

# *Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar*

श्री मुत्तुस्वामि दीक्षितः



ஸ்ரீ முத்துஸ்வாமி தீக்ஷிதர்  
(1775 - 1835)

(Portrait drawn in his presence by the Royal Artist of Ettayapuram Samastāna)

## *Collected Articles*

# *The Eternal Pilgrim*

*Compiled by Ravi & Sridhar*

It is rarely that a phenomenon takes place in the world. An epoch-making event of far-reaching consequence that would change the course of history. The advent of sages, saints, great men of science, sacred men of art, have all heralded new beginnings in their respective realms. In the world of Indian art music, the advent of Shyama Sastri, Thyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar changed the course and perception of music. The harbingers of a new age in classical music, the threesome are reverentially referred to as the Trinity of Carnatic music. Not without reason, the foremost of which was their being born in the same town and being contemporaries. But this was not the only reason. Their pioneering work was such that after their times, Carnatic music was never the same again.

Looking at their works, one finds a unity of purpose behind them. This unity of purpose is reflected in the fact that the Trinity refined the medium of the kriti and made it into a wholesome entity. They also brought into vogue several ragas that had fallen into oblivion. That they adopted almost the same methods and utilised the same tools speaks volumes about this unity of purpose. All the more reason why, they are hailed as incarnations whose specific task was to elevate the art form into a true rasAnubhavA. The art form as an experience that would ennoble the heart and lift the soul of man to greater heights. The purpose of an incarnation is to transcend and transform. Shyama Sastri, Thyagaraja, and Muthuswami Dikshitar transcended the mundane and transformed the way music was handled. The Trinity proved to the world through their music and through their exemplary lives, that the sole purpose of music was to make man perfect and help him realise his unity with God.

Muthuswami Dikshitar was one of those rare beings who graced this earth with his noble presence and who left behind an eternal fragrance that shall never wither, eternal footprints on the sands of time that shall never be effaced. His works of grandeur and depth, both in melody and poesy, afford us a glimpse into the Eternal Soul, the Muse he worshipped, a glimpse of the summit of perfection he attained. With devotion we shall try to retell the monumental saga of one of the greatest men that God gave to humanity.

### **The Milieu of Those Times**

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were remarkable periods in the history of culture and spirituality in India, especially in the South, where the bhakti movement flourished. The kings who ruled in many parts of South India were themselves religious minded and cultured. They encouraged artistes and gave due respect to saints and spiritual savants.

The Cauvery delta region, in what is now the Tanjavur district in Tamilnadu was ruled by the Cholas and later the Nayaks. Both the Cholas and the Nayak rulers patronised several art forms. Later in the seventeenth century came the Mahratta rulers, descendants of the great Emperor Shivaji. The Cauvery river and its numerous tributaries that criss-cross the region made the lands fertile and generally it was an area of plenty and prosperity. Under the benevolent reign of the Mahratta kings, arts like music, dance, painting and sculpture and crafts flourished. The kings were generous in their patronage to the artists, relieving them from the necessity of having to worry about their livelihood. The artist, whatever was his calling, could therefore, give undivided attention to perfecting his art and bringing excellence to it.

In this milieu lived a scholar and musician, Ramaswami Dikshitar. He was born in 1735. He originally hailed from Virinchipuram in the South Arcot district. But due to disturbed political conditions in the mid-eighteenth century, his father Venkateswara Dikshitar migrated to the Cauvery delta with his family and settled at Govindapuram near Kumbhakonam. Here, Ramaswami Dikshitar grew up. When he was about sixteen years old, Ramaswami Dikshitar lost both his parents. He was supported by generous relatives and friends. Ramaswami Dikshitar who had a predilection for music, approached a musician called Virabhadriah who was attached to the Tanjavur palace, and learnt music from him. In course of time, Ramaswami Dikshitar attained sufficient proficiency in the art to be able to give concerts. He also learnt musicology from Venkata Vaidyanatha Dikshitar who was an acknowledged expert in the science of music and who belonged to the parampara of Venkatamakhi, the author of chaturdaNDi prakAshikA and the architect of the 72 mELakartA scheme. Ramaswami Dikshitar's knowledge and proficiency in music, gained for him the respect and admiration of the cognoscenti of those times. He eventually settled down at Tiruvarur and married a pious girl Subbamma.

