known for their simplicity and sweetness. His significant pieces include "Prana Nadhan Enikku Nalkiya Paramananda Rasathe."

Thampi uniquely contributed to Varnam, Keertanam, and Padam categories of Carnatic music. His contributions include five Malayalam Keertanas, 21 Sankeertanas, five Varnas, and 21 Padas, excelling in various bhavas. His compositions feature rare ragas like 'Kukubha,' 'Jingala,' and 'Manji,' with prosody elements like Dvitheeya Akshara Prasa, Anuprasa, and Antya Prasa.

Thampi's mastery of language and Kathakali is evident in "Kshoneendra Patniyude." His song "Veera Virata Kumara Vibho" from 'Uthara Swayamvaram' is ideal for Kummi and Kaikottikkali. Other notable pieces include "Karuna Cheyvan Entu Tamasam Krishna" in Sri Raga, "Atimalarina Thanne Krishna" in Mukhari, "Neela Varna Pahimam" in Suruti, "Pahimam Giritanaye" in Saveri, and "Sambho Goureesa" in Kedaragaula. The padam "Arodu Cholven," with 26 charanas, is another unique contribution.

K.C. Kesava Pillai (1868-1913)

A scholar in both music and literature, K.C. Kesava Pillai earned the title "Sarasagayaka Kavimani." Along with Swathi Thirunal and Irayimman Thampi, he is part of the 'Sangeetha Thrayam of Travancore.' Kesava Pillai composed around 200 pieces, including kritis, keertanas, namavalis, and musical dramas. His three Attakathas, "Hiranyasura Vadham," "Surapadmasura Vadham," and "Sreekrishna Vijayam," showcase his literary versatility. He enriched Carnatic music with his Kshetra kritis, like the Mohana raga kriti for Pozhikkara Devi, featuring the stala mudra in the pallavi.

Kuttamath Kunjikkurup (1880-1943)

Known as the 'Bhakta Kavi' of modern Kerala and awarded the title 'Mahakavi,' Kurup was a scholar in Sanskrit and Vyakarana. His popular compositions include "Bhajanam Cheyvin Krishnapadam" in Bagesri and "Palolum Bhashini" in Amritavarshini. He passed away in 1943.



Kottayam Kerala Varma



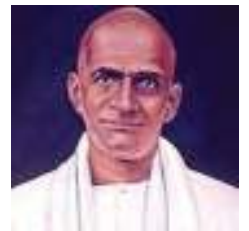
Swathi Thirunal Rama Varma



Iravivarman Thampi



K.C. Kesava Pillai



Kuttamath Kunjikkurup



Sree Swathi Thirumal Govt. College of Music



C.S. Krishna Iyer

C.S. Krishna Iyer (1916-1998)

Born in Palakkad, Krishna Iyer studied music under T.S. Sabhesa Iyer and Tanjore Ponnayya Pillai. He received the Sangita Natak Academy Award for his contributions to Carnatic music. Notable among his kritis is “Ambike Jagadambike” in Ritigaula, set to Misra Chapu Tala, popularized by his own performances.



Puthucode Krishnamurthy

Puthucode Krishnamurthy (1923-1985)

Puthucode Krishnamurthy, from Palakkad, was the principal of Chembai Memorial Music College. He composed over 200 pieces in Malayalam, Sanskrit, Hindi, and Tamil, using simple Malayalam in his works. His notable compositions include group kritis, Navagraha Kritis in Malayalam, Ghanaraga Devi Pancharathnam, Shodasa Kritis, Dasavathara Ragamalika, and Ramayana Ragamalika. He also composed for specific festivals like Kalpathy Radholsavam.



Rani Rugmini Bai Thampuratti

Women and Timeless Tunes

The legacy of women composers in Kerala highlights their profound impact on the

region's musical and cultural heritage, blending traditional bhakti themes with innovative lyrical and melodic contributions.

The slow changes in the social structure of Kerala brought many opportunities for women to express their talents in the field of music. ‘Bhakti’ being the main theme for music, women composers also handled the same topic and enriched the music field with considerable contributions. Due to their gender individuality, a new approach in ‘bhakti bhava’ was evident in their poetry and compositions. Rani Rugmini Bai and Kuttykunju Thankachi hold a very prominent place among the women composers of Kerala.

Rani Rugmini Bai Thampuratti (1809-1837)

Rugmini Bai was the elder sister of Maharaja Swathi Thirunal and was talented in music and poetry, like other royal composers. Among her several kritis, ‘Sreekantesa Pahi’ in Mukhari raga and Adi tala is a significant kriti addressed to Lord Sreekantesa of Travancore. She composed another kriti in Malayalam, “Sree Vasudeva,” in praise of Lord Krishna with 16 ‘Charanas.’ Each ‘Charanam’ starts with A, AA, E, EE to represent

the Malayalam alphabets, which is also a unique feature of this nature.

Another unique and beautiful composition is 'Sarasija Nayane,' named 'Saptaswara Sankeertanam,' composed in puranira, an ancient raga, in praise of the Goddess. There is a pallavi and seven charanas in this composition, and each sahithya starts with the swaras of sapta swaras. Even though it doesn't carry the whole characteristics of a kriti, each line begins with the symbols of the Saptaswaram, Sa, Ri, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, and Ni. Hence, it's known as 'Sapthaswara Sankeertanam'.

By the efforts of prominent musician, the late Cherthala Gopalan Nair, this composition is gaining attention from musicians and researchers nowadays. He gave notation for this composition with 'Mayamalava Gaula' as the parent ragam and composed it as a Ragamalika format. The lyrics are in the format of 'Ashtakan,' in which the Pallavi is followed by seven charanas. He composed the pallavi in 'Saveri' and concluded with 'Mayamalava Gaula.' All these 7 ragas are Saveri, Gaula, Jaganmohini, Bouli, Vasanta, Malahari, Vasanta Bhairavi, and Mayamalavagaula. All the concluding lines in each charana end with "Mathangi Jaya Bhagavathi Jaya Jaya." Cherthala Gopalan Nair will be remembered forever for his great service as a composer and for bringing forth many compositions of Irayimman Thampi, Swathi Thirunal, K.C. Kesava Pillai, and so on.

Kuttikunju Thankachy (1820-1908)

Kuttikunju Thankachi can be considered the most prominent woman composer of Kerala. She was born in Vilavankod Taluk of the Travancore state, which is in Kanyakumari district at present. A multi-talented composer, she handled 'Kritis' to 'Attakatha' with the same ease and quality. She was the daughter of Irayimman Thampi and wrote a number of musical forms like kirtanas, kshetra kritis, Tiruvattirappattu, Kurattippattu, Thullal, kilippattu, etc. The most respected contribution of hers is the three 'Attakathas' named "Sreemathi Swayamvaram," "Mitrashamoksham," and "Parvathy Swayamvaram," which is a very rare skill for a woman composer to attempt. She is considered the woman pioneer in writing Attakadhas. It is worthy to mention her work 'Kurathipaattu,' which is a folk art. "Kiratham" stands as the first of its kind in Malayalam.

Another unique work is 'Vaathilthurapattu.' They are almost similar to 'padam.' But here the theme has been a bit erotic in the format of conversational folk songs.

