

Tamizh Music (Tamizh-PaN) and Gopalakrishna Bharati



Saint TyAgarAja (1767-1847) have enriched Karnāṭaka saṃgītam literature and operatic musicals, Gopala Krishna Bharati's Tamizh opera *Nandanar C'aritam* broke new ground, not only for its unique and exalted concept and musical excellence, but also for its incisiveness and revolutionary impact on societal norms and spiritual understanding.

While it is true that Karnāṭaka saṃgītam benefited greatly from the significant contributions from Tamizh composers such as Thayumanavar¹ (1705-1744) Marimutha Pillai² (1712-1787), Muthu-thAnDavar³ (16th C), OotthukkADu Venkatakavi (1700-1765), and Ghanam Krishna Iyer (1790-1854) who all bestowed exquisite Tamizh CheyyuL (poetry) and Keertanams (songs), the aficionados and musicians who were passionate about Sivakatha traditions also longed for Tamizh compositions that narrated stories from the PuranAs affiliated with Lord Siva and His devotees.

This is when Gopala Krishna Bharati ('Bharati') arrived on scene to offer his immortal and unique contributions in Tamizh, as a contemporary of the *Karnāṭaka saṃgīta Trinity*, Saint tyAgarAja, Syama Sastry and Mudduswamy Dikshitar. He revitalized the *Tamizh-paN* tradition by integrating it into the evolving Karnāṭaka saṃgīta tradition.

Biography (1811-1881)⁴:

Though there are very few publications on the life and works of Bharati, we do find a reliable account of his life and 25 of Bharati's musical compositions in the work of his direct disciple Dr. U. V. Swaminatha Iyer (1855-1942), one of the greatest scholars and researchers in Tamizh. He brought out many forgotten works of classical Tamizh literature to light (i.e., C'ilappatikaram, Pattuppattu, and Ettuthogai). Until this time 'Music' was a less important priority in Tamizh research. Being the son of a famous musician of Bharati's time, the teenager had the good fortune to become a student of Bharati in 1871. He observed him for the next three years and recorded his observations in his short biography on Bharati, which was first published in 1936 in the oldest Tamizh magazine, *Kalaimagal'*.

Bharati was born in 1811 in NarimaNam, near Nagapattinam. He was the son of Ramaswami Bharati (aka Sivarama Bharati). His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather were all vainikAs and scholars in Sanskrit. After

There is serious merit to the widespread belief that Gopalakrishna Bharati ('Bharati') is the immortal Father of Tamizh Music Renaissance, modern Tamizh opera and Karnāṭaka saṃgītam. The writer would like to avoid the anglicized coinages such as 'Hinduism', 'Hindu', 'Carnatic', 'Tamil' and 'Kutcheri/Cutcheri' but stick to ancient, meaningful, original words/coinages that authentically referred to our venerable music (Karnāṭaka saṃgītam) and the concert forms (Sankeertanam).

If *Tiruppugazh* (in Tamizh) of Arunagirinathar (C 1450) *KrishNa-leela-tarangiNi* (in Sanskrit) of Yogi Narayana teertha (16th/17th C), *Rama Natakam* (in Tamizh) of Arunachala Kavi (1700-1765) and *Prahlada Bhakti Vijayam* and *Nauka C'aritam* (in Telugu) of

1 *Thāyūm-ānavar, a great philosopher well versed in Sanskrit and Tamizh served as a minister to the King of Tiruchirappalli and articulated Saiva Siddhanta Philosophy; only 1,454 of his sacred hymns have been recovered and saved.*

2 *Marimutha Pillai (1712-1787) along with Muthu Thandavar and Arunachala Kavi was a pioneering Karnāṭaka saṃgīta exponent and a contemporary of Arunachala Kavi.*

3 *Muthu Thandavar (1525-1600) early architect of the current kriti format (Pallavi, anupallavi, C'aranam) was the senior most composer of the Tamil Trinity.*

4 *There is lack of agreement as to his life span and some publications quote that he was born 1810 and lived until 1896 or 1905.*

losing his parents at a very early age, Bharati joined the local temple as a cook. The transformation of a young cook (who suffered ridicule and indignity) to that of a Colossus revered during his lifetime and one that became a landmark in modern interpretation of Karnāṭaka saṃgītam is worth pondering in detail.

