

Reconstructing Kinnari Vina (The Folk Classical Continuum)

First Report-- From mid February to June 15, 2015

Introduction:

In the first week of February 2015, I received a Sanction Letter no. 28-6/ICH-Scheme-2 /2014-15/11152, dt. January 28, from the Ministry of Culture, Govt. of India via Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi to the payment of an **Ad-hoc Grant** of Rs.2,000,00/- (Rs Two Lakh only). I received the first instalment of the ad-hoc Grant in March, 2015. Immediately I started my work.

Meanwhile I was asked by the ICH Section of SNA to prepare **Blue Print** of the work. Since it is my long cherished project, I prepared the Blue Print and sent it along with a revised proposal to enhance the Grant; considering its wide range.

Thereafter, I received a '**Form for National Inventory Register of Intangible Cultural Heritage of India**' to fill it up and submit along with First Report.

After a sincere and serious study of the History of Musical Instruments and Indian Culture; consulting Libraries, Websites and a few Experts during my field study; and of course, after conducting a workshop of a group of singers and players of Kinnari Vina from Telengana (erstwhile Andhra Pradesh); I hereby submit my findings as under:

Kinnari Vina:



Three Gourd (Tumba) Traditional Kinnari Vina

Kinnari Veena is an ancient Chordophone (string instrument) of India. This instrument derives its name from the divine musicians referred in Hindu mythology, known as Kinnara. Other than musical texts, the Kinnari finds mention in Sanskrit/Pali/Prakrit literature and also in paintings and sculptures.

Kinnara--Origin and Myth:

Indian history has narrated a number of exotic people such as Yaksha, Apsara, Gandharva Kinnara (Kimpurusha), Raksha, Riksha, Daitya, Kirata, Vanara etc. who, in modern period, are considered as mythical races. But a few scholars referred these races as specific immigrant (?) tribes. In my first report I am giving an outline of Kinnara only. The other races will be discussed in detail when final report will be submitted in book form.

Kinnara, the Reality:

Apart from mention in oldest scriptures; my knowledge and understanding say that in course of time, the race was considered to lending fantasy of the anecdotes. For example, later Sanskrit works referred that the *Kinnara* or *Kimpurusha*, which literally meant questionable human forms known as *Kim+Nara* or *Kim+Purusha*="Is this a human being?!" The Kinnara was narrated as Horse-faced and Kimpurusha as Lion headed human beings.

I recall here an episode of Ramayana. When in Kishkindha region, Sri Rama saw a specific tribe (Hanuman, Sugriva and other), he exclaimed for their features and dresses; Who are they--'Naro va Vanaro va!' It is an apathy that in later texts the tribe was accepted as monkey! Same with the Riksha (Jamvabanta) tribe. The males were shown as bear. The interesting part is that the females (wives and daughters) were pretty looking humans. The same way, the Kinnara tribe was also shown as Horse headed or Lion-headed beings!! Very interesting!

Some of the Puranas described *Kinnaras* as horse (long) necked tribe. In the opinion of a few modern scholars, such long necked humans might have been inspired by some African tribes, who, following their traditional practice, lengthen their necks by wearing series of rings around.

But no such reference is available in Indian texts or tradition. In Adi Parva (1st Chapter) of Mahabharata, the character of Kinnara was referred as **perpetual lovers and celestial musicians**. We may find in some later Hindu and Buddhist scripts describing *Kinnara* as mythical character; having half-human in upper part and half-horse form in its lower part. They are also featured in Buddhist text like '*Lotus Sutra*'.

But in South-East Asian legends, a half-bird (lower body) and half human (upper body) had been very popular. Such figures are still found in the temples.

The evolutionary changes or deviations in Indian and South-East Asian myths on *Kinnara* proves that such formats had been inspired by fantasies and evolved with time and space.



Kinneyi of Myanmar

In Southeast Asian mythology, Kinnari, the female counterpart of Kinnara, is depicted as half-bird and half-woman creature. In Burma (Myanmar), Kinnara is called *Kinnaya* or *keinnaya*. Kinnari (female Kinnara) is called *kinnayi* or *keinnayi*. We should not forget that Burma or Myanmar (Brhma Desha) and entire South--East Asian countries were politically and culturally inspired with Greater Bharat (Indian Penninsula).

