
Discovery of Songs with the mudrā of 'Abhinava Purandara Viṭṭhala' in Thanjavur Manuscripts

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ABSTRACT

Among the music manuscripts in the Thaṅjāvur Mahārāja Serfoji's Sarasvatī Mahal Library (TMSSML), three hitherto unpublished songs with the mudrā of 'Abhinava Purandara Viṭṭhala' have been found. These are i) a Kaivāḍa prabandha in the rāga sālaEganāma ii) a gīta in rāga sālaṅga nāma and iii) lyrics of a sulādi in rāga Bauli. The paper briefly discusses the features of these and what they say about 'Abhinava Purandara Viṭṭhala' as a composer. This discovery is significant for the following reasons: a) To date, 'Padumanābha parama puruṣa' in rāga Malahari, a popular beginner's lesson for students of Carnatic music, is the only known song to carry this mudrā. b) The lyrics of the Kaivāḍa prabandha suggest that the composer had allegiance to the Mādhva sect, as the names Braḥmaṇya Tīrtha and Vyāsa Tīrtha, the paramaguru and guru of Purandaradasa have been mentioned. c) In addition, the choice of Kannada language, composing in the sulādi form, a consistently Vaiṣṇavaite theme, make it likely that the composer was a Haridāsa himself. If so, this Kaivāḍa prabandha might be the first evidence of a notated Prabandha of a Haridāsa that has come to light.

KEYWORDS

Kaivāḍa Prabandha, Sulādi, Abhinava Purandara Viṭṭhala, Haridasa, Thanjavur Manuscripts

Among the music manuscripts at the TMSSM Library (Taṅjāvur Mahārāja Serfoji's Sarasvatī Mahal Library, Thanjavur), many notations of ālāpa, ṭhāya, gīta and prabandha are found. These offer valuable insights into the music, the musical forms, and composers from the 16th century onwards. From among these, hitherto unpublished manuscripts of a Kaivāḍa Prabandha, a gīta, and a sulādi with the mudrā of 'Abhinava Purandara Viṭṭhala' have been found. The paper briefly analyses the structural features of these compositions, presents evidence of the composer belonging to the Haridāsa tradition and discusses the significance of this discovery. The songs for this study were obtained from the microfilms of the palm leaf manuscripts of TMSSML, which are available at the IGNCA RC¹, Bengaluru (Referred to as 'Thanjavur Manuscripts' in this paper) a Prabandha, a gīta, and a sulādi with the mudrā of 'Abhinava Purandara Viṭṭhala' have been found. The paper briefly analyses the structural features of these compositions, presents evidence of the composer

belonging to the Haridāsa tradition and discusses the significance of this discovery. The songs for this study were obtained from the microfilms of the palm leaf manuscripts of TMSSML, which are available at the IGNCA RC¹, Bengaluru (Referred to as ‘Thanjavur Manuscripts’ in this paper).

Manuscripts of the songs of ‘Abhinava Purandara Viṭṭhala’

The only known song with the mudrā (signature or nom de plume) of ‘Abhinava Purandara Viṭṭhala’ (APV, hereon) is ‘Padumanābha paramapuruca’, a popular gīta set to the rāga Malahari and tāla ‘Tripuma’ (Dīkṣtulu, 1905, pp. 17-8). This is taught as a beginner’s lesson to students of Carnatic music. Dīksōitulu has documented this song as a gīta by ‘Purandara Viṭṭhala Dāsa’. But Satyanarayana, while discussing the pedagogy of the Haridāsa-s, opines that this song is not a composition of Purandaradāsa at all (Sathyanarayana, n.d.). However, the lack of compositions with this mudrā in published sources has meant that nothing substantive is known about the composer behind this signature. It is in this context that the discovery of three songs with this signature is significant.

Kaivāḍa Prabandha

The lyrics of the Kaivāḍa Prabandha (dgi dgi dgi dgi dham dham) with the vāggeyakāra mudrā of APV as seen in the manuscripts² is as follows:

Kaivāḍa prabandha, Rāga: sālānga nāma, Tāla: eka 3

dgi dgi dgi dgi dham dham taha dhimi dhimiki tā dhimi dhimikima tom tomgi Gamgi |ide reGu māmlu pāa valenu|

|jāvada| jaga jaga jhēmtari jhētari jhakakiGa jhēm jhēm kiṇṇa...kiṭ tōdgidgi dham dham

|mudra ālāpacāri| madhva matōdadhi candra | aparagājamrgēndra hari parāmbuja bhrṅga | śubhagaṇḍottuṅga

|jāvada ēka tālam| brahmaṇya tīritha suta vyāsa muni manohara kaivāḍa prabandhēśa abhinava purandara viṭṭhalla jaya jaya (dgi dgi dgi dgi dham dham)

It is important to note that the notations in the Thanjavur manuscripts need to be studied carefully, as they often have critical gaps in information (Rao & Srilatha, 2019). Some of these gaps may be filled by studying the lakṣaṇa texts. But others, such as the interpretation of the non-lakṣaṇa terms jāvada and ālāpacāri above, require a deeper study and a nuanced approach. With this background, only a brief structural analysis of the songs is undertaken in this paper.

