The Influence of Sufism in Gaana Songs

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Abstract

The mystical songs are in vogue for centuries, keeping the individuality and pre-eminence in the society in Tamil Nadu. The Mystics were in appearance very simple and ageless, but in knowledge and wisdom, they were incomparable. Their songs were related to the themes wisdom, medicine; strengthen the body for prolonging life, alchemy, astrology, Vedic poems and magic. Likewise, the Gaana singers in appearance are very simple, but they are very gifted of singing objective and ideal songs. The Mystical lyrics, which were composed by the Mystics are very simple to learn and understandable as well as vibrant and have tender musical emotions.

Keywords: Sufism, Gaana songs, Chennai, Mystic songs.

Mystic Songs

The mystical songs are in vogue for centuries, keeping the individuality and pre-eminence in the society in Tamil Nadu. The Mystics were in appearance very simple and ageless, but in knowledge and wisdom, they were incomparable. Their songs were related to the themes wisdom, medicine; strengthen the body for prolonging life, alchemy, astrology, Vedic poems and magic. Likewise, the Gaana singers in appearance are very simple, but they are very gifted of singing objective and ideal songs. The Mystical lyrics, which were composed by the Mystics are very simple to learn and understandable as well as vibrant and have tender musical emotions.

In chronological order, mystic Agasthiar, Edaikaadar, Romer, Kongunar, Karuvoorar, Chattai Muni, Nanthinathar, Pinnakeesar, Bogar and Ramadevar alias Yakob are listed. Agapei, Azhugani, Kuthumbai, the songs of siddars are when they are sung with music it is able to heartening one's mind. Likewise, the Gaana songs are inspiring the youngsters to dance to its strains. To the present day, scientific research is preceding on to find the activity of the human brain neurological studies in contrast to the Mystics lyrics saying about the transistorised of the world life and advice.

Oh, mind! Do not commit sin
If your violent tomorrow – Death God
Takes away your life and runs
Oh, mind! Do not commit sin

There was popper in a large garden
He made a potter for ten months
And brought it to the world life
There it committed sin

(Kaaduvari Siddhar:1996:252)

When comparing this lyrical stanza with the Gaana lyrics, the influence of the lyrics of the Mystics on the Gaana songs found.

Application of this word Gaana, Gaanam, and Gaanal: The Sangam literature speaks about the internal and external nature of existence. In this literature, the words Gaana, Gaanam and Gaanal are often used. According to Kabilan (1991), has said that some learned scholars tell that the work Gaana may attribute to music. The Gaana songs may originate from the Tamil Culture. However, this concept could not be admitted. In Tamil literature in most places the word Gaana had been referred especially in the external chapter Purapadal
The poet Moshi Keeranar composed a poem and a line in mentioned the word Gaana as “கெருங்கொண்ட கொண்டநாணை பலம் கேள்வது லிரிக்கு”. The meaning of this line is that it is easy to sing the song with this substance.

The extant corpus of Gaana songs shows multiple influences. There are songs with obvious folk roots, and their language captures it. Some Gaana singers influenced by popular songs of Siddhars – Sufi-like saints and some have clearly arisen in the urban environment with distinct language traits. Variations made with old tunes and new ones regularly composed (Srivathsan, 2013)

North Indian Music Culture

In Hindi language, the word Gaana refers to the song. Another theory says that Gaana songs had the origin from the north Indian ‘Gaana Qawwali’ music. A group of people has engaged in a Gaana concert, wherein damsel is dancing in a circle, a single man singing a song while the others are clapping the hands; and are playing music with the musical instruments like Tabla, Harmonium, Chalangaimelam (tap). In Chennai City, the oppressed people, who live in the slums also have recited the Gaana songs as like North Indians by sitting in the round and sing Gaana songs with musical instruments like Tabla, Dolak, Dimmiki, and Chalangaimelam. Regarding the quality of the sound of the instrument, rhythm is enhanced with the aid of more than one mic and called as the Gaana concert. A vocalist sings with strain and another person enjoys the song and follows the song with simile and series. This case of counter-singing with one another with the analogy and the series of the song are called the Gaana songs.