Tender and innocent, Bharati would often stare at the deities of Mariamman koil, Ayyanar koil, and Sivan koil of Uttamacholapuram holding in his hand the giveaway of temple cooked-food. He was acutely conscious of the physical deformities that had been inflicted on him by a harsh fate and malnourishment especially because he had to constantly endure people abusively beckoning him as 'koonan, kuruhā, durguna, and asooyan. While living in Mudikondan village, he used to visit Koothanur temple dedicated to the Goddess Saraswati. When Bharati, ignorant of what to pray for, looked at Goddess Saraswati through a pair of tearful eyes, *She* decided to make another Kālidāsa out of young Bharati. The visitor had no idea that the Goddess was smiling at him, waiting to transform his intense emotions from his thoughtful mind to shape a renaissance and revolution within the next few years. We will see more of this when we look at the 'untouchable' Nandan and Bharati's world-renowned-opera spun around Nandan's life.

Bharati had little interest in material pursuits, so he followed strict *brahmacharyam* (going after *Brahman* loosely translated to be 'celibacy'), and *Oonchavritti* as his *way of life*. He came under the tutelage of Govinda Sivam (aka Govinda Yati), a practical saint well versed in advaita sastras. This helped Bharati master Vedanta and yoga sastras. As he came from a family of musicians, Bharati

pursued 'Sankeertanams' and learned from hundreds of musical gatherings in numerous temple settings in and around Mayurapuri (Mayavaram or Mayiladuthurai) and Thanjavur. All these exposures steered his life towards Sankeertanams. Siva-Katha & Hari-Katha BhAgavatAs convinced him to remain a brahmachari so that he would be able to focus on his divine *purpose*. Since he spent several years of his youth in Mudikondan (near Thanjavur) and later in Ana(nda)Thandavapuram (near Mayiladuthurai), Bharati came to be also known as Mudikondan Bharati and Anathandavapuram Bharati in Sankeertanam and musical circuits. With the patronage of a rich landlord in Mudikondan, Annu-Iyer, Bharati learned Sanskrit and advaita-siddhanta, 'poetic-plays (Kavya-natakam)', Kaivalya navaneetam, Prabodha chandrodayam, Tatvarayar pAduthurai, and *Thāyumānavar* compositions which all helped him create his own Tamizh-keertanams with pre-defined laya patterns. His expertise in Karnāṭaka saṃgītam was expanding at this stage of his life, concurrently augmenting the learning and singing of compositions of *Mayooratthammal*⁵, *Papavinasa Mudaliar*⁶ and *Peria-thirukkunRam Subbaramaiyar*⁷.

Bharati's musical journey:

This was the time when his extensive listening kindled his passion to learn the Hindusthani system of music as well. Bharati traveled to Tiruvidaimaruthur (near Kumbakonam) and approached Sri Ghanam Krishnaiyar and Sri Ramadoss, both eminent musicians patronized by Maharaja Amarasimha Bhosle of Thanjavur (uncle of *King Serfoji II*). Fascinated by the fervor and knowledge of Bharati, Ramadoss, a great exponent of Hindusthani music, readily took him as his disciple and taught him the basics, nuances, variances, and compositions in Marati and several other Indian languages.

Bharati was highly disciplined in his life-style, which included serving (aka 'SevA-kAlams') the temple deity Mahalingeswarar six times a day. Observing his austere life and dedication, Ghanam Krishnaiyar, volunteered to teach him his own Tamizh compositions. Bharati's singing during sevA-kAlams in the various temple(s) near Mayavaram and his well-known saintly life-style attracted a lot of musicians from the neighboring villages and towns, resulting in Bharati's compositions becoming a great attraction for these performing and traveling musicians.

Patronage by Other Great Musicians of His Time:

Bharati used to submit his newer compositions to a well-known musician, Tiruvidaimaruthur Ananta Bharatiyar⁸, who was fascinated by Bharati's nadanamakriya raga keertanam, "ini inimEl enakkenna vichAram," especially the beauty of the structure, grammar, and emotion. This prompted Ananta-Bharati to volunteer to expand that keertanam with a couple of new lines on Sri Rama since, it was told, Ananta-Bharati was then engrossed in completing compositions on Uttara-Ramayana c`aritam.

