

The ragamalikas of Subbarama Dikshitar

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Among the various compositions notated in the *Sangeeta Sampradaya Pradarsini*, the ragamalikas are interesting and intriguing. Among the composers belonging to the family of Ramaswami Dikshitar, Subbarama Dikshitar has employed this musical form extensively. He has composed ten ragamalikas, including the raganga ragamalika. These ragamalikas form vital study material, from the aspects of both sahitya and sangeeta. An attempt is made here to understand the ragamalikas of Subbarama Dikshitar as a whole, although it is important to analyse each one individually.

Though the majority of these ragamalikas were composed on royal patrons like Pusapati Ananda Gajapati Raju (*Kaminchina kalavatira*), Raja Jagadveera Mudduswami Ettendra (*Enduku ra ra*), Bhaskara Setupati (*Garavamu*) and Sri Rama Tiruvadi of Travancore (*Ni sari*), Subbarama Dikshitar has also dedicated his ragamalikas to deities like Rajagopalaswami (*Vedukato*) and Kartikeya of Kazhugumalai (*Manatodi*). All of them were composed in Telugu, except *Manatodi*, which is in Tamil.

Sahitya

The sahitya of these ragamalikas not only have their raga mudras interwoven, but also have the 'poshaka' (patron) mudra like *Sri mudduswami jagadveera ettendra chandra* in *Enduku ra ra*; *Bhaskara mahipala* in *Garavamu*; and *Pusapati ananda Gajapati* in *Kaminchina kalavatira*.



Subbarama Dikshitar

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Many of these sahityas are also replete with 'anuprasa'—an alliteration; a single syllable is repeated, but as a part of a different set of closely connected words. Using anuprasa is actually an option and not a mandate to be used in a composition. Let us take the Sama raga segment featuring in the ragamalika *Kaminchina kalavatira* as an example. The sahitya reads as *kurulu mogula tegalu nagavalarulunu duru nela saga manuduru*, where the akshara 'la' is used as anuprasa. Though it is aesthetically appealing, it is challenging for a musician to sing, especially when it occurs as a madhyama kala sahitya.

Structure

The structure of these ragamalikas can be divided into two types—those with structured pallavi, anupallavi and charanam and those without any defined structure. The ragamalikas *Manatodi*, *Priyamuna* and *E kanakambari* come under the first category. It is indeed these

unstructured ragamalikas that captivate, as they are quite abstruse in their construction. In many cases, the composer has prescribed stringent ways to render these compositions. For instance, the ragamalika *Kaminchina kalavatira* is perhaps the most asymmetric composition available. This is a ragamalika comprising 32 ragas, where the first 16 ragas are given an elaborate treatment, with a detailed swara-sahitya segment. Contrastingly, a single tala avarta is allotted to the second 16 ragas. The composer grouped these 32 ragas into 16 pairs. These raga pairs are to be sung alternately after the elaborate section consisting of 16 ragas. The composer has also prescribed unique guidelines for the ragamalikas *Enduku ra ra* and *Valapumiri*. This kind of grouping and giving directions to render these compositions are unique to Subbarama Dikshitar. Though this adds value to the composition, it also makes it more intricate, difficult and complex.

Raga

Analysis of the ragamalikas (excluding *E kanakambari* which is a raganga ragamalika), shows that the composer has indeed included a wide array of ragas. It ranges from common ragas like Kalyani, Sankarabharanam to rare ones like Rudrapriya and Balahamsa. It also reveals his personal preference for Todi which features in all these ragamalikas. Khamas seems next in preference as it is used in five compositions. Other ragas like Bhairavi, Sree and Yamuna, occur more than once. The raga selection seems to be more or less influenced

by Ramaswami Dikshitar. Every raga used in these ragamalikas, except three were used by Ramaswami Dikshitar. Paraju, Khamas, and Rudrapriya form this trio and the above statement can be confirmed only if we get the complete corpus of the compositions of Ramaswami Dikshitar.

