
Structural Analysis of Tillānās Composed by Sri M. D. Ramanathan: A Brief Study

Author Name:

Bhavaraju Lakshmi Surya Teja

Assistant Professor, Department of Fine & Performing Arts,

GITAM Deemed University, Visakhapatnam, AP

Mail: laxmiteja.b@gmail.com

ABSTRACT:

The 20th Century Composer, Sri M D Ramanathan, was a Stalwart Musician and Composer who has a very unique musical presentation in terms of voice as well as style. He is fondly called as MDR and was the disciple of Sri Tiger Varadachari. He composed over 300 compositions, according to available sources, in multiple languages. He composed in varied number of Rāgās and Tālās. Especially the Tālās used were Ādi, Rūpaka, Tripuṭa, Jhampe, Cāpu and Triśra gati patterns. The musical form Tillāna is highly rhythm-based and often highlighted for the intricate laya patterns and regarded as a fast-paced energetic compositions. Sri M D Ramanathan's style of music mostly follows the Viḷambita laya presenting a calm and relaxed feel throughout. The point to reflect is that he chose to compose Tillānās very beautifully in his style. This manuscript includes investigating the compositional form Tillāna focusing on the unique characteristics and contributions by Sri MDR. This manuscript focuses on the analysis of the few selected Tillānās composed by him. The objective is to analyse the structure of the composer's Tillānās, reflecting its scope on the analysis of the rhythm, rāga and emotional aspects produced. This study is based on the methodology which is done by the analytical approach through the available audio and text sources. The analysis includes the structure, framework, rhythmic highlights and patterns, raga significance, the rasa aspect of the Tillānas etc, aiming at the findings on Sri MDR's composing style, addition on the knowledge of music mathematical aspects like the muktāyi patterns which leads to gain command over laya.

KEYWORDS: M. D. Ramanathan, Musical Form, Tillāna, Carnatic Music, Structure of Tillāna, Laya patterns.

❖ **Introduction:**

➤ **Sri M. D. Ramanathan:**

The 20th Century Composer, Sri M D Ramanathan, was a Stalwart Musician and Composer who has a very unique musical presentation in terms of voice as well as style. He is fondly called as MDR. He was the disciple of Sri Tiger Varadachari and very affectionately he kept his guru's name as the mudra for his compositions i.e.; Varadadāsa reflecting his guru bhakti. He composed over 300 compositions¹, according to available sources, in multiple languages. Though he is basically a Malayali, the compositions he composed in other languages like Telugu, Tamil and Sanskrit show his command over these languages. Being a Vāggēyakāra in the modern world is truly a demanding task and he fulfilled it successfully. He composed in varied number of Rāgās and Tālās. Especially the Tālās used were Ādi, Rūpaka, Tripuṭa, Jhampe, Cāpu and Triśra gati patterns. Sri M D Ramanathan's style of music mostly follows the Viḷambita laya presenting a calm and relaxed feel throughout his performances. But unfortunately, his music was not so well received by many people. It might be due to some of his features and style of singing while presenting a concert. Sri MDR's musical knowledge is exceptional and only a learned audience will understand the worth of his knowledge. His concert presentation seems very natural and a sense of capturing the present moment. His robust voice which has a command over three octaves and being specialised in mandra sthāyi his music is a result of Nādōpāsana. MDR's singing style and his nature as a musician to be understood properly and if followed one can enjoy the subtle elements of classical music.

➤ **Tillāna:**

Tillāna is a very lively composition which is performed at the end of the concert presentation in music performances. This musical form is said to be initially found in Hindustani classical music named as Tarāna and later was appeared in the Cranatic Music². The style of using the words or the jatīs differ a bit due to the tinge of the linguistic differences but mostly the words find similar. One can also observe that in Hindustani Music improvisation is also shown in Tarānās but in Karnatic Music improvisation or the manōdharmam aspect is not presented while singing the Tillāna. This composition is seen both in music as well as Dance concerts. If carefully observed one can find some differences in the mode of Tillānās in Dance form and in Music form³. But lot of similarities are, Tillānās

¹ Karnatik.com, <https://www.karnatik.com/co1239.shtml>

² The Journal Of Madras Music Academy, Vol. LV, Page: 149

³ Journal of the Indian Musicological Society; Baroda Vol. 21, Iss. 1, (Jun 1, 1990): 67.