The ‘Kaivāḍa Prabandha’ is classified as an ‘āli’ prabandha in the Saṅgītaratnakara (SR, circa 13th cent. CE). In the chapter on prabandha-s, SR describes the Kaivāḍa prabandha as follows:

kaivāḍaḥ pāṭaiḥ syātām dhruvōdgrāhau kaivāḍe nyasanam grahe |

sārthakairarthahīnaiśca pāṭaiḥ sa dvividho mataḥ ||

sa śuddhairmiśritaiḥ pāṭaiḥ śuddho miśra iti dvividhā (4: 199-200) (Chaudhary, 2000)

Meaning: The udgrāha and dhruva in kaivāda are composed with pāma-s (instrumental syllabic sounds), while the nyāsa (ending) is done in udgrāha. It is of two types, based on if the pāma-s are meaningful or meaningless. This is again of two types, ceuddha and miçera based on whether unmixed or mixed pāma-s are used.

Comparing with lakṣaṇa, the sections of the prabandha in the manuscript appear to be as follows:

- *Udgrāha*, the starting section: According to the manuscript this is to be sung twice: dgi dgi dgi dham...tom tomgi Gamgi
- *Dhruva*: The section titled ‘jāvada’, starting ‘jaga jaga jhem tari...’
- The section, titled ‘*mudrā ālāpacāri*’, which contains the mudrā-s of the composer (Abhinava Purandara Viṭṭhala), the patron (Vyāsamuni) and the prabandha (Kaivāda) seems to play the role of the *ābhoga* (the concluding section of a prabandha, which usually contains the mudrā of the composer)
- The song ends on ‘dgi dgi dgi dgi dham dham’ (the udgrāha)

It is observed that the structure of this prabandha is similar to that of the Kaivāda prabandha in rāga Nārāyanagaula attributed to Venkatamakhin (Dīksōitulu, 1904, pp. 754-5). While Saṅgītasampradāyapradarśinī uses the term ‘*ālāpakhāṇḍa*’, the manuscript uses the term ‘*ālāpacāri*’⁴. Based on the similarity with the published Nārāyanagaula prabandha, it may be inferred that the section marked ‘*mudrā ālāpacāri*’ in the manuscript is likely sung without a tāla. The phrase ‘*jāvada eka tālam*’ in the manuscript may indicate the resumption of the eka tāla. Though this term needs to be studied further, from the standpoint of construction, it appears that the Prabandha conforms to the lakṣaṇa outlined in SR.

Gīta

The gīta with the mudrā of APV, ‘*suramuni vanditam*’, in the rāga ‘Sālaṅganāṭa’ and the tāla ‘maṭhya’ is structured as follows:

Suramuni vanditam dina... matige garuḍārūḍantāgi sati sahita ...ruṣa
dharaddharamnāgi hari eni nam oratikaidi |Antari| surattaru vanagāhi sukannikara verasi gaja
veri dhurakebham arindale tarana mucī haraṇa paricalisivure...de iya iya...
|ālāpacāri| satyānamalāta sarasiruha daḷa nayana sārūjam ... saubhāgā taraṅga indirā
manōmurāga jaya |maṭhyam| dvarakāvātipura varādīyēṣa abhinava purandara n(v)iṭṭhalane

‘Gīta’ and ‘*Trikhaṇḍam*’ are terms used in the Thanjavur manuscripts to denote a simple song, which is usually made up of two or three sections. The gīta given above contains sections titled ‘*antari*’ and ‘*ālāpacāri*’. As in the Kaivāda Prabandha, here too, the term ‘*ālāpacāri*’ seems to indicate suspension of the maṭhya tāla for the passage starting ‘*satyānamalāta*’ and the resumption

of the *tāla* for the passage starting ‘*dvāarakāvatiपुरa*’ seems to be indicated by the mention of the name of the *tāla* before it.

