

# SUB: PERFORMING ARTS (DANCE/THEATER)

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## PAPER 5 DANCE POETS AND POETRY, RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY AND INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE



ज्ञान - विज्ञानं विमुक्तये



# PAPER 5

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## MODULE 20

### TAMIL COMPOSERS

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# Paper 5

## Module 20

### Tamil Composers



## PAPER 5

### DANCE, POETS AND POETRY, RELIGIOUS PHILOSOPHY AND INDIAN CLASSICAL DANCE

#### MODULE 20 TAMIL COMPOSERS

##### OOTHAkadu VenkatasubbiER (Venkata Kavi)

According to the doyen of Carnatic music, Sri Semmanagudi Srinivasa Iyer, Venkata Kavi as he was popularly known, was a great Vaggeyakara of the order of the Trinity, who lived in the later part of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. He composed hundreds of compositions in Sanskrit, Tamil and Marathi of which over 500 are available. These were handed down from generation to generation by the descendants of the composer's brother's family. His compositions encompass a variety of forms- varnams, kritis, Samudaya kritis / समुदाय कृति, padam, javali, tillana, Kalyana Paatu / कल्याण पाटु, Chindu / चिंदु, etc. He has handled a wide variety of ragas as well as ancient Tamil Panns. Venkata Kavi had deep scholarship in Sanskrit and Tamil. His fluency in Sanskrit rivaled that of his command in Tamil, a commentary not only on his erudition but also a pointer to a period when Sanskrit was used more conversationally than merely as an academic language. His vocabulary was immense. He also employed attractive swaraksharas / स्वराक्षर – a technique where the lyrics match the sol-fa notes of the tune. He has also incorporated raga mudra (mentioning the names of ragas of the composition) in several kritis. Venkata Kavi had a



vast knowledge of music and musical nuances. He used a wide variety of ragas ranging from the well known such as Kalyani, Thodi, Sahana, Karaharapriya as well as minor ones like Kannadagowla, Jayantashri, Malavi, Umabharanam and also a few that are seldom used today like Balahamsa / बालहंस and Rasamanjari / रसमंजरी. In some instances, his works are the first or only ones to be available in a given raga such as Sri Shivanayike in Lalitagandharvam and Padasevanam in Deeparam. His approach of even common ragas like Sahana, Paras, Nadanamakriya and Arabhi are distinctive and refreshing.

His vision of the raga and melody as a whole is considerable and can be seen in the number of different styles in which he composed various kritis in the same raga. He was equally at ease with talas. Gati and kalai bhedas are found in several of his compositions. Venkata Kavi's great command over rhythm is seen in his attempt at talas such as Khanda Dhruvam, Sankeerna Mathyam and Mishra Atam, which are scarcely used. He made complex eduppus seem like child's play and they appeared in his kritis naturally, without ever affecting the flow of the music or the lyrics. His vocabulary and the use of words and phrases are unique in Carnatic literature.

Venkata Kavi's vivid imagination and picturisation can be seen in Thaye Yashoda in raga Todi, where the gopis are complaining to Yashoda about her son Lord Krishna. This song has eight charanams and each one describes the pranks of Krishna very humorously. Not so well known is the reply by Krishna to every one of these charges in another piece, Illai illai in Mohanam, also with eight charanams. There are literally hundreds of similar examples in his operas based on the Bhagavatam,

Ramayana, Pranavopadesham / प्रणवोपदेशम् and similar epics and legends.

No other composer in India has created as many musical operas as Venkata Kavi has. The most well known is Krishna Ganam based on Bhagavatam, which narrates Krishna's birth and colourful childhood, beginning from Devaki-Vasudeva's wedding, Kamsa's curse and ending with Krishna's wedding with Rukmini. It is now well known that many popular songs on Krishna like Thaye yashoda, Alaipayude kanna, Pal vadiyum mukham, Parvai onre podume and Pullai piravi tara venum are part of this opera.

