

## Saptaratna krtis

The Saptaratna krtis of Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi (1700-65) are vibrant creations of inspired genius. Easily among the best pieces composed in Indian music, these compositions have an arresting appeal that conceals the composer's high-calibre scholarship. They are profound, yet amenable to chorus renditions even by school children. They aptly deserve the name ratnas.

### Trailblazing

One can only speculate on Venkata Kavi's source material for the musical form of Saptaratna. We don't find any other composer prior to him creating major compositions in this style. Probably, smaller swarajatis of similar form may have existed around that time in music and dance performance repertoires. It is interesting that Tyagaraja (1767-1847) also used the same structure for five of his compositions that are known as *Pancharatna* krtis.

Song	Raga	Language	Theme
Bhajanamrta	Nattai	Sanskrit	Tribute to great devotees
Aganita mahimadbhuta	Gowla	Sanskrit	Vishnu
Madhava hrdis khelini	Kalyani	Sanskrit	Radha
Balasarasamurali	Keeravani	Sanskrit	Krishna
Jatadhara Shankara	Todi	Sanskrit	Shiva
Alavadennalo	Paras	Tamil	Tribute to the 63 <i>nayanmars</i>
Sundara nandakumara	Madhyamavati	Sanskrit	Daily worship/offerings to Krishna

### Colour and variety

As can be seen from the above list, Venkata Kavi has made the Saptaratnas extremely colourful. The ragas employed – Nattai, Gowla, Kalyani, Keeravani, Todi, Paraz and Madhyamavati – are a combination of evocative sublimity and weighty solidity. Rhythmically, even though all the pieces are in Adi tala, the composer has inserted numerous unique touches that make them enchanting. There are several pieces where the composer's ability to provide interesting melo-rhythmic finishes with appropriate lyrics comes to the fore.

His brilliant mastery over Tamil (in the Paras composition, Alavadennalo) and Sanskrit (the rest of the set) shines through. He has indulged in word play, used familiar words in rare contexts, rare words in familiar contexts, mentioned the names of several great personalities, instruments and ornamentation.

Thematically, the Saptaratnas offer a dazzling variety. Venkata Kavi's reverence for other great personalities is exemplified in the Nattai and Paraz pieces where he pays tributes to numerous devotees such as the *aazhvars*, *nayanmars*, Purandara Dasa and Tulasi

Dasa. His rich imagination is displayed in the Kalyani and Keeravani pieces and his equal familiarity with both Vishnu and Shiva is projected in the composition in Gowla and Todi respectively while his daily worship of Lord Krishna is reflected in the final piece in Madhyamavati.

### **Anchor charanas**

Five of these songs (the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, 6th and 7th) have an anchor charanam (similar to what one sees in *Samayaniki* in Tyagaraja's *Sadhinchane*) but even here, Venkata Kavi has offered much variety. Sometimes, it is *not* the first line of the charanam but the 3rd line that is the anchor and Venkata Kavi has set the landing points in several complex ways, which again offer proof of his rhythmic skills. In a few pieces, there are madhyamakala endings to the anchor charanams.

Email [carnaticworld@yahoo.com](mailto:carnaticworld@yahoo.com) to obtain a copy of Chitravina N Ravikiran's book, ***Kamakshi Navavaranam and Saptaratna krtis of Oottukkadu Venkata Kavi.***