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Dikshitar parampara (Part 2)

Chinnaswami Dikshitar (1778-1823 AD), the second son of Ramaswami Dikshitar, was a great musician and brilliant composer, patronised by Manali Muthukrishna Mudaliar (see *Sruti* 275). Chinnaswami Dikshitar composed two kritis on sage Narada – *Ganalola karunalavala* in Todi and *Narayanananti* in Kalyani. In the former, the first line of the pallavi *Ganalola karunalavala*, and anupallavi *manita guna sujnana dthurina* were popularly used in ragam-tanam-pallavi expositions of the early 20th century. But for this, the compositions themselves are not well-known. Chinnaswami created sancharis (set of phrases that help in understanding the basic form of a raga) for many ragas and composed in many talas like Dhruva, Tripura, Adi, Matya and Ragana Matya.

While on a pilgrimage with his brother Baluswami, he died at Madurai at the age of 45.

Muthuswami Dikshitar (1765-1835 AD) is the crest-jewel of the Dikshitar parampara. The music world bows down in reverence to this Sreevidya upasaka whose bhakti, musical brilliance, deep knowledge of Sanskrit, and expertise in combining musical prowess and literary excellence are unparalleled. Apart from music (vocal and veena), and languages like Sanskrit, Telugu and Tamil, he was also well-versed in the Vedas and other branches of learning like mantra sastra, jyotisha and Vedanta. Though he was a Devi upasaka, his *ishta devata* was Subramanya and his mudra Guruguha. Dikshitar sang on many gods and goddesses like Ganesa, Rama, Krishna, Siva, Lalita, Lakshmi and Renukadevi. His kshetra kritis include exhaustive details related to the kshetra, the temple and the deity, including information about the festivals, the sthala vriksha (the tree that is sacred in that particular temple), vimanas (the tower on top of the deity's sanctum sanctorum) as well as iconographic and architectural details. Vibhakti kritis on a single deity, like Guruguha vibhakti on Subramanya, Neelotpalamba vibhakti on goddess Neelotpalamba and Abhayamba vibhakti on the goddess in Mayavaram, showcase Dikshitar's mastery over the language.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, many of Muthuswami Dikshitar's kritis were not even a part of the repertoire of



musicians and only a handful of kriti-s were sung by the vidwans of the time. A rich oral tradition and the tireless efforts of Subbarama Dikshitar, who documented Muthuswami Dikshitar's compositions in his *Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini*, have helped in preserving many of his compositions.

Subbarama Dikshitar (1839-1906 AD), it may be said, was the last of the brilliant musicians of the Dikshitar parampara. As Muthuswami, Chinnaswami and Baluswami did not have sons, Baluswami, on the advice of Kumara Ettappa Maharaja, adopted his daughter Annapurni's second son Subbarama Dikshitar. Subbarama was born in Tiruvarur in 1839. His father was



Subbarama Dikshitar

Sivarama Iyer. When the child was five years old, Baluswami Dikshitar adopted him as his son and brought him to Ettayapuram. He taught him Telugu and Sanskrit and gave him rigorous training in music and veena. With his inherent musical abilities channelled by such intense sadhana, Subbarama Dikshitar blossomed into a brilliant musician and vageyakara at the age of 17.

His genius as a composer was such as would make his forefathers proud. He composed tana and chauka varnams, darus, kritis and a ragamalika. His chauka varnam in Surati was by itself testimony to his great musical prowess. This magnificent varnam portrays the raga exhaustively with its special prayogas and gamakas. In keeping with the structure of the varnam prevalent at that time, this Surati varnam has a sahitya portion after the charana and concludes with the pallavi. He composed the music for some of Krishnasamayya's sahityas. In his description of one of Krishnasamayya's kritis, *Devi divya nama* in the raga Mechabauli, he mentions that the music for it was composed by him.

The world of Carnatic music is greatly indebted to Subbarama Dikshitar. It is through his monumental work *Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini* that we know about many compositions of vageyakaras before and during his time. The first part of this work is *Vageyakara Charitramu*, which has details of the life history and works of as many as 77 composers. This is followed by a section on the lakshana aspects of music, with special reference to Sarangadeva's *Sangeeta Ratnakara* and Venkatamakhi's *Chaturdandi Prakasika*. The main body of the text consists of an elaborate elucidation of the 72 raganga ragas of the Venkatamakhi tradition along with their respective bhashanga and upanga ragas, as well as compositions (with notation) of vageyakaras in each of them. There is a sanchari portion with sets of phrases that help in understanding the form of the raga.

A very important aspect of this book is the use of gamaka signs in the notation that help in defining minute details in the musical structure of the composition to the greatest extent possible. An explanation of how the gamaka signs are to be interpreted and rendered in vocal and instrumental music is also given. This method of notation, aimed at reflecting the form of the song as it would be sung, has helped retain the compositions in their original form, thereby ensuring some uniformity and authenticity in the way they are rendered.

The *Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini* was published in 1906, in two volumes of 1770 pages, with the support of Ettappa Maharaja and the persuasion of A.M. Chinnasami Mudaliar. The book is a great treasure for musicians (see *Sruti* 245).

In 1905, his book *Prathamabhyasa Pustakamu* was published. This included early lessons in music as well as some kritis. In 1906 the book *Samskritantara Dravida Keertana* with tunes he composed for Krishnasamayya's sahitya was brought out. He mentioned a collection of the works of Tyagaraja, songs of Syama Sastry and padams of Kshetraraya that he planned to bring out, but his demise in 1906 did not allow him to fulfill this desire.

The three successive generations of the great composer-musicians of the Dikshitar parampara are like pillars supporting the magnificent structure of Carnatic music. Thanks to the *Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini*, the effulgence of this parampara even today serves as the guiding light for musicians and students, leading them to the depths of the magical world of Carnatic classical music.

(Concluded)