5 *Advaita philosopher (C 17th century) who composed 'advaita sastra' keertanams reportedly blessed by Sri Abhayambika of Mayooranatha.*

6 *Adorned the court of Tulaja maharaja II (18th century) and the famous composer of Kumbesar Kuravanji.*

7 *Subbaramaiyar (b 1786), a composer in Tamizh was Ghanam Krishna-Iyer's elder brother.*

8 *a great vaishnavaita scholar who composed 'Bhagavata-Dasama-skanda-keertanams', 'Tiruvidaimaruthur nonDi-nAtakam' et al.*

After receiving several years of patronage from eminent musicians, scholars, and devotees in Tiruvidaimaruthur, Tiruvavaduthurai, Karuppur and Tiruvalangadu, Bharati relocated to Mayavaram. Appreciation for Bharati turned to reverence and he came to be known as ‘BharatigaL’. Even though there were several Bharatis around that time [including Kavi-Kunjara-Bharati (1810-1896)], the term ‘Bharati’ was used only *for and about* Gopalakrishna Bharati in musical and scholarly circuits.

Not only scholars and musicians approached Bharati for newer compositions, young girls and older women also felt comfortable approaching him for marriage songs such as *Nalangu*, *Oonjal*, *LAli*, *kummi*, and *kOlaaTTam* centered on Sri Nataraja swami. This was also the time when Bharati started spending more time on dhyAna and yoga in front of Dhakshinamoorthy sannidhi in VaLLalAr koil and in EkAnta-dhyAna near Agasteeswarar sannidhi in MayUranathar koil. On one such occasion, he became so ecstatic listening to a composition of Saint TyAgarAja that he felt compelled to visit him in Tiruvaiyaru.

Bharati Meets Saint TyAgarAja:

When Bharati prostrated before TyAgarAja, he did not initially give out any of his personal details.

The conversation is said to have progressed along these lines:

TyAgarAja: Where do you come from?

Bharati : ‘MayUram’

TyAgarAja: I heard that there is a great vidwan named Gopalakrishna Bharatiyar in Mayavaram; do you know him? Is he doing well?

Bharati : ‘dasan, aDiyEn’ (an expression of ‘I am that’ but soaked in humility).

A fascinated and affectionate TyAgarAja (in his seventies) observed his disciples singing an Abhogi kriti⁹ turned to Bharati and asked,

TyAgarAja: Have you done any kriti in this ragam?

Bharati was silent and did not respond. The disciples continued singing several more and Bharati watched in awe as to how Saint TyAgarAja enjoyed Rama and the divine music in such a simple hermitage with no other desires of this mortal world. Bharati left TyAgarAja’s home to have the darsanam of Dharmasamvardhini and PranatArthihara swami in Tiruvaiyaru temple; while at the sanctum and upon return he was haunted by Sri TyAgarAja’s question. That night, Bharati composed an exquisite composition ‘Sabapathikku vEru deivam

in Abhogi. He then re-visited TyAgarAja’s home, prostrated before him, and then asked him, “Can I sing for you a composition that I have attempted?” The great saint became very happy. He said, “Certainly! I have listened to others singing your compositions and enjoyed them, but it will be a unique pleasure to listen to you singing your own composition. Please...”.

When Bharati sang the Abhogi kriti, the surprised TyAgarAja asked, ‘Swami (you) said that you have not done any in Abhogi!’ Bharati responded in all humility, ‘Yes, not before last night. However, because of your blessings I was able to create this; kindly pardon me for any defects in this emotional outburst.’”

Karnaparampara anecdotes are afloat that the last sentence in the charanam (of SabApathikku) triggered a discussion when Bharati explained to an inquiring TyAgarAja, the coinage ‘ariya-pulaiyar moovar padam aDainthAr’ as the three nayanars, ‘*tillai-veTTiyAn*’, ‘*PetrAn sAmbAn*’, and ‘*nandanAr*’ who attained sAyujyam (closeness to Brahman). The news that Saint TyAgarAja had blessed Bharati and his compositions wholeheartedly added greater grace and popularity to Bharati’s compositions upon his return from Tiruvaiyaru. Bharati became prolific in his compositions upon return from Tiruvaiyaru and after repeated requests from musicians, composed his own

9 U Ve Sa Iyer mentions that it was ‘SriRama-Seeta alankaraswaroopa’ – a composition of questionable authorship.

ghana-raga pancharatnam¹⁰ on lord Siva following Saint TyAgarAja.

