

## CONTRIBUTION OF MARATHAS OF TANJORE TO ART AND ARCHITECTURE

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In this paper an attempt has been made to deal with the contribution of Marathas of Tanjore to Art and architecture. Tanjore had the unbroken artistic excellence since the time of the Cholas and the Nayaks. These cultural traditions flourished and attained zenith under the Marathas of Tanjore. <sup>1</sup>Tanjore possesses a rich and fertile soil singularly well supplied with water from two great rivers Cauvery and Coleroon. The river waters dispersed almost every field in the country through reservoirs, sluices and canals. The uncommon fertility of the country splendidly contributed the artistic tradition of South India in general and Tamil Nadu in particular.<sup>2</sup>

Tanjore, historically a heartland of Chola Kingdom, came under the influence of the Vijayanagar rule, about the third quarter of the fourteenth century. Krishnadevaraya (1509-1529) the greatest ruler, organised the Nayakdom of Tanjore, Madura and Senji in the early decades of the sixteenth century.<sup>3</sup> The Nayaks of Tanjore established their kingdom in 1540 and their rule continued till 1675.<sup>4</sup> A factional war between the Nayaks of Tanjore and Madurai Chokkanatha Nayak (1662-1682) the ruler of Madurai requested Vijayaraghava Nayak (1633-1673) of Tanjore to give his daughter for marriage. But the latter declined the offer. Enraged Chokkanatha Nayak ordered his commander of the troops to proceed against Tanjore. In the war of 1673, the ruling power of the Tanjore was destroyed and Chokkanatha assumed the whole territories. In 1674 his foster brother was appointed as the Governor of the country. The kingdom of Tanjore came to an end.<sup>5</sup>

Meanwhile Chengamaladhas (1674-1675), a boy of the old dynasty was brought-up secretly at Nagapatinam by a wealthy merchant. Hearing this Venkanna, the former Rayasam of Vijayaraghava invited Bijapur Sultan for reinstating Chengamaladas on the throne of Tanjore. The Bijapur Sultan sent his general Ekoji (Venkoji) who was ordered to drive out Alagiri and to reinstate the boy Chengamaladhas.<sup>6</sup> The invasion of the Ekoji, ultimately led to the occupation of Tanjore in 1675 which marked the beginning of the Maratha rule in Tanjore. Ekoji, taking advantage of the confusion in the Bijapur kingdom, usurped power from Chengamaladhas and established the Maratha rule in Tanjore.<sup>7</sup> In 1676, Ekoji (1676-1683) founded Maratha kingdom and the Marathas rule continued for a century and a half which marked the beginning of cultural revival and blossoming of the artistic tradition.<sup>8</sup> The Marathas of Tanjore maintained a separate identity from the date of its inception. The kingdom faced political opposition of various Hindu and Muslim rulers on one side and on the other side the trade concession of Western countries. The competition among them forced it to continue a balance from internal and external groups. It had no

scope for any political expansion, but continued to amalgamate different cultures. Thus Tanjore became a centre of court culture.<sup>9</sup>

The Maratha rule witnessed margined changes of ownership. Telugu, Kannada and Maratha immigrants poured in steady streams into Tanjore region. The bureaucracy came to be filled with Telugu and Maratha immigrants. They were remunerated by grant of land called *maniams* and thus they became the owners of vast estates. The productive labour force was tied to the soil and their condition resembled the serfs of medieval period. The agrarian society consisted of landowners of vast estate tenants and agricultural labourers. The tenants were mostly from the Sudra caste and the caste structure dominated the agrarian society. In almost all the villages the upper caste of Brahmin and Vellalas were the land owners. The productive forces the serfs, slaves and tenants continuously supported the Brahmins with their toiling and moiling on the lands.<sup>10</sup> The productive forces were squeezed in all possible ways and their welfare was neglected. Their earnings were diverted for the expenses of native princes and idle classes like Brahmins and courtiers. As the idle classes had extra income and time they created fresh amusement and developed zest for dance, music and artistic tradition.<sup>11</sup>

### Architecture

With the abundance of large working forces and artisans, the ruling Marathas constructed beautiful structures in Tanjore. The most important Maratha structures in the town as the group of buildings within the palace complex. The 400 year old palace complex was erected by the Nayaks and the Marathas. The palace contained four main structures i.e. the Arsenal Tower, Bell Tower, Maratha Durbar Hall and SarjaMadi. The Arsenal Tower, a seven floor structure was used as the Andhapuram for the Nayak kings who had their harem in each floor. Later when British rule emerged, they used the seven floor structure to dump weapons and hence the name Arsenal Tower.<sup>12</sup> It is a seven storeyed *Gudagopuram* which was built to resemble a temple. Near the *Gudagopuram* is the six-storeyed *Madamaligam* constructed by a Nayak ruler, but extensively renovated by the Marathas. It was constructed to enable the ruler to view the towers of the famous Sri Ranganatha temple at Srirangam.

