

SRI MUTHUSWAMI DIKSHITAR

Composer par excellence

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This year (1975-76) is the Bicentenary of the birth of Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar — acknowledged gratefully as one of the Trinity of Karnatak Music. He is referred to as a 'composer of composers'; and as a *Bhakta* to whom music *and* words came unbidden to result in exquisitely woven and intricately contrived webs of compositions. In them, musical depth is found in abundance and loftiness of ideas is of a very high order. This article is meant as a humble tribute to that great *Nado-pasaka* — variously referred to as a Second Arunagiri (in his devotion to Lord Subrahmanya); or a combination of *Alvars*—*Nayanmars* (who were leaders in the *Bhakti* movement in India and sang respectively about Narayana and Siva) in his wide tour of the sacred shrines of South India and composing verses in praise of the deities therein. The stress in this paper is *not* on the details of his life or on the miracles he is said to have brought about; enough has been written on them. I shall endeavour to analyse the compositions (only) of this *Vageyakara* of repute — both in the traditional and in the modern way — pointing out comparisons with the other two of the trinity.

Sources

Unlike Thyagaraja's school, there is not much of a tradition of a Dikshitar school. No doubt, Dikshitar had a long list of *Sishyas* to whom he taught his compositions; many of them made a name for themselves later. Since, invariably, the name of the *raga* also appears in Dikshitar's *kritis*, little confusion would arise between the *sishyas* in such details. The first and hence the most authentic publication of Dikshitar's compositions was done by Subbarama Dikshitar in his *Balasiksha*¹ and *Sangita Sampradaya Pradarsini*² — both published in the early years of this century. Others who have helped to popularise the songs are — Rangaramanuja Ayyangar³ through his publication: *Kritimāmalai*; Veena A. Sundaram Iyer⁴ through his *Dikshitakeertana mala*; Justice T.L. Venkatarama Iyer through his study circle in the Madras Music Academy; the Madras Music Academy which published serially rare pieces of Dikshitar's compositions in almost every

issue for two decades — and has set apart this years conference to his revered memory; and Dr. Raghavan who besides being the Secretary of the Academy, has composed a Samskrit *Kavya* on Muthuswami Dikshitar.

There has been some doubt in accepting all that has been published as Dikshitar's own compositions, as is to be expected. But the list⁵ prepared by me includes all the compositions found in the above sources. We thus have, in all, 461 pieces, details of which are given below :

<i>Sampradaya Pra arsin</i>	219
<i>Balasiksha</i>	33
<i>Dikshita Keertanamala</i>	209

Ragas

Dikshitar has utilised a larger number of *ragas* than Thyagaraja has done for his seven hundred compositions⁶. While 212 *ragas* have been handled by Thyagaraja, Deekshitar has used 160 *ragas* for his 460 songs. Deekshitar was a staunch follower of the Venkatamakhi classification of *ragas* and has compositions in all the 72 *ragas* — but he has avoided the *Vivadi doshas* in them, following Venkatamakhi's guidance. Only 42 *melas* are found in Thyagaraja's songs — 26 from the *Suddha* and 16 from the *Prati madhyama* groups. Because of the large variety of *ragas* used, there are not many compositions per *raga* in his works as is the case with Thyagaraja. The only exception is the *raga Sankarabharanam* (*Bilawal That*) in which there are 48 compositions (but of these 35 are of the *Nottuswara* or *Jatiswara* type, which are Sanskrit words set to the tunes of small English pieces (including one on 'God Save the King!)). Other *ragas* in which more than 5 pieces are found are given in Table-I (for more details please refer to Reference 5).

TABLE I

Number of Deekshitar kritis in some selected ragas

Raga	Number
<i>Kalyani</i>	10
<i>Todi</i>	8
<i>Ananda Bhairavi, Bhairavi, Kambhoji, Surati, Arabhi</i>	7
<i>Dhanyasi, Sree, Bilahari, KasiRamakriya Mohana</i>	6
<i>Veghavaahini, Sree ranjini, Balahamsa Natakuranji, Kamas</i>	5

Talas

As in the case of *ragas*, Dikshitar has utilised a large number of *talas*

also. He has followed the traditional system of *Sapta talas* in his *kritis* or the *Navagrahas*. Full details of classification are found in Table-II.