Although Bharati wanted to spend all his time in spiritual pursuit, *dhyanam*, *mananam*, and *kavanam* (*compositions*), musicians who were attracted to his creations pursued him relentlessly and became his disciples; most important of them were (1) C`itambaram Ponnusamy Dikshitar (2) C`itambaram Rajaratna Dikshitar (3) Mayooram Ramaswamy Iyer and his brothers (4) Natesa Iyer and (5) Subrahmanya Iyer.

C`itambaram Nataraja beckoned him so frequently that Bharati decided to accept Ponnusamy Dikshitar's invitation to host him. The latter was also a brahmachari and shared Bharati's interest in seeking Vairagya, Bhakti, and Gyana margams for spiritual sadhana through music. It is believed that Ponnusamy, eventually, became Bharati's foremost disciple and took the lead in propagating his compositions.

Compositions – Spontaneity, Variety & Divinity:

It is believed that Bharati composed more than 600 songs including the opera¹¹ songs for 'Tiruneelakanta Nayanar,' 'Iyarpagai Nayanar,' and Nandanar C`aritam; the background, exquisite beauty and greatness of Nandanar C`aritam are elaborated in separate sections.

10 *Harahara siva sankara (nATa), SaranAgati enRu nambi (GowLa), ADiya pAdamE gathi (VarALi), PiravAda mukthiyai (Arabhi) and MaravAmal eppaDiyum ninainamE (Sri Ragam)*

11 *There is a claim that Bharati composed another opera known as 'Karaikkal ammayar' although this is disputed by scholars.*

Bharati's grip on diction, dialogue, and description is not only brisk but also dynamic, waggish, poignant, appealing and captivating as the occasion demanded; the lyrics and the music are an outpouring of creativity, clarity, and incisiveness. Borrowing the words of Sir John F Neville Cardus¹², one of the world-renowned and foremost critics of music and cricket, we could say that Bharati "understood life in its heights and depths, put his aesthetic reactions, impulses, and himself into his creations."

Bharati reportedly used more than 150 ragas for his compositions. While many of the ragas were those that were frequently used, he also turned to less utilized ragas such as 'Natakapriya (Sivalogamengira), Sarasangi (Mahadeva Saranam), Ahiri (Ambalavananai), Jaganmohini (Sivakamasundari), and Manji (Sanjalapada Vendam).

Bharati's versatility was multidimensional. After his return from Tiruvaiyaru, the unassuming colossus started composing some of the finest gems which have delighted millions of music and dance followers; they include "Eppo varuvArO" in *Kamas*¹³ and "Piravatha varam thArum ennaiA" in Arabhi (which inspired Papanasam Sivan to give his exquisite gem "Pirava varam tharum" in *latangi*); "Tiruvadi charanam" in Kambhoji and "NaTanam Adinar" in Vasanta. He felt His Lord's presence right in front when he sang "Deham ippadi umakku iLaikkavendiyathenna" in Saurashtram, "Irakkam varAmal ponathenna kAraNam" in Bihag and many more in Nandanar C`aritam. He admired, advised, and admonished his Nataraja Swami through his songs, some of which were questions, some profound statements and some in utter wonderment! The writer is reminded of the famous quotes of the French philosopher, Voltaire, (François-Marie Arouet)¹⁴ when listening to some of the philosophical gems of Bharati. Even non-believers have admitted experiencing extraordinary feelings or the presence of God when they listened to some of Bharati's compositions.

Bharati had a knack of composing a sthala-kriti delineating the sannidhis of the famous C`itambaram temple albeit in a folk style song as desired by young women requesting him for a 'Chidambara-Kummi.' The famous song goes like this: 'SaanthuppoTTu thaLathaLanna..' as though young girls and women were beckoning one another for visiting Nataraja Swami. The main lines of this kummi became a popular dance-song in a famous Tamizh movie, *Sivagangai Seemai* released in 1959.

Bharati's spontaneity impressed his contemporaries. During a visit to his friend's home, Bharati witnessed an altercation between two individuals whose friendship was threatened by a borrowing turned sour. Bharati opined to his friend that *it is better to be a donor than a lender if friendship should not be in jeopardy*; he went on to sing an extempore song, "pArtthukaDan koDungal"¹⁵ with three stanzas studded with invaluable advice to the material world.

