

Sambandhar - A Cognoscente in the Field of Fine-Arts

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Abstract

Thirugnana Sambandhar is a multifaceted personality. He is a Saint, Poet, Philosopher, Composer, Scientist, Mathematician, Musician of the 7th century. He has no parallels in the poetic world. Indian poetry has its root dating back to the Vedic times. His poetry for decades has reflected diverse spiritual traditions within India and in many Foreign Countries. He had penned down amazing poetic structures through his mystical experience. His vision, lyrical skills, technical expertise, command over Language, Vocabulary, word-play, meters, Imagery, attitude, love towards his mother tongue are uncomparable. Ultimately he is the Epitome of Tamil Literature.

Keywords: Navarasa, Visionary, Maalai-maatru, Palindrome, Prosody, Word-play, Yamaham, Meters, Traveller, Imagery, Crowning trait, Attitude

This is an article about Thirugnana Sambandhar's hymns which belong to the Seventh Century. This article put-forth some original inferences and conclusions that challenge several hitherto accepted realities and other alternative viewpoints to others strictly based on musical and intellectual logic. This article also brings to the fore his fertile imagination and literary beauty which places him over and above on TOP among the true poets in the country and also proves beyond doubt his exemplary musical knowledge and versatility.

There is absolutely no doubt that Gnanasambandhar was the brightest star in the Galaxy of Indian Music and Culture. He had created music of immeasurable brilliance in the form of Pann. He is not only a Musician but also a multifaceted personality. Lyrically his command over Tamil is Extraordinary and Exemplary. Truly and Emotionally, he is a master of Navarasaas. Poetically his expressions and imaginations are of a very high magnitude, attitude, caliber and order. Statistically, he has a few PEERS in terms of numbers: 1) Music; 2) Dance; 3) Thaalas; 4) Prosody; 5) Sandham (Jathi); 6) Arts; 7) Miracles; etc., during that century. Attitudinally he is exemplary and excellent in all ways.

Musical Visionary

Sambandhar is not only a composer who churned out both melody and Lyrics but also a Musical Visionary with Consummate Command over every aspect of Music. Multi-layered musicianship. In Indian Music, it is extremely challenging and difficult to assess the actual musical skills of the original composers who lived in the earlier Centuries. Analysis of Sambandhar Thevaaram is equal to analyzing Lord's words. Sambandhar himself says in his “Thiru Ilambiam Kottur” Thevaaram that his words are His (Lord) words (Enadurai thanadurai yoga). There are five Principal styles of Compositions. The three distinct styles of Tyagaraaja, Muthuswamy Dikshitar, and Shyamaa Sastri have been studied comprehensively by Great Scholars over the years and the approaches to composing have been classified as Draaksha paakam (Grapes), Naarikela paakam (Coconut) and Kadali paakam (Banana), respectively.

The reasoning is that Tyagaraaja's composing style is as easy as popping a Grape into one's mouth and immediately tasting its Sweetness. Dikshitar's works are akin to a coconut which offers fruit only after innumerable Challenges before it can be relished. Shyamaa Saasthri's pieces have relatively smaller Challenges: just peel one skin layer to access just like the Banana.

Kshetrangnar and other padhams are comparable to the exquisite but challenging to access i.e., Jack Fruit-Panasa paakam. Oothukkaadu VenkataKavi's compositions can very well be categorized as Aamra paakam (Mango) because it is equally delicious with and without the skin.

Over and above of all above quoted the deep style of Sambandhar's Thevaaram with its multi-faceted charm, multi-dimensional structure can be compared to Honey which is a sweet collection from the beautiful flowers of many Flowering Plants. It is divine, and indestructible, everlasting like Lord and it cannot and should not be and could not be altered/destroyed.

Another great testimony to Gnanasambandhar's musicianship is the number of references to music in his works more than any composers whose works have been studied in depth. The astounding feature is that he has inter-woven them almost playfully and with ease into his lyrics, making no effect of flaunting his skill and scholarliness.

References to Rhythm

Sambandhar's multifaceted approach to music ensured that he found every aspect of music delightful. He naturally expressed his vision eloquently, extrapolating his knowledge with his vision of the divine. There are numerous references to rhythmic aspects in his works.

