


7. Ibid., p.48


9. Ibid.
SOUTH INDIAN OPERA - ITS STRUCTURE & DEFINITION
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'Opera' in South India is a type of musical form wherein a story is set with songs with intermittent verses and prose passages in both conversational and indirect style. The word 'Opera' is properly the plural of the Latin word 'Opus' meaning work. Opera is a shortened form of the Italian 'Opera in musica' that is a 'musical work'. In the West, the composers used the word 'Melodrama' for Opera and the term 'Opera' meaning 'dramma per musica' or musical play was first used in England from 1658, in France and Germany at the end of 18th Century and this term has been accepted recently in Italy.

Composers in South India except Raya Ramananda did not call their works as musical play or Sangeetanatakam but named them 'Natakam' as there was no necessity to distinguish the play or Natakam from musical play or Sangeetanatakam because the plays were operatic in character. It is Late Prof. P. Sambamoorthy, who first used the term 'Opera' to denote the type of musical forms which have a story set with music and introduced the vernacular names Sangeetanatakam,
Gayanatakan and Isainatakan to these type of South Indian musical forms.

In the West, the term 'Opera' is defined as follows:

"A dramatic work in which the words, instead of being spoken in verse or prose are wholly or partly sung to an instrumental accompaniment almost always assigned to an orchestra."

"Opera (It., work - an abbreviation for Opera in musica) A drama to be sung with instrumental accompaniment by one or more singers in costume; recitative or spoken dialogue may separate set musical numbers."

"A drama either tragic or comic, sung throughout with appropriate scenery and acting to the accompaniment of an orchestra."

Late Prof. P. Sambamoorthy remarks in 1934 that "it is unfortunate that both in Sanskrit and in the South Indian vernacular, there is not a word in to correctly convey the idea of 'Opera'. Natakam is only pure drama. The term 'Sangeetanatakam' might perhaps be popularised as the equivalent of the 'Opera' in the English language."

"Kalaikkalanjyan, the Tamil encyclopaedia defines the term "Isainatakam", and
Geyanatakam or Opera.

A South Indian Opera is not merely a drama set to music. It is both a musical and literary form combined. Music is the vital part of the play and it acts as a powerful commentary on several dramatic situations. There is no clown or Vidushaka in a musical play of South India. The whole work is enacted with 'Abhinaya' and the performers who act will sing the songs themselves. Rather there will not be any play back singers in Operas or Sangeetanatakas of South India.

The term Sangeetanatakam is used first to denote the type of musical form which has a story set with songs with verses and prose passages in conversational and indirect style, by Sri Raja Ramananda who was the Governor of Raja Rajamahendri in South India during the reign of Gajapati Prataparudra of Orissa in his work "Jagannatha Vallabha". King Prataparudra ruled from 1407 to 1540 A.D. and his period is remarkable in the history of India for spreading Vaishnavism in Orissa. Raja Ramananda is the most famous and chief disciple of Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu who formulated the Goudiya Vaishnavism. Raja Ramananda is the first and only composer to have used the term 'Sangeetanatakam' to denote the work
which is composed on the model of an Opera.

Though the exact date of this work is not known, it must have been composed and staged during King Prataparudra's rule as we find in the work, the statement that this Sanravanatakam has been composed at the direction of the king and patron Gajapathi Prataparudra.

"श्री वंगमलाकृतिका वास जलमग्ने शनारिश्च क्रिया
अग्नितंत्रात् श्रावणे भंगितंत्रात् परकाकारे समविनयानानाः श्रावणे"  

Raja Ramananda also gives the lakshana of the Sanravanatakam as that the Opera should be performed with "Abhinayanatanam".

The difference between a drama and an Opera is one of emphasis. The action is simpler in an Opera than in an ordinary play. The plot and characterization are set in broad outline rather than in detail in an Opera. In other words, the plot is only the means to an end in a musical play while prominence is given to the musical setting and the way in which it is performed by the vocalists and instrumentalists. As speech is not employed in an opera, music serves four different purposes in relation to the words.
1. Music for declamation: as a vehicle for reciting the verses.