12 *Sir John FN Cardus, CBE (1888-1975) one of the world-renowned writers and critics; came from an impoverished background, and self-educated; although attained international fame as a Cricket critic, he considered his principal vocation to be that of a 'music critic'.*

13 *Sri Madurai Mani Iyer popularized this in raga Jonpuri (aka Jaunpuri)*

14 *Voltaire: 'Judge a man by his questions rather than by his answers!' and 'If there were no God, it would be necessary to invent him'.*

15 *Evaluate (critically) before lending!*

Nandanar C`aritam:

Bharati enjoyed meditating in the hall outside the nritta-sabha (C`itambaram) and often went in to trance singing besides the Nandanar statue positioned facing the sanctum-sanctorum. In one such admiring session, a group of Bharati's admirers requested him to sing a song as if Nandanar sang to his Lord Nataraja! Instantly came 'enneramum undan sannidhiyilE nAn' which (U Ve Sa) Iyer mentioned to be set to Arabhi raga¹⁶.

Nandan As Bharati Portrayed:

Barring a laconic account of Nandan in *Periapuranam*¹⁷, there was neither an interesting legend nor a drama in Sekkizhār's short synopsis. It was the extraordinary genius of Bharati that produced the magnum opus opera in Tamizh, reflecting (a) Bharati's study of the rural socio-economic landscape of times and its deep malaise (b) his blending of his enormous creativity with spiritual fragrance and musical innovation. Bharati's Nandan was the same as Sekkizhār's harijan farm-worker, but Bharati makes him a (hereditary) slave in the service of a rich brahmin landlord. Nandan is also doubled as 'town crier,' drummer, and handyman for the village. Bharati paints Nandan's insatiable passion to have a darshan of the Cosmic Lord Dancer of C`itambaram. Nandan's purity of devotion is described as unequalled and his unmatched intensity of desire to see the Lord is portrayed as profound. Bharati's portrayal is that Lord Nataraja comes to the rescue of Nandan ensuring that his humble and innocent servant from (Mel)Adanur is not only allowed to visit the temple at C`itambaram but also to be received with Poorna kumbham – all honors and paraphernalia offered only to the exalted priests and authorities. Sekkizhār described Nandan 'heeding the Lord in his dreams, i.e., to enter the fire to be purified and fit enough to enter the temple' so that Nandan can re-emerge as a sacred brahmin to be received with honors by the rest of the brahmins. **Bharati did not like to put his Nandan through that ordeal.** Bharati seemed to have loathed the man-made social hierarchy that precluded a large section of the society to be treated equally in front of the Lord Supreme and wanted to

remedy that through his opera. Thus, according to Bharati, the Lord, instead, instructs his other obstinate devotees to realize their folly and to receive Nandanar with honors inside the temple. At one stroke, Bharati (*well versed in Ramayana, remembers how Agni' (the fire god) felt 'scorched' when Sita entered 'Fire' for ostensible 'purification' and*) saves Nandanar from the indignity of subjecting him to such a test for establishing his credentials to enter the Sanctum of the Lord and saves 'Agni' too of being punished 'a second time.' If chastity is hotter than Fire, absolute devotion to the Lord should be hotter still, since the former is a personal virtue and the latter is the greatest achievement to yearn for.

This is the real courage of conviction of the greatest social reformer of our times. It is, therefore, no surprise that he became the trail-blazer to great reformers in less than a century. He democratized the opera and spread the crusade against "untouchability" to the nook and corner of the silent south, especially the rural areas, which Subramania Bharati¹⁸ and Mahatma Gandhi, the Father of The Indian Nation, followed as a 'national crusade' till they breathed their last.

While we perceive this development to be the glory of 'Saint Nandanar,' it is Bharati's Nandan – the true devotee – who reaches the Lord by transcending caste barriers, social demarcations, and religious taboos; through his actions, Nandan demonstrates that a true devotee shall reach the Lord against all odds, hurdles, and insurmountable barriers. Through the way Nandan led his life, he demonstrated the power of 'SaranAgati' or total surrender. Bharati's Nandan(ar) requires extensive appreciation from kaleidoscopic angles; but, due to space constraints, it may suffice to admire the highly imaginative dramatist Bharati who brings out the prejudices of the times in vivid portrayal, scene by scene, as though he was penning down a visual biography.