Islamic Songs

Similar to the analysing the Gaana songs with the Mystic’s lyrics, Gunankudi Masthan Sahib was one of the great sages of Islam lived in Tamil Nadu. In search of spiritual life, he left the domestic life at the early stage. Gunankudi Masthan Sahib contributed many poems to the Islam. He had spiritual wisdom, both in Tamil and Urdu languages. Gunankudi Masthan Sahib lyrics rhythm’s influence upon the story of the creation of Gaana songs could also be realised. Before examining the historicity of the Gunankudi Masthan Sahib’s lyrical effect, the learning of his life history would be very useful.

Gunankudi Masthan Saheb Songs

Gunankudi Masthan Sahib was born in 1792 A.D at Ramanathapuram District, Thondi village near the northwest of the port Thondi. Bayly (2004) in her work Saints, Goddess, Kings refers the Qadiriyya Sufi poet Gunankudi Masthan Sahib, this literary man was a maraikkayar who had been strongly influenced by the works of the Tamil siddhars (tantric adepts) and the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century Tamil Hindu mystic Tayumanavar. One of the poet’s major verse compositions (part of the collection known as the Masthan Sahib Padalgal) deals with the power of the Tirupparankunram shrine: it was here that he experienced a profound mystical awakening while undergoing a period of chilla (forty days of seclusion and enfraptured meditation.)

This poet-mystic was one of the most ‘syncretic’ of all Tamil Muslim Sufis. His association with the Sikandar tradition suggests once again that the martial cult personalities of Tamil Nadu were perceived as all-embracing figures of power. His father was Nynar Mohammed, and his mother was Fatima. His family compelled him to marry his maternal uncle’s daughter Maimoon; but he refused and at the age of seventeen, he renounced the pleasure of life and left the house to lead an ascetic life. He learned a religious lesson from Syed Abdul Kadir Labbai Ali. He had received the initiation of religious solemn oath from his guru Alim Mauli Sham Sahib from Thirisapuram. He took penance at Thondi Maraikkayar Garden.

As a vagabond, he travelled widely from place to place. Being attracted towards the divine nature, he relinquished the worldly pleasure and endured the life of penance. Even the dustbin became his dwelling place. Because of his madness, miracles and supernatural intelligence, the people called him as “Masthan”. This name has become the nomenclature of his identity; he had many Hindu disciples and followers; that had exposed the traditionally cordial relations with other section of the society. A Hindu Devotee Sudhakar from Kannadasan Salai “From my early stages, I heard about the Masthan’s Sainthood from my family members, who are staunchly religious. I have continuously been practicing meditation for the last fifteen years.” In 1813 A.D., he denounced his worldly life and became a hermit. He lived in a village Kalgam at Aranthangi for four months for penance, followed by the mountains and forests and the bank of rivers at the places Sathuragiri, Puramalai, Nagamalai, Anaimalai.

The parents christened his name as Sultan Abdul Khadir. He was honoured as a spiritu-
al teacher and a wise man. At the end of his years, he came to Chennai city, where he lived in a barren semi-forest area at Royapuram, owned by Bhava Labbai. Experiencing the divine nature of Gunankudi Masthan Sahib's life, the Bhava Labbai permitted him to hold the land and fixed up to construct a hermitage on the estate. He spent his daily by touring in and around the city and then stayed in for engaging in penance. Sometimes he spent his time in procession around the streets while singing lyrics. During the procession in a day, he visited the Masjid Mamoor mosque at Angappan Nayakkan Street.