Venkata Kavi also composed an entire group of pieces covering Krishna's wedding with Radha. His other operas include Ramayanam, Mahabharatam, Daksha Yagam / दक्षयगम, Prahlada Charitra / प्रह्लाद चरित , Dhruva Charitram / ध्रुवचरितम्, Pranavopadesham (which is a single folk style piece with 83 stanzas narrating Lord Subramanya's famous story of teaching his own father), Life sketch of Manickavachakar / मानिकवाचकर, Life sketch of Kungili Nayanar / कुंगिली नयनार and Life sketch of Tirumangai Azhwar. Although several songs from the Ramayana and Mahabharata are missing, the few that are found reveal his genius in the treatment of known episodes. The composer also penned abridged versions of Ramayana, Mahabharata and Bhagavatam. He also composed the Anjaneya Saptaratna kritis / अञ्जनेय्य सप्तरत्न कृति , eulogizing Hanuman and this entire set is in Sanskrit. Venkata Kavi also composed Navavarnams / नववर्णम् (nine varnams) on the goddess Srividya to be sung during Dassera. Apart from the



main nine songs for the nine nights, he has also composed Vinayaka stuti, Dhyana stuti and a Phala stuti. There are several similarities as well as differences between his Navavaranam and that of Dikshitar but both reveal the composers' scholarship in the various aspects of Devi worship. Although his Ishta Devata was Krishna, he composed on other deities too. His Krishna Gaanam songs are perennial favourites of dancers and singers alike - Swagatham Krishna / स्वागतम क्रिष्ण , Palvadiyum / पल्वदीयुम, Alai Payude / अलाई पयुदे , Thaye Yashoda / ताए यशोदा , Madhura Madhura Venu Geetham / मधुरमधुर वेणु गीतम , Kalinga Narthana Thillana / कलिंग नर्तन तिल्लाना, among others.

Venkata Kavi's works have been automatic choices for hundreds of dancers for the scope they offer for visual interpretation, dance-specific jatis, dramatic appeal and creative content. Leading dancers of Bharatnatyam, Kuchipudi and other dance styles have choreographed several of his compositions, thus popularizing them a great deal. However, many of his kritis like Nalladella enru solladi (Shankarabharanam), Bhuvana moha (Dhanyashi), Neela malar (Vasanta), Ettanai kettalum (Bhairavi) and operas like Pranavopadesham are yet to be explored in the dance field.

Venkata Kavi's works have been extensively used in Harikatha (musical discourses) by leading exponents. The composer's unique works like Kalinga Nartana Natangam and Krishna Padaadi Keshaanta varnanam are popular among Harikatha experts. Several of Venkata Kavi's compositions are part of Bhagavata Bhajana Sampradaya repertoire as well. The brilliant shlokas like Madhava Panchakam, Ranganatha Panchakam,



Nrsimha Panchakam and Shiva Tandava stotram are eminently suited for daily household worship as well as concert rendition.

GOPALAKRISHNA BHARATI (1811-1896) is regarded as the father of Tamil Music Renaissance and Modern Tamil Opera. His Nanadanar Charitram is unique in its exalted concept and reflection of society in those days, of the sufferings of the down-trodden. He has to his credit more than a 1000 songs written in simple spoken Tamil. He was born in a Brahmin family in Narimanam, a village near Nagapattinam in Tamilnadu. His father's name was Ramaswami Bharati. Music was one of the ancestral properties that he inherited. Gopalakrishna Bharati considered Govindasivam his philosophical guru under whom he learnt vedantas and yoga shastras. He trained in music under the veteran Ghanam Kishna Iyer and learnt Hindustani music from another exponent, Ramdas. Formal study of Hindu philosophical and religious lore and interactions with composers like Anantabharati Iyengar enriched his flair for composing and singing. Deeply spiritual, Gopalakrishna Bharati led life with yogic discipline. His compositions, only in Tamil, reflected these aspects in ample measure. Hailing from family of music exponents Bharati showed inclination towards music even at a very young age. He had commendable ability to grasp and reproduce complex musical feats. In those days thanks to the boom in Carnatic Music several musicians lived in the villages of Tamilnadu. Listening to the music of these artistes further enriched Gopalakrishna Bharati's musical prowess. Inspired by meeting Tyagaraja, Gopalakrishna Bharati composed several gems such as Tiruvadi Charanam / तिरुवादी चरणं, Natanamadinar / नटनम आडीनार, Varugalamo / वरुगालमो, Ennaramum / एन्नारामुम, Varuvaaro / वरुवारो among others which have delighted