Bharati's Nandan was more underprivileged and outcast than the great composer himself; we should look at U Ve Sa Iyer's description of his first meeting in 1871 when he went to become Bharati's disciple. With the official publication of Nandanar C`aritam (by the French Collector Cisse¹⁹) in 1861, Bharati's already established

16 The publications that came after 1952 and the musicians that popularized this song have made this to be in 'DevagAndhAri' raga.

17 Sekkizhar (12th C) compiled and wrote the Periya Puranam or the Great Purana, the life stories of the sixty-three Shaiva-Nayanars, devotees of Lord Shiva who composed the liturgical poems of the Tirumurai, was later himself canonized and the work became part of the sacred canon. Among all the hagiographic Puranas in Tamizh, Sekkizhar's Periyapuram, aka Tirutondar Puranam (composed during the rule of Kullottunga Chola II (1133-1150) stands foremost.

18 Mahakavi Subramania Bharati (1882-1921) was one of the greatest pioneers of Tamizh literature and Independence; his progressive and reformist zeal in his poems became the greatest inspiration in southern India for freedom call.

19 Nandanar C`aritam discourse by Bharati became an instant success in Nagapattinam that many of the devotees in attendance were officers from the French collectorate of Karaikkal started sleeping while at work due to late night return after listening to this phenomenal discourse; the curious Collector Cisse` found upon investigation the reason for the inefficiency in his office and

fame as a great composer became exalted. The sixteen-year old Iyer, already a music student of Ghanam Krishna-Iyer, expected to see a handsome hero in great pomp, but was shocked at the 'Asukavi or Varakavi' he met. Iyer describes the famed Bharati as one with "broad feet, wasted legs, swollen knees, broad waist, cloth above his knees, hunch back, short neck, double chin, cat's eyes, elongated head, Alopecia with a few strands sticking out, and a single bead of Rudraksha adorning his bony chest" His poor personality compromised his stature; thus, when Bharati met TyAgarAja swami, Tyagaraja asked him whether he knew Bharati! Of course, the saint was thrilled to learn that the inelegant and puny frame was none else than the great man he had heard of and desired to meet.

Just as the discerning scholars and fair thinkers were able to look past the less-than-attractive physical form or appearance of Vyasa, Chanakya, Kabir, Socrates, Aristotle, Confucius, and Plato and instead revere them for what they gave to humanity, people were also able to ignore Bharati's physical appearance and instead revel on the splendor of his opera, admire the spiritual power of his crusading mission, and appreciate his solicitude for truth and excellence in every one of his compositions.

Bharati's Nandanar is bound by the principles of gratitude to his master; without his master's permission, Nandanar does not want to leave the slum or go on a pilgrimage to his ultimate abode, C'itambaram, although it would not have been difficult to walk away! The rich and arrogant master uses all tactics including sweet

talk, cunning praise, threats, and intimidation to dissuade Nandanar from visiting C'itambaram. Finally, he offers Nandanar a way out. He tells him that if he completed 'planting' the barren dirt of forty 'Veli,'²⁰ he would be 'free to go to C'itambaram.' While Nandanar gives up hope, and pines for HIS grace, he finds a miracle the next morning. Overnight, through an act of divine grace, the land had not only been tilled and planted in full, but the crop had also grown almost mature to pick. While Nandanar melts in gratitude to his Supreme Lord, his master is completely shaken by what he had witnessed. With utmost respect, he submits himself to Nandanar and seeks his pardon. Nandanar assuages the master, offers remarkable wisdom, and departs for C'itambaram. Even though this entire story is only a fiction of Bharati's imagination, the poetry used to narrate the story has the power to melt the hearts of readers and listeners alike. Every one of the ninety-three (93) opera songs²¹ has been used by millions including the Nationalist Movement in colonial India yearning for Independence from the British.

Nandanar's appearance, actions, statements and advice (through Bharati's pen) represent the life of a Jeevan-mukta soaked in Vedanta and enshrined in Bhakti and jnAna Yoga; in other words, whatever Bharati wanted to be was how he portrayed Nandanar. Bharati drew on his tough personal life experiences for such a portrayal and hence melted the hearts of millions of southerners who could enjoy Tamizh.