Kinnaras, primarily the females of Kinnaur region in Himachal Pradesh, are still well versed in music having excellent high pitched voice. Kinnari was their traditional instrument accompanied with songs. Till early 20th Century it was conveniently played by them.

Migration of tribes:

Since the beginning of the human history, 'Charaiveti' or 'move forward' was the guiding principal of all races of the earth. Thus, they had been migrating from one region to another and spread their culture and civilization. In those days though, they had to travel exclusively by foot or using animal caravan like bulls, mules, horses, camels and many times boats too. They also used other available means in their respective areas.

There is a strong belief amongst some historians that originally Indian subcontinent and Africa were geographically, racially and culturally inter-connected/ inter-linked. Because of their wondering nature, they widely migrated from one place to another. Same happen with middle east Asian countries. So, the concept of 'Global Village' is not so modern. Constant human flux was not only an important character of Indians continent, but also each part of the world civilizations.

The Musical Texts on Kinnari Vina:

Available sources confirm that Matanga was the first author who described both Marga and Desi Kinnari and their number of varieties. Matanga's treatment of 'Dwadasha(12) Svara Murchana' system was in accordance with the tradition founded by his Gurus; like Acharya Kohala and Nandikesvara. But later on, Sharngadeva and Kumbha out-rightly rejected this concept and accepted Bharata's 'Sapta Svara Murchhana' system. In my opinion, the theory of Dwadasha Svara Murchhana could be related to Kinnari (the first fretted vina) in particular and other fretted Chordophones in general. There must be some valid reasons to introduce the theory of Dwadasha Svara Murchhana by Kohala and Acharya (the master) Nandikeshwara, whom Matanga followed wholeheartedly. But later authors dismissed Matanga's view and unquestionably accepted 'Sapta Svara Murchana System'. Proposed study will carefully explore the truth behind this theory in later stage.

Varieties of Kinnari:

Somesvara and Parsvadeva mentioned two types of Kinnaris named Brhati and Laghvi with three or two Tumbas (gourds/sound box) respectively. Sharngadeva narrated two types of Marga Kinnaris--Brhati and Laghvi; and three varieties of Desi Kinnari viz. Brhati, Madhyama and Laghvi. The differences among these kinnaris were:- i- measurements or the length of fingerboard (Danda), ii- number of sound box (Tumba) and iii- number of Frets (Sarika/Parda).

Sharngadeva and other authors disowned the length bigger than Brhati and smaller than Laghvi, worthy to be played. Traditionally such Kinnaris were devoid of Rakti (pleasing/ delightful). Shockingly in my earlier Field Study in many villages of Karnataka (1982-84; the Kinnari Vina is in my personal collection); I found with surprise that the length and other structural details were similar to Brhati Marga Kinnari, when it was measured and compared with textual evidences! The Jogi Kinnari (as I named it) had three Tumba and eleven (11) Frets. The svaras were placed on frets as described by Sharngadeva! I was stunned to discover that the svaras were not the Gramik svaras though modern scholars so believed. But those had more affinity with contemporary svaras!!

Prior to 3-5th century and late medieval period, Kinnari influenced music lovers with its immense popularity because of its constant flux. For its wide ranged transmission from generations together, it has been able to make a permanent imprint in human's mind. That is why innumerable references of Kinnari Vina

are found in the songs, ballads, paintings, sculptures, poetic works, other than Sangita Shastras. In Bhakti Geet (devotional songs) and other poetical works, Been (Rudra Vina), Kinnari (Kinnudi, Kingri), Jantar, Sarangi and many more chordophones were lovingly mentioned by the lyricists. Kinnari, Ravanhattha, Jantar, Sarinda, Sarangi, Shahnai (Surnai) etc. are still played in classical as well as in remote villages of the country; bearing the testimony of mass popularity of these chordophones.

