

Technically speaking, 'Manipravalam' refers to a harmonious blend of gems, 'Mani' and 'Pravalam', forming a beautiful garland. In poetical and musical works, this means a composition combining phrases in various languages, resulting in an aesthetically pleasing work of art.

Manipravalam is a separate literary language, consciously crafted by the elite medieval Kerala. The literature of the elite was composed in the curious mixture of Sanskrit and Malayalam which is referred to as Manipravalam, 'Mani' meaning 'Ruby' in Malayalam and 'Pravalam' meaning 'Coral' in Sanskrit. So, it is a type of composition which employs more than one language, in any one single composition.

In Kerala, there are numerous works in Manipravalam. The early literature comprised of 3 types of compositions:

1. Classical songs known as 'Paattu' of the Tamil tradition.
2. Manipravalam of the Sanskrit tradition which permitted a generous interspersing of Sanskrit with Malayalam.
3. The 'Folk Songs' rich in native elements.

Malayalam language which belongs to the Dravidian group of languages evolved from Tamil. Malayalam remained in the shadows of Tamil till 10th century. The efforts of powerful 'Namboodiris' metamorphosed it into a highly sanskritised one. Thus Manipravalam style, a hybridization of Malayalam and Sanskrit, was a result of the predominant namboodiri influence.

The early literary works of Kerala are all in Manipravalam, of which 'Vaisika Tantram'(13th century) is the earliest. 'Achi Charitam' (tales of courtesans) and 'Sandesha Kavyas'(message poems) are the most representative of the early Manipravalam works. Manipravalam looked to Sanskrit for models of literary works. These works appealed to the "upper class reading public" of those days.

The compositions in this dialect reflect the way the Aryan and Dravidian cultures were moving towards a synthesis. 'Lilathilakam', a work on grammar and rhetoric written towards the end of 14th century, lays special emphasis on the types of words that blend harmoniously. This text presents itself as establishing the linguistic and poetic standards for vernacular literary expression in Kerala. Manipravalam is a clear precursor to Kerala's modern language of Malayalam.

Manipravalam was not merely a linguistic peculiarity or dictional individuality. It was expected to exhibit certain specific features distinguishing it from 'Paattu' – the narrative poetry – of the earlier period. The triumphant culmination of Manipravalam style is found in 'Chandrotsavam'(15th-16th century) – a story in a splendid verse format.

The poets who lived in 14th and 15th century sowed the seed for new poetics in Malayalam, as they felt the need for development of Malayalam as an independent language and their writing style defied the Manipravalam poetics. As a result efforts were made to bring out works in Malayalam and 'Ramacharitam' was written which is considered as the oldest text in Malayalam. However, writing in Manipravalam continued till Cherusseri Namboodiri wrote "Krishna Gatha' in the 15th century. With this, the transition from Manipravalam to 'Pacha Malayalam' (Pure Malayalam). By 17th century, there appeared a number of authors who have written in pure Malayalam giving regional, realistic flavours to their creations.

In Tamilnadu, the Manipravalam works are of a completely different background. Tamil, considered as the most ancient language, developed as an independent language very early, and the literary works in Tamil date back to ones like 'Sangam' literature including 'Silappadikaram' and so on. Yet, the Tamil 'Azvars' and 'Acharyas' (who lived between 11th and 13th century) were so enchanted by the beauty of Manipravalam, that they employed it in their works. All the Vaishnavait Acharyas were learned scholars of both Prabhandams in Tamil as well as the 'Vedas', 'Upanishads' and other works in Sanskrit. They spread the preaching of Azvars through their writings, in which they mostly followed the Manipravalam style, a delectable mixture of Sanskrit and Tamil. Of these, 'The Guruparamparas' (hereditary details and line of succession of Azvars), is an important one.

'Vedanta Desika, also called 'Nigamantha Maha Desika' or simply 'Desikan' (born in 1268 AD) is a great Vaishnava Acharya. He has written more than 100 works in Sanskrit, Tamil, Prakrit and Manipravalam. Of these, 32 are in Manipravalam – called 'Rahasyas'. Since the Vedas and Upanishads are in Sanskrit and not accessible to all, he wrote these Manipravalam works in simple language, which could be easily followed by all, including women. All these works are commentaries on the works of Azvars and earlier Acharyas. The most popular of these are his

‘Rahasyatrayasaram’. ‘Hasthigiri Mahatmyam’, extolling the glory of the diety of Kancheepuram is another famous work.

The other Acharyas of fame who employed Manipravalam in their works are:

Thirukkurugai Piran Pillai, Nanjeeyar, Pinpazhagiya Perumal Jeeyar, Periya Vachan Pillai, Azhagiya Manavala Jeeyar, Azhgiya Manavala Nayanar, Acharya Manavala Mamuni and Sri Pillailokam Jeeyar.