Best-known Malayalam Keerthanas by Kuttykunju Thankachi:

1. **Paahimohanakrithe** - Raga: Khamas, Tala: Rupaka, Deity: Neyyattinkara Srikrishnan
2. **Samajahara** - Raga: Kalyani, Tala: Adi, Deity: Thiruvattar Adikesavan
3. **Anandaroopahare** - Raga: Pantuvarali, Tala: Misra Chapu, Deity: Malayinkeezh Srikrishna
4. **Karthyayani** - Raga: Kamboji, Tala: Adi, Deity: Palkulangara Devi
5. **Suryakoti Samaprabha** - Raga: Natta, Tala: Chapu, Deity: Mookambika Kollur
6. **Sri Pavanapuresha** - Raga: Surutti, Tala: Adi, Deity: Guruvayoor Srikrishnan
7. **Karunyam Ennod** - Raga: Sourashtram, Tala: Chapu, Deity: Srikrishnan Malayinkeezh

These kritis are attributed to the particular deities of selected temples. It is interesting to note that the stala mudra in the Sanskrit version can be seen in all these compositions. For example: "Pahimohanakrite" - Khamas - Roopaka - is addressed to Lord Krishna of Neyyattinkara temple near Thiruvananthapuram. In the charana, the stala mudra is given as 'Ghruta Nadee Teera Nilayanam,' which is the Sanskrit version of the place and means one who is presiding at Neyyattinkara in Thiruvananthapuram.

There are many other woman composers such as Kalyanikkutty Ammachi (1839-1909) and Rani Lakshmi Bai (1848-1901) who have contributed to the music of Kerala. Rani Lakshmi Bai composed Kritis and songs for Kaikottikkali. "Ganasaram," a section of her work namely 'Sthavamalika,' consists of more than 30 kritis composed by her. The contribution of these female poets and composers to Malayalam, Sanskrit, and Manipravalam languages and on different themes are monumental. They are considered the woman pioneers to compose songs and the pathfinders for the next generations of female composers. These women composers can also be regarded as revolutionary examples in the poetic and cultural scenario of Travancore.



Kuttikunju Thankachy



Kozhikode's Nightlife Echoes with Music

Kozhikode, the city renowned for its rich musical heritage, has long been a vibrant hub for music enthusiasts. From Hindustani classical to theatrical songs, the city's music clubs, which emerged in the early twentieth century, played a pivotal role in cultivating a diverse musical culture.



Nadeem Noushad
Music Critic

Kozhikode boasts a storied tradition of music festivities, with a community of enthusiasts who cherish a wide array of musical genres. The city's music clubs, which began to flourish at the dawn of the twentieth century, are a testament to this passion. These clubs thrived on the empty upper floors of commercial buildings in the evenings, while shops operated below. The main centers of these clubs were in southern areas like Kuttichira, Parappil, Kundungal, Thekkumthala, Idiyanga, and Haluwa Bazaar, driving the cultural dynamism of the city.

Trade in Kozhikode was concentrated in areas like SM Street, Silk Street, and Big Bazaar, where commercial activities wound down by two o'clock in the afternoon. This allowed music aficionados ample time to gather and indulge in their passion, making Kozhikode's nightlife a musical haven long after other cities had gone to sleep.

By the 1920s, several notable music clubs had emerged, including the Brothers Music Club, founded by Constable Kunju Mohammad and dramatist KT Mohammad, Salt Muhammed Koya's Everest Music Club, Postman Syed Bhai's Evening Club, Chembukandi Hassan Bhai's Hindustan Club, and Archie Hutton's Orchestra. The Brothers Music Club and Hutton's Orchestra engaged in friendly competitions at the YMCA, captivating audiences who eagerly debated which club performed better. Annual concerts at the town hall further enriched the city's musical landscape.

These clubs welcomed not only local talents but also singers from North India, offering a valuable

Nurturing Musical Talents:

The music clubs of Kozhikode played a crucial role in shaping the careers of renowned musicians like M S Baburaj and Kozhikode Abdul Khader, offering a platform for local talents to learn and perform alongside visiting artists from cities like Mangalore, Mumbai, and Kolkata.



Kozhikode Abdul Khader & Family

Musical Melting Pot of Kozhikode:

Kozhikode's music clubs, flourishing from the early twentieth century, transformed the city's commercial spaces into vibrant night-time venues, fostering a rich cultural landscape that welcomed both local and North Indian singers, and erased social boundaries among its diverse audience.

learning experience for Kozhikode's musicians. The audiences, sitting on grass mats, included people from all walks of life, from laborers and goldsmiths to writers and businessmen, dissolving social boundaries in the shared joy of music.

The night mehfil of Kozhikode, often referred to as the 'darbar' of the common people, were characterized by the harmonious blend of the harmonium, the rhythm of the tabla, and the aroma of beedi smoke. Enthusiasts often adorned exceptional singers with gilt necklaces, and the clubs were instrumental in nurturing the talents of many celebrated singers, such as M S Baburaj, Kozhikode Abdul Khader, Nallalam Beeran, and SM Koya. The clubs featured essential instruments like the tabla and harmonium, along with the sitar, sarangi, and dilruba brought by visiting musicians. Renowned performers included tablists Abu Ustad, Bichamu, Lawrence, and Usman, violinist Nohan, and harmonium maestros Vincent's Master and SM Koya.

Singers from Mangalore, Mumbai, and Kolkata

were often hosted by wealthy merchants passionate about music, leading many to settle in Kozhikode due to the city's welcoming atmosphere. This hospitality fostered the Mehfil culture, attracting numerous North Indian singers to the city, with notable patrons like Shyamji Sunderlal hosting private concerts illuminated by petrol lamps and accompanied by Sulaimani and Kochikoya dessert.

During these concerts, male duets were sometimes performed by female singers, with C A Aboobacker making his debut as a female voice in such settings. The enthusiastic audience's rhythmic claps and the singer's contentment were iconic sights of the era. Eminent singers like Ustad Sadaqatullah, Bangalore Abdul Razak, Gul Mohammad, and Jan Mohammad performed ghazals, qawwalis, and thumris, making the clubs vibrant with music throughout the night and paving the way for the emergence of many Malayalee singers.

However, the music clubs began to decline in the 1980s with the rise of Gulf migration and the advent of tape recordings, which made music consumption a more solitary experience. Over time, these clubs transitioned into carrom clubs and tuition centers. Today, music has become a commercial product, and the intimate connection between singers and their audience has faded. Unlike the past, where singers mingled with their listeners, today's performers are often distant figures on decorated stages, leaving music lovers nostalgic for the days when they could enjoy a cup of tea and share the rhythm with the artists.



M.S. Baburaj



K.T. Mohammad

Winds of Change in Kathakali Music



Deepa Palanad and Meera Rammohan

From Sopanam to Carnatic and even Hindustani classical, Kathakali music keeps adopting elements, even from film songs, to appeal to changing audiences.



**Sreevalsan
Thiyyadi**

Freelance Journalist,
Translator, Writer

Six-and-a-half decades ago, two boys joined Kalamandalam to learn Kathakali music. Both came from families that had no association with any classical dance-theatre. One was from hilly Malabar, but with ancestors from South Canara. Sankaran Embranthiri, as the name suggests, was a Karnataka Brahmin. The other budding vocalist was M. Hyderali, a Muslim. Both got enrolled at the institution near Shoranur around 1958. A third student in the batch was Madambi Subrahmanian Namboothiri, a native of Sreekrishnapuram in erstwhile Valluvanad, his moorings matched well with the ethos of Kathakali. A fourth teenager was Puliylil Narayanan. Today, Madambi, 81, alone is alive.

