

Traditional Bhajans in India
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Traditional south Indian Bhajan

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The present day, conventionally sung Hari Nama sankeertanam (South Indian Bhajan) originated mainly due to the efforts of **Maruthanallur Sadguru Swamigal**. Bhajan basically involves music in simple form with essence of Bhakti as the main embodiment. The songs are sung in chorus thus bringing a universal brotherhood. A melodic piece rendered in-group has profound influence on the ear and mind and fetches mass appeal. The spiritual fervour of a Bhajan is apt to move one to reverence and worship.

Different aspects of Bhajan

Bhajans have evolved with a variety of patterns (paddhathi) over the years mainly due to the efforts of a few important stalwarts. The general sketch remains the same, viz., songs of various saints in different languages, regional forms of music etc. One can find Todayamangalam of Annamacharya, Geetagovinda (Ashtapati) of Jayadeva, Krishna Leela Tarangini of Narayana theertha, keertans of many poets of India embellished in the bhajans. While Ashtapati of Jayadeva of Orissa took the prominent position in the bhajan plan, the Telugu compositions of Bhadrachala Ramadasa, Kannada compositions of Purandaradasa, sanskrit compositions of Sadasiva Brahmendra, Tamil songs from Nandanar Charithram of Gopala Krishna Bharathi, Tyagaraja kritis, the Marathi Abhangs, Hindi keertans of Tulasidas, Surdas, Kabir, Meerabhai's songs added a sense of unity.

Presentation style

The songs sung in simple melodies. All the three forms of Indian music (classical, semiclassical and folk) find a place. The Ashtapathis and Tarangams which form a primary part in the bhajan are sung with a brief narration of slokas preceding the song. The ability of the singer to embellish the sloka with his musical skill will produce the essence of the sloka absorbed well. Following this, the Ashtapathis are sung in chorus. Thus one can clearly find that the classical method of alapana comes over in the first part and simple melody rich semiclassical style prevails in the latter portion.

Scope for manodharma

Interesting exhibitions of classical music are seen in presentation of songs including namavalis. To cite a few, the niraval in the song "Amalaasayanutha" and the niraval and pratyahada gamaka phrases in "Kamalavallabha" are worth noting. Namavalis are not set in specific ragas but they are presented in such a way that the tunes are enriched with classical methodology. For example, the namavali, "Govinda Govinda Gopala Radha ramana" is sung in three positions spread over middle, higher octave, thus clearly portraying the fact that a form of pallavi singing is present. Also, many intricate rhythmic patterns are brought out during the presentation.

Special features of Bhajans

The highlight of South Indian Bhajan is Deepa Pradakshinam. This item consists of several simple songs followed by folk forms in majority. Kummi, Kollattam, OOdham, Chittar songs are some of the typical folk forms of Tamil Nadu sung towards the end of the Deepa Pradakshinam. The item Dolotsavam or Utsava Sampradaya kritis which come as the last part of bhajan contains many folk tunes of Andhra. It contains several forms of lullaby songs and finally prabodhana (suprabhata) songs.

Traditional ragas in Bhajan

In the presentation of bhajan songs, utmost care is taken to bring out the essential aspects of a raga in which it is sung. It is a joy to listen to the bhajan rendering of several of the classical ragas like *Sankarabharanam*, *Kambhoji*, *Kalyani*, *Bhairavi* (in which the subtle variations of nishada are brought out with ease by the singers), *Yadukulakambhoji*, *Nilambari*, *Anandabhairavi*, *Nadanamakriya*, *Punnagavarali* etc. It may be noted that bhashanga raga like *Ghanta* (not often heard in our present day classical concerts) is a very familiar raga for bhajan singers.

Bhajan as inspiration for composers

At this juncture it is worth noting that many of the Saint Tyagaraja compositions have been influenced by the bhajan presentations because of his involvement in bhajans. For example, songs with "niraval" sangatis (such as Rama Nee samana mevaru) are influences derived from namavali singing in Bhajans. Tyagaraja has composed many

songs (Divyanama kritis) for Deepa Pradakshinam and his Utsava sampradaya kritis are clear indication of his involvement in Bhajans. Most of these kritis are set to folk tunes well-known in the dolotsava padhdhati of South Indian bhajans. Typical examples of such songs are: Hecharikaka rara, Pavanaja stuthi patra, nagumomu galavani, Napali, Ksherasahara vihara.

Bhajans and Divine marriages

Marriage celebration is also considered an important item of Bhajans especially during occasions like Ramanavami day etc. It is believed that Bhadrachala Ramadasa initiated this form of worship by conducting Sita Kalyanam with songs set in Telugu folk tunes. The marriage invitation song (Allo neradillo), Muthukuthal (suvvi song) etc are practised in our bhajan tradition. Conduct of Radha Kalyanam, Deivani Kalyanam, Valli Kalyanam are now in vogue which use the relevant songs suiting to the occasion appropriately.

Conclusion

Thus in short one can say that bhajans form a platform for all the three styles of Indian music. If one wishes to have a feel for all three of them, just join the Bhagavatas in chorus. No wonder, classical stalwarts like G.N.Balasubramanian, Ariyakudi Ramanujam Iyengar participated in bhajans to gain the

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of Indian music. Not the least, the fact that a mridangam player starts accompanying artistes in bhajans to gain confidence in the first place is a testimony of the scope bhajans have for Indian music.

North Indian Bhajan

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The spread of bhajan trend in North India is due to the efforts of *saint poets like TukaRam, Meera Bai, Kabir Das, Sur Das* and so on. Their staunch bhakti made them sing a number of kirtans in praise of their beloved God. The fact that people found a great appeal in these songs is a testimony to its simple tunes and mass appealing lyric. The

Chorus sankeertan of the locale dwellers of Pandaripura, Madura sing with typical instruments in support like Dolak, cymbols.

The Hindustani Sangeeth artistes regularly present these fine melodic pieces in their concerts as one of their important features. The presentation of the kirtans in ragas like Khamas, Bageswari, Desh are quite common and the Hinduatani Musician usually adds manodharma to the piece and sing with immense bhakthi.

North -South Exchange

Ashtapathis, the compositions of Jaya Deva of Orissa which are brought to South India by Chaithanya, is presently forming a main feature in South Indian bhajans. The Marathi Abhangs, songs of Mira Bai and Kabir are regularly sung in South Indian bhajans.

Similar exchanges are also prevalent in North Indian Bhajans.