Carnatic Music: While Muthuswamy Dikshitar chose Sanskrit language as the medium for most of his compositions, he composed a few pieces in Telugu, Tamil and 3 pieces in Manipravalam. The most popular Manipravalam composition of Dikshitar is ‘Sri Abhayamba ninnu’ in ‘Sri’ Ragam set to Adi Talam. It is the last kriti (9th) the Mangala kriti in the ‘Abhayamaba Vibhakti Kritis’ group. Here Dikshitar employs three languages, Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil. The other 2 Manipravala kritis are ‘Sri Venkata Chalapathe (Adi), and ‘Sri Maharajni’, both in ‘Karnataka Kapi’ Ragam.

H.H. Maharaja Swathi Tirunal: At this juncture it appears most appropriate to recall the name of H.H. Maharaja Swathi Tirunal who as an eminent musician and composer. He ably employed Manipravalam in scores of his compositions. Before and during the period of Swathi Tirunal, there have been several composers of great repute, namely, Kunjan Nambiar, Kerala Varma, Iravi Varman Thampi, Kutty Kunju Thankachi, T. Lakshmana Pillai, Mahakavi Kuttamath, K.C. Keshava Pillai, and others. Valsala Shastriar, another poet, music composer, singer and social reformer, who lived till the beginning of 20th century, had made remarkable contributions to the field of carnatic music. But what distinguishes Maharaja Swathi Tirunal from others and gives him the prime of place in the history of carnatic music is, the variety of compositions, lyrical quality, magnitude of the body of compositions he has produced and the range of languages he has employed in his work.

H H Maharaja Swati Tirunal was a contemporary of the carnatic music ‘Trinity’, and he has, in his compositions, incorporated the styles of all the three and, also has followed the style of composers prior to the Trinity. He was well versed in a number of languages. Though most of his compositions are in Sanskrit, he has composed in languages like Malayalam, Telugu, Tamil, Hindi, Kannada and more strikingly in Manipravalam. Mastery in a number of languages would enable a composer to write in different languages, but employing different languages in any one single composition is not an easy task, for, using words from different languages should be harmonious and blend appropriately in order to retain the aesthetic value of the song. In this

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direction, Swathi Tirunal was a most successful composer. His Manipravalam compositions are rich in 'Sahitya' and Rhythmic' beauty. The aesthetic splendour of the lyrics have placed his compositions on par with those of the Trinity. In his Manipravalam kritis there is no compromise on the quality.

What could have triggered his interest in Manipravalam is, his proficiency in many languages, the already prevailing Manipravalam works in Kerala before his time and the influence of Manipravalam compositions of his contemporary – Muthuswamy Dikshitar. Out of the compositions of Swathi Tirunal that are available, the following are the compositions in Manipravalam style:

Compositions Talam	Ragam	
Alarsara	Surat	Chapu
Andolikavahane	Anandabhairavi	Jhampa
Hante Jeevanayaka	Nilambari	Jhampa
Hanta Inanendu	Gauri	
Rupakam		
Hanta na ninnu	Pantuvrali	
Ata		
Indirapati Vilangum	Navaraj	Rupakam
Jaajabandu		
Surati		
Chapu		
Kanakamayamaayidum	Huseni	Rupakam
Kantanodu Cennu		
Nilambari	Rupakam	
Kintu Ceyvu naan	Kalyani	Rupakam
Kulirmati Vadane		
Dhanyasi	Tripura	
Manasi Dussaham	Ahiri	
Chapu		
Manasi Madana Tapam	Surati	Adi
Nagasayananaam	Pantuvrali	Adi
Pankajaksanam	Todi	Rupakam

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Pankajanabhotsava	Mohanam	Chapu
Pancasayakajanakan	Nilambari	Adi
Sarasijanabhanin	Saurashtram	Chapu
Sundarange Kanta	Todi	Rupakam
Syananduresan	Kurinji	Adi
Tellupolum Kripa	Kurinji	Chapu
Valayunniha	Varali	Jhampa

He has composed many Group Kritis. Among them the 'Utsava Prabhandam' kritis, consisting of 12 songs and 42 verses are in Manipravalam. These songs are prefixed and suffixed by a good number of 'Slokams' in Manipravalam. Most of his Manipravalam compositions employ a combination of Malayalam and Sanskrit for the lyrics. Perhaps he is the only known composer to have composed so many songs in Manipravalam. Some of his poetical works are also in Manipravalam.

Another popular composer of recent times who has employed Manipravalam in some of his compositions is Vidwan M.D. Ramanathan. Some of his Manipravalam kritis known to us are: Innamum I Chalame (Begada Ragam, Adi Talam), 'Kanda Unakkinda'(Todi Ragam,Adi Talam) and 'Palayamam' (Begada Ragam, Rupaka Talam).

There could be more composers who have employed Manipravalam style and hence the list is not exhaustive. However there is no doubt that it would be greatly rewarding to unearth those compositions to bring to light the beauty and uniqueness of this special work.