Though portions of the lyrics are corrupt, some of the words, such as ‘*matige*’, ‘*garuḍārūdantāgi*’, ‘*oratikaidi*’ appear to be in Kannada. The song seems to address Lord Viṣṇu, based on references to ‘*garuḍārūḍa*’, ‘*hari*’, and ‘*dvāarakāvatiपुरa varādiyēśa*’.

Sulāḍi

The third song (*gajamu*⁵) carrying the *mudrā* of APV contains only the lyrics and does not have a notation⁶. The lyrics of the song are corrupted and are discernible only in places. Only the first and last words are transliterated below.

/bauli rāgam |

/maṭhya tālam| Gajamu...abhinauva purandara viṭṭhala vimala carita vinōdireya |

durulābhutani...abhinava purandara viṭṭhala

/rūpakam| Yindirā dēvi...abhinava purandara viṭṭhala

/tripuṭa tālam| vāraṇapuriya...abhinava purandara viṭṭhala

/āṭa ṭālam| bhakatavaccala...abhinava purandara viṭṭhalanā ... deva

/yēka tālam| sadamala caritra viccitra mahima| madhukaiṭabha kamsasura hara |

sudaruśanaddara aja bhara sura vāma kula rañjita ...abhinava purandara

viṭṭhala(sadamala)

There are some structural details that can be studied. There are five passages appearing in succession, all set to the *rāga* Bauli. Each passage is set to a different ‘*sulāḍi*’ *tāla*⁷ and each carries the composer’s *mudrā*. The last passage alone shows a return to its first line ‘*sadamala*’. Though the type of the composition is not mentioned in the manuscript, it is observed that this closely resembles the structure of a *sulāḍi*, a musical form popularized by the Haridāsa-s. A typical *sulāḍi* is a single song of multiple stanzas, all set to a single *rāga*, but with each stanza set to a different ‘*sulāḍi*’ *tāla*. Each stanza rests on its own first or second line and the whole song concludes on a passage called the ‘*jate*’, that thematically sums up the song (Rao A. , 2018).

Though the manuscript shows minor differences from the structure of a typical *sulāḍi* song, the stanzas seem to be bound by a similarity of theme and language, making them highly likely to be part of a single *sulāḍi*. For example, the rhyming phrases *janiśide*, *oraśide*, *salahide* appear in different stanzas, and the last stanza refers to the exploits of Lord Kṛṣṇa. The language of the lyrics is Kannada (*janiśide*, *oraśideyalla*, *durulābha*, *salahideyalla*). The likelihood of this being a *sulāḍi* is also strengthened by the presence of another *sulāḍi* immediately preceding this, the well-known

'*acyutānanda gōvinda*', which is written in a similar fashion, without a notation. The minor structural differences and deficiency in lyrics may well be resolved if a better copy of the song were to be found in TMSSML or some other repository.

Identity of the composer

There is no information available about the composer. The only song known to use this mudrā, '*Padumanābha paramapurūṣa*', is bereft of any autobiographical information. But when the lyrics of the three newly uncovered songs are analysed, they show many stylistic similarities with the compositions of Haridāsa-s, while also offering some clues on the composer himself. These are noted below:

- The effulgent praise of Vyāsa Tīrtha through the lines of the Kaivāḍa Prabandha '*madhva matōdadhi candra, aparagājamṛgēndra hari parāmbuja bhṛṅga, śubhaguṇōttuṅga, brahmaṇya tīritha suta vyāsa muni*' suggest the composer's allegiance to Vyāsatīrtha, the guru of Purandara Dāsa.
- The use of 'Viṭṭhala' in the signature suggest he is a Haridāsa. Many Haridāsa-s took the name of 'Viṭṭhala' as part of their signature and '*Dīkṣanāma*'⁸.
- The presence of a composition of the sulādi form, which is almost exclusive to the Haridāsa-s⁹
- The use of Kannada language in the gīta and sulādi
- Lord Viṣṇu being extolled in both the gīta and the sulādi. Haridāsa-s being Vaiṣṇavaite, composed mainly on Viṣṇu, often in the form of Kṛṣṇa.

The three new songs, all having the unambiguous prefix '*Abhinava*', indicate that the mudrā belongs to a Haridāsa who is distinct from Purandaradāsa. But what might have been the era of this composer? The dedication of the Kaivāḍa prabandha to Vyāsa Tīrtha, the guru of Purandaradāsa might mean that the composer lived at a time close to that of Vyāsa Tīrtha. Vyāsa Tīrtha passed away in 1539 (Sitaramaiah, p. 128). So, the prabandha was likely composed in the 1500's.

