

# Overview of Classical Ragas in Christian Tamil Keerthanaigal

Dr. Vinohar Stephen and Dr. (Mrs). Sharmila Stephen

## Introduction

Tamil Christian "Keerthanaigal", also means 'Songs of Praise' are devotional Christian songs in Tamil. They are also referred to as 'kirtis' or 'lyrics'. These are mostly a collection of indigenous hymns written by Tamil Christian poets. A few of them are translations of Christian hymns from other languages. They use the kirti form that includes the classical karnatak (or Carnatic) raga (mode) and tala (rhythmic cycle) designations for each song.

## History of Christian Tamil Keerthanaigal

Vedanayagam Sastriar of Tanjore, H. A. Krishnapillai of Palyamkottai, and N. Samuel of Tranquebar are the three lyricists who formed the triumvirate of ancient Tamil Christian poets. The hymns of Christian Tamil Keerthanaigal are widely used in worship services by the South Indian Churches of traditional denominations. The richness of the Tamil Classical music and lyrics of the songs instantly induce fervor in the worship. The reverence in the songs is further augmented by their pleasing melodies.

**Vedanayagam Sastriar** was born on the 7th of September, 1774, the first son of Mr. Devasahayam, a native of Tirunelveli. Rev. Swartz mentored him besides *Prince Serfoji* in Tanjore. Vedanayagam Sastriar authored 133 books and his **most** famous work was 'Bethlehem Kuravanji'. When his former classmate, *Prince Serfoji* became king of Tanjore and Vedanayagam was appointed as the official court poet. Vedanayagam was conferred various titles such as 'Gnanadeepa Kavirayar', Veda Sastrigal and 'Suvishesha Kavirayar'. **Henry Alfred Krishnapillai** (1827–1900) was a well-known Tamil poet from Karaiyiruppu, appointed as a Tamil Scholar at Church Missionary Society (CMS) college at Tirunelveli. His masterwork was "Rachanya Yaatrigam" which is still one of finest works of Tamil literature of the nineteenth century. His Christian keerthanaigal are very popular. **Rev. N. Samuel** (18 September 1850 - 20 May 1927) was a famous poet and author of many Tamil Christian Keerthanaigal. He was the first Indian professor in the Theological College in Tranquebar. **Dr. Abraham Pandithar** (1859–1919) was a Tamil classical music originator and a traditional medicine practitioner from Tirunelveli, who is celebrated for his patronage of numerous Tamil Christian Keerthanaigal and his influential studies concerning the origins and evolution of traditional Tamil music in his two volumes of "Karunamita Sagaram". **Mr. John Palmer** (1812-1883) from Kanyakumari district is considered as one of the best Christian lyric poets. The following are some of his extremely popular tamil Christian keerthanaigal: "Bethalaiyil Piranthavarai" (பெத்தலைவில் பிரந்தவரை சொந்த ஆறு), "Osanna Paduvom" (ஓசனம் பாடுவோம்), "Innalil Yesunathar Uyirthar" (இந்தனில் ஏசுநாதர் உயிர்த்தார்), "Yesuvava Kirubasanapathiyae" (யேசுவை கிருபாசனபதியை) and so many others.

## Classical Carnatic Ragas: Melakarta & Janya Ragas

Classical music form of South India, such as Carnatic music has a long history in Tamil Nadu. Swara, Tala and Raga are the important musical concepts described in detail in classical music. **Mēḷakarta** is a collection of fundamental ragas (musical scales) in Carnatic music (South Indian classical music). *Mēḷakarta* ragas are parent ragas (hence known as *janaka* ragas) from which other ragas may be generated.

Each *mēḷakarta* raga has a different scale. This scheme envisages the lower Sa (*Keezha Shadja*), upper Sa (*Mael Shadja*) and Pa (*Panchama*) as fixed *swaras*, with the Ma (*Madhyama*) having two variants and the remaining swaras Ri (*Rishabha*), Ga (*Gandhaara*), Dha (*Dhaivata*) and Ni (*Nishaada*) as having three variants each:

N	G	M	R, D
1 = Shudhdha	1 = Shudhdha	1 = Shudhdha	1 = Shudhdha
2 = Kaishika	2 = Sadharana	2 = Prathi	2 = Chathushruthi
3 = Kakali	3 = Anuhara		3 = Sathshruthi

This leads to 72 combinations (scales in **Arohanam** & **Avrohanam**) referred to as the *Mēḷakarta* ragas as given in the following few examples:

Arohanam	Avrohanam	Name	Mela Raga Number
S R1 G1 M1 P D1 N1 S	S N1 D1 P M1 G1 R1 S	Kanakan'gi	1
S R1 G1 M1 P D1 N2 S	S N2 D1 P M1 G1 R1 S	Rathan'gi	2
S R1 G1 M1 P D1 N3 S	S N3 D1 P M1 G1 R1 S	Ganamurthi	3
S R1 G1 M1 P D3 N3 S	S N3 D3 P M1 G1 R1 S	Thanarupi	6
S R1 G2 M1 P D1 N1 S	S N1 D1 P M1 G2 R1 S	Senavathi	7
S R1 G2 M1 P D1 N3 S	S N3 D1 P M1 G2 R1 S	Dhenuka	9
S R1 G2 M1 P D2 N2 S	S N2 D2 P M1 G2 R1 S	Natakapriya	10
S R2 G3 M1 P D1 N1 S	S N1 D1 P M1 G3 R2 S	Mararanjani	25
S R2 G3 M1 P D1 N2 S	S N2 D1 P M1 G3 R2 S	Charukeshi	26
S R2 G3 M1 P D1 N3 S	S N3 D1 P M1 G3 R2 S	Sarasan'gi	27
S R2 G3 M1 P D2 N2 S	S N2 D2 P M1 G3 R2 S	Harikamboji	28
S R3 G3 M1 P D1 N1 S	S N1 D1 P M1 G3 R3 S	Yagapriya	31
S R3 G3 M1 P D1 N2 S	S N2 D1 P M1 G3 R3 S	Ragavardhani	32
S R3 G3 M1 P D1 N3 S	S N3 D1 P M1 G3 R3 S	Gan'geyabbushani	33
S R3 G3 M1 P D2 N2 S	S N2 D2 P M1 G3 R3 S	Vagadhisvari	34
S R1 G1 M2 P D1 N1 S	S N1 D1 P M2 G1 R1 S	Salagam	37
S R1 G1 M2 P D1 N2 S	S N2 D1 P M2 G1 R1 S	Jalarnavam	38
S R1 G1 M2 P D1 N3 S	S N3 D1 P M2 G1 R1 S	Jalavarali	39
S R1 G1 M2 P D2 N2 S	S N2 D2 P M2 G1 R1 S	Navanitham	40

S R1 G2 M2 P D1 N1 S	S N1 D1 P M2 G2 R1 S	Gavambodhi	43
S R1 G2 M2 P D1 N2 S	S N2 D1 P M2 G2 R1 S	Bhavapriya	44
S R1 G2 M2 P D1 N3 S	S N3 D1 P M2 G2 R1 S	Shubhapanthuvrali	45
S R1 G2 M2 P D2 N2 S	S N2 D2 P M2 G2 R1 S	Shadividha margini	46
S R2 G3 M2 P D1 N1 S	S N1 D1 P M2 G3 R2 S	Kanthatani	61
S R2 G3 M2 P D1 N2 S	S N2 D1 P M2 G3 R2 S	Rishabhapriya	62
S R2 G3 M2 P D1 N3 S	S N3 D1 P M2 G3 R2 S	Lathangi	63
S R2 G3 M2 P D2 N2 S	S N2 D2 P M2 G3 R2 S	Vachaspathi	64
S R3 G3 M2 P D1 N1 S	S N1 D1 P M2 G3 R3 S	Sucharithra	67
S R3 G3 M2 P D1 N2 S	S N2 D1 P M2 G3 R3 S	Jyothisvarigini	68
S R3 G3 M2 P D1 N3 S	S N3 D1 P M2 G3 R3 S	Dhatuvaradhani	69
S R3 G3 M2 P D2 N2 S	S N2 D2 P M2 G3 R3 S	Natika bhushani	70

### Janya Ragas

Janya ragas are Carnatic music ragas derived from the fundamental set of 72 ragas called Melakarta ragas, by the permutation and combination of the various ascending and descending notes:

Arohanam	Avarohanam	Mela Raga No.	Janya ragas
S R1 S G3 M1 P D1 N2 S	S N2 D1 P M1 G3 R1 S	8	Ahiri
S R1 M1 P D1 S	SN2SPD1M1PR1G2R1S	8	Asaveri
S R1 G2 P D1 S	S D1 P G2 R1 S	8	Bhupalam
S G2 M1 P N2 S	S N2 D1 P M1 G2 R1 S	8	Dhanvani
N2, S R1 G2 M1 P D1 N2	N2 D1 P M1 G2 R1 S N2,	8	Punnagavarali
S R2 G2 M1 G2 P D1 N2 S	N2 D1 P M1 G2 R1 S N2 S	10	Sindhu bhairavi
S R1 G3 M1 P D1 S N3 S	S D1 P M1 G3 R1 S	15	Ardhradhesi
S R1 G3 P D1 S	S N3 D1 P G3 R1 S	15	Bowli
S G3 M1 P N3 S	S N3 P M1 G3 R1 S	15	Jaganmohini
S R1 M1 G3 M1 P D1 S	S D1 P M1 G3 R1 S	15	Kannadaban'gata
S R1 G3 M1 P N3 S	S N3 P M1 G3 R1 S	15	Krushnaveni
S R1 G3 M1 D2 N3 S	S N3 D2 M1 G3 R1 S	15	Lalitha
S R1 M1 P D1 S	S D1 P M1 G3 R1 S	15	Malahari
S R1 M1 P D2 S	S D2 P M1 G3 S R1 S	16	Kalavathi
S R2 M1 P D1 N2 S	S N2 D1 M1 G2 R2 S	20	Amrithavahini
SG2R2G2M1PD2PN2S	S N2 D2 P M1 G2 R2 S	20	Anandhabhairavi
S R2 G2 M1 P D2 N2 S	S N2 D1 P M1 G2 R2 S	20	Bhairavi
SG2R2G2M1PD2PN2D2N2S	S N2 D2 P M1 G2 R2 S	20	Gantha
S R2 M1 P D1 N2 S	S N2 D1 P M1 G2 R2 S	20	Sudhdha dhesi
S R2 G2 M1 P D1 N3 S	S P M1 G2 R2 S	21	Kiranavali
S R2 M1 P N3 S	S N2 D2 N2 P M1 G2 R2 S	22	Hindhusthani kapi

S R2 G2 M1 D N2 S	S N2 P M1 G2 M1 R2 S	22	Kanada
S G2 R2 G2 M1 P D2 S	S D2 P M1 G2 R2 S	22	Manohari
S R2 G3 P D2 S	S D2 P G3 R2 S	28	Mohana
S R2 G3 P N2 S	S N2 P G3 R2 S	28	Vina vadhini
S R2 G3 P D2 S	S N3 D2 P M1 G3 R2 S	29	Bilahari
S R2 G3 M1 P D2 N3 S	S D2 P G3 R2 S	29	Garudadhvani
S R2 G3 M1 P D2 P N3 S	S D2 P M1 R2 S	29	Jamaranjani
S G3 M1 P M1 D2 N3 S	S D2 P M1 G3 M1 R2 N3 S	29	Kannada
S R1 G3 M2 D2 N3 S	S N3 D2 M2 G3 R1 S	53	Hamsanandhi
S R2 G2 M2 P N3 S	S N3 P M2 G2 R2 S	57	Sudhdha raga
S R2 G2 M2 P D2 S	S D2 P M2 G2 R2 S	58	Vijayanagari
S G2 M2 P N3 S	S N3 D2 P M2 G2 R2 S	59	Madhuvanathi
S R2 G2 M2 D2 S	S N3 D2 M2 G2 S R2 G2 S	59	Ranjani
S P M2 P D2 N3 S	SN3D2PM2M1G3PM1R2S	65	Hamirkalyani
S R2 G3 P D2 S	S N3 D2 P M2 G3 R2 S	65	Mohanakalyani
S R2 G3 P M2 P D2 S	S D2 P M2 P G3 R2 S	65	Yamunakalyani

### Expression of Raga and Tala in Tamil Christian Keerthanaigal as examples:

இராகம்	தமிழ் கீர்த்தனவு கீர்த்தனை பாடல் (எண்)	ஆசிரியர்
தாளம்: ஆதிதாளம்		
ஆனந்தகவுடமி	பாவி மனதுருமே! [25]	பெ. சாஸ்திரியன்
உ.மேலி	ஆதிதாளம் கீர்த்தனைத் தந்திக்கின்றே [266]	ச.பெ. குமாரசாமி
மொகஸம்	ஒரு மருத்தரும் குருமருத்த (து) [106]	பெ. பாலன்
தம்பாசி	தனது செழுத்தாய்வே என மனமே [27]	ஆ. தேவநாதன்
சுறூரப்பிரேம	ஆ! ஆம்படி உய்யாரும் புகழுத்தீரு [33]	பெ. பாக்மேடி
மருதி	அரணைக் காணாமலிருப்பீரேயோ? [34]	ஜி. சே. தேவநாதன்
சுறூரனை	ஆதாரம் நீ தான ஐயா என துறவே [180]	ஆ. தேவநாதன்
பியாகு	யீராத் தீர யேக சேனை தாண்ட [229]	ச. சீமேன்
பேரணி	குள கவிசேஷமே [214]	பெ. பாலன்

### Conclusion

The singing and instrumental playing of classical ragas expressed in Tamil Christian Keerthanaigal through various 'Tala' such as Adi tala, Eka tala, Ata tala, Tisra Eka tala, Rupaka Tala, Chapu Tala and Khanda Chapu tala is an everlasting beautiful experience!!!

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P.s. the authors are novices in the classical Tamil music, and have recently started to appreciate the depth and breadth of the field. They have freely used numerous articles written on the subjects by subject experts to compile this essay.