Dance

Sambandhar's description of dance reveals his extraordinary and exemplary visualization and knowledge. This is reflected in the way of Lord Nataraja's variety of Thaandavaa's and Dances. The Naayaka Naayaki bhaava padhigams are abhinaya-centric parts. He has mentioned several types of Dances like Padam, Nirutham, Nattam, Sandhiyaa Thaandavam, (Malai Nattam), Urthuva Thaandavam,

Thiripura Samhaara Thaandavam, (Dance at Burial Ground), Gowri Thaandavam (Dance with Umadevi), Kaalika Thaandavam (Dance with Kaali) and so on.

Lyrical Skills

Any attempt to categorize and communicate Sambandhar's Lyrical skill is like trying to map an "Ocean" and capture its immensity through a Television Screen.

If one were to decide on the most striking feature of the composer's lyrics, it is an incredible combination of power and elegance that his words possess. Even with and without music, they can cogently convey a whole range of emotions, portray scenes vividly, dwarf intellects with erudition and touch one's very soul sublimely. His amazing articulation is not merely about skill and scholarliness; it is more about Divine Inspirations. Sambandhar is a master of Sanskrit (Veda) and Tamil. Sambandhar was revered for his prolific contributions to spiritualism and Philosophy along with music. The Hallmark of real Scholarliness is to reveal it spontaneously without any effort. Sambandhar's outputs are seamlessly blended with erudition with imagination in equal measures. His compositions inspire awe for the Quality of their content and how they were constructed.

Characteristic Features

Spontaneity the most obvious aspect of Sambandhar's lyrics, is the inimitable flow of words which hardly seems calculated but their profundity becomes evident only upon close examination. The smooth flow of words is a product of a very smooth flow of thoughts. He was most modest about his capabilities, attributing it all to the grace of the Lord.

Command Over Languages

Sambandhar's mastery over Tamil gave him the luxury of switching levels at will. New poetic construction and new lyrical imaginations show a different vision in the literary field. All the sub headings like Maalai Maatru, Thiru Ezhukkootrirukkai, Ekapaadam are examples to quote.

Erudite Tamil

In Piramapuram padhigam

Surulagu naragal payil tharanithala
muranazhiya aranamadhiinmup Purameriya
viravuvagai sara visaikol karamudaiya
paramanidamaam Varamarula varanmuraiyin
irainirai kol varusurudi sira vuraiyinaal
Piramanuyar aran ezhil kol charana vinai parava
valar piramapurame

In the above hymn the extensive use of letter “ra” is seen in each line and the whole hymn. The Maalai Maatru padhigam is another artistic creation in Pann Kowsigam. The Palindrome structure shows and proves beyond doubt his scholarly nature.

Technical Expertise (Prosody)

Most of his pieces abound in high-quality rhyme (Prasa) and alliteration (anu praasa) It can be inferred from the facts that he had employed both 2nd syllable rhyme- (dviteeyaakshara price) and the last syllable rhyme (antyaakshara prasa). His usage of complex compound words and metaphors attest to his command over the Language.

Vocabulary

A stunning vocabulary is one of the main features of Sambandhar’s lyrical style. The mastery over words and expressions enabled him to use rare words or their variants coin innovative words, use different words for the same context or employ popular words in rare contexts, indulge in dazzling word-play and also throw in an occasional challenge to later days scholars, perhaps to enable further access only to those who persevered with the right attitude. As a lyricist, he had an excellent knowledge of synonyms.

Word-Play; (Mozhimaatru, Yamaham)

Sambandhar had a penchant power for word-play. It makes some of his passages awe-inspiring. Best examples are Mzhimaatru, and Yamaham. But most importantly, it must be noted that the spontaneity of the lyrics does not suggest a pre-designed effort to play with words for their own sake. They only reveal Sambandhar’s lyrical versatility, naturally asserting itself in various ways.

Meters (Sandham)

Meters (Sandham) lend structures to poems and verses as the best lyrical devices to capture the reader’s attention and appreciation. Indian literature is rich with great poets who have composed their verses in compelling meters. Sambandhar’s use of interesting meters (sandham) adds to unique punch to his creations which sets them apart stylistically. Some of the sections, especially when blended with tongue-twisting phrases are rare and special ones that give rise to later Thirupugazh like hymns.