In 1684 Shahji, the Maratha ruler erected the Maratha durbar Hall. The durbar comprised of two *mandapas*. The front *mandapa* has a wooden roof covering with tiles and supported by pillars. The rear *mandapa* is raised and has a small vault roof standing on granite pillars, plastered with bricks and lime.<sup>13</sup> The SangitaMahal, a miniature of the surviving court of TirumalaiNayak's palace in Madura is also fine.<sup>14</sup> The Marathas constructed another palace at Tiruvaiyar which was proximity to the main capital. This is small, but richly ornamented palace. Near the palace are two peculiar pyramids like four storeyed structure, "Pigeon Houses", which attracts the attention of the spectators.<sup>15</sup>

Another historically important spot is Manora, located twenty km south of Pattukottai. The place derives its name from the fort built here by king Serfoji. The word

Manora means a tower a derivative of the *minars* of North Indian architecture. It is an excellent piece of Art. The 140 feet monument stands majestically on the shore of the Bay of Bengal. In 1815 built the tower to commemorate the victory of the British over Napoleon Bonaparte in the historical battle of Waterloo. The hexagonal shaped storeyed fort has a moat around it. The fort has a centrally located tower which is 23.3 meter high and has nine floors.<sup>16</sup> The moat with sea water is provided with drainage facility through underground connections. There are both inlet and outlet facilities. The Maratha king used the fort as summer palace.<sup>17</sup>

### Carnatic Music

Tanjore, the seat of ancient Chola and Nayak kingdoms continued to foster the cultural and musical tradition of the past. Music is a precious heritage and is an abstract of art. The art flourished in a better social and political climate of the time which had both political and religious character. Music is an extremely versatile medium of communication by emotion and this was demonstrated by palace musicians. They were patronised and surrounded in the atmosphere of art.<sup>18</sup> Tanjore the only seat of musical tradition since the fall of the Vijayanagar rules, was the synthesising centre of northern Hindustani music and southern Carnatic native music. Hindustani music was refined by Persian music. A gradual fusion of one another took place but the main point of difference between the two are the still well marked distinction.<sup>19</sup> The Carnatic music was inherited from the Kanada musician, saint and poet Sri PurandaraDasa(1480-1564) in the Vijayanagar Empire. He had simplified and systematised the process of learning music. But a great revolution in Carnatic music was created during the Maratha rule by musical Trinity SyamaSastri (1762-1827), Thyagaraja (1767-1847) and MuthuswamiDikshitar (1776-1835).<sup>20</sup> King Tulajaji (1763-1787) the Maratha ruler offered his patronage to musicians from all parts of India and made his court a renowned centre of musical culture.<sup>21</sup>

The glory of the music attained its zenith during the time of the great singer Tyagaraja (1767-1847). He was one among the musical trinities. He was born at Tiruvarur in 1767 to Ramabrahman, a Telugu Brahmin. Later the family moved to Tiruvaiyaru and he lived there till the end of his life in 1847. The Saint had his learning from Guru Venkataramana. The *kirtis* of Thyagaraja. 2400 in number have Rama bhakti and Nadopasana as two cordial features. His *kirtis* impoverished are known as *Sanghathis*. The purpose of *Sanghathis* is only an elaboration of *Ragasancharas*. This richness of *Ragabava* gave him a place among the greatest composers of music like Purandara Dasa.<sup>22</sup> The melodious *kirtan* which he sang had a lasting impact on the musicians and music lovers of his time. Tyagaraja could claim a period of his own as the modern Sangita attained at the full stature during that period. To the development of music his contribution was the introduction of *Sanghathis* in which their elaborate variation upon the original melodies made the theme more musical. Tyagaraja left a school of disciple who developed and spread the art of the masters in succeeding generations.<sup>23</sup>

Another senior most trinity MuthuswamiDikshitar was a composer of rare distinctions. Sastri is believed to have created 300 pieces in all, fifty in Telugu, fifteen in Sanskrit and five in Tamil, besides five *geetams*, four *varnams* and three Swarajatis in addition to a *navarathamalika* on Devi Meenakshi in nine ragas, a great performance. He invented new form of Indian notation which contains richness of musical conception and artistic excellence of high order.<sup>24</sup>