TABLE II

Number of Dikshitar's kritis in Talas

<i>Tala</i>	Number	<i>Tala</i>	Number
<i>Dhruva</i>	1	<i>Chaturasra Eka</i>	15
<i>Mathya</i>	2	<i>Misra Eka</i>	21
<i>Roopaka</i>	101	<i>Khanda Eka</i>	11
<i>Jhampa</i>	14	<i>Chapu</i>	20
<i>Tripata</i>	20	<i>Misra Chapu</i>	7
<i>Ata</i>	6	<i>Khanda Chapu</i>	5
<i>Eka</i>	4	<i>Tisra Tripata</i>	2
<i>Adi</i>	183	<i>Khanda Tripata</i>	1
<i>Tisra Eka</i>	15	<i>Khanda Ata</i>	1
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Thyagaraja has no compositions in *Duruva* and *Mathya talas*. Dikshitar has not composed any songs in *Desadi* and *Madhyadi talas* handled quite frequently by Thyagaraja. It should be mentioned that *Dhruva tala* has not been largely used by any earlier or later composer; a single instance, that of Arunagiri's Tiruppugazh (*Adalasedanarada* in Ananda Bhairavi) is the only known composition (as far as the authors' knowledge goes).

Deities of the Compositons

As already remarked, Dikshitar visited almost all shrines of Tamil Nadu and sang more than one song on the Deity of each place. It is a truism to say that the *kriti* would contain all the relevant details of the place of pilgrimage: name of deity, *Sthala Vrksa*, *Vimana*, *Pushkarini* etc. and any special *poojas* or *utsavas* of the Deity and many other details. Many examples could be cited, but only one will suffice — "*Ranganayakam Bhavaye*" is a song (*Nayaki-Adi*) composed about Srirangam and its Deity, Ranganatha. The song abounds in details of the Sthalapurana — consort : *Ranganayaki*; *Vimana*: *Pranavakaru Vimana*; Pose: reclining pose on Adishesha; He has been worshipped by all the Ikshwaku Dynasty of kings upto Srirama as their family deity; Vibheeshana; the *gunanidhi* got his *moorti* from Sri Rama as a present, and wanted to carry it to his place, Lanka, but could not; the Veda Parayana at the temple is well known.

All Dikshitar compositions are in praise of Deities only and the next

table (Table III) gives a gist of the details. Even though Dikshitar has his *mudra* (or signature) as *Guruguha*, the number of his compositions on the Mother Goddess is the largest. Moreover, whenever he speaks of one Deity, he speaks of it as the Highest Divinity — showing thus his catholicity of outlook.

TABLE III
Deities

Name of the Deity	No. of songs
Ganapathi	25
Subrahmanya (guruguha)	35
Vishnu deities:	70
(Rama—19; Krishna—13; others—38)	
Siva in various forms :	127
(Lord Thyagaraja—17; Nataraja—7; Brhadesea—12; others—91)	
Mother Goddesses :	185
(Lakshmi—8; Saraswathi—10; Kamakshi—14; Meenakshi—18; Abhyamba—9; Brhadamba—12; Neelotpalamba—9; Kamalamba—11; Others—94)	
Other Deities :	19
(Ganga, Hanuman, Ayyappan etc)	

One of the specialities of this composer, is that he has composed a large number of 'groups' of songs. His patron Lord is Thyagaraja of Tiruvarur and on this Lord, Dikshitar has sung many a song detailing the methods of worship, *utsavams* etc. The Lord has two consorts — Kamalaamba (on whom are a string of *Navavaranamams* noted for their excellence in Sri Vidya mode of worship) and Neelotpalamba (on whom also, he has a string of songs set in *ragas* all of which end with the words '*Gowla*'). His nine songs on the Navagrahas are too well known. Dikshitar also has five songs on the five *Panchabhootakshetras* (Kanchi, Tiruvanaikka, Kalahasti, Tiruvannamalai and Chidambaram) where Lord Siva is worshipped as the manifestation of the five elements in order; — *Prithvi* (earth), *Appu* (water), *Vayu* (Air), *Tejas* (Agni or fire) and *Akasa* (ether). On the Deity Abhayamba at Mayuram also, he has composed *Navavarana kritis*. He has *Vibhakti kritis* on Subrahmanya and sixteen songs on the Shodasaganapathis.