millions. He composed in several rare ragas like Natakapriya, Sarasangi, Manji etc. The popularity of his compositions is due as much to their lilting tunes as to their free, lucid and charming style. Bharati's ishta devata was Shiva and his immortal compositions are a dancer's delight.

The highly emotional Tamil opera Nandanar Charitram / नन्दनार चरित्रं of Gopalakrishna Bharati when it was launched, in the mid-nineteenth century tugged at the heartstrings of the entire Tamil diaspora. "Vazhi maraithrikuthu Malai Pole Unthan Maadu Paduthirukuthu" "Hiding my view like a colossal mountain is a bull supine... Sivalokanatha... "Moved by the plea of his Harijan devotee Nandanar, Lord Siva of Tiruppunkur, gently commanded his bull, and Nandi obeyed his master. As Nandanar rejoiced at his fortune, the Tamil country wept in joy. The appeal of Gopalakrishna Bharati's songs cuts across all boundaries of territory, erudition and even age. Nandanar Charitram proved very popular and he published it in his lifetime. Many adaptations appeared, including stage plays and three film versions Later, Bharata Natyam dancers, including T. Balasaraswati, took up select pieces for interpretation as abhinaya.

Once, Gopalakrishna Bharati visited the legendary Tyagaraja. They had a lengthy conversation. Gopalakrishna Bharati then listened to his disciples sing a kriti of Tyagaraja Manasu Nilpa in the Ragam Abhogi. When he went to bathe in the river Kaveri he composed the famous kriti Sabhapatikku Veru Deivam Samanamaguma / सभापतिकू वेरु देइवं समनमगुम on Lord Nataraja of Chidambaram on the spot in Tamil in the same ragam. When he came back to Tyagaraja's house, he was asked by Tyagaraja if he had composed any kriti in Abhogi.



Gopalakrishnan said he had after hearing Tyagaraja's kriti and sang it for him. Tyagaraja was delighted and showered praise on Gopalakrishna Bharati.

The phrase Ariya Pulaiyar Moovar / अरिया पुलैयर मूवर in the kriti evokes deep feelings in anyone who hears this kriti. It is widely known that Gopalakrishna Bharati, although born a Brahmin, felt deeply for the downtrodden, especially harijans, as is obvious from his magnum opus Nandanar Charitira Kirtanai, a Tamil opera glorifying the low-caste farm hand Nandanar for his unflinching devotion to Lord Nataraja. The term "ariya pulaiyar moovar" refers to three "untouchables" i.e. Nandanar, Tillai Vettiyaan, and Perran Sambhan who lived in the area around Tillai Chidambaram and were supposed to have attained Godhead as a reward for their piety. The other two lived in later times.

Inspired by Tyagaraja's Pancharatna kritis, Gopalakrishna Bharati composed a set of five kritis in the Ghana ragas — Nattai, Gowlai, Arabhi, Varali and Sri Ragas. He composed several songs and other operas too. Many of them are popular on the music and dance platforms. The compositions show his mastery over literary and musical forms. He composed a wide variety of musical forms— Darus (situational songs), Iru sollalankaram (dialogue), Sindu, Dandakam, and Kummi. He used “Gopalakrishnan / गोपालकृष्णन” and “Balakrishnan / बालकृष्णन” as his mudra in his songs. He composed many famous works like ‘Katakaletshepam / कथाकलाक्षेपम’, Iyarpagai Nayanar Charitram, Tiruneelakanda Nayanar Charitram and Karaikal Ammayar Charitram. Many of his students including the famous Vedanayagam Pillai who was the District Munsif at Mayuram were taught a number of his songs by Gopalakrishna