This bunch was a grand mix of talents. The first two became popular with

their innovative temperament, while Subrahmanian Namboothiri stuck to orthodoxy in Kathakali vocals. Narayanan, who gained fame as Tirur Nambissan (his native place and caste), positioned somewhere in between — collaborating with radical story-plays in Kathakali even while adhering to his inheritance from the Cheruthuruthy campus. Embranthiri and Hyderali branched out to serve the beauty of Carnatic and Hindustani modulations respectively, while Madambi's charm lies in his faithfulness to the classroom lessons. So, who were their gurus at Kalamandalam? Chiefly, Neelakantan Nambisan. Plus, the lesser-known Kavungal Madhava Panikkar and Lakkidi Sivaraman Nair. If Nambisan (1920-85) earned a grander place in Kathakali vocals, it was not just because of his singing talent or leading capacity.

The musician got an opportunity to learn under a titan who lived just across the river flowing alongside Kalamandalam. That was Venkitakrishna Bhagavatar of Mundaya



village by the Bharatapuzha. Nambisan had by then finished his formal studies under Kavasseri Swamikutty. He was a young teacher at Kalamandalam with Pulapatta Kuttan heading its Kathakali music section. In the late 1930s, Nambisan got official permission to train under Bhagavatar (1881-1957), whose Tamil family was originally from the Cauvery basin. They had migrated from Thanjavur region as exponents of the devotional Sampradaya Bhajana. Obviously, Bhagavatar's vocals carried plenty of elements from Carnatic. Nambisan absorbed them all and passed the features on to an army of his disciples. Kathakali music got an overall elevation.

Sopanam, really?

So, what was the general nature of the system till, say, the first half of the 20th century? The vocalists fundamentally followed a more local Sopana Sangeetam system. Unlike gamaka-frilled Carnatic, this Kerala form went for plain notes with a smaller pool of ragas. Sopanam flourished in temples, where the standing vocalist would render invocatory songs when the sanctorum is closed for the pujas. The vocals, which are accompanied by the handy edakka drum, employs the gong to lay out the rhythm. This metal disc is what the principal Kathakali musician, too, holds while

A third student in the batch was Madambi Subrahmanian Namboothiri. A native of Sreekrishnapuram in erstwhile Valluvanad, his moorings matched well with the ethos of Kathakali. A fourth teenager was Puliyl Narayanan. Today, Madambi, 81, alone is alive



Chertala Kuttappa Kurup

anchoring the stage proceedings, standing the whole night. There will be an assistant, called shankidi, tapping on a pair of ilathalam cymbals. Both will be bare-chested, wearing just a pair of mundu round the waist.

Two centuries ago, artistic contributions by Maharaja Swathi Thirunal (1813-46) introduced Carnatic across his Travancore and beyond. Yet Kathakali music in that kingdom continued to be relatively uninfluenced by the classical idiom that drew vitality from a trinity led by Tyagaraja across the Western Ghats. However, unlike with Bhagavatar, no audio records are available of his southern counterpart: Iravankara Neelakantan Unnithan. A native of Mavelikara locality, Unnithan was only 39 when he became the court musician at the king's palace in Thiruvananthapuram in 1924. His vocals earned wide praise till his death in 1957 — the same year Venkitakrishnan breathed his last. Interestingly, Unnithan's chief guru, too, was a Tamil Brahmin: Ambakkad Parameswara Iyer, who lived in Haripad. A couple of other noted Kathakali musicians around central Travancore, too, were of Tamil descent: Aymanam Appu Iyer and Kayamkulam Surya Pattar.

Yet none of them adopted Carnatic style. Be it singing for popular stories such as

Nalacharitham and Kuchelavritam or the finely-choreographed Kalyanasougandhikam or Kalakeyavadham in central Kerala, Sopana Sangeetam used to define the sound of Kathakali verses even up north of Kannur. Be it Kadathanattu Govindan Nambisan or Payyannur Kunjambu Poduval of Malabar, or Thakazhi Kuttan Pillai or Mudakkal Gopinathan Nair of Travancore, the defining style was Sopanam. That trend changed, first with Bhagavatar and, soon, through his pupil Nambisan. They infused Carnatic elements, spreading colourful Kathakali music across the state ahead of the second half of the 20th century. Into the 1950s, this kind of rendition began making inroads into the south and north of Kerala. By then microphones came in to amplify human voice, thereby giving scope to nuances from even a feeble throat.

Popular influences

Popular influences Just as Neelakantan Nambisan's disciples began to bloom in the mid-1960s, Kerala saw the rise of a film musician who went on to gain an iconic status. K.J. Yesudas emerged as a household name for Malayalis, bringing in fresh concepts about voice modulation. Some of the emerging promises in Kathakali music, too, got enchanted by his crooning. Topping them were Kalamandalam Hyderali (1946-2006) and Venmani Haridas (1946-2005). Embranthiri, too, was particular about clean voice and correct diction, though his idols



*Cherthala
Thankappa Panikkar*

This century has seen Kathakali music increasingly borrowing melodies from not just from Carnatic, but north Indian khayal as well. Adoption of ragas unfamiliar to Kathakali implies not just a novel audio experience; they cater to the chanting visual tastes too.

were Carnatic stalwarts such as Madurai Mani Iyer and M. Balamuralikrishna.

Embranthiri (1944-2007) was among the pioneers of Kathakali music collaborating with Carnatic on public platforms. His jugalbandis with maestro Neyyattinkara Vasudevan and Hindustani exponent Ramesh Narayan in the 1990s won massive appreciation. Even so, the credit of presenting Kathakali music as a concert (devoid of the dancing characters) perhaps goes to Nambisan. Such experiments have a history starting from the 1960s, when the two vocalists would sit cross-legged with percussive accompaniment by the chenda and maddalam artistes positioned sideways on chairs. When it came to Embranthiri, he sometimes opted for the violin and mridangam as accompaniments. Both types of Kathakali Pada kacheris continue today.

Prominent among the present crop of musicians are middle-agers led by Kottakkal Madhu. The generation he represents has quite a few A-graders such as Babu Namboodiri, Manayathattu Hareesh, Kalanilayam Rajeevan, Kalamandalam Vinod, and Nedumbally Rammohan. Even while being progressive, these practitioners have a love for tradition. This reflects in their admiration for Madambi and the even more illustrious Kalamandalam Gangadharan, known for his heavy voice as well as admirable imagination. Gangadharan





(1936-2015) was Nambisan's first disciple from Travancore, having reached Kalamandalam all the way from near Kottarakara and assimilating the essence of central Kerala's Kalluvazhi style. A generation later came Kalanilayam Unnikrishnan of Thakazhi, scripting a similar track-record at Irinjalakuda near Thrissur. Next was Pathiyoor Sankarakutty from near Kayamkulam; he upgraded skills at Kalamandalam under Gangadharan. Cherthala Kuttappa Kurup (1914-84) of the south was a maverick genius, while his disciple Thankappa Panikkar (1927-2023) learned also from Nambisan. Their contemporaries Thanneermukkam Viswambharan and Tiruvalla Gopikuttan of Travancore were noted for their sonority. Present-day Kathakali has sexagenarian Kottakkal Narayanan keeping aloft the ideals of the old school. His vocals often sound closest to that of his guru Nambisan, while the farthest from the mainstream perhaps flows from all-rounder Sadanam K Harikumar, also a Carnatic vocalist-composer who keenly follows several genres of music the world over. Harikumar's disciples Sadanam Shyamalan and Kollengode Sivadas display key traits of their school. The most revolutionary Kathakali musician has been Kottakal P.D. Namboodiri, with his unorthodox ideas and their extempore application. Among the younger prospects

Embranthiri and Hyderali branched out to serve the beauty of Carnatic and Hindustani modulations respectively, while Madambi's charm lies in his faithfulness to the classroom lessons



Iravankara Neelakantan Ummithan

are Jyothish Babu, Jishnu Namboodiripad, Kalamandalam Viswas, Krishna Kumar, Kalamandalam Yashwant, Sai Kumar, and Abhijith Varma.