Musical and Compositional Excellence:

Bharati used some ancient rAgams (as shown in the first publication in 1848). The second publication in 1939 (by A Rangasamy Mudaliar - PoomagaL release) gave new names to some of these ragas. Songs with previous ragams and the replaced ones are shown here:

<i>Name of the song</i>	<i>Ragam in 1848</i>	<i>Ragam in 1939</i>
Pittam theLiya	Sengala	Chenchurutti
viruthA senmam	KannaDa piyAgu	Durbar
Satre vilagi	angusa dOni	Purvikalyani
uttAram	desika toDi	thoDi
nanda unakkinda	varALi	Mohanam
chidambara darisanam	sAvEri	mukhAri
sEdi solla	KannaDa piyAgu	dwijAvanti (or kEdAram)
Sivaloka nAthana	Chenchurutti	MalavagowLa

Most of those songs are in Keertana form with Pallavi, anupallavi and Charanam. However, 'kaDukka,' 'danDakam,' 'C'ndu,' 'nonDi-C'indu,' 'kaNNi,' 'kummi,' 'Ananda KaLippu,' 'Iru-sol alankaram,' 'Aesal,' 'thukkaDA,' 'savAyi,' and 'lAvaNi' were the other forms Bharati used within those opera songs; he also interspersed the songs with 'viruttham' (non-metrical poetry). Such an encompassing renaissance of Tamizh PaN or SangItam had not been witnessed for over a millennium until Bharati's arrival.

wanted to listen to the discourse himself! Bharati obliged in Karaikkal. An enchanted Cisse` offered to first publish the C'aritam at his expense in 1861.

20 Area Calculation: 1 Veli = 7 kāni = 6.43 acres = 2.6 hectares

21 Professor S Ramanathan had published (1972) the full sequence of 93 songs (with swara notations) as opposed to 124 in others which apparently include non-opera songs as well.

Bharati's opera was an instant blitz. The book graciously published by Collector Cisse went for a reprint the next year. The songs and message spread like wild fire through the villages and towns to hundreds of thousands of young and old; dramas and musical discourses were seen everywhere, and the songs became the delight of the connoisseur and the uninitiated, theists and atheists. Tamizh Nadu has been the mother of musical discourses (Hari-katha tradition) and suddenly 'Nandanar C'aritam' became *the-every-other-program*, by popular demand.

A social revolution had been ignited, and it began spreading like a wild fire-

storm. Decades later, movies on the story of Nandanar were made and devoured with passion by millions. The first of these was a silent movie in 1923, and then came a talkie in 1930. In 1935, the famous Ellis Dungan produced the movie, *Bhakta Nandanar*, with a great star cast, which included KB Sundarambal as Nandanar and the famous Karnāṭaka saṃgīta vidwan Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer as the brahmin landlord. In 1942, Gemini produced the most successful version of the opera. The movie, *Nandanar*, featured MM Dandapani Desikar, a great Tamizh isai exponent and Karnāṭaka saṃgīta vidwan, as Nandanar (singing 19 out of total 22 songs). The movie not only used many of Bharati's songs, but also those of Papanasam Sivan and Kothamangalam Subbu. The movie sparked the uproar against *untouchability* in Tamizh Nadu first and it soon became a national movement. Famous political leaders and reformers jumped in to the fray and the message of Bharati became universal.

While many scholars who analyzed his life and poetry came up with superlatives, a handful raised their doubts regarding whether Bharati saw in Nandanar an epitome of social wrongs or 'was he simply using him to express his own pangs and sufferings?'; deferential scholars, eventually, concluded that Bharati was yet another edition of the Saint Nandanar!

It would require some serious soul searching and first-hand experience of each one of his gems to come up with a fine dissertation on his contribution to the music world.

Some Anecdotes from Bharati's Life:

Bharati was a saint even though he neither dressed in saffron attire nor publicized that he was a Sanyasi (a mendicant who has renounced desires). When the great musician, Maha Vaidyanatha Sivan (1844-1893), used to visit C'itambaram or Mayavaram wherever Bharati was staying, Sivan would stay with Bharati in his humble residence as a mark of profound respect (declining invitations from rich landlords and village chieftains). Bharati's spartan life-style made him independent, devoid of material wants or needs. Towards the later part of his life, he regularly collected sixty rupees for each performance, but left the entire amount with the hosts and issued hand-notes (like checks) on palm leaves to hosts to hand donations to the needy and for charities. With a few thousand rupees so collected, Bharati started charities in Mayavaram and C'itambaram temples for food and other donations



and hoped that philanthropic patrons would continue such efforts even after his time.