himself. The very famous songs used by dancers are Natanamadinar (Vasanth), Aadum Chidambaramo / आडूम चिदाम्बरामो (Behag) Ayye Methakadinam / आयये मेथाकादिनाम (Ragamalika), Enneramum / एन्नेरामुम (Devagandhari), Kanaka Sabhai / कनक सभै (Suruti), Pitham Theliya / पितम थेलिया (Senjuruti), Sabapathiku Veru Deivam / सभापतिकू वेरु देइवं (Abhogi), Sivaloka Naathanai / शिवलोक नाथने (Mayamalava Gowla), Varugalamo / वरुगलामो (Maanji), Vazhi Maraitirukkuthe / वज्ही मरेतिरुक्कुथे (Natakuriniji) and Yeppo Varuvaro / येप्पो वरुवारो (Jonpuri) among several others.

PAPANASAM SIVAN (1890-1973) was a prominent post-trinity composer of Carnatic music and a singer. Sivan was also known as Tamil Tyagayya. At the early age of seven, Sivan lost his father. The entire family migrated to Trivandrum, where Sivan joined the Sanskrit School. Even in his teens he showed a great flair for music. His contact with Neelakanta Sivan and others greatly helped Sivan to develop his musical talents. The compositions of Swati Tirunal reverberating from within the four walls of Sri Padmanabha Swamy Temple greatly captivated the youngster. He was also fortunate to come in contact with S.G. Kittappa and the great Harikesanallur Muthaiah Bhagavathar, who were at that time residing in Trivandrum. Sivan was a regular participant in the Bhajan goshtis organised by Nilakanta Sivan to master innumerable compositions. Later, Sivan blossomed into a consummate artiste under the tutelage of well-known musician, Konerirajapuram Vaidyanatha Iyer. His wanderings would take him regularly to the temple at Papanasam, where he would smear holy ash all over his body. Hence people began to refer him as Papanasam Sivan, the



name by which he was to become well known later. In spite of his deep knowledge of music, Papanasam Sivan was more interested in the devotional aspect of music. He preferred to sing devotional songs and encouraged other singers take part in sessions of devotional music with him. Papanasam Sivan was a regular in all the major temple festivals in South India with his devotional songs. Sivan's compositions cover a wide gamut of songs ranging from varnams, krithis, operas to padams and javalis. He sang with fervour and devotion, infusing his compositions with great feeling which is why they are so popular. His compositions have been published in book form by his daughter Dr. Rukmani Ramani. Seven volumes of his compositions have been published so far. He composed for and performed in theatrical productions, both as singer and actor. He was also a teacher at Kalakshetra. He composed music for Kalakshetra's productions too. He started composing for films, but also did a stint as an actor, when he acted in four movies. A prolific composer, he has composed around 2,500 songs in a variety of ragas, talas and gati. They are couched in simple language but are replete with raga and sahitya bhava. His mudra was Ramadas as his real name was Ramayya. Nan oruvilayattu bommaya in (Navarasakannada), Kapali (Mohanam), Karpagame (Madhyamavati) are some of his famous compositions. He received the Sangeetha Kalanidhi as well as the Sangeet Natak Academy fellowship in 1972. He was also the recipient of the Padma Bhushan. Rukmini Devi once said that none else lived the soul of music as Sivan did through his songs. His songs were popularised by leading singers, like Bharata Ratna Dr. M.S. Subbulakshmi, Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar, Maharajapuram Vishwanatha Iyer, Chembai Vaidyanatha Bhagavathar, Musiri Subramania Iyer, Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and other giants of those times. The compositions very popular with dancers are his Natakurinji



varnam-Swami nan undan adimai / स्वामी नान उन्दन अडीमई ,  
Mahalakshmi (Shankarabharanam), Devi Neeye Thunai / देवी  
नीये तुनै (Keervani), Gajavadana karuna sadana / गजवंदना  
करुणा सदन (Sriranjani), Enna Tavam seydan / एन्ना तवं  
सेयदाने (Kapi), Srinivasa tiruvenkata (Hamsanandi), Mayil  
Vahana / मईल वाहन (Mohanam), Sivakama Sundari / शिवकाम  
सुंदरी (Mukhari) among others.

