



Sangita Kalanidhi R. Vedavalli is not only one of the most accomplished of our vocalists, she is also among the foremost thinkers of Carnatic music today with a mind as insightful and uncluttered as her music. *Sruti* is delighted to share her thoughts on a variety of topics with its readers.

Dikshitar parampara (Part 1)

In musical parlance the name 'Dikshitar' instantly brings to our mind the illustrious saint-composer Muthuswami Dikshitar who, as a pioneer composer, musician and poet in the field of Carnatic music, remains unparalleled even today. The literary beauty and depth of content in perfect proportion with the subtleties and aesthetics of our music are the hallmarks of his compositions.

A striking thing about Dikshitar is the glorious parampara or lineage associated with him. His father, Ramaswami Dikshitar, and brothers Chinnaswami and Baluswami were all accomplished musicians and composers. And Subbarama Dikshitar, a grandson (and adopted son) of Baluswami Dikshitar, inherited the musical prowess of his father, paternal uncle and grandfather, and made an indelible mark in the world of music with his monumental work, *Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini*. This parampara is unique in that it is a combination of 'vamsa parampara' or family lineage and 'sishya parampara' or lineage of disciples. Such a glorious lineage, spanning over three generations with each member equally proficient and knowledgeable is a very rare occurrence. This article is an attempt to bring out more information on this great lineage, with emphasis on the life and works of the Dikshitars other than Muthuswami Dikshitar.

Ramaswami Dikshitar was born in 1735 AD. He came from an Auttara Vadama family in Virinchipuram. Because of a troubled political situation, this family moved further south from Kanchipuram to Govindapuram near Tiruvidaimarudur and settled there. Ramaswami lost his parents early. He studied the Vedas and learnt Telugu and Sanskrit. He learnt vocal music from Veerabhadrayya, an eminent musician who enjoyed the patronage of the rulers of Tanjavur. He also trained in the veena under Venkata Vaidyanatha Dikshitar, who belonged to the lineage of Govinda Dikshitar and Venkatamakhi. From him he learnt the science of music as well as the 72 melas and their janyas as propounded by Venkatamakhi. He studied in great detail the *Chaturdandi*



Prakasika, a work authored by Venkatamakhi. He was honoured by the Tanjavur rulers. Later, Ramaswami Dikshitar moved to Tiruvarur and settled there. It was he who regularised the music to be played during various rituals and festivals in the temple of Lord Tyagaraja of Tiruvarur. With his profound knowledge of music and agama sastra (doctrines dealing with temples and their rituals) he instituted the time and place for the rendition of nagaswaram and dance in the temple premises.

His fame as a musician spread far and wide, and Ramaswami Dikshitar gained the support of Manali Muthukrishna Mudaliar of Chennai.

Being childless, Ramaswami Dikshitar prayed to Muthukumara-swami at Vaideeswarankoil and was blessed with a son whom he named Muthuswami. He was later blessed with twins, Chinna-swami and Balambal, and then a son, Baluswami. Among all his children, Muthuswami became famous as a great vaggeyakara and is one among the musical trinity. Though not as famous, the other two sons were excellent vaggeyakaras as well.

Himself a great vaggeyakara, Ramaswami Dikshitar composed in a variety of forms such as varnams, darus, keertanas and ragamalikas. Of these, his chauka varnam-s deserve special mention. A chauka varnam, as the name implies, is to be rendered in a slow pace, and has sahitya for the muktayi swara and charana-swaras. Today any varnam with sahitya for the swaras is known as a pada varnam, though older texts mention the name chauka varnam only. Ramaswami Dikshitar composed chauka varnams in Hindolam, Hindola Vasantam, Sreeranjani and Poornachandrika. There is also a tana varnam in the raga Sankarabharanam in Ata tala, and a very unique composition, *Sariganidhani* in Todi raga, called swarasthana varnam. This swarasthana varnam follows a format similar to that of a kriti, with pallavi, anupallavi, charana and a muktayi swara after the charana. The feature that is unique to this varnam is that the swara syllables and the letters of the sahitya are identical all through, except where the name of the royal patron occurs. For example, the pallavi is :

s r g, n d n | p, m r | n n, p d || s m, g m m, g | n, g n | s, ||
sariganidhani pamari ni neepada || samagamamaga neegane sa ||

In his daru in the raga Gangatarangini (mela 33) in tisra eka tala, both the dhatu and matu (swara and sahitya) form palindromes, like 'sarasa nayana sarasa'.