As to the identity of the composer, a couple of possibilities may be considered. The prefix '*Abhinava*', when added to the name of 'Purandara Viṭṭhala', may be a biruda (title) given to a composer of a later period, who was considered as illustrious as Purandaradāsa himself, perhaps in his skills as a vāggeyakāra¹⁰. In this case, the signature '*Abhinava Purandara Viṭṭhala*' would be a biruda (title) of a Haridāsa. However, it is not known if any Haridāsa was given such a title.

Another distinct likelihood is that the mudrā was adopted by 'Abhinava', who, according to a popular devaranāma '*śaraṇu śrī vyāsa muni*' (Rao M. S., p. 121), was one of the four sons of Purandaradāsa¹¹. According to the song, Vyāsa Tīrtha had also blessed Abhinava. Though the composer's identity cannot be ascertained with the available evidence, the finding of three more songs with the APV mudrā lend credence to Satyanarayana's

assertion that ‘Abhinava Purandara Viṭhala’ is not a mudrā of Purandaradāsa.

Significance of the findings

The three compositions with the mudrā of APV discovered among the Thanjavur manuscripts give us new clues about the composer. His allegiance to the Madhva sect, the use of Kannada language, the choice of the sulādi as a musical form, and the mudrā ‘Abhinava Purandara Viṭhala’ are strong indicators that the composer was a Haridāsa. Though more evidence is needed to ascertain the identity of the composer, the reference to Vyāsa Tīrtha in the lyrics of the Kaivāḍa Prabandha allows us to surmise that the composer lived close to the time of Vyāsa Tīrtha, in the 16th cent. C.E. The prefix ‘abhinava’ in all these songs also indicates that the composer was not Purandaradāsa.

The findings are significant from the standpoint of the history of music of the Haridāsa-s as well. It is known that the Haridāsa-s have composed in prabandha forms such as the gadya, cūrṇikā, daṇḍaka, śukasārīta, umātilaka and sudarśana and innovated with vṛttanāma-s (Sathyanarayana). While past research into the manuscripts at TMSSML have uncovered notated examples of ugābhoga-s, sulādi-s, and gīta-s, no examples of notated Prabandha-s by the Haridāsa-s have been found till now. The newly uncovered Kaivāḍa prabandha is the first evidence of a notated ‘prabandha’ composed by an early Haridāsa, one who might have lived close to the time of Vyāsa Tīrtha and Purandaradāsa. The choice of the musical form of ‘Kaivāḍa Prabandha’ is further proof that the Haridāsa-s not only spread Bhakti through their songs, but also contributed to the development of music.

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Microfilms

dgi dgi dgi dgi dam dam, Roll No. 414, Record No. 4850, Folio 195b-6, TMSSML collection, Microfilm, IGNCAR, Bengaluru

suramuni vanditam, Roll No. 416, Record No. 4858, Folio 5b-6, TMSSML collection, Microfilm, IGNCAR, Bengaluru

gajamu, Roll No. 416, Record No. 4859, Folio 16-7, TMSSML collection, Microfilm, IGNCAR, Bengaluru

(Footnotes)

- ¹ Indira Gandhi National Centre for the Arts, Regional Centre, Bengaluru
- ² Another copy is found in 11582, Folio 12 with errors of copying. For example, the title incorrectly calls this a 'kollāpura kaivdā prabandha', while it is seen that the 'kollāpura' is the last word of the previous song which is dedicated to the goddess of kollāpura.
- ³ The name of the tāla is not mentioned at the beginning of the song. It is inferred from its mention inside the song, at the end of the section titled ālapacāri
- ⁴ In fact, the term ālapacāriā/āpacāri is noticed in many manuscripts of gīta-s and prabandha-s at TMSSML.
- ⁵ The manuscript is damaged – only 'gajamu..ne' is discernible
- ⁶ The presence of this sulādi manuscript is documented by Rao in Appendix I (Rao A., Haridāsa sulādis in Thanjavur manuscript notations, In Press)
- ⁷ A set of the seven tāla-s - the dhruva, maṭhya, jhampa, rūpaka, tripu ma, a ma and eka
- ⁸ A name given when one is ordained a Haridāsa
- ⁹ The Tallapakka composers have composed sulādi-s, but the language used is not Kannada
- ¹⁰ Traditionally, the prefix of 'abhinava' is added to the name of a legendary predecessor and conferred as a title to someone who exhibits similar traits. Some examples are: 'Abhinava Bharata' (for an expert in the fields of dance and music), 'Abhinava Bhoja' (for a king)
- ¹¹ An inscription describing land and property donations to the sons of Purandara Viṭṭhala does not mention Abhinava. Only Lakshmanadāsa, HebaGadāsa and Madhvapadāsa are mentioned (Sitaramaiah, p. 10)