The Spreading of Masthan's Keerthanas

In North Chennai, Gunankudi Masthan had been visiting street by street and recited his hymns (keertanas). In the mean, time his songs had spread among the oppressed people who were living on the pavements. Tmt. K.K.Dhanakodi, the daughter of the Gaana singer K.K.Kuppusamy from Tondiarpet, has reported that seventy years back, his father had sung the lyrics of Gunankudi Masthan Sahib (Ramakrishnan, 2005, p. 77). Gunankudi Masthan Sahib lived at Tondiarpet. Thiru.K.K.Kuppusamy had also lived at Tondiarpet, and both have sung lyrics on the line as such, it is understandable that Gaana songs are originated from this region. The field report has recorded that the Gaana singer Mylai Venu has sung both Gaana songs and has sung songs adopting tune from the Masthan's lyrics. This phenomenon suggests the connections between the Masthan Sahibs lyrics and the Gaana songs.

This lyric belonged to Gunankudi Masthan. (Abdul Rahim 1980:246)

Parabarakaninni refers to the songs sung about the world and its existence. Mylai Venu sings Manonmani kanni song.

In search of true worship
I dreamt in my worship folded with hand, prospered
Lost eyes, blind man, mind wanderers
My heart regrets doomed mind isolates
I dreamed with my eyes closed, prospered

By using instruments for this song, the output of the melody of the songs would be in different line. Masthan lyrics conveys about transience moral of life.

Sandal Utsav Festival

For the past nine years, Venu has been reciting songs about Gunankudi Masthan Sahib in his dargah. Every year in the month of April they have a festival called Santhana Kudam ustav (Sandal pot festival) at Muslim dargah. “During this festival, Gaana concert is going to be held as usual” says Venu. Qawwali function organized in addition to this concert. They prefer our Gaana concert because Gunankudi Masthan is going to sing at the concert. He has written many songs; it includes Manonmani kaani, Rahman kaani, Ekkala kaani of which singers select only eye-catching songs for singing.

Gaana Songs refer to the recital of songs, which illuminates the spiritual wisdom of masses; the songs induced the spiritual wisdom in them. The singers sit and recite with spiritual wisdom, the people sit and hear, and get enlighten. This nomenclature is called Gaana. At Present the situation is changed, the singers sing their different version of Gaana of social events and the songs depict the nature of women. Singers recite their own type of songs not representing the old one.

For some people, the timely reminder from the early morning to night is the sound of the prayer of the Islamic songs. In the early morning, Islamic prayer is aired in a lyrical form pleasing the mind who hears it. It includes the melodious Islamic songs. At present in Chennai City, there is nobody who owns radio or TV. The Islamic songs are well-known songs among the slum dwellers. Most of the people have the habit of hearing the songs of Nagoor Hanifa. Before that Pothakudi Abdul Rehman, the known singer is very popular. He has written the Islamic books such as Manimaalai, Meignana Thiruvauukugal, Jegajothi Sudarmaalai. Thuckalay Kamal, the Islamic preacher, sings some of his songs. A specific song that is sung by him chosen from the lyrics of Pethakudi Rahim is Gnanamani. The Pethakudi T. P. Abdul Rahim composed the lyrics in the books of Jegajothi Sudarmaalai, Meignana Th-
ruvaakugal that was created based on the rhythm of the movie songs and the verses of the Hindi and Urdu songs. Mylai Venu a Gaana singer knows about fifty songs of the Masthan Sahibs, Parabarakaninii, EkkalaKanni, Manonmaniamkanni, Bahavankanni and so on many classified songs are famous. Government authorities demolished Mylai Venu’s house, aged 59 lived in foreshore estate, and he lived in an adjacent tent, he owns a radio set plays. He has a dolak instrument.

Gunankudi Masthan once wrote and captioned “the action counter itself” in which the verse says that “The very evil action committed by you destined you to react; Therefore explore yourself to do well”.

Says Mylai Venu (Fieldwork: Tape 9)

Nochikuppam Kumar knows about sixty Islam songs, Appeal to god with folded hands, In a palm tree oasis, Tamil Nadu Dargah.

Let us visit the Tamilnadu Dargah
Let listens to the pure guide
With divine worship things happen easily
God’s word Mohammed Nabi would be blessing.

According to Kumar, Islamic songs are the base for the creation of Gaana songs.