During the Maratha period artistic sophistication was the strong binding factor between temple and court. The most gifted composers lent their talents to both the temples and the courts. The *devadasis* assisted them and taught them music.<sup>25</sup> The *devadasi* communities were embodiment of music. Like his predecessor, Shivaji II (1832-1855) asked SivananthaNatuvanar attached to the temple at Tanjore to teach Carnatic music and dance to the *devadasis* in the town. In addition to this in Tanjore the Kuravanji folk songs were also a popular among the people.<sup>26</sup> Thus the Carnatic music retained an elaborate system of solemnisation and rhythmic arrangements. The *swarajotas*, *vernams*, *kriutis*, *kirtans*, *javadis* and *patham* were some of the style of the musical composition.<sup>27</sup>

### Dance

Music and dance are intermingled with each other from time immemorial. Temple and court culture in Tamil Nadu represented a dominant dancing performance. Over centuries, the ruling houses nurtured this art preserved the tradition of dance. The court tradition of dance continued to attract the princesses. Royal patronage of dance reached the pinnacle during the time of Marathas. During the latter half of the eighteenth century the rulers of Tanjore became interested in *Dasiattam* (*BharataNatyam* later name) and patronised MahadevaAnnavi, a great exponent of that art. He took extraordinary interest along with his disciple to explore new methods to develop the dance. When the celebrated Tyagaraja inaugurated a new era in the history of Carnatic music, *BharataNatyam* too entered into new phase of Vigour and refinement.<sup>28</sup>

The name *BharataNatyam* is of recent origin of about 250 years. It developed an elegant style and was practiced by *Devadasis* and courtesan as a solo type of a *natya* in temples and durbars of the ruling classes.<sup>29</sup> It was earlier known as *Sadir*, *Dasiattam* and *ThanjavurNatyam*. Ponnayya, Chinnayya, Vadivelu and Sivanandan, the four brothers popularly set a pattern and syllabus and gave a chiseled structure to the *Sadir* dance. They performed the style in modern form. They were the sons of the famous SubharaayaNattuvanaar, the court musician of Thulaji (1763-1787). They adorned the court of Serfoji (1798-1832) and were popularly called the 'Thanjavur quartette' who laid down the rule as to how a dancer should dress. The traditional dance format codified by the illustrious Thanjavur Quartette has attained glory. King SwathiThirunal of Travancore patronised one of his brothers Vadivelu in his court giving all encouragement to train many of his disciplines. Chinnayya later became the official guru in the court of Mysore to train his disciples. Ponniah and Sivanandam were attached to the Brihadiswara temple of

Tanjore.<sup>30</sup> The dance spread to other parts of South India. The *devadasis* performed the *Sadirnot* only in the temples but also in places, houses on all auspicious occasions. Many *devadasis* were great dancer who has a perfect technique and great devotion.<sup>31</sup> The *devadasis* of the temple were also experts in the *Dasiyattam*. In its usual form the dance is generally broken into seven parts; *Alarippu*, *Jatiswara*, *Shabha*, *Varna*, *Padam*, *Tillanna* and *Sloba*.<sup>32</sup>

In Tanjore the *Kuravanji* folk songs were appreciated both by the rulers and the people. Among the *Kuravanchis*, the play *ThyagesarKuravanji* was often performed in the temple of Lord Thyagesar at Thiruvarur which had a separate hall for the *devadasis* to perform. The *devadasis* of the Kondi family of Thiruvarur were the past masters of the art.<sup>33</sup> Another popular drama in the Tanjore region was *Pommallattam*. The dances took themes of the spiritual nature and blended it with various tradition of the country. The repertoire included several dances for resembling features, stories from the *puranas* *Ramayanas* and *Mahabharatas*. The delightful combination of the graceful performance of the dances to the unforgettable audiences.<sup>34</sup> King Serfoji also patronised *Kondle*, the exponents of *PoikkalkuthiraiNattiyam* (dummy horse). The ancestors of *kondlemigrated* from Maharashtra. The descendants of *kondleare* still living in *Konthalakaratheru* near Tanjore.<sup>35</sup>