are majorly rhythm-based form which includes jāṭis or solkaṭṭu syllables which are usually meaning less and only the caraṇam is seen with lyrics which conveys the context of the composition. Singing or playing Tillānās give a very good voice training and instrumental finger training to present the solfa syllables in varied speeds and also gives good training to gain command over Laya. Learning a Tillāna also benefits the student to understand the mathematical patterns which can be applied while singing the manodharma form of singing i.e. Svarakalpana. Tillānās are composed in different Tālās and usually consists of Pallavi, Anupallavi and Caraṇam, following the kṛti musical form. Tillānās are usually performed in the end of the concert and usually considered as the concluding item in the concert. It has become a very popular form for its attractive nature through rhythmic aspects and almost every musician attempts to conclude a concert with a Tillāna. The presentation of Tillāna on instrumental is very catchy and the it gets much more attracted by the accompaniment given by the percussion instrumentalists.

➤ **Sri MDR & Tillāna:**

The musical form Tillāna is highly rhythm-based and often highlighted for the intricate laya patterns and regarded as a fast-paced energetic composition. Whereas, Sri M D Ramanathan's style of music mostly follows the Viḷāmbita laya presenting a calm and relaxed feel throughout. The point to reflect is that he chose to compose Tillānās very beautifully in his own style. Few of his Tillānās were also sung in medium tempo. Sri MDR composed many compositions and among them were Tillānās⁴. Many dancers also perform his Tillānās. In this paper, few of his Tillānās which are available with audio sources are taken up for Analysis.

This manuscript includes investigating the compositional form Tillāna focusing on the unique characteristics and contributions by Sri MDR. The structural analysis of rhythmic patterns that are composed in alignment with the rāga bhāva is studied and presented which results in the understanding of Sri MDR's style of composing Tillānās and also aids in the learning process of mathematical patterns which reflects in the kalpanasvara, the maodharma form of presentation.

➤ **Objectives of the Study:**

1. To study the contributions of the modern composer Sri M D Ramanathan to the field of Carnatic Music which results in the analysis of the composing style of Tillāna musical form

2. To analyze the structure of Tillānās composed by Sri MDR and understand the mathematical patterns included
3. To provide insights on understanding the Carnatic musical form Tillāna

❖ Literature Survey:

This review explores the compositional style of Tillānās composed by Sri MDR. Tillāna is a very interesting musical form in Carnatic Music which attracts many people as it is predominantly rhythm-based form of music. Different rhythmic patterns attract more people rather than abstract form singing. Basically, the literature related to the Tillāna is surveyed from web articles to books. Also, the survey included articles on Sri MDR's biography and his compositions. As this is a practical oriented paper, more of survey depends on the digital audio video sources of Sri MDR's performances. The main purpose of the survey is to connect dots with the Tillāna musical form and the compositional style of Sri MDR. All the literature surveyed and the digital sources are mentioned in the list of references. This area of analyzing the structural form of MDR's Tillāna is not seen in particular and is identified as one of the research gaps to take up this topic and to present the paper.

❖ Methodology & Approach:

- This study is completely based on the Analytical approach through the available web **Audio** and **Video sources**. Analyzing the style of composing Tillāna by Sri MDR is the main scope of this research paper and the following methodology and approach is followed:

1. **Musical Characteristics:** The musical structure including the melody i.e.; the rāga, rhythm i.e.; the tāla and the aesthetical aspects of Sri MDR Tillānās are analysed. Each and every section like the Pallavi, anupallavi and caraṇam observed keenly line by line and the structural analysis is presented. Analysis is based upon the aesthetical, mathematical and musical observations. A sample of two Tillānās are taken for observation to understand the basic framework of the analysis.
2. **Observations:** Observations drawn from the analysis of two Tillānās are presented which gives a general overview of the composing style of Sri MDR's Tillānās. Observations are explained on how creative, simple, attractive the Tillānās are composed with rāga bhāva and rhythmical aspects involving throughout aesthetically.

3. **Performance Approach:** The appearance of Sri MDR's Tillānās in Music as well as Dance recitals is discussed in this. Performance is the end result of being a musician in that angle, how MDR's Tillānās are placed is discussed.