Tiruvarur is one of the mukti kshetras known for its magnificent temple for Lord Thyagaraja and Goddess Kamalambika and its huge tank, Kamalalaya. It is also famous for its magnificent chariots.

*jananAt kamalAlayE, darshanAt aprasadasI,  
smaraNAd aruNACHalam, kAshI tu maraNAN muktih*

The puranas have declared that birth at Tiruvarur, darshan of Chidambaram, thinking of Arunachala and death at Kashi result in liberation. Great many were the saints born at Tiruvarur. Among these were the Carnatic music Trinity of Shyama Sastri, Thyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar.

### His Birth

Till his fortieth year Ramaswami Dikshitar did not have children. On the advice of family elders, he and his wife went to Vaideeswaran Koil near Sirkali and worshipped Lord Vaidyanatha and Goddess Balambika. They observed austerities and performed navAvaraNa pUjA for forty-eight days. On the last day, it is said that the Goddess appeared in Ramaswami Dikshitar's dream and presented him with a muktAhAram, a pearl necklace. The wise and the elderly of Vaideeswaran Koil interpreted the dream to mean that his prayer was granted by the Goddess, and that a gem (Muktha) of a child would be born to him. In 1775, in the month of Phalguna (March-April), when the star of Krittika was ascending, a male child was born to the couple. He was named Muthuswami after Lord Subramanya whose name is Muthukumaraswami at Vaideeswaran Koil.

His intense wish of begetting a son having been fulfilled, Ramaswami Dikshitar settled down to perfecting his music with greater enthusiasm. The newborn brought him luck too. Ramaswami Dikshitar was invited to give concerts at prestigious gatherings. The Tanjore king bestowed honours on him as befitting his status and dignity. The honour of organising and streamlining the playing of Nagaswaram and other musical instruments at the Tiruvarur temple for the daily services, festivals and processions, was given to Ramaswami Dikshitar and he admirably carried out the task. These procedures are being followed even now at the Tiruvarur temple. It may be pertinent to point out here that the Tiruvarur temple services boast of three instruments that are unique to that temple; the pancamukha vAdyam, the shuddha maddhaLam and the long bAri nAgaswaram.

Ramaswami Dikshitar is credited with inventing the rAgA hamsadhvani. (This is open to debate. As the rAgA also existed in the sangraha cUDamaNi. He certainly appears to be the first to compose in it.) He also blossomed into a good composer of varNAs, darUs and kritIs. In one of the padavarNAs in Telugu which starts as sarigAni dAni, he has used only the seven swarAs throughout as its sAhitya. Ramaswami Dikshitar revelled in composing long rAgamAlikAs. He composed in 44 rAgAs a kriti in praise of Goddess Minakshi of Madurai. All in all, he led a satisfactory life. In course of time, Ramaswami Dikshitar had three more children; a son, ChinnaSwami(b1778), a daughter who was named Balambal after the Goddess of Vaideeswaran Koil and again a son, Baluswami(b1786). Now his ambition was to groom his children to follow his footsteps. He had high hopes on Muthuswami who, early in life itself, exhibited superior intelligence and wisdom.

Ramaswami Dikshitar arranged to have the young Muthuswami study the Vedas and Sanskrit. Sincerely dedicated to study, Muthuswami quickly acquired mastery over the kAvyAs, alankArAs and vyAkaraNA. Ramaswami Dikshitar himself gave intensive training in music, both in theory and practice, to his son. Muthuswami was also taught to play the vINA and in course of time, blossomed not only as a vocalist but also as a competent player on that instrument. The thorough scientific knowledge the lad acquired in music helped him to properly handle the rAgAs and discover their intrinsic, hidden beauty. In this he was aided by his deep knowledge and mastery of the vINA.