For example, the pallavi is:

s, , r s m g m s r s, | s, , n d p p d n s, ||
sa rasa nayana sa ra sa sa ra tara ra ta rasa ||

The first line of the anupallavi reads as:

m, m p, p p, m m, , | m, g p d p m g m m, |
ma ra ta ta ta ra ma | ma ni ta ma dhya ma ta ni ma |

Natakadi vidyala, a raga-tala-malika consisting of 61 ragas and many rare talas like Simhavikrama, Rarigaleela and Kavilokita, deserves special mention. The composer's command over the language and his musical skill are reflected in this composition where the respective raga and tala names are interwoven into the sahitya beautifully within the space of two avartas (tala cycles) for each segment.

Ramaswami Dikshitar was the first to compose in the raga Hamsadhvani. He authored a prabandha (a compositional form prevalent in olden times) in madhya tala in

this raga. This raga later became very popular and both Muthuswami Dikshitar and Tyagaraja have composed in it.

Ramaswami Dikshitar's compositions are full of raga bhava and have rich lyrical content, offering ample scope for a separate study on them.

Baluswami Dikshitar (1786-1859 AD), the third and youngest son of Ramaswami Dikshitar, was a scholar in Telugu, highly intelligent and versatile. His name was Balakrishna. He moved with his father to Kanchi, then to Tiruvarur, after that to Madurai with his father and his disciple Hari, and later to Rameswaram and Ettayapuram.

Baluswami Dikshitar could play many instruments like the veena, swarabhat, violin, sitar and mridangam. He was also a musicologist. Manali Chinnayya Mudaliar arranged for a European teacher to train him in violin-playing. He stayed there for three years learning Western music. After the demise of his brother Chinna-swami, he moved to Ettayapuram. Recognising his genius in music, the Maharaja there made him the asthana vidwan. The Maharaja also arranged for him to teach his son Kumara Ettappa. Subsequently when Kumara Ettappa ascended the throne, Baluswami, who was his guru, was showered with honours and gifts on various occasions for his skill and competence in music.

On one occasion the reputed musician Sonti Venkatasubbayya played the Takka raga geeta, and a tana in the same raga, and mentioned that Takka was his family property. Baluswami immediately sang a geeta, *Aramajjha aparadha* in the same raga and received appreciation from all. Mudaliar honoured him with a shawl and pearls. His compositions include seven tana varnams in Telugu, three darus and three kritis, each of these compositions is amazing. Though he himself was not very proficient in Tamil, he set to music a chauka varnam, a pada and a swarasthana pada of Kadigai Mukku Pulavar.

VEDAVALLI SPEAKS

Not only was he skilled in tuning compositions, but was also an expert in crafting apt chittaswaras (swara passages incorporated after the anupallavi and charana or only the charana in kritis) for songs. A classic example is his chittaswara for the kriti *Gajavadana* in Todi of Kumara Ettendra, in which the ingenious portrayal of the gandhara in all its hues and shades, is a connoisseurs' delight even today.

The use of different types of yatis (patterns), unexpected twists and brilliant makuta (a special pattern of syllables that marks the grand finale) are noteworthy aspects in his varnams. His Chalanata varnam is truly a masterpiece with use of long karvais (extension of notes) and mind boggling swara patterns again interspersed with appropriate karvais, making them very interesting and at the same time bringing out the beauty of the raga. In the charana swaras, particularly the last one, many permutations of the jatis like seven, five, four and three are intricately woven together. The king was so pleased with this varnam that he honoured him with, among

other gifts, a ruby studded toda with crests of lions worth 1000 varahas and a pair of shawls.

Baluswami Dikshitar's favourite raga is said to be Rudrapriya in which he has composed two kritis with chittaswara. He has composed three songs on Ettappa Maharaja in Rudrapriya, Darbar and Vasanta. Pleased with this, the Maharaja honoured him with shawls, gifts and 100 varahas for each daru. These instances show his expertise in creating chittaswaras so well-crafted that they enhanced the quality and appeal of the composition. The Ettappa Maharajas, who were great connoisseurs, appreciated his music and unstintingly patronised him. Some say that the reason for his compositions not being so popular is that they were all in praise of his patrons, but it is said that his contemporaries had great regard and respect for him.

(To be continued)

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