2. Music for decoration: The music set out to charm on its own account using the text only as a medium to bring out the musical excellence.

3. Music for depiction: The music attempts to illustrate certain picturesque details of the text.

4. Music for expression: To give utterance to the emotional implications of the situation in the text, which is the most important function of music in an Opera.

An Opera depends upon music for expression and hence it cannot be realistic. The mode of singing instead of speaking in a play is the first convention and completely at variance with reality. But in any art, the conventional mode of expression has to be accepted. The opera lovers accept the convention of actors conversing in songs. In an Opera, the beauty and expressiveness of the music really holds the audience. The music intensifies the dramatic force but eases the dramatic tension. The purpose of the connecting verses and prose passages are to convey the audience a 'Programme' so that they can better appreciate the expressiveness
of the strictly musical portions. The entire

_dramatic a tempo is slower than the tempo of
the drama in an Opera. This is because the entire
play is sung throughout in an opera. It also takes
a longer time for the development of the plot than
the actual time required for an ordinary play.

It is mainly for the music, that the lover of Opera
goes to the theatre. Unlike a drama, which can be
enjoyed only by those who know the language of
the play, Opera can be appreciated to a certain
extent even by those who do not follow the text
through the beauty of the music.

In South India, the traditional Provincial
theatres use music and dance with Nrutta and Nrutya
or Nrutya alone. The vernacular dramas which
evolved out of these traditional theatres were
also operatic in character until the middle of
the 20th Century. The Sangeetanatakas were written
during 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries. To differ-
entiate from the traditional provincial theatres
which were also using ragas of South Indian Music
and dance, the composers of Sangeetanatakas resorted
to the classical style of Carnatic music and only
'Abhinaya' - Mime - without any kind of foot-work is
prescribed when presenting these works on the stage.
The Sangestanātakas make use of both literary and musical forms. The themes are mainly Purānic and they evoke Bhakti rasa. The ragas which are used in Operas of South India are mostly 'Rakti' ragas. The music will be of simple type without much 'Sangatis' of 'yanaras'. The music will be very expressive. The 'Tāla' will also be of simpler type. All the three kinds of tempo are used. The Rasa will be created by the choice of the rāga and the tempo of the composition.

Though there are many musical plays in Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Sanskrit, Arumachalakavirayar's Rāmanātakan, Saint Thyagaraja's Prahlāda Bhaktha Vijayan and Nōuka Charithram and Gopalakrishnan Bharatiyar's Nandanār Charithram are the famous Sangestanātakas of South India. Songs from these above mentioned Operas are performed in vocal and instrumental concerts even today because of their very high musical value. The Opera Nandanār Charithram of Gopalakrishna Bharatiyar became very popular and it is used for Harikathākālakahepam performances and was produced as a drama and was also produced as a movie with the title Nandanār by Gemini Pictures of Madras.

At the end of the 19th Cent. (1864) a composite form of entertainment namely 'Harikathākālakahepam' came into South. The opera compositions which were composed before the advent of Harikathā
kalakshepaam were very useful for this musical discourse. This performance is a discourse by a single performer on sacred themes to the accompaniment of music and occasionally with dance. Threfore the Opera composition was used for Harikathakalakshepaam and this type of performance became popular in South India. Secondly, people aimed at reality and hence dramas without songs or dance, having only prose dialogues came into vogue from the early 20th Century in many parts of South India. These two Harikathakalakshepaam and drama or natakam have made the Operatic plays loose their popularity on the stage. Of late, a performer who is proficient in carnatic music as well having a good voice with the ability to act on the stage has become a rare phenomenon. It is yet another cause for the non-staring of sanseetanatakam on the platform as an Opera.

At present, slowly Sanseetanatakam are coming up and they are staged in musical sabhas at Madras. The production of Opera on the stage has its own advantages - the Carnatic music will become more popular as theatre is a mass media and the field of "Orchestra" with melodic music can be explored and improved which has not so far advanced in South India. Opera can be
regarded as a separate manifestation of the art of music and drama claiming sovereign status. It belongs to the branch of applied music, and is an International Art form. It differs according to the country in its form and style. The Opera in South India is entirely different from the Opera of the Western countries.