A seminal Kathakali musician who made a meteoric appearance was Unnikrishna Kurup. As the prime disciple of Nambisan, bohemian Kurup (1931-88) carried tasteful influences of his family's tryst with the ritual art of Kalampattu. Kurup has flag-bearers in Palanad Divakaran and, for a brief period, Maruthorvattam Appu. Divakaran's daughter Deepa Palanad is currently a strong presence among female vocalists in Kathakali. She finds able support from Meera Rammohan (also a Carnatic vocalist), Adrija Varma, and Hridya Mundanat et al. Deepa and Meera also cooperate in fusion music, in contrast to pioneering female vocalists starting from Sadanam Sisters (Padmini-Nalini) to Kumari Varma, who anchored path-breaking shows of a ladies' troupe in Tripunithura near Kochi since the 1970s. Today, freelance vocalists from other fields widely deliver Kathakali songs such as Ajita hare (Shri raga) and Entiha manmanase (Hindolam).

This century has seen Kathakali music increasingly borrowing melodies from not just from Carnatic, but north Indian khayal as well. Adoption of ragas unfamiliar to Kathakali implies not just a novel audio experience; they cater to the chanting visual tastes too. For, background music decides the entire mood of a scene



K. J. Chakrapani and P. Mohan Kumar

Music that Soars above Traditional Borders

K. J. Chakrapani and P. Mohan Kumar are two remarkable young musicians from Kerala who have seamlessly blended traditional Carnatic and Hindustani music with popular forms, significantly enriching the state's musical landscape.



Ramesh Gopalakrishnan

Music Critic

Born in 1982 in Kummanam, Kottayam district, K. J. Chakrapani inherited his family's passion for Carnatic music despite unfavourable social conditions. After losing his father at six, Chakrapani managed to complete his school education and entered a government college at Nattakam, where he juggled manual labour and studies due to financial constraints, supplementing his income by singing bhajans. He trained under Kummanam Raghavan Bhagavatar and later Satyanesan Master, ultimately joining RLV College of Music and Fine Arts in Trippunithura to further his musical education.

Captivated by a radio recital of Carnatic musician Madurai G. S. Mani, Chakrapani pursued training under him, facilitated by his friendship with ghatam artist Chennai V. Suresh. G. S. Mani, a polyglot who

composed keerthanas in seven languages, agreed to mentor Chakrapani as a vidyadaan, or gift of knowledge, without monetary compensation. Chakrapani often consulted and travelled to Chennai for lessons, sometimes funded by Mani. Inspired by his guru's integration of Carnatic music with cinema, Chakrapani created "Carnatic Music and Cinema," highlighting how composers like Dakshinamoorthy and Raveendran incorporated Carnatic ragas into Malayalam film music, bridging the gap between traditional and film music audiences.

During the course of a recital, if a raga named "Chakravakam" makes its appearance, Chakrapani will sing Muthuswamy Dikshitar's Carnatic composition "Gajaananyutam Ganeshwaram . . ." and then flow seamlessly into a Malayalam film song "Aayiram kaatham akaleyaanenkilum . . ." written by Khan Sahib and set to the same raga by the renowned music composer M. K. Arjunan for the film Harshabaashpam. Thus, two languages and two religious symbols are brought together effortlessly through the vehicle of music. If by now his listeners are overwhelmed by the richness of the fare, they are treated to more.

Without any waste of time, Chakrapani glides into another popular-but-not-frequently-heard song “Kanninum kannaadikkum kanaathidathoru . . .” created by the immortal duo – Vayalar Rama Varma and Devarajan – for the film Achanum Baaayum.

Next, Chakrapani goes into “Mayamalavagowla,” the raga placed next to “Chakravakam” in the Melakarta table, by singing the swaras of the pallavi of Swati Thirunal’s keerthana “Deva deva kalayami . . .”. Then, he moves to the next in the Melakarta table – “Vakulaabharanam” raga – and after singing its ascending and descending notes, Chakrapani shifts to the swaras of an Arabian style of music, by the end of which this Carnatic musician appears to be singing the muezzin’s prayer from a mosque! Through such a rendition, this extraordinary singer reveals to us that the muezzin’s prayers sung in the Arabian lands even today are actually based on “Vakulaabharanam” raga! Thereafter, he sings one of the Telugu compositions of his own guru Madurai G. S. Mani, “Nee padadwayamu nirathamukhabhaagyam . . .”. In this manner, Chakrapani takes us through three ragas placed next to one another in the Melakarta table, and brings his recital to a close. This young genius is much in demand in India and abroad. He has many fans in the Gulf countries and in Europe. And through his performances, Chakrapani accomplishes the noble and revolutionary task of harmonizing different cultures, which he feels are nothing but products created by humans by dividing themselves along religious, political and linguistic lines.

P. Mohan Kumar is a young disciple of Ramesh Narayan, the well-known exponent of Hindustani music in Kerala and follower of the Mevati gharana represented by Pandit Jasraj. He has made his anangettam or debut performance in both Carnatic and Hindustani music, but preferred to pursue the intricacies of the latter. Having performed innumerable Hindustani concerts and jugalbandis, He was born in 1972 in Maloor, Kannur district. His father, despite being a Toxicologist, used to sing bhajans. His early exposure to local harvest and Theyyam songs shaping his transition from regional musical traditions to the intricate realms of Hindustani music. His musical journey flourished as he was first recognized for his talent in Maloor Upper Primary School, leading to studies under Ramesh Narayan in Thiruvananthapuram,



where he overcame financial challenges, excelled academically, and mastered both Carnatic and Hindustani music, culminating in his arangettam and preparation for the Sangeet Visharad exam.

Although Mohan Kumar had both good and bad experiences during his student days, here are a couple of good ones. In 1996, Pandit Jasraj came to do a concert at the Swati Sangeetholsavam at Kuthirai Malika in Thiruvananthapuram. Mohan Kumar participated in the padapooja function conducted to honour the great master, and later sang in front of Pandit Jasraj at the inaugural function of the Kerala branch of the Mevati Sangeet Pracharan Sangh. Both the functions were held at his guru’s house. The blessings he received from Pandit Jasraj on that occasion reverberates in his heart to this day. Another happy memory is that of singing along with his guru Ramesh Narayan at the 30-hour Sangeetaarchana (musical worship) in Thiruvananthapuram. Mohan Kumar remarks that the experience was so exhilarating that he enjoyed other worldly bliss for nearly a full week thereafter.

Despite his struggles, Mohan Kumar’s determination led him to a successful decade in the Gulf, where he trained many students and conducted numerous concerts. Now, as the Global President of the Indian Musicians’ Forum and a seasoned performer and composer, he has returned to Kerala, finding fulfillment in promoting Hindustani music in his homeland.



K. J. Chakrapani

Theatre Songs that Shaped Modern Malayali



Drama songs ignited the Malayalam music renaissance, with icons like P. Bhaskaran, O.N.V. Kurup, and Devarajan transforming the theatrical landscape. Their work bridged folk traditions with revolutionary themes, setting the stage for Kerala's rich musical heritage and influencing cinema profoundly.