Influence in Film Music

After 1960, folklorist has enlightened about rural and urban culture. They had come together to research. The rural culture and the urban culture instead of destroying each other they are emerging and binding together. The two have entered into a new epoch in the development of the urban culture, absorbing the diminishing rural culture. Similar to the rural people migrated to the urban area, the village art and culture has also migrated to the urban area. The media like Television, Radio, Cinema, and audio and video communicative instruments act as a catalyst for this change. Besides, the concerts, the Advertising, the storytelling, the Magazines, the Gaana songs have also been penetrated into the rural areas. The belief that the mass media are destroying the rural culture has found unreasonable. Instead, everyone could realize that the mass media is giving a platform to the folk artists to re-emerge to the front stage. However, the elite has the feeling that the folk art and culture has been waning. Gaana as a mixture of all components; it is a confluence of folklore, cinema, rural tradition, urban society life, the influence of circumstances, fishermen traditions, and Qawwali.

“Gaana Qawwali”, it refers to that a person questioning another person by singing a poem and the other person replies the question by a poem and it is locally known as Gaana competition. To illustrate the Gaana competition:

Gaana singer, “Death comes one day, but I do not know the time of death”. The other singer, “Death, Death is not forgettable, friend! It is not forgettable.”

The competitive creativeness of a Gaana song is to sing the Gaana in a creative way, by insisting the life’s instability. From the thesis it considers as incidental that this incidental Gaana is also one of the bases for the creation of the word Gaana. In the early period, there was no adequate media representation. In earlier days, there was no adequate media, only films were released. Today there is Sun TV, Jaya TV, Raj TV, and Vijay TV. However, earlier there was no such media representation. The Government owned Doordharsan, which visualized the new programmes and some dramas. Today in the Globalised media world the trend is changed drastically.

Films occasionally used Qawwali. In its traditional form, Qawwali is performed by one or two lead singers with accompanying singers and instrumentalists. Dolak, harmonium, and Tabla are the most typical instruments used, and hand-clapping is essential. The lead singers may indulge in virtuoso coloratura improvisations, which alternate with a group refrain. The texts, usually in Urdu, are devotional; they may be mystical love poetry - often in ghazal form - or elegies in praise of a particular holy personage. Qawwalis traditionally performed at Muslim shrines, with considerable interaction between performers and audience. In this century, Qawwali is often heard in a concert format and on recordings, removed from direct associations with Muslim shrines.

Film Qawwalis maintain the genre's collective character by showing the entire performing group on screen (even if the soundtrack recorded separately); thus, the presence of the group is worked into the plot by some means. In this sense, the film Qawwali differs from most other film songs, wherein the musicians usually are not visible, such that the hero can burst into song in any locale, from a Kashmiri glacier to a crowded bus. The film Qawwali also retains the traditional Qawwali's solo coloratura passages, hand-clap-
ping, solo-chorus alternation, and the use of Urdu texts and traditional instrumentation. It differs, however, in several respects. The accompanying ensemble usually includes Western string and wind instruments. Female singers are common, unlike in the traditional Qawwali. The coloratura passages, although in a freestyle, are pre-composed. Finally, the erotic rather than the religious aspect of the text is stressed; very often, the text is explicitly concerned with personal love relationships and admits no devotional interpretation.

Media institutions play an important role in the construction of their identity. However, these identities are not static; they have undergone many changes. Through time, Gaana songs performed by older people characteristics became less popular or declined while other contemporary singers became more popular. It depends on which ones are encouraged or discouraged by the mass people defined here as the working class and middle class. The ruling elite groups allow Gaana songs and music to be broadcast and distributed through their media and companies, regardless of the lyrical content, which may involve love, sex, alcohol and adultery as long as this music does not express opposition to the ruling class. Gaana music is also important in communicating and reinforcing these ideologies. Gaana songs receive a significant air time on media (FM Radio and Television). This suggests that Gaana songs viewed as an important ideological tool by the elite class.

References