The performance of nitya karmAs, the diligent study of the Vedas and shAstrAs, his deep devotion to God, the continuous study and practice of sangItA and above all his respect and reverence for his parents, teachers and elders were the strong foundational aspects which were to stand Muthuswami in good stead in his monumental work, still in the future.

Marriage at a young age was very common in those days. Muthuswami too was married young. Nevertheless, even while a youngster, he was sufficiently mature to be able to understand the transitory nature of worldly pleasures. Seeing Muthuswami ever engaged in religious austerities, practice of music and mostly observing silence, his parents were worried. They surmised, but wrongly, that the boy was unhappy with his dark complexioned wife. Ramaswami Dikshitar and his wife Subbamma discussed the matter between themselves and concluded that Muthuswami would lead a normal family life if a fair-complexioned girl were to become his wife. They accordingly found a suitable girl and persuaded Muthuswami to marry her. We do not know whether Muthuswami consented willingly or under pressure from his parents. But one thing is certain. He remained the same. His having two wives or their complexions hardly mattered to him. He had set his goals high above the mundane. The world and its attractions had to be transcended, not only to facilitate the epochal work he was destined for, but also to achieve the highest spiritual goal.

Thus went by the initial years of our future composer. Once, Muthukrishna Mudaliar, a dubash (a translator) of the East India Co., visited Tiruvarur with his family. He also held the post of Chief Merchant of the Company, the last Indian to hold the position. He belonged to a prominent family of Manali near Madras. He was a patron of the arts and he and his family considered it a great privilege to patronise, encourage and support music and musicians. Muthukrishna Mudaliar was responsible for the reconstruction of the Twin Temples, Chenna Kesava and Chenna



Malleeswara at the corner of Flower Bazaar, Madras, after they had been demolished at their earlier site to make way for the High Court. Muthukrishna Mudaliar's town house at No 63, Govindappa Naicken Street, George Town, still exists. Adjoining it is the Manali Hostel, a building set up by the same philanthropist for the benefit of indigent students who wished to migrate to Madras for higher studies. Boarding and Lodging was free and sometimes the Manali Charities even paid the education fees!

Muthukrishna Mudaliar visited the Tiruvarur temple and had darshan of the deities. There was a bhajanA being conducted by Ramaswami Dikshitar at the temple at that time. The Mudaliar and his family had the opportunity of listening to the music of the Dikshitar. Greatly moved by the music and impressed by the piety of the Dikshitar family the Mudaliar invited them to visit Manali and stay with him for sometime. This was in the 1790s. Ramaswami Dikshitar, after consultation with his family and relatives agreed to this proposal. The family shifted to Manali and settled down there.

After Muthukrishna Mudaliar's death, his son Venkatakrishna (Chinnayya) Mudaliar continued to play host to the Dikshitar. The Dikshitar family lived in Tiruvottriyur and later at Manali, close to the "Meddai Veedu", the palatial country home of the Mudaliars. (Till the 1980s, this house existed as a ruin). Venkatakrishna Mudaliar was also a dubash, attached to the East India Company and quite influential with his English masters. He introduced Muthuswami and his younger brothers to the bands playing Western music at Fort St. George. Muthuswami listened keenly and assimilated the essentials of that alien music. Later in his life he composed Sanskrit sAhityas in praise of Hindu deities for about thirty-five of those Western tunes including the British national anthem. These are called nOTTu svara sAhityas. Ramaswami Dikshitar who observed the various western instruments being played, was particularly fascinated by the violin. He spoke to the Mudaliar who engaged an Englishman, Col. Brown to teach the violin to Baluswami, Ramaswami Dikshitar's youngest son. Baluswami attained proficiency on the instrument and with the help of his father and eldest brother Muthuswami, adapted the violin to Carnatic music. The Carnatic music world owes it to Baluswami Dikshitar and later Vadivelu, the youngest of the Tanjore Quartette and a disciple of Muthuswami Dikshitar, for introducing and adapting the violin to South Indian music.