Structure of Kinnari:

Deshi Brhati Kinnari had three gourds, Madhyama and Laghvi had two. The Kinnari Vinas are found in different museums of the country and personal collections. Some are having three gourds, some are two. The illustrations published by National Museum, Sangeet Natak Akademi and other collections have these varieties. I have already highlighted these points in my thesis and research papers in detail.

The First Academic Journey:

Prof. Rahul Sankritayan's excellent travelogue titled 'Kinnar Desh' took me to Kinnaur, one of the most exotic land of Himachal Pradesh. Sankritayan narrated very interestingly the ancient tradition of the land, followed by the inhabitants religiously till first half of 20th century before modernity grabbed their culture. They followed the tradition unknown to main land then. To save their fertile land (which is still very precious in the remote areas of Himalayan hills), a girl is married with all brothers of a family; so that land was not divided amongst the brothers' kith and kin. This reminds me the system of Mahabharata period, when Kunti asked her five sons (Pancha Pandavas) to marry Draupadi. In some Himalayan tradition, one of the daughters in a house had to accept music and dance as her profession (Devadasis?). She was not allowed to get married. She had to live outskirts of the village to entertain the visiting guests. The villagers took care of the girl with food and clothes. This trend was gradually discarded in free India and the girls were allowed to live in the main stream of the society. As time passed, playing of Kinnari Vina also became rare in Kinnaur and other regions of Himalayan belt.

I was serious to execute my dream. Hence, in 1982, as HOD of the Department of Music in Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla, I contacted the Himachal Art, Language and Culture Academy, Shimla; and knew that the Kindri/Kingri or Kinnari Vina was played in Himachal till nineteen fifties. I found thereafter,

either musicians could play Kinnari or the frets were taken out and was used as Drone instrument to support their songs. But basic structure of Kinnari was not changed. The same form is found in the Museums and personal collections.

From different sources, I came to know that Kinnari was being played in remote villages of Karnataka and Maharashtra belt by some specific tribes. Finally in 1982, I undertook a field study in the villages of Karnataka. With psychological support from Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi, and with inspiring assistance of Dr. G. S. Paramashivaiah alias G Shampa, (the then HOD, Department of Folklore Studies, Mysore University); I dared to start my job. I marched forward to prove my academic and professional acumen to find out the hidden truth of the incredible instrument.



Two Gourd Kinnari

In search of practical evidences, I covered more than sixteen villages in remote areas scattered in six Districts of South-West Karnataka. From them, I collected many fascinating information: i- Kinnari was played by '*Kinnara-Jogis*', ii- They were nomads, living in tribal belts, iii- They considered themselves directly related to Arjuna (of Mahabharata, circa 3000+BC!), iv- It was Arjuna who trained their ancestors to sing 'Mahabharata Katha' (ballads) and v- Since then, the tradition was continuing!

They sang Mahabharata Katha and played Kinnari, as supporting instrument. Sometimes the Katha continued for 2 to 3 nights. Their presentation was fascinating and relevant. Often their wives support them in singing. The study made me determined to continue my search further in the adjoining states too. In Karnataka, I persuaded the best *Kinnara* (Kinnudi) Jogi of the region to teach me playing the Vina and I then purchased his personal Kinnari; that he had been playing since his childhood. On my request, G Shampa recommended the Government of Karnataka to honour him with State Award and the same year the Kinnara Jogi received the Award as **Best Kinnari Vina player!**

Result Oriented Study:

My study made fantastic revelations. In 1992, I presented a paper on Kinnari in an International Seminar at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi; sponsored by Central Sangeet Natak Akademi, New Delhi. My paper highlighted many valid points that I have already mentioned in my Blue Print (submitted to ICH).

Problems of Re-constructing Kinnari:

After my first attempt, I gave a trial to reconstruct 'Jogi-Kinnari' (as I named it). But I found that without renewing deeper studies and proper financial assistance and sponsorship; a serious study was not possible. Academic and administrative responsibilities were also the reasons for postponement of further study.