The composer has taken utmost care to give a new flavour to a raga when it occurs more than once. For instance, Todi is used as a panchama varjya raga in the ragamalika *Priyamuna*, but used as a routine raga though with its different phrases in other ragamalikas. In addition, many phrases that were known/used by his family alone can be seen aplenty. Be it the phrase ‘PNM’ in Kedaram or ‘SDP’ in Manohari, they stand alone. These ragamalikas also enable us to understand the old swarooma of these ragas. For example, the phrase *NSGGM* in Neelambari (not in vogue today) is used profusely in his ragamalika *Garavamu*.

Subbarama Dikshitar employed an interesting feature in his raganga ragamalika. This ragamalika serves as a lexicon to understand the 72 raganga ragas used by the Dikshitar family, starting from Kanakambari and ending with Rasamanjari. In this ragamalika, when he transits from one raganga raga to its immediate successor (within a chakra), he prefers not to use the swaras unique to them.

Being raganga ragas, every member within a chakra has the same swara varieties in the poorvanga (*sa* to *ma*), and differs only in the uttaranga (*pa* to *ni*). If a difference is to be shown between any two ragas that occur in succession (within a chakra), it is much easier to show if the differing swaras are used at the beginning of the raga segment as its opening

Ragamalikas of Subbarama Dikshitar		
Ragamalika	Number of ragas	Tala
<i>Enduku rara</i>	9	Roopakam
<i>Ni sarileni</i>	9	Tisra Ekam
<i>Garavamu</i>	9	Roopakam
<i>Kaminchina kalavatira</i>	32	Tisra Ekam
<i>Valapumiri</i>	4	Roopakam
<i>Manatodi</i>	6	Adi
<i>Vanidaroye</i>	4	Roopakam
<i>Vedukato</i>	5	Roopakam
<i>Priyamuna</i>	10	Tisra Ekam
<i>E kanakambari</i> (sahitya by Krishna Kavi and music by Subbarama Dikshitar)	72 (raganga ragamalika)	Adi

phrase. This was followed by Maha Vaidyanatha Iyer in his 72-mela ragamalika (though we do see a few exceptions). Subbarama Dikshitar surprisingly did not resort much to this practice. Instead, he has shown the phrases unique to these raganga ragas. Therefore, at many places, we may not be aware of the change in the ragas, unless we are cautious, as the successive ragas share the same swara variety in their poorvanga. For example, in the first chakra, the raga segments Kanakambari, Phenadyuti, Ganasamavarali, Bhanumati and Manoranjani start with the phrase *SRGRMPM*, *MGGRMP*, *MGRMP*, *MPMRR*, *PDPMP* respectively. Tanukeerti alone starts with the phrase *SNDNP*. Hence, the opening phrases are not suggestive of the ragas used. The ragas unveil themselves only as we explore the composition.

Tala

Excluding the ragamalikas *Manatodi* and *E kanakambari*, all the others are composed in either Roopaka or tisra Eka tala. Analysis of the tala reveals the musical acumen of the

composer in the sphere of talaprastara. Almost in every ragamalika, we see the usage of three speeds seamlessly and skillfully, resulting in various unique patterns. Again, this is an influence from the works of Ramaswami Dikshitar.

Conclusion

The ragamalikas of Subbarama Dikshitar not only serve as reference material for understanding the raga swarooma; they also help us to understand the music of a bygone era. Analysis of each of these ragamalikas separately will not only help us to understand the musical thoughts of Subbarama Dikshitar, but also that of Ramaswami Dikshitar, as the seed of the latter’s musical thoughts and/or influence can be seen in the composition of all the members of the Dikshitar family.

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(You can listen to a few reconstructed versions of these ragamalikas on the author’s YouTube channel *The Lost Melodies – TLM* at <https://www.youtube.com/user/Vathathmaja/videos>)