Life went on smoothly and in a satisfactory manner for the Dikshitar family. A visitor was to change all that. Chidambaranatha Yogi, a Vedantin, tantric, and a spiritually evolved sannyasi, came to the Mudaliar household on his way to Kashi. It was Chidambaranatha Yogi who had given shri vidya dIkshA to Ramaswami Dikshitar, early in the latter's life at Tiruvarur. The Yogi was also a guru to the Mudaliar family. He was therefore welcomed with deep veneration by the Mudaliars as well as the Dikshitar family. Chidambaranatha Yogi stayed for a few days with the Dikshitar. Muthuswami it was who was called upon to serve the Yogi. The lad, with reverence and humility, catered to all his needs. During the Yogi's pUjA, Muthuswami would play on the vINA and sing. The Yogi was quite impressed by the modesty, piety and the musical prowess of Muthuswami and was very affectionate towards the lad. The time came for the Yogi to resume his tour.

The Dikshitar prostrated before him and asked for his blessings. Ramaswami Dikshitar requested Chidambaranatha Yogi to ask for whatever he wanted and promised that he would fulfill it. Whereupon, Chidambaranatha Yogi asked Ramaswami Dikshitar to send his son Muthuswami to accompany him to Kashi. The father was benumbed with shock and pleaded with the Yogi to spare Muthuswami, saying that the lad was born after a long time in their lives, that he was very young and that they could not bear to be separated from him. Chidambaranatha Yogi was annoyed and told Ramaswami Dikshitar that he wanted nothing else and that if the former did not want to send his son along, so be it.

Sensing the delicacy of the situation, Venkatakrishna Mudaliar intervened in the matter and bid Ramaswami Dikshitar part with his son, saying that Muthuswami would be safe with the Yogi, that such an opportunity of serving a great yati was rare to get in life, and that the lad would benefit immensely from association with the great man. The father finally agreed to part with the son. It was a tearful farewell that the family gave its first born. Chidambaranatha Yogi accompanied by Muthuswami left Manali on their pilgrimage to the holy city of Kashi.

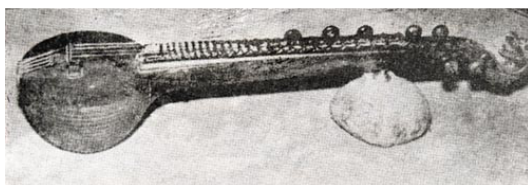
The journey to Kashi in those days involved travelling on foot for months together, sometimes close to a year depending on the vagaries of the weather. Pilgrims also sometimes made detours from the straight route in order to bathe in the sacred rivers and have darshan of important shrines. The usual route taken by pilgrims from the south to Kashi was Tiruttani, Mangalagiri, the Krishna and Godavari regions of what is now Andhra Pradesh, Puri Jagannath and Allahabad. Chidambaranatha Yogi and Muthuswami visited the important shrines and tIrthAs on the way. The Yogi explained to the young lad the significance and importance of each kshetrA that they visited. After a few months of travel the party reached Kashi.

Under the benign grace of Chidambaranatha Yogi, Muthuswami lived a deeply religious and spiritual life at Kashi. The Yogi initiated him in the Sri Vidya cult, gave him upadEsa of the ShODashAkshari mantra and trained him in the tantric mode of worship. He also taught the young lad yOGa and vEdAnta. Muthuswami spent his time in Kashi serving his guru, reciting the vEdAs, practising Shri Vidya, meditating, and singing and playing on the vIna. This kind of disciplined life resulted in Muthuswami's acquiring a keen and perceptive intellect and a mind that was capable of probing deep into spiritual matters. Doubtless, it also sowed the seeds of vairAgya (detachment) and

instilled in the young lad a sense of equanimity. Though very young, and though he sometimes felt the separation from his parents, Muthuswami came to look upon the Yogi not only as his guru but as the embodiment of his father and mother too. The Yogi in turn, loved his disciple and took care of him as a mother would. The relationship between guru and sishyA was unique. Being an advanced tantric and a spiritually evolