

**An Audio Documentation of the Compositions of Shri Muttusvami Dikshitar from the Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini: Audio Book One.** 2006. Recordings of T. M. Krishna and R. K. Sriramkumar, produced and distributed by Jnanarnava Trust, email: [jnanarnava@gmail.com](mailto:jnanarnava@gmail.com). Available on request from university libraries and archives. Notes (5 pp.) in English by N. Ramanathan with introductory commentary by T. M. Krishna and Sanskrit texts in romanized transliteration.

The vitality of the South Indian dialect of Indian art music continues to manifest itself in the present century. The artists now reaching their peak not only carry on the oral traditions of interlinked words-music compositions, sophisticated improvisatory techniques, and traditional scholarship in Sanskrit, Tamil and other Indic languages; they are full participants in the international world linked by fluent English, internet websites, and CD recordings; among those recordings is this one, representing a combination of historical documentation and musical scholarship. With this CD the brilliant vocalist T. M. Krishna, assisted by colleagues R. S. Jayalakshmi (fretted South Indian *veena*), R. K. Sriramkumar (violin), and K. Arun Prakash (barrel-drum *mridangam*), is launching an ambitious project: to record, on a CD series, compositions by Muttusvami Dikshitar (1776–1835), one of the contemporaneous so-called “trinity” of words-music composers whose works, as handed down in oral tradition, still constitute the core of the present-day concert repertory.

But oral tradition is not the source of this recording, and it does not represent T. M. Krishna as performer but rather as scholar. The series thus initiated will attempt to reproduce in audible form the 220 or more compositions of Muttusvami Dikshitar as notated by his younger brother’s grandson and adopted son, Subbarama Dikshitar (1839–1906), in his monumental work *Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini* (SSP) (1904/1961–77). Subbarama Dikshitar, by then in his sixties, was at first reluctant to undertake this enormous task, but he was largely persuaded by his friend Chinnaswamy Mudaliar, who—like many in the expanding world of the colonial nineteenth century—feared lest oral tradition be swamped if not preserved in some more permanent form; only when his eyesight failed had Chinnaswamy Mudaliar ceased publication of his own *Oriental Music in European Notation* (1893/1982). Subbarama Dikshitar’s notation was an ingenious combination of the letter-names of the seven Indian scale degrees with their specific pitch classes indicated by name and a description of the particulars of the relevant scale type, with modifications inspired by European notation: two-to-one durational values are indicated by long versus short vowels, while prolongations or rests are represented by semicolons versus commas; sets of still shorter durations are clustered under single or double lines over the letters, as in European eighth- and sixteenth-notes; outer registers are indicated by under-dotting and over-dotting. A most important additional feature is a set of ten symbols indicating embellishments as played on the veena, derived from two Sanskrit treatises.

Varying dispositions of higher, lower, and enharmonic varieties of the five variable scale-steps—the universal “system tonic” and its upper fifth are invariant in Indian music—are indicated by systematic grouping of melodic-type ragas under 72 scale-types, called *melakartas*, in a scheme developed from sixteenth-century classifications based on the fretted veena by the seventeenth-century theorist Venkatamakhin in his treatise *Chaturdandi*

*Prakashika* (Shastri et al, 1934). The single manuscript of this work belonged to the Dikshitar family, though by the nineteenth century the scheme was well-known in the oral tradition. The ragas in SSP are arranged in order of the melakartas whose pitch classes they share, including the melakartas themselves treated as melodic types, and the recordings in the Audio Documentation of SSP are planned to follow the same order.

This first CD of the proposed series contains compositions by Muttusvami Dikshitar in melakarta ragas 1 through 8, with only one composition in each except melakarta raga 5, in which there are two; only here can one hear how more than one composition can use the same raga. The formal divisions of each composition—*pallavi*, *anupallavi* and *charanam* (refrain, counter-refrain, and stanza)—are presented separately, first on the veena and then vocally; for compositions with only two movements SSP provides instead a set of *chitta svaras*, a movement of precomposed solfège. The CD concludes with raga Todi, the principal raga using melakarta number 8, called Janatodi in SSP. Up to this point in the system, Janatodi is the only scale-type in which compositions by Muttusvami Dikshitar using other ragas sharing the same scale-type are found in SSP; one presumes that CD-2 of the project will begin with these three, two of which are the familiar ragas Punnagavarali and Asavari.