Language and Diction

Of all the composers in India, Dikshitar is perhaps the only composer to have sung such a large number of pieces in Sanskrit — the language *par excellence* in the field of philosophy, religion and the sciences. Under the genius of Dikshitar, this language has lent itself melodiously to musical nuances also. The songs contain every type of *moorchana* listed in textbooks of music and all the types of *prasas* that one can think of. The songs have very few instances of *pada-cchedu* which are present to a large extent in the compositions of the other composers.

A few instances where in Dikshitar has deftly woven the name of the *raga* in his song are given :

- (1) *Deenarakshaka-reetambaradhara* (Song : *Venkatachalapati-Kapi-Adi*)
- (2) *Sangeetapriyam* (*Sadhujanavinuta* — *Geetapriya* — *Tripura*)
- (3) *Mohaakara-bhikshatana* (*Marakoti* — *Arabhi* — *Jhampa*)

Many of the songs begin with the name of the *raga* itself. A few examples are : *Chayavati*, *Kusumakara*, *Nagabharanam*, *Nishadadi*, *Sree mooladhara*, *Veeravasanta*, *Vamsavati* etc.

Analysis Using Modern Methods

Modern methods of using Entropy to analyse Karnatak Music have already been used.⁶ The number of times each note occurs in the song is counted and then they are converted to proportions — called p's. The Entropy (or Information) called H is calculated by the formula

$$H = - \sum (p, \log p)$$

(where 'log' stands for logarithm to base 2). For example, in three songs, the following are the proportions of the notes from Higher *Panchama* (HP) to Lower *Panchama* (LP). (Table IV)

TABLE IV
Proportion of the various notes in 3 songs

Note	Song 1	Song 2	Song 3
HP	.000	.001	.000
HM	.005	.003	.009
HG	.022	.002	—
HR	.052	.058	.063
HS	.117	.143	.152
N	.074	.101	.122
D	.113	.146	—
P	.194	.197	.213
M	.133	.146	.155
G	.132	.104	—
R	.060	.041	.154
S	.072	.047	.103
LN	.020	.011	.022
LD	.044	.022	—
LP	.002	—	.006
LM	—	—	.006
H-values	3.301	3.327	2.900

Song 1 : *Nagalingam* (*Sankarabharanam*)

Song 2 : *Sadasivam* (")

Song 3 : *Dharmasamvardhini* (*Madhyamavati*)

If all the *swaras* have the same proportion of occurrence i.e. maximum variation (at any stage, one cannot say what the next *swara* would be — as in the case of the tosses of a coin or rolling of a dice) — then the value of H would be a maximum. Thus, by comparing the values of H for various songs, one can find whether there is a larger 'freedom' in the exploitation of the *swaras* than in other songs. In the above table, notes in different octaves have been treated as being different (HP, P, LP for example). Since it is said that the *swara* is the same whatever the octave, the next table would present the calculations of H based on seven *swaras* only for a number of compositions of the trinity in the *ragas*, *Kalyani* and *Sankarabharana*.⁷

Values of H (Unbiased Estimates) have been listed separately for each *raga* and each composer, songwise. The listing is from higher values of H to lower values in a descending order: (Table V & VI)