### Paintings

Paintings is another art blended with political and religious characters. The art of Tanjavur painting has carved a niche for itself in the annals of the arts and craft history of the country. In the Maratha durbar hall there are large pictures of all the Maratha kings, beginning with Shahji, father of Venkoji.<sup>36</sup> The front *mandapa* is originally painted in red and adorned with garlands of grapes and vine leaves.<sup>37</sup> The Joliram Math is a repository of old paintings, some of the paintings are over 400 years old.<sup>38</sup> Serfoji II constructed many choultries at Tiruvaiyar, Tanjore, Orattanad and Pattukottai. Inside the large *chattrams* many of the walls are adorned with beautiful murals exhibiting scenes from Hindu mythology.<sup>39</sup> Raja Serfoji is credited with encouraging the growth of this art form. The ornaments, clothes, arches and the seats of the gods and kings and distinct and specially designed. Most of the images in paintings are of god, king, queen, nature, birds and animals. The paintings of Lord Krishna is very attractive where white pearls are used for decorating the images. The face, hand, legs and the background colours are printed in even surface.<sup>40</sup> Rig Vedic manuscript in the Saraswathi Mahal Library contains splendid paintings belonging to the mid eighteenth century. The manuscripts of *Tiruvilaiyadalpuranam* contain the birth of Ugrapandian shows a dancer accompanied by a *Nattuvanar* attired in Maratha style. The artistic clad is bright red in a costume, strongly similar to that worn by *Bharatanatyam* dancer.<sup>41</sup>

### **SaraswathiMahal Library**

Another feature of Maratha rule in Tanjore is the maintenance of a historical library popularly called SaraswathiMahal Library. The history of the library dates back to the Nayak period of Tanjore around 1540. The Nayaks formed the SaraswathiBhandar which means collection place of manuscripts. The Maratha rulers who captured Tanjore in 1676, developed SaraswathiBhandar into Royal Palace Library which was used for the purpose of reading by the royal people.<sup>42</sup> The early Maratha rulers were neither the patron of learning nor made any attempt to collect manuscripts. But several pundits lived with royal bounty collected and maintained manuscripts for their own use. These manuscripts were kept in the SawaswathiBhandar. However, the later Maratha ruler Serfoji II (1789-1932) was a king of different character and a patron of art and literature.<sup>43</sup> He was an eminent scholar. In this younger days, he came under the influence of a Danish missionary Father Rev. Schwartz who was responsible for his education and cultural revivals. Under his tutelage the king learnt various languages like English, French, Italian, Latin etc.<sup>44</sup>

The Maharaja was reprieved of his independent position in 1799. He converted his court into a centre of cultural and literary activities. In 1820 he founded there the famous SaraswathiMahal Library. He took keen interest in enriching the library by collecting and storing rare manuscripts of different language.<sup>45</sup> During his pilgrimage to Benares, he employed many pundits to collect and copy vast number of manuscripts from Sanskrit centres of learning in the north. The Library had the richest collection of manuscripts which reflect the culture of South India. There are more than 46,695 manuscripts in the form of palm leaf and paper. There are 39,300 Sanskrit manuscripts which represent the works of authors spread over 400 years. 3,518 Tamil manuscripts representing rare commentaries on the Sangam works, unpublished portions of classics, Saiva, Vaishnava and Jain works and later poetry of all descriptions are found here. The Library has 802 Telugu manuscripts, 3,075 Marathi manuscripts and 850 bundle containing 255,000 documents.<sup>46</sup> The medical works of exceptional value is accommodated in the building the DhanawanthriMahal. The medical works deal with Ayurveda, Unnani, Siddha and English medicines.<sup>47</sup>

Another feature of the library is the availability of modi manuscripts. Modi is a type of script used for writing the Marathi court language. There are seven lakhs of Modi documents in 1,342 bundles. Till the life of the last queen it was the palace property. In 1918 the British Government took possession of the library under the Charitable Endowment Act. Under the Government Order in 1919, the library was opened to the public. SaraswathiMahal Library is one of the biggest manuscript Libraries in Asia.<sup>48</sup> The library is often described as the encyclopedia of most remarkable collection of arts, medicine, literature and different languages.<sup>49</sup>

To conclude, Tanjore itself is a classic profile of fusion and a mutual adoption of different cultures and languages. It was the centre of synthesis of culture of Tamil Cholas, Telugu Nayaks and the Marathas. As it served as a capital of many dynasties, Tanjore is a repository of contemporary art, craft and rituals.<sup>50</sup> Though the people from the bottom

provided material progress of the country, the facilities to witness the dance and music were the monopoly of the aristocrats, princess, Brahmins, kings and *devadasis*. However, after the annexation of Tanjore by the British in 1799 the role of the patron of art intelligentsia were partly taken over by the small courts like Pudukottai, Ettayapuram and Travancore and trade centres like Madras.<sup>51</sup> Temple and court where privileged section participated and enjoyed the fine arts became the cultural heritage of all sections of population. Major cities and auditoriums replaced the monopoly of the privileged section of the population. The common and downtrodden section of the population had for the first time, got the opportunity to glimpse the art in the auditoriums.<sup>52</sup> Thus the rich cultural legacy of the Nayaks and Marathas flourished in the court and temple were shifted to public places and it became the cultural heritage of common people during the British rule.

#### End Notes

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