Many of the compositions in SSP, and even some of the ragas, differ in varying degrees from the way they are rendered in the general performing tradition. According to an interview published in the Karnatak music newsletter *KutcheriBuzz*, Krishna conceived the idea for the project when a friend wondered where Krishna had learned his rendition on a commercial CD of a rare Dikshitar composition that differed from the version he himself knew; Krishna replied that, not being familiar with any oral version of the composition, he had developed his version starting from the notation in SSP. In this first volume of the Audio Documentation the kinds of differences between notated versions from 1904 in SSP and the current traditions are illustrated by Krishna's two renditions of Dikshitar's composition "Kamalambike" in the raga Todi, on track 9 as in SSP, on track 10 in a standard performing version. (Figure 1 is my transnotation from SSP of the refrain portion, the pallavi, with the system tonic conventionally set at *c'*). The differences between Krishna's audio version based on SSP and the much more lavishly embellished phrases in his version of the current concert tradition are certainly audible, but there is no difference in the fundamental pitch classes. In later volumes will be heard Dikshitar compositions in ragas whose current traditions differ from SSP not only in details of the compositions but also in aspects of pitch-class content.

Krishna's rendering of "Kamalambike" in Todi raga on track 10, elegant though it is, does not represent his art at its most complete. He has recorded many commercial CDs, and one of the best is *Myriad Hues of Anandabhairavi* (2004), a CD with five items in the raga Anandabhairavi released in 2003.

Figure 1. Transnotation after Subbarama's *Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini* (1904, I, 61–63) showing Subbarama Dikshitar's notation with embellishments of the refrain portion, the pallavi, of Muttuswami Dikshitar's "Kamalambike."

pallavi

Kama - lām - - bi - kē ————— Kama - lām - - bi - kē ā - śrita

kal - pa - la - ti - - kē ————— caṅ - ḍi - kē ka - ma - ni - - yya - -

- ru - ṇām - - śu - kē ka - ra - vidhr̥ - ta - śu - kē māṁ - - ava

Kama - lām - - - - - bi - kē jaga - dam - - bi - kē —————

Detailed description: The image shows a musical score for the song 'Kamalambike'. It consists of four lines of music, each with a corresponding line of lyrics. The notation includes treble clefs, a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat), and a 4/4 time signature. The lyrics are written in a stylized font with diacritics. The first line is labeled 'pallavi'. The score includes various musical ornaments such as 'w' (vibrato), 'v' (accents), and 'r' (trills). There are also some decorative symbols like a 'S' in a circle at the beginning and end of the piece. The lyrics are: 'Kama - lām - - bi - kē ————— Kama - lām - - bi - kē ā - śrita', 'kal - pa - la - ti - - kē ————— caṅ - ḍi - kē ka - ma - ni - - yya - -', '- ru - ṇām - - śu - kē ka - ra - vidhr̥ - ta - śu - kē māṁ - - ava', and 'Kama - lām - - - - - bi - kē jaga - dam - - bi - kē —————'.

It happens that a transnotation of the SSP notation for one of these, another of Dikshitar's offerings to goddess Kamala, "Kamalamba samrakshatu mam" on track 2, may be seen in an old essay of mine (Powers 1984).<sup>1</sup> To conclude his rendition of this composition in Anandabhairavi, Krishna sings passages of improvised solfège—*kalpana svaras*—each returning to the opening of the composition, in alternation with Sriramkumar's violin in the usual fashion. A very popular Anandabhairavi composition on track 4, Syama Shastri's "O Jagadamba," is preceded by an improvised textless and meterless *alapana* (discourse) on the raga, again alternating with violin. The last ten minutes of this half-hour presentation is devoted to *niraval*, improvisation using words from the composition sung to phrases from the raga within the metric framework of the composition. For this most unusual *niraval* Krishna has used some particularly expressive and rhythmically interesting text from the second quarter of the third refrain, beginning "Kanchi Kamakshi" and ending "sharanu sharanu." A short mridangam solo by Arun Prakash concludes the track.

That a performing star of Krishna's high excellence has chosen to undertake a grueling scholarly project is a particular attestation of that general artistic and intellectual vitality of the South Indian musical world entering

the twenty-first century. On the one hand, the old traditions are maintained; on the other, the latest international technology is used, in this case to bring to audible life a phase of the old tradition that itself had adapted the international technology of a hundred years ago, musical notation in print.

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## Note

1. The essay contains an account of the Tiruvarur temple and its deities and a detailed discussion of two of Dikshitar's compositions. In my transnotation on p. 323 of "Kamalamba samrakshatu mam" from SSP, the system tonic is set, unconventionally, at *d'*.

## References

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