Divine Equations

Sambandhar’s equation with Lord Shiva is well known and the image of Sambandhar is almost uni-dimensional a Shiva’s adherent. Lord Shiva of Piramapuram (Seerkaazhi) seems to have been the favorite deity of the mega poet. This is not surprising since being his birthplace, and he got the divine milk and vision of both at the age of 3. Another reason for him being a fervent follower of Lord Shiva is that he considered them (Lord Shiva and Umadevi) as his mentor, parents. His intimate knowledge and mastery over details about the deity make his creation even more astounding. But it must be noted here that his compositions do not reflect just academic knowledge coming through in a report-like form. They are up to the brim with emotional feelings which results in a passionate flow of thought and expression.

References to Major Incidents

Sambandhar has referred to several mythological incidents in his various padhigams. Examples 1) Raavanan, 2) Maal Aayan, 3) Consuming Poison (Visham Undathu) 4) Burning Thiripuram 5) Burning Manmadhan. There are several references to rare details that occurred in Sambandhar’s work that reveal his incredible masterliness, scholarliness and awareness of minute culturally relevant details.

Sambandhar’s compositions encompassing a whole range of themes and his portrayal of details reveal the near matchless depth of his knowledge and passion about varied subjects. He had proved beyond doubt that he is a Mahaa Kavi - Mega Poet.

Traveller

Sambandhar had traveled extensively, visited many temples, had left his imprint in numerous pilgrimage centers through vivid hymns. His colorful padhigams on the presiding deity ie local God and Goddess, indicate his first-hand knowledge and experience in these towns and villages rather than something derived from other sources. His scholarly knowledge about that temple, street, village, trees, flowers, animals architecture, sounds etc., is astounding and amazing.

Imagery and Imagination

Sambandhar was revered as a Maha Kavi- Mega Poet even within his lifetime (being appreciated by Thiru Navukkarasar) and other Religious People Kings. What makes someone the best Composer / Poet? Adherence to Grammatical requirements like rhyme, alliteration, and meter. Sambandhar was almost a prerequisite in classical times and most composers or poets are measured against these yardsticks, as they prevailed in their language, region, and time. Several Composers have displayed their scholarliness and competence in this area by the employment of Simile and Metaphores lend color to their work.

Crowning Trait

The definite trait of a Poet is his Original Imagination. A writer sees words , a Scholar sees work but a Poet sees Pictures when high-quality knowledge anchors inspired imagination; the results are magical. That's why Great Poets have always been rare on this Planet. When it comes to a display of imagination very few composers only can be considered and included. Here Sambandhar stands tall among these POETS. They had the special ability to foresee beyond words and create scenarios and take their readers exactly where they want them to be.

Glowing Imagery

Sambandhar's compositions are not merely pleas uttered in Devotion or entreaties clothed in flowery language. Nor are they only about a set of scholarly phrases strung together. They glow with imagery; he creates the picture he paints with his

brush of imagination that transports the connoisseur into a world of eternal and ethereal beauty. It is as though he has seen, heard and experienced what he described and one is left to wonder what reality is.

Torrential Thoughts

The Torrential flow of words one sees in Sambandhar's Creations leaves one wondering about a beautiful mind that was perpetually inundated with a Niagarasque flow of thoughts.

Attitude

Some chapters have offered irrefutable proof of Sambandhar's multi-faceted, multi-dimensional aptitude. What marks him out of the crowd as an exceptional human being is his exemplary attitude. A study of Composer's lyrics is often the best Window to his heart, brain and spirit as opposed to second, third or hundredth hand , Opinions about him from other sources. His compositions are effortless and are merely extensions of his relationship with the LORD. Thus Sambandhar has proved beyond doubt that he is "cognoscente" in the field of Fine Arts – Music.

Conclusion

Thirugnana Sambandhar Thevaram is analyzed on an overall view. . He has proved undoubtedly that he is a child Prodigy by his extra-ordinary contributions to the world of Literature and Fine – Arts within his short span of life i.e. 13 years (3 to 16). This article speaks about his Lyrical Wonders such as Rhythmic Structures, Uncomparable love for Tamil, construction of New Poetic forms, powerful imagination, uninterrupted flow of thoughts, exemplary vocabulary amd Musical Splendours such as Pann (Ragas), Thalasa (Rhythm), Meters (Sandam) Technical Terms of Fine-Arts and in-depth knowledge about Musical Instruments brings the author to the fore and the Limelight and proves that he is the Cognoscente in the field of Fine-Arts.

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