SUBRAMANYA BHARATI (1882 –1921)

Popularly known as "Mahakavi Bharati", he is a pioneer of modern Tamil poetry and is considered one among the greatest of Tamil literary figures of all time. An independence activist and iconoclastic reformer, he was a writer, poet and journalist whose numerous works were fiery songs kindling patriotism and nationalism during the fight for independence.

Subramanya Bharati was born to Chinnasami Subramanya Iyer and Lakshmiammaal as Subbayya on 11 December 1882 in the village of Ettayapuram. From a very young age he learnt music and at eleven, he learnt poetry. It was during this time that he was conferred the title of "Bharati", the one blessed by Saraswati, the Goddess of learning. He learnt 32 languages (29 Indian languages and 3 foreign languages). During his stay in Benares, Subramanya Bharati was exposed to spirituality and nationalism. This broadened his outlook and he learned Sanskrit, Hindi and English. He was the court poet of Raja of Ettayapuram for a couple of years. Years later he attended the All India Congress session held in Benaras. On his journey back home, he met Sister Nivedita, Swami Vivekananda's spiritual heir. She inspired Subramanya Bharati to recognise the



privileges of women and the emancipation of women exercised Bharati's mind. He visualised the new woman as a manifestation of Shakti, a willing helpmate of man to build a new earth through co-operative endeavour. He considered Sister Nivedita as his mentor and penned a couple of lyrics in praise of her. He attended the Indian National Congress session in Calcutta under Dadabai Naoroji, which demanded Swaraj and boycott of British goods. By April 1907, he started editing the Tamil weekly India and the English newspaper Bala Bharatham. These newspapers were also a means of expressing Subramanya Bharati's creativity, which began to peak during this period. Subramanya Bharati started to publish his poems regularly in these editions. From hymns to nationalistic writings, from contemplations on the relationship between God and man to songs on the Russian and French revolutions, Subramanya Bharati's subjects were diverse. To escape arrest during the freedom struggle he went to Pondicherry. During his exile, Subramanya Bharati started learning Vedic literature. Three of his greatest works namely, Kuyil Pattu / कुयिल पट्टू, Panchali Sabatham / पांचाली शबदम and Kannan Pattu / कन्नन पट्टू were composed during 1912. He also translated Vedic hymns, Patanjali's Yoga Sutra and the Bhagavad Gita to Tamil.

His poetry stands out for many facets of his love for his motherland. He passionately dreamt of the day his country would lead the world in culture, trade, literature and every other aspect of life and wrote out those dreams. Subramanya Bharati is considered the first to have advocated and campaigned for women's participation in politics. He advocated greater rights for women and their education. He visualised a modern Indian woman at the vanguard of society. He was of the strong opinion that the world will prosper in knowledge



and intellect if both men and women are deemed equal. He condemned the Shashtras that suppressed women's rights. Most of his views are considered contemporary even in modern times.

His imagery and the vigour of his verse were a forerunner to modern Tamil poetry in different aspects. He was the forerunner of a forceful kind of poetry that combined classical and contemporary elements. He had a prodigious output penning thousands of verses on diverse topics like Indian Nationalism, love songs, children's songs, songs of nature, glory of the Tamil language, and odes to prominent freedom fighters of India.

Many of his compositions are used for dance. The most famous composition is the moving Chinnanchiru kiliye kanamma / चिन्ननचिरु किलिये कनम्मा by most dancers. Pengal vidudalai kummi is performed as a group song to bring out the emancipation of women. Teerada vilayattu pillai is another perennial favourite about the gopis complaining to Yashoda about her mischievous son Krishna .Panchali Sapatham, Kuyil patu,Thaga thaga (Shivashakti),Om Shakti, Kakkai chiraginile, are other compositions used by dancers.

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