❖ Analysis

List of few Tillānās composed by M.D. Ramanathan as available to the author from various sources:

1. Kānaḍa Tillāna - Nādhru dhīm – Ādi Tāḷam
2. Ranjani Tillāna - Dhīm Nādhru dhīm - Ādi Tāḷam
3. Kadanakutūhalaṁ - Nādhru dhūdhiṭa – Ādi Tāḷam
4. Hindōḷa Tillāna – Nādhru – Ādi Tāḷam
5. Kāpi Tillāna - Dhīm Dhīm - Trisra Ādi Tāḷam
6. Śankarābharaṇaṁ Tillāna - Nādhru dhīmṭa dharana – Ādi Tāḷam
7. Sindhubhairavi Tillāna - Nādhru dhīm – Ādi Tāḷam
8. Bēhāg Tillāna - Nādhru dhīm tanadhirana – Ādi Tāḷam
9. Bilahari Tillāna - Dhīm nadhrudhīm – Ādi Tāḷam

Note: Apart from the above list, there might be a few more Tillānās composed by Sri MDR. Only the available list to the author is mentioned here for a quick reference. Analyzing the structure of all the 9 Tillānās mentioned above makes it a lengthy work and so, only 2 Tillānās are selected to present in this paper.

➤ Musical Characteristics of Kānaḍa Tillāna – Ādi Tāḷam:

Kānaḍa is a rakti rāga which attracts listener's mind instantly. The svarās present in this rāga are Ṣaḍjam, Catuśrī Riṣabhaṁ, Sādhāraṇa Gāndhāraṁ, Śuddha Madhyamaṁ, Pancamaṁ, Catuśrī Daivataṁ, Kaiśiki Niṣādaṁ.

Mūrcana: S R G M P M D N Ś - Ś N P M G M R S

The Analysis on the musical characteristics of Kānaḍa Tillāna is explained as follows:

1. The tillāna Nādhru dhīm, was composed beautifully aligning with the rāga prayōgās of the Kānaḍa raga. The Pallavi starts with the amśa prayōga **N P G;** which was beautifully presented in varied ways, at the atīta graha of the Ādi Tāḷa. The strength given to the sādharāṇa gāndhāra shows the vidhwat of the composer.
2. The structure of pallavi in 16 count is divided as follows which merges beautifully with the rāga bhava

7 + 4 + 3 + 2 + | 6 + 2 + 6

;;;|;;| NP || G~;;; GM R, R, S NR | S,;;; NS R,;;; + NP

..... Nādhru dhīm... dhīm.dhīm dhīmta dhira nā..... dhira nā.....

7 + 4 + 3 + 2 + | 6 4 + 4

;;;|;;| NP || G~;;; GM R, R, S NR | S,;;; PR | SN PMGM + NP

..... Nādhru dhīm... dhīm.dhīm dhīmta dhira nā..... dhira nā dhiranā.

3. Anupallavi starts on the first beat of Laghu, with a pair of 5s patterns in the first line and followed by a pair of 4s patterns and ends with a pair of 3s patterns presented in second speed. The patterns are very well structured with the consonant phrases of the rāga.

5 + 5 + 6 4 + 4 3 + 3 + 2

MGMD, NDNS, NSRŠR, | ĠMRŠ NSNP | ŠŠŠŠŠ PPPPP PMNP || + G~

nādhruhru dhīm tōmdhruhru dhīm tanadirana tadirana tadira tadhigīṇatorṁ tadhigīṇatorṁ tadhigīṇa +

4. In the caraṇam, the sāhityam reflects the devotion towards the Nīlakanṭha svāmi and starts with the swarākṣara phrase. The lyrical section is followed by beautiful jati phrases completely showcasing the pairs and triplets of odd number phrases.

nīdupāda mulane neranammiti | nīrajāsanādi vinutapāda ||

nēramellanu dīrcibrōvumayya | nīlakanṭha srī varadadāsuni ||

3 + 3 + 5 + 5 3 + 3 + 5 + 5

tām - takīṭa - RŠNPM - jham, ta RR | tām ; - tajhaṇu - takatakīṭa - GMDDN ||

7 7 7

tadhīm, guṇita RĠ, dhīṭlām kītataka tōm | dhīṭlām kītataka tōm dhīṭlām kītataka tōm + nādhru || dhīm

The above analysis shows the style of MDR's composing the Tillāna musical form in an attractive raga Kāṇaḍa.

➤ Musical Characteristics of Ranjani Tillāna – Ādi Tāḷam:

Ranjani seems to be a very divine rāga which produces the energies of goddess form and gives a very deep meditative feel while listening. The svarās present in this rāga are Śaḍjaṁ, Catuśṛti Riṣabhaṁ, Sādhāraṇa Gāndhāraṁ, Prati Madhyamaṁ, Catuśṛti Daivataṁ, Kākalī Niṣādaṁ.

The Analysis on the musical characteristics of Ranjani Tillāna is explained as follows:

1. Ranjani Tillāna truly reflects the style of MDR. The tempo of this Tillāna is observed to be sung in medium tempo almost having the texture of viḷamba presentation in contrast with how Tillānās usually be in a brisk form. The reason is also because of the selection of Ranjani rāga, which is a very weighty and classy rāga. The beginning of the Tillāna starts with a deep slide ādhāra ṣaḍja to tāra ṣaḍja and the first line of Pallavi is beautifully structured in 6s, 2s and 3s.

The second line shows the muktāyi pattern in 7s which is designed in three speeds.

6 + 6 + 6 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 3 + 3

(s)/ Ś, ; ; Ś Ś | ŚND, D, | M N D M || G, Ś N D M G G S, Ḍ S R G M D ||

dhīm.. nādhṛ dhīm.dhīm. tōṁdhṛdhira nā.nādhṛ tāni tōṁdhṛ dhīm tadira dirana

7 7

Ś N D ; Ś Ṛ Ġ | , Ṛ, Ś | ND Ṛ:Ś ||

dhīm dhīm.. ta ka dhī . ṭlām. ki ṭatom dhī.ṭlām

7 7 7 (in 2nd speed)

ḌN;D;M, , Ġ, Ṛ, ĠṚŚN D Ṛ, Ś, ṚŚND M S, R, SRGM D ||

..ki.ṭa.tom. dhī.ṭlām. kiṭataka tom dhī.ṭlām kiṭataka tom dhī.ṭlām kiṭataka tom

2. The anupallavi of this Tillāna is composed very beautifully with patterns of 4s dominating in first two lines and the sangatī reflect the rāga bhava expressing the emotions of Ranjani, especially when there is a sharp stop at sādḥāraṇa gāndhāra in the sangati S R G R G,.

The next two lines consists the words ḍṛ Tillāna which is a frequent usage in MDR's Tillānās. This phrase ḍṛ Tillāna is structured by doubling the count of the letter ḍṛ. In the first phrase it is ḍṛ tillāna with only one ḍṛ and in the next two phrases the letter ḍṛ is doubled and it is structured as ḍṛ ḍṛ tillāna - ḍṛ ḍṛ ḍṛ ḍṛ tillāna.

4 4 6

S N Ḍ, SS R, | ; SR | GRG, ||

Nāḍṛ dhīm. tōṁdhṛ dhīm .. tana diranā.

4 4 4 4

S R G, RG M, | GNDM | RGS, ||

Nādhṛ dhīm. tōṁdhṛ dhīm. tadirana dirana.

S N D D S , S S N D , | S , R G M R G S ||

Nā. dṛdṛ tā..ni tōmḍṛ. tā..ni dṛ dṛ tillāna

1 3 1+1 3 1+1+1+1 3

G R S S R R S N | D G N D | M R G S ||

dṛ tillāna dṛ dṛ till ā na dṛ dṛ dṛ tillāna

3. The caraṇam starts with the rāga mudra and throughout the lyrics the rhyming is maintained. The usage of the word Ranjani at the note daivataṁ sounds so divine in MDR's voice.

ranjani niranjani durita bhanjani sujana pōṣiṇi

kunjara mukha ṣaṇmukha janani manju bhāṣiṇi mānini

pañca bāṇa janaka sōdari patita pāvani purāṇi bhavāṇi

vāncitārdha mella dīrci brōva manci samayamidamma māyamma.

The lyrical part is again followed by the jatīs same as in anupallavi. On the whole this Tillāna produces Ranjani rāga with a lot of divine appeal.

The above analysis on the musical structure of the composition Tillāna is presented as a critical observation on the composing style of Tillānās by Sri MDR.