TABLE V
Values of H for various songs in Kalyani

Song	Values of H
1. <i>Bhajana Seyare</i>	2.783
2. <i>Eesa pahimama</i>	2.778
3. <i>Bhajare raghu</i>	2.771
4. <i>Vacchunu Hari</i>	2.769
5. <i>Endukoneemanasu</i>	2.768
6. <i>Rama neevadu</i>	2.766
7. <i>Sandhehamu</i>	2.761
8. <i>Evaramadugudu</i>	2.760
9. <i>Nidhichala</i>	2.7497
10. <i>Sundarinee</i>	2.7496
11. <i>Nannu vacchina</i>	2.746
12. <i>Amma ravamma</i>	2.743
13. <i>Ninnenavalasina</i>	2.737
14. <i>Ramarama rama</i>	2.723
15. <i>Vasudevayani</i>	2.722
16. <i>Kamalabhavadu</i>	2.722
17. <i>Karuvelpulu</i>	2.706
18. <i>Etavunara</i>	2.705
19. <i>Sive pahimam</i>	2.696
<i>Dikshitar</i>	
1. <i>Sreemangalambike</i>	2.767
2. <i>Abhayamba</i>	2.757
3. <i>Kamaksheem</i>	2.756
4. <i>Bhajare rechitta</i>	2.754
5. <i>Kamalambam</i>	2.732
6. <i>Sivakameswareem</i>	2.708
<i>Syamasastri</i>	
1. <i>Ninnu vina</i>	2.773
2. <i>Sankari sankari</i>	2.748
3. <i>Talli ninnu</i>	2.738
4. <i>Himadri sute</i>	2.724

TABLE VI

Values of H in Sankarabharana Raga

<i>Thyagaraja;</i>		
1.	<i>Seetapati</i>	2.773
2.	<i>Eevaragu</i>	2.767
3.	<i>Rama ninnuvina</i>	2.763
4.	<i>Sri raghuvara</i>	2.762
5.	<i>Prananathe</i>	2.756
6.	<i>Rama ramana</i>	2.754
7.	<i>Gatamoha</i>	2.754
8.	<i>Sambho siva</i>	2.748
9.	<i>Emineramu</i>	2.744
10.	<i>Endukeeschala</i>	2.746
11.	<i>Bhakti biccha</i>	2.740
12.	<i>Sarasa netra</i>	2.738
13.	<i>Evidamulaina</i>	2.738
14.	<i>Seetakalyana</i>	2.734
15.	<i>Ramasita rama</i>	2.728
16.	<i>Nannu brova</i>	2.725
17.	<i>Vallaga danaka</i>	2.725
18.	<i>Varaleelagana</i>	2.724
19.	<i>Mariyadaka</i>	2.722
20.	<i>Pahirama</i>	2.712
21.	<i>Paripalaya</i>	2.711
22.	<i>Swara raga</i>	2.699
23.	<i>Buddhi radu</i>	2.696
24.	<i>Manasu swadheena</i>	2.692
25.	<i>Etuda nila</i>	2.685
26.	<i>Vishnu vahanundu</i>	2.679
27.	<i>Enduku peddala</i>	2.659
28.	<i>Ehitrijagadeesa</i>	2.656
29.	<i>Sundareswaruni</i>	2.639
 <i>Dikshitar</i>		
1.	<i>Nagalingam</i>	2.756
2.	<i>Sadasivam</i>	2.756
3.	<i>Srikamalambike</i>	2.753
4.	<i>Akshaya linga</i>	2.751
5.	<i>Sundareswaraya</i>	2.750
6.	<i>Dakshinamoorte</i>	2.724
7.	<i>Sankara charyam</i>	2.721
8.	<i>Gurumurte</i>	2.636
 <i>Syama Sastri</i>		
1.	<i>Nannu karuninchi</i>	2.754
2.	<i>Devimeena netri</i>	2.711
3.	<i>Saroja dala netri</i>	2.662

Considering both the *ragas* have all the seven *swaras*, they have the same maximum value of H viz 2.80764. It is seen that for all composers, generally, the H-values of *Kalyani* are higher than more in the former. It would also be noted that songs found towards the end of the list (under each category) are more in vogue (i.e. commonly heard in performance) than those found towards the beginning of the list. Could we take this to indicate that easier pieces would have generally low H-values?

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