Bharati admired and respected noble men who did service to humanity; for instance, he called Vedanayagam Pillai²² a 'Purushameru' (the noblest of men). Pillai had arranged a grand musical discourse on Nandanar C'aritam by the maestro Thanjavur Krishna Bhagavatar²³ and had invited Bharati for the program. The discourse was grand and well attended and Bhagavatar was making copious venerable references to the eminence and excellence of Bharati, unaware that Bharati was seated in front of him! When Pillai finally introduced the great man present in the audience, Bhagavatar felt embarrassed and apologized, but Pillai also apologized for his lapse in introducing Bharati in the beginning itself! Well, even eminence seems to require a decent frame or presentation to be recognized! Jealous Tamizh-poets of his time spread gossip that the greatest of Tamizh scholars, Mahavidwan Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai²⁴ refused to acknowledge the Tamizh proficiency of Nandanar C'aritam and hence the absence of the 'prologue'; Bharati laughed at such pettiness; but, it was Sundaram Pillai that put an end to that jealous propaganda by offering a prologue [*கோமேவு திருத்தில்லை நடராசப்பெருமான்றாள்*] in ultimate

22 *The great poet, novelist, social worker and District Munsif Vedanayagam Pillai, I.C.S (1826-1889) served as a Civil Servant for 13 years and was a great admirer of Bharati.*

23 *Thanjavur Krishna Bhagavatar (1847-1903) was renowned as the father of Thanjavur Harikatha Bani (also known as Katha Kalakshepa).*

24 *Meenakshi Sundaram Pillai (1815-1876) was one of the greatest Tamizh scholars who unearthed forgotten classical Tamizh Literature was also the teacher of Dr. U Ve Saminatha Iyer (who became a student of Bharati).*



recognition of Bharati's prowess; and Bharati responded, "HE decides the timing and what to happen, when!"

First it was Andal, the divine consort of the Lord who, as a child, sang to unite the underprivileged with the Lord - who Himself took the ultimate incarnation as a cowherd to dispel all notions of all man-made social hierarchy when it comes to the service to the Lord!

1. Ten Azhwārs, the greatest of vaishnavite saints and nAyanmArs reinforced the dictum that 'birth' does not give any overriding right over true spiritual sadhana to reach the Lord.
2. A thousand years to date, Sri RamanujAcharya, the greatest reformer the Indian society reiterated it throughout his long life of 120 years, which Swami Vivekananda²⁵ explained in his

25 *Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) - "... The movement of Sankara forced its way through its high intellectuality, but it could be of little service to the masses, because of its adherence to strict caste laws, very small scope for ordinary emotion, and making Sanskrit the only vehicle of communication. Ramanuja, on the other hand, with a most practical philosophy, a great appeal to the emotions, an entire denial of birthrights before spiritual*

'The Historical Evolution of India'.

3. *Sant Jñāneśvar²⁶ followed and set the place for Bharati!*

Born poor and almost abandoned, but rich in poetical, musical, intellectual and spiritual accomplishments, Bharati rose almost from dust to sainthood against all odds by devotion, dedication, self-control and Saranagati to the Lord. The legacy he has left for mankind is unparalleled. He is indeed the 'Father of Modern Tamizh Opera,' Tamizh Music Renaissance, and one of the principal contributors to modern day Karnāṭaka saṃgītam. Something that stands far above those achievements is how his Nandanar landed him in history books, as a venerable crusader against untouchability, surpassing the angst of Bharati's predecessors!

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attainments and appeals through the popular tongue, completely succeeded in bringing the masses back to the Vedic religion".

- 26 *Jñāneśvar aka Dnyaneshwar or Dnyandev or 'mAuli' (1275-1296), believed to be Lord Vishnu reincarnate was the writer of Dnyaneshwari (aka BhAvArth-deepika, a commentary on Bhagavad Gita in 9,999 Marati verses) breaking all taboo and bringing Gita to masses.*