Karivelloor Murali
Secretary,
Kerala Sangeetha
Nataka Academy

There are numerous luminaries who have been at the forefront of creating a renaissance in Malayalam music. This illustrious group comprises poets, lyricists, music directors, and singers, forming a vast array of talent. Among the foremost and highly regarded lyricists is P. Bhaskaran Master. When his songs were published in a collection titled "Naazhiyurippal" in 1992, the introduction contained a particularly notable observation. "During that era, the Malayalam theatre scene largely mirrored Tamil dramas, resplendent with keertanas, the rhythmic chime of the harmonium, and intricate sapta swara exercises. These were often plays devoid of real-life touchstones. Traditional art forms like Kathakali songs were not integral to the music of the masses. Folk songs primarily remained the cultural treasure

of a marginalized section, resonating through the paddy fields and coconut groves. In essence, Malayalis lacked simple melodies to sing or spirited anthems for nationalists and revolutionaries to chant with vigor. It was against this backdrop that I was compelled to pen songs, addressing a historical need of the era."

Before the 1940s, apart from the Carnatic music's Keerthanas and elaborate Ragas, there were primarily folk songs, anonymous compositions, and rustic tunes. The transformation began in the 1920s and 1930s as the national movement and the struggle for independence gained momentum. Across India, a society fragmented into diverse religious, caste, and linguistic communities was being inspired towards a consciousness of national independence through luminous tales of struggle and songs in various languages.

Songs like Iqbal's "Sare Jahān se Achchā, Hindustān Hamārā," Bharatiyar's "Pārkullē Nalla Nādu, Engal Bhārata Nādu," Vallathol's "Pōrā Pōrā Nāḷil Nāḷil Dūradūramuyarattē," Bodheswaran's "Jaya Jaya Kōmala Kērala Dharani," Amsi Narayana Pillai's "Varika Varika Sahajarē, Sahana Samara Samayamāy," and Vidwan P. Kelu Nair's "Smarippin Bhāratīyarē, Namippin

Mātrbhūmiye" began to emerge, albeit sparsely, with new rhythms, melodies, and languages. It is on this path that, in the early 1940s, Bhaskaran Master's Unification of Kerala song, "Padam Padam Uracchu Nām Pādippadippōvuka, Pāril Aikya Kēralattin Kāhālam Mulakkuvān," was born. Amidst the mesmerizing renditions of semi-classical songs in Tamil-Malayalam musical dramas, the era was eagerly awaiting the birth of a popular music genre that embodied simplicity in both lyrics and melody, reflecting the progressive aspirations of the people.

In 1952, following in the footsteps of IPTA, the Kerala People's Arts Club (KPAC) was formed. The initial theatrical venture of KPAC, born under the leadership of K. Janardhanakurup, Rajagopalan Nair, and Sreenarayanapillai at the CPI conference in Trivandrum, was "Ente Makananu Sari" ("My Son is Right"). The songs for this play were penned by Punalur Balan. These songs, crafted in the tune of folk music, did not have a designated music director.

The next play that made history was "Ningal Enne Communistakki" ("You Made Me a Communist"). In reality, it features a song that marks the beginning of all subsequent songs we hear. This was not originally written for the play. It was a poem titled "Irulil Ninnoru Gaanam" ("A Song from the Darkness") penned in 1948 by O.N.V. Kurup, who was a student at S.N. College, Kollam. It was only four years later that this poem was printed in the Communist Party's newspaper, edited by Vaikom Chandrasekharan Nair. Devarajan composed music for it, leading to the creation of the famous song "Ponnarival Ambiliyil Kanneriyunnoole." This song was later incorporated into the play "Ningal Enne Communistakki." However, this song holds a historical mission. "Ponnarival" was the pioneering model for all subsequent drama and film songs we have heard.

O.N.V. Kurup's lyrics, set to music by Devarajan and performed by K.S. George, KPAC Sulochana, and their troupe, comprised 26 songs in 'Ningal Enne Communistakki.' Starting with the introductory song 'Deepangal Mangi Koorirul Thingi,' many of these songs remain deeply imprinted in the hearts of the people. Songs like 'Neelakkuruvi Neelakkuruvi Neeyoru Kaaryam Chollumo,' 'Moolippaattumaai Thambraan Varumbam Choolathangane Nilledi Penne,' 'Innale Naattoru Njaarugalellaam Punnelkathirinte Polkudam Choodi,' 'Ponnarivaal Ambiliyil,' and 'Vellarankunnile Ponnmulam Kaattile' continue to resonate with the public even after many years.

The general characteristics of these songs lie in their raw essence of life and connections, both in lyrics and music. In the early 1950s, the theatrical



O.N.V.



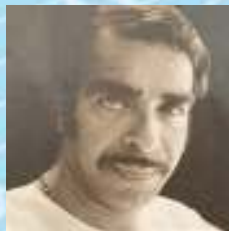
G. Devarajan



P. Bhaskaran



Vayalar Ramavarma



L.P.R. Varma



M.S. Baburaj

song genre thrived, infusing local Malayalam, rustic expressions, and the familiar tunes of folk songs into the ears of people who had been accustomed to hearing the complex Sanskrit words and elaborate Carnatic Ragas in the mythological musical dramas filled with kings, queens, gods, and goddesses. The path paved by the songs in KPAC's "Ningal Enne Communistakki" continued to be travelled by our later film songs.

The song "Ponnarival Ambiliyil," which initiated this, is simultaneously a love song and a revolutionary anthem. It is a flowering tree where love and revolution blossom on each branch, as epitomized in the lines, "Paadukayaanen Karal, Poraadumen Karangal" ("My heart sings, my hands fight"). Even in love, there is a childlike innocence and adolescent mischief not only in the lyrics but also in the music.

In the radiant spring of popular art in the 1950s, cinema and theater both witnessed the creation of exceptional songs. The inspiration for this came not from elsewhere but from KPAC and "Ningal Enne Communistakki." Plays like "Mudiyanyaya Puthran," "Sarvekkallu," "Puthiyaakasham Puthiya Bhoomi," "Ashwamedham," and "Sharashayya" from KPAC were showers of the flowering tree of songs. The Kalidasa Kalakendram, established in Kollam in 1962, can be seen as both a break from and a continuation of KPAC. Through plays like "Doctor" and "Janani Janmabhoomi," O.N.V. Kurup and Devarajan, the founding fathers of our theatrical song genre, initiated the deluge of Kalidasa songs.

Other theater groups like Kerala Theatres in Kottayam, known for plays like "Kathiru Kaanaakkili" and "Visharikku Kaatu Venda," and Pratibha Arts Club in Ernakulam, with plays like "Mooladhanam" and "Kaakkapponnu," also provided Malayalam audiences with excellent songs through their dramas. Alongside this, Cherukad's play "Nammal Onnu" also deserves mention. Premiered as early as 1948, the lyrics were crafted by Ponkunnam Damodaran and Vayalar. The music was composed by P.K. Sivadhas and Baburaj. Songs that captivated the hearts of millions, such as "Iru Nazhi Manninnai Urukunna Karshakan," "Pachappanantathe," and "Punnaarappoomuththe," remain unforgettable. In a TV interview, K. Raghavan Master mentioned that the primary influence on the songs he composed for the 1954 Ramu Kariat-P. Bhaskaran film "Neelakkuyil" was indeed the Malayalam theatrical song genre.

Luminaries like O.N.V. Kurup, Devarajan, Vayalar, L.P.R. Varma, P. Bhaskaran, Baburaj, and Ponkunnam Damodaran have all significantly bolstered this popular musical tradition in both theatre and cinema.