Search for truth finds its way. In 2014-15, I have been able to spot an important link with valuable information from newly formed Telengana State. Without further delay I contacted the Kinnari player and his group from Maboobnagar Distt., Telengana State. A workshop was convened from 4 to 6 April, 2015 in Puttaparthi. Thereafter I found that the information was received from the main singer and his assistants, was different what I gathered in Karnataka field study. Hence a comparative study was needed. This would be possible only when another combined and comprehensive workshop is conducted. I am contacting the experts for this job.

The Kinnari player of Telengana:

After Andhra Pradesh was divided, the region of Kinnari players and other (so called) folk singers came under Telengana State. Mahbubnagar Distt. is one of the important regions where the musicians are living for generations together. The Kinnara players are scattered mainly in the remote villages of three border states; viz. Telengana, Maharashtra and Karnataka. In Karnataka region, three types of Jogis were recorded, Among them, the Bala Jogis are Telugu speaking, who sang the stories of heroes and also 'Bala Nagamani Katha' and played Kinnari. But I have not received any reference of such Kinnari players in Telengana who are related to Karnataka.

I have been able to contact players from three States (Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka and Telengana), and in search of Kinnari players from Maharashtra. In the second phase, I am planning to conduct two day combined workshop with Kinnari players from these three states to get the best result.

Darshanam Mogulayya- The Kinnara Vina Player from Telengana:

Darshanam Mogulayya nee Moglia, is an inhabitant of Amuralakunta Village of Distt. Mahbubnagar in Telengana State. Introducing him in the workshop, his assistant Sri DasaraRanga told us;

"Mogulayya is very famous artist of Ballad singing and a known Kinnari player. He has been invited in many festivals and functions at local as well as State levels. Public enjoy his presentations. Mogulayya has been felicitated and presented many awards. And now he is in Sai Sannidhi on the invitation of Madam Principal of Music College (the Researcher).

Since 400 years, folk singers of Dakkali and Artha areas of Mahabubnagar have been singing Ballads of local heroes with an accompaniment on Kinnari. They are street-singers and minstrels. Mogulayya, though very poor, sometime without food for several days; but never thought of leaving Kinnari playing. Mogulayya is very simple in dress and manners. Even he is struggling with poverty; he never succumbed to bad habits. He is now 63 years old. A shy fellow with cheerful soul. Whenever he is dearth of money, he goes deep into the forest to collect dry logs to sell as fire wood, and then buy food to support himself and his family.

"Mogulayya sings Ballads based on historical and social themes. A few popular Ballads are 'Raja Vanaparthi and his queen Vanaparthi Shankamma (1853-57), Sipayee Reddy, Pandaga Sayanna, Bal Reddy and so on. Around 150 years back, after listening to the ballad "Kollapuri Raja", a singer named Lakshma Reddy started playing 12 fretted Kinnari for accompanying and other followed him. Mogulayya also plays 12 fretted Kinnari. Contribution of Mogulayya is highly applauded and a documentary film has also been completed on him".

Mogulayya like his fellow Balladeers and Kinnari players, though, is down in debts; but with his high spirit struggling to keep the legacy alive; even as he battles against poverty and indifference from society. Though fighting with steep penury, yet he sings songs of courage and accompanies with Kinnari.



Mogulayya, the Kinnari Vina player

Mogulayya recalled his musical journey in touchy local Telugu dialect; “Kinnara Vina is our family legacy. The instrument was played by my great grandfathers, passed on to my grandfather, then to my father and now to me.” A remarkable glow on his face was seen when he spoke of his instrument. But his glow faded when he spoke of his family. He continued his apathy with concern, “After me I do not know who will play this instrument. I cannot force my children to take it up as it is not providing livelihood”. He recalled the days when the Kinnara vina was much respected by people. He recollected the days, “I used to play the instrument in front of huge gatherings; telling real and courageous stories;” he added, “If there is a death in any family, the family members had to be awake the whole night. I was called then to render the songs to keep them awake.” The stories he sang before them were about the heroes of the region who were like friends to the poor and needy. The heroes were forgotten over the years, so the music”! Lamented Mogulayya.

Musical Heritage:

Moguliyya's Cast is Madiga (SC-sub caste). By religion he is vegetarian Hindu. He does not eat meet neither has habit of drinking hard liquor. The community worships village goddesses and local heroes; such as Yellamma, Balamma, Chandramani, Fakirayya, Panganti Mian Saab and so on. They also sing in the praise of Sri Rama, Sri Krishna and Venkata Swami (Tirupati).

His great grandfather Khasim was the first person in his family who started playing Kinnari supported by his wife Ramamma. (In Karnataka too, the wives accompany their husbands in performances). The tradition had been continued by his grandfather and later on, by his father Yellayya Mogulayya. Darshanam Mogulayya learnt the art from his father. So, for more than 150

years his family is playing the instrument, and now he wants to teach his children to continue the tradition without any break.

During festivals or in some special functions, they are called to perform by the riches. In return, they receive money or rice to support their family.

The community does not allow Inter-caste marriages. The Community Head performs marriages as priest .

About the Traditional Kinnari:

The Kinnari is constructed primarily with hollowed bamboo. Sometime a log of black wood is also used. There are three gourds. The middle one being the largest is tied with the bamboo stick. These gourds function as resonators. Metal frets, numbering 7 to 12, are fixed over the bamboo fingerboard (Danda), The neck of this instrument is shaped like a kite. Two or three iron strings are attached length wise on the danda. One string is used for producing the drone.

Kinnaravina of Telengana:

The special feature of the Vina is as under:-

1. The Vina Danda (fingerboard) is made of bamboo (vedurukatti). The frets are placed over the danda and a swan (Hamsa) is erected in the last part of the danda, Hamsa is depicted as the vehicle of Goddess Saraswati. Therefore, they also call the instrument as 'Saraswati Vina'.
2. The kinnari has three different sized Tumba (Resonator or sound box) made of pumpkin (sweet gourd/svarakay). The people eat the pulp of pumpkin gourd before using it as tumba. The size of tumba differs from each other. The tumbas are tied with bamboo using cotton thread. The biggest tumba is tied in the middle of the danda to be held near the ear or chest of the player when played. The biggest gourd produces heavy sound from within. The middle sized tumba is tied in the lower part of the danda. The smallest one is fixed on upper part of fingerboard. Because the fingerboard of Kinnari is very thin, therefore, three tumbas are used to produce better resonance. So, it is proved that for the purpose of deep vibration, the vina needs bigger sound box (tumba).
3. Two iron strings are firmly tied with Shanku (Khunti/pegs) placed in upper area of fingerboard; and run through the Tar-gahan (a long stick/Meru); stretching over the Sarika (parda/frets) and Ghudach (Kakubh/bridge) and then tightly fixed at the far end of the danda. The pegs are made of teak wood.

4. 12 Frets (Mettu) are fixed over the danda. Mogulayya claims his great grandfather Khasim introduced 12 frets in his family. With this inclusion, sound of the vina has become glorious. Others play with lesser frets. Mogulayya recalls; "Originally Vina frets were seven. It developed gradually. The masters increased frets in the following sequence:-

7-9--> 9-11--> 11-12. (He did not explain the source of this theory)

The names of the frets are:-

1. Dava 2. DavaThammadu 3 RavdoVadu 4.Nadimi 5. Vishnu

1-----[2]-----3-----4-----5-----[6]-----7-----8-----

6. Eshwara 7. Brahma 8.Chilukameltu 9.Chilukatodu 10. Paatameltu

-----9-----[10]-----11-----12-----

He did not name the last two frets.

The frets are made of cow or buffalo horns and are very strong. Honey comb wax is used to make ball-shaped platform. Over these platforms the Frets are fixed and then placed on the fingerboard (danda).

A parrot is fixed over the middle sized Tumba. The legs of the parrot are tied with cotton string at one end of the tumba and its other end tied in parallel with the danda. The parrot's wings open in rhythm when the string is pulled. This is a later inclusion for amusement of the audience.

The songs sung with Kinnari:

The Kinnari players sing about the character and bravery of the local heroes who became legendary. The master musicians compose, tune and sing that is followed by others. The songs are accompanied with Kinnari. Examples of two ballads are referred here, which show their admirations for the heroes:-

1--

Ballad of Miya Saab Sung by Sri Mogulayya

Miyasaab was a notorious robber for the rich but hero of downtrodden villagers. As local Robin Hood, he used to loot the riches and distributed it among the poor to fulfil their needs.

Miyasaab lived in Panagal Village, Telangana. Hence he was called as Panganti Miyasaab. Among the rulers of Pangal Dynasty, Pedda Kameshwara Rao was a famous and kind ruler. His queen Rani Shankamma was a patron of fine arts and artists. It is said that Miyasaab had close association with royal family. Rani Shankamma had great affection for Miyasaab. From his childhood onwards, he was fostered by Rani with proper care.

When he was eighteen, he started to form a parallel Government with the help of Banjaras and Chenchus (Tribes). This shows that Miyasaab was valorous and courageous. The song narrates that Miyasaab learnt black-magic and acquired supernatural powers from Chenchus and used this power for robbery.

He was killed by a rival group when he was just Fortyeight. Shankamma, the Queen, was upset with his murder. She then constructed a temple and built his Samadhi there. People visit the temple to pay their obeisance.

2. Ballad of Vendimetla Fhagirayya [1870 – 1949]

Sung by Sri Mogulayya

Vendimetla Fhagirayya is one of the popular Ballads of Mehabubnagar Dist. Fagirayya belonged to 'Ediga' (SC) community of Mehabubnagar. The people of this community collect and sell country liquor.

Fhagirayya was the son of Venga Peddaramayya and Venga Chennamma. They were natives of Vendimetla village in Nagarkurnool Mandal, Mehabubnagar Dist. His father was very poor. Fhagirayya lost his father when he was just seven years old. His mother had to work hard to support herself and her son. Peddaramayya used to borrow money from money lenders when he was alive. He passed away indebted. Fhagirayya was very honest. He decided to repay the debt of his father to make his soul free. Fhagirayya worked hard to improve his business. By God's Grace he became very rich and cleared all debts of his father. His honesty was appreciated by villagers.

Fhagirayya used to spend his wealth for the welfare of the society. He renovated many temples, arranged mass marriage, built many schools and appointed teachers. He financially helped poor students to continue their studies.

Fhakhirayya was contemporary to Nizam Nawab Meer Usman Ali khan and Panagal Ruler Raja Roy. Both honoured him. Later, Fhakhirayya was elected as MLA from Nagarkurnool constituency consequently for three times. He was also elected as Municipal Chairman of Nagarkurnool town.

Fhakhirayya's noble deeds are still remembered by the Ballad singers. The songs are accompanied with Kinnaravina. As narrated by Mogulayya, Fhakhirayya had won the hearts of people of Mehabubnagar Dist, because of his noble deeds.

The Future dream of Kinnari Player:

Mogulayya wants to teach the art to interested youngsters. He rues; "This will give me some money to take care of my family. I will be able to give proper treatment of my son who is suffering from Epilepsy. If proper financial help is given, I want to keep this ancient art-form alive. My art should not die,"

Inference:

The Kinnari player Sri Darshanam Mogulayya has been acknowledged as one of the best Kinnari players of newly formed Telengana State. He has also received State Award. I have conducted a fruitful Workshop with the artist and his group of support-singers and interpreters. They speak local (Telugu) dialect. The workshop was a grand success. I have been able to collect many valuable information of the tradition as well as about the instrument.

During workshop I received some references of other traditional players who belong to different sub-castes or tribes. They live in the remote villages of Telengana, Karnataka and Maharashtra borders. To get comprehensive result I need further assistance of those artists. Hence a combined workshop is mandatory. If I succeed, my long cherished dream and mission to safeguard the knowledge of such unparalleled instrument; I will also be able to prove my Theory of the Concept of Svara and its Incessant Splendour in Indian Music.

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Shakravarshi
(Prof. Indrani Chakravarti)