➤ **Observations drawn from the Structural Analysis:**

1. The alignment of Rāga Bhāva with the rhythmical aspects in the Tillāna:

The above brief study proposes how Sri MDR expresses the Rāga Bhava in the rhythmically structured compositions Tillāna. He emphasizes the melodic phrases with emotion as a main element and thus ensures the never comprising nature on the soul of the raga. Throughout the rhythmic interplay, one can observe that the raga identity remains strong. He merges the viśēṣa consonant prayōgās simply into the rhythmical structured patterns which enriches the Tillāna with the raga Bhāva.

2. Beauty of presenting Tillāna in Madhya and Vīlambita laya with vibrant rāga bhāva:

Tillāna is a highly rhythm based, brisk lively composition which is mainly performed in fast tempos to showcase the rhythmic brilliance. But when approached in medium and slow tempos it shows a different aesthetic potential and this is the main feature of Sri MDR's Tillānās. The style of singing with emotional fullness and artistic grace completely reflects in his Tillānās also.

Sri MDR's compositional style is very creative as well as aesthetically easy to understand and practice. The usage of atīta graha, svarāksara phrases, mathematical patterns are very well blended with the aesthetics of musical presentation.

4. Helpful for a student in understanding the muktāyi patterns easily by learning the Tillāna:

The structural analysis presented in this paper, helps the students of music in triggering a thought process in understanding the musical form Tillāna. This process of musical analysis will guide on learning the muktāyi patterns and mathematical calculations while presenting the svarakalpana section of manodharma sangītaṁ

➤ **Performance Approach:**

The Tillānās composed by Sri MDR are wonderful compositions to perform in music concerts as well as dance recitals. Due to his working career at Kaḷākṣētra, his Tillānās were learnt by dancers and were also performed in their recitals. The rāgās he chose, for example Kānaḍa, Kāpi, Kadanakutūhalaṁ, Bēhāg, Sindhubhairavi very well suited to perform a Tillāna as an ending item of the concert. Many of his Tillānās are famous and observed to be performed in concerts. The simple and easy patterns in his Tillānās attracts even a layman and makes it lively and joyful while performing as the wholesome effect of presentation along with the percussion accompaniments highlighting the rhythmical aspects makes a beautiful impact on the audience. The Tillāna in the rāga Kāpi is a very familiar and many musicians perform this composition in concerts. The Bilahari rāga Tillāna is often seen in the performances of Dance recitals.

The above explanation on the Analysis of Musical Characteristics, observations drawn upon the Analysis and the Performance Approach of Sri MDR Tillānās are presented upon brief research on the core aspects of the compositions. Upon the above explanation, a few Findings and Concluding points are given as follows:

❖ **Findings & Conclusion:**

1. The structural analysis of compositions helps in understanding the composing styles of Composers
2. Sri MDR's unique style of classic composing is well understood through the structural analysis of Tillānās.
3. This study helped to experience the beauty of singing Tillānās in full form of classicism in Madhya/vilāmbita tempos rather than in fast tempos.
4. A musician can get good command and clarity over laya aspects when the Tillānās are studied, understood, practiced and then performed.

5. Upon this study, it is found that working in Kaḷākṣētra might be the inspiration to Sri MDR to compose Tillānās and also it is said that many of his Tillānās were used in Dance recitals.
6. The famous Kāpi Tillāna was found to be performed by many artists and his Bilahari Tillāna is usually performed in the Dance recitals.

❖ Summary & Future Scope

- ✓ This paper presents a brief study on the Structural Analysis of Tillānās composed by Sri M. D. Ramanathan, where few of his Tillānās were analysed based on the structural rhythmic patterns and rāga bhāva aspects. This study helped in gaining more knowledge on the rhythmic patterns and also on the unique style of Sri MDR.
- ✓ The findings of the study are presented and investigating the contributions of composers result in gaining knowledge on composing skills and also strengthens in developing unique style of a musician.
- ✓ This study is a great addition to the Academic research which shows the way of presenting the structural analysis of Tillānās.
- ✓ As a note on Future Scope one can work on the concept of Compositional style of other compositions of MDR as a modern composer, a comparative analysis of MDR Tillānās with other modern composers can be studied, one can research on finding the other Tillānās Sri MDR composed and present a structural analysis or even one can attempt to undertake research on the MDR's style of singing and performances.

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