The Love that Refuses to Let Go



On the birth centenary of P. Bhaskaran, I explore the profound and enduring impact of the lyricist's verses, showing how they continue to resonate and cling to our hearts like a persistent lover.

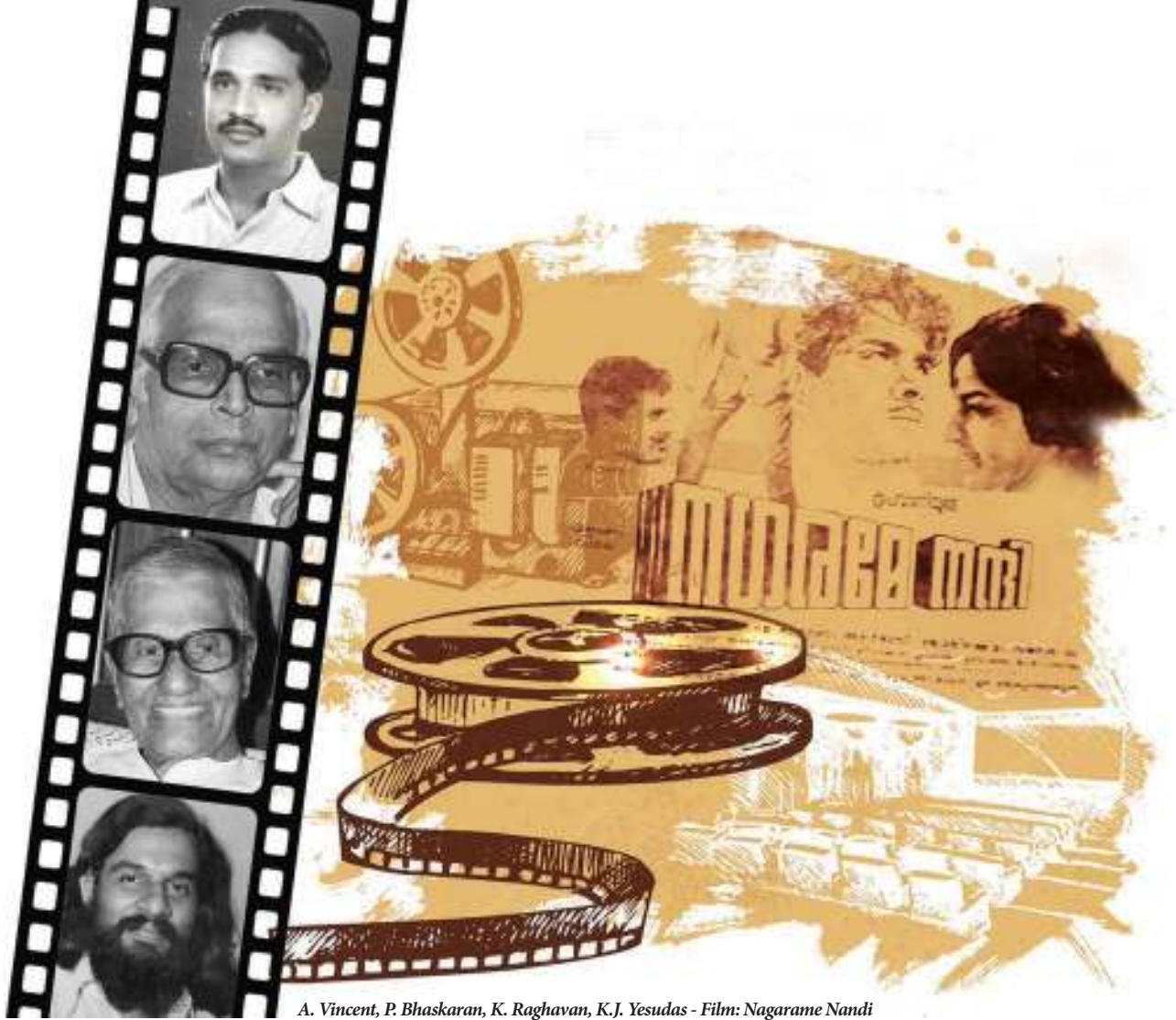


Ravi Menon
Music Critic

From the balcony of the apartment where I live, I can see the city. The narrow greens amidst the densely standing concrete buildings, vehicles racing with heads and tails, and people walking hurriedly... Along with those familiar city scenes, a line from a song flows into my mind: “Play and laughter above, mud and twist below, outside a beauty who spreads smiles, the girlfriend who wouldn’t leave...” (“Kaliyum chiriyum mele, chaliyum chuzhiyum thazhe, purame punchiri choriyum sundari piriya vidatha kamuki...”)

These are lines from the song “Nagaram Nagaram Mahasagaram” written by P. Bhaskaran for the 1967 film “Nagaram Nandi,” directed by A. Vincent. The music was composed by K. Raghavan; the singer: Yesudas.

Wherever I end up in any city, that song echoes in my ears. How simply does Bhaskaran Master sketch the artificiality of the city through just two lines. Perhaps there’s some magic that makes even that false face appear delightful, a magic held by all cities. I arrive in each city determined to leave soon. Eventually, unknowingly, we become part of that busy, noisy life. Like the girlfriend who won’t leave, the city embraces us, and we, without even trying to wriggle out, bask in



A. Vincent, P. Bhaskaran, K. Raghavan, K.J. Yesudas - Film: *Nagarame Nandi*

that embrace, forgetting ourselves.

That was Bhaskaran Master too, lost in thought. He, who had to uproot his life from the countryside to the city unexpectedly. Sitting in some hotel room in Madras, while writing the song for “Nagarame Nandi,” it must have been his own life and his hopes for the future that filled his mind; back then, he lived in rented rooms, dreaming only of a house of his own. The same song’s verse plaintively asks, “How shall I, in this swiftly flowing city, disguise my small hut? What if my coral island shatters in the ocean waves?” Isn’t that the same rustic who, unknowingly transformed from a native of a small hamlet called Chundel in Wayanad to a man of Kozhikode, then Kochi, and now Trivandrum? Even at this age, he harbors a longing to return to the purity of the village, if it still exists. Shouldn’t the city, like the girlfriend who wouldn’t let him go, let him

“When combined with the rhythmic beauty of the tabla, it becomes a distinctive Swamigeetham. ‘Even today, when I hear that song, I reflect on how beautifully Master’s lyrics and Swami’s music blend together,’ Jayachandran says.

go? To me, this city too is like the girlfriend who won’t let go.

Even as he penned down the diverse narrative moments in cinema, the poet Bhaskaran infused his own soul into many songs. The lines, “Today or tomorrow the lamp will extinguish, and then only pitch darkness,” come to mind. How simple, yet profound and thought-provoking, is the life truth hidden in those words?

The moments when those lines and the song that contained them first flowed into my ears are still vivid in my memory. On a stormy Wayanad night, as wind and rain conspired to snatch away the electricity, I sat around a kerosene lamp with my younger brother and sister, loudly reciting that evening’s lessons to engrave them in our hearts. Unexpectedly, from the radio in the room, the song began to play in Jayachandran’s expressive voice: “Life is a poetry book, isn’t life a book of

poems, where are the pages to write the calculations...”

In front of us flickered the oil lamp, and perhaps because the matter concerned the light of life, those lines imprinted themselves in the mind of the schoolchild then. We three were waiting for the oil to run out and the lamp to extinguish. It was then that father called from inside: “Come up, all three of you. Enough studying.” What joy could match sitting in the dark, enjoying the songs on the radio in those days?

It was years later that I truly understood and absorbed the depth of Bhaskaran Master’s lyrics. Has anyone else ever portrayed death, waiting at the doorstep with a ‘manchal’, in such a simple and “romantic” way in a song? Other lines from the same song also touched the heart. How relevant they are in these days filled with anxieties about the future.

“Madhurakavyamithu marakkunnu,
ithil Mandanmar kanakkukal kurikkunnu



V. Dakshinamoorthy

Koottunnu pinne kizhikkunnu, oduvil
Koottalum kizhikkalum pizhaykkunnu ...”
Isn’t it true? All our calculations keep going wrong in our lives. “We must savor each line, the joyful message sweet as nectar, today or tomorrow the lamp will extinguish, then only pitch darkness...” This advice gains a special significance in modern times. In Bhaskaran Master’s words, I see my own reflection.

I recall that the pallavi of the song composed by Dakshinamoorthy in the film “Aswathy” (1974), directed by Jessy, sparked some controversy when it was released. A recent issue of “Cinema Masika” featured an interview with Bhaskaran Master, where one question raised was: “Isn’t there a flaw in asking where are the pages to write calculations in a book of poetry?”

“The flaw is indeed the point. No one would really write calculations in a book meant for poetry...” — this was Master’s witty response, as I remember it.

Years later, when I first met Bhaskaran Master



P. Jayachandran, K.J. Yesudas and P. Bhaskaran



P. Bhaskaran, G. Devarajan and Noushad Ali

at the Alakapuri cottage in Kozhikode, that question and his answer once again came up in our conversation. I still remember him saying with a smile: “That song is me. It’s my view of life. The calculations of life are not meant for poets who roam in imaginative worlds. There are no transactions or profit and loss calculations in that dream world. Even when I ventured from the world of poetry into film production and other commercial fields, I never felt like it was a personal success. Ultimately, our domain is poetry and literature.” Those words shone with genuine insight.

I have always felt Dakshinamoorthy’s creation “Kavyapusthakam” was a unique piece of music. Although it carried the touch of Hindola, it also had a Hindustani hue and the aesthetic beauty of a ghazal. Jayachandran effectively utilized the possibilities of improvisation in his rendition, especially evident in the line “Anagha Granthamitharo Thannu.” When combined with the rhythmic



K.P. Udayabhanu

beauty of the tabla, it becomes a distinctive Swamigeetham. “Even today, when I hear that song, I reflect on how beautifully Master’s lyrics and Swami’s music blend together,” Jayachandran says. “Then, the utter darkness,” he sings, stirring a subtle sorrow somewhere deep within.

A nostalgic evening spent at Udayabhanu’s house with singers Udayabhanu, Jayachandran, and their friend Manoharan, filled with songs and stories, remains in memory. Yielding to Udayabhanu’s request, one of the songs Jayettan sang that day was “Kavyapusthakam.” “Master’s meaningful lyrics...” — Udayabhanu remarked as he listened with his eyes closed. “What a feeling in Jayan’s voice...”

In his final days, as I stood watching Udayabhanu lying alone and helpless in the bedroom of the same house, struggling against his ailments, weren’t those same lines unknowingly echoing in my mind?

Ghazal

Parayan Maranna Paribhavgal..



T.V. Subhash IAS

Malayalam ghazals beautifully intertwine heartfelt lyrics
with Kerala's rich musical heritage





Kadale, neelakadale
 Nin aatmaavilum neerunna chintakal undo?
 Neerunna chintakal undo?

Kadale, neelakadale...

When these verses grace our ears, we are transported to a realm of indescribable emotions. Ghazals, with their haunting melodies, evoke a spectrum of feelings: the tenderness of love, the ache of unrequited passion, an inexplicable loneliness, or a profound joy. Their essence is truly multidimensional, capturing the very essence of our deepest sentiments.

That's the beauty of ghazals!

These evocative lines from the film Dweep, composed by M. S. Baburaj and sung by Talat Mohmood, epitomise one of the finest ghazals Malayalam cinema has ever heard. Composed in Raga Yaman, with lyrics by Yousuf Ali Kecheri, this masterpiece highlights the profound emotional depth and lyrical richness that ghazals bring to Malayalam music.

The Historical Roots and Structural Beauty of Ghazals

Ghazals, deeply rooted in Persian literature, were popularised in Urdu during the Mughal era. Amir Khusrau's contributions to the ghazal are particularly noteworthy for their blend of Persian and Indian cultural elements, reflecting his own hybrid heritage. He is reputed to have introduced the Persian ghazal to the Indian subcontinent, adapting it to include Indian classical music nuances. This fusion resulted in a more melodious rendition of the ghazal, which was different from the purely literary Persian form.

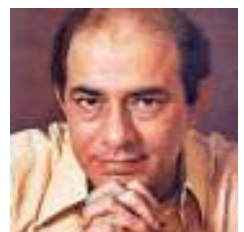
Ghazals typically consist of rhyming couplets, with each line maintaining a similar length and rhythm, creating a smooth and captivating flow. This structure, combined with a consistent rhyme scheme and refrains, defines their musicality. Themes often delve into love, longing, and introspection, offering



Abdul Khader



M.S. Baburaj



Talat Mahmood



Gayathri Ashokan



Manjari



Sithara

listeners a deep and immersive emotional experience.

Malayalam Filmy Ghazals: A Harmonious Fusion

In Malayalam music, ghazals have been adeptly adapted to reflect the region's language and culture. The lyrical quality of Malayalam enhances the appeal of ghazals, making them both accessible and profound. Traditional ragas and melodies are frequently employed, with instruments like the harmonium, tabla, and sitar blending seamlessly with Kerala's native instruments, enriching the musical tapestry.

Ghazals have significantly influenced Malayalam film music, adding emotional depth and lyrical richness to soundtracks. In films, ghazals often accentuate pivotal moments, enhancing the impact of scenes with their soulful melodies and thoughtful lyrics. Their inclusion has introduced musical variety to Malayalam cinema, blending classical ghazal elements with modern film music styles. Many Malayalam films feature memorable ghazals that have become iconic, adding

to the films' overall allure.

Several artistes have played key roles in popularising Filmy ghazals, each bringing their unique style. M. S. Baburaj, though not primarily a ghazal singer, significantly contributed to Malayalam music by incorporating elements of Hindustani classical music, including ghazals, into his compositions. His work introduced a fusion of classical Indian music to Malayalam cinema, influencing numerous musicians.

In the 1970s, Najmal Babu, son of Abdul Khader, emerged as a pivotal figure in popularising ghazal music in Malabar.

Umbayee is renowned for his soulful performances, blending traditional and contemporary elements, leaving a lasting impact on the genre. Kozhikode Abdul Khader, a pioneer in Malayalam light music, drama songs, and film songs, is celebrated for his lyrical and emotional compositions, rendering them timeless.



Hariharan

Pankaj Udas



Shahabaz Aman

Artistes like Hariharan, Shahabaz Aman, Gayathri Ashokan, Manjari, and Sithara have sung exquisite ghazals for films and albums.

M. S. Baburaj, though not primarily a ghazal singer, significantly contributed to Malayalam music by incorporating elements of Hindustani classical music, including ghazals, into his compositions.

The late Pankaj Udas featured in an album composed by Jithesh Sundaram, with lyrics written by Rafeeque Ahamed, titled "Athmasaila Nirakall." Hariharan's melodious "Parayan Maranna Paribhavangal" is a notable example. Umbayee composed poems by ONV and Yousuf Ali Kecheri. The Baburaj-P. Bhaskaran-Yesudas trio created mesmerising film songs with a ghazal

essence. "Thamasamenthe Varuvan" from the film Bhargavi Nilayam, composed in Raga Bhimplasi, and "Pranasakhi Njan Verum Pamaranam Pattukaran," based on Raga Bhairavi, are unforgettable compositions.

In the 1970s, Najmal Babu, son of Abdul Khader, emerged as a pivotal figure in popularising ghazal music in Malabar. Drawing inspiration from the soulful renditions of Mehdi Hassan and Ghulam Ali, and Jagjit Singh, he introduced these evocative ghazals to a broader audience across Kerala. Najmal Babu also skilfully transformed the film and light music compositions of his father, Abdul Khader, into captivating ghazals. His brother, Sathyajith, followed in his footsteps, taking the stage more frequently to perform these enchanting melodies, thereby further cementing their popularity.

Malayalam ghazals, with their mix of classical and local elements, continue to captivate audiences, reflecting the changing yet enduring nature of Kerala's musical heritage. As they embrace modern themes while keeping their classical roots, ghazals remain a key part of the region's diverse cultural legacy, leaving a lasting mark on both traditional and film music.



Najmal Babu



Rafeeque Ahamed



Jithesh Sundaram

From Melody to Modernity



K. Jayakumar, the prominent lyricist, examines the stark contrast between the rich, lyrically-driven Malayalam film songs of the pre-2000 era and the technologically-influenced, orchestration-dominant songs of the post-2000 period.



K. Jayakumar
Lyricist

Not that anything particular happened in 2000, but many changes occurred at the dawn of the new century, and so did films. What has happened to the songs in the films is consequential to what happened to cinema. Along with the easy access to versatile technologies, the themes and treatment of films underwent a paradigm shift. Issues and concerns that were once considered unsuitable and too daring made an easy entry into films. The younger filmgoers, free from the usual preconceived ideas and judgements, approached the new films with a fresh mind and an appetite for novelty and boldness. The distinction between award films and popular films slowly got erased. Generation

X, accustomed to fast actions and decisions, thanks to digital technology, demanded a fast pace of narration that broke with the conventional scripting style where everything is explained. The pace of storytelling changed. Themes changed. Conventional sentiments were interrogated, leading to what is loosely called 'Newgen' films. This is indeed a misnomer; it merely refers to contemporary cinema. There cannot be an 'Oldgen cinema'. Although these changes are felt throughout the film world, Malayalam cinema is a few steps ahead of other languages in its thematic audacity and narrative boldness.

Songs in Malayalam films have, in the past, played a key role in their box office success. The popularity of the songs lured the audience to watch the films. Good songs commanded a place of primacy in films until the early years of this century. Their importance and quality however began to decline since the late 80s, though memorable songs continued to appear. Undoubtedly, the golden era of

Malayalam film songs spans the three decades from 1960 to 1980. Legendary composers

The golden era of Malayalam film songs spans the three decades from 1960 to 1980. Legendary composers like G. Devarajan, M.S. Baburaj, and V. Dakshinamoorthy created an enchanting period up to the mid-seventies.

like G. Devarajan, M.S. Baburaj, and V. Dakshinamoorthy created an enchanting period up to the mid-seventies. Poets-turned-lyricists like P. Bhaskaran, Vayalar Ramavarma, and O.N.V. Kurup enriched Malayalam films with everlasting lyrics. Many songs, by virtue of their lyrical and musical greatness, had a life beyond the context of the films. Alongside these great lyricists and composers,

we must recognise the equally powerful presence of lyricists like Sreekumaran Thampi, Yusuf Ali Kechery and Bichu Thirumala. Sreekumaran Thampi entered the industry in



V. Dakshinamoorthy



P. Bhaskaran



Vayalar Ramavarma

the 60s and went on to pen several thousand songs remembered for their directness and simplicity. Composers M.K. Arjunan, A.T. Ummer, Chidambaranath, and later Johnson and Raveendran, made Malayalam film songs varied and rich.

The songs featured in films until 1990 were mostly romantic, celebrating the bonding between the hero and the heroine. The lyrics generally dwelt on the beauty of the girl, who in return would offer herself to the hero. This gender stereotype, though out of sync with modern-day equations, was the most celebrated theme in film songs until the 90s. Other occasions for songs were sentimentally rich sequences of parting, death, and other misfortunes. These situations allowed writers some leverage to philosophise and touch certain emotional chords. These moments have given us several everlasting songs like 'Mangalam Nerunnu Njaan,' 'Sanyasini Nin Punyasramathil,' and 'Sukhamoru Bindu Dukhamoru Bindu.'

All these usual situations have undergone a major shift in their emotional settings in films



Madhu, Ramu Karyat, Baburaj and Yusufali Kecheri



G. Devarajan



M.K. Arjunan



Prabha Varma



A.T. Ummer



Sreekumaran Thampi



Bichu Thirumala



Chidambaranath

The tenor of the relationship between young men and women has mutated into a highly informal and playful engagement with each other. The songs have to convey that kind of casualness.



Raveendran and Johnson

post-2000. Of course, characters still fall in love and part ways. Still misfortunes befall characters. But such situations do not always warrant a song as such human situations are now approached differently. It is now almost impossible to expect a love song like 'Anupame Azhake' or 'Sahyadri Sanukkal Enikku Nalkiya Soundarya Devatha Nee'. The tenor of the relationship between young men and women has mutated into a highly informal and playful engagement with each other. The songs have to convey that kind of casualness. Idealization has no place today particularly in love relationship. Naturally, a new lyrical style and a new musical beat and lilt have become necessary. The traditional style of a writer creating the lyrics and then the music director setting them to tune could not do justice to the requirements of the new songs. Thus, the practice of a tune being born ahead of the lyrics became the order of the day. Although this had some justification, it slowly undermined the primacy of the lyrics and the importance of the lyricist. The lyricist's contribution has now become secondary as the tune, with its westernised orchestration, began to steal the show. As a result, hundreds

of songs were created that were rich in musical score but poor in literary value. The recall value of such songs is limited as they do not enshrine any worthwhile ideas. The devaluation of the literary quality of the songs has been the most significant cause of their poor shelf life.

The widespread craze for English medium education has also catalysed the devaluation of lyrics in Malayalam songs. Many graduates and professionally qualified young people can go through their entire education without being able to read or write Malayalam. For them, anything beyond casual conversation is 'highbrow literature'. Consequently, filmmakers often insist on 'simple lyrics', a euphemism for lines devoid of literary merit. This trend, coupled with anglicised pronunciation and Western-style orchestration, has given rise to a new type of songs in Malayalam, now hailed as trendy and youthful. Whether this is the only possible style or if a better, more acceptable style is on the anvil remains to be seen. Until then, we are destined to endure the cacophony of today's Malayalam film songs.

Lady with the Veena



Raja Ravi Varma (Oil on Canvas)
Photo courtesy : Sree Chithra Art Gallery, Thiruvananthapuram

Love is in the air

Cotton clouds that play hide and seek with rolling hills. Languid waterways that stretch for miles. Waves that caress serene shores. Quiet brooks and gushing waterfalls. Charming tea gardens and paddy fields.

Give your love story a fairy-tale backdrop in God's Own Country. Come, fall in love again.



For more details, log on to keralatourism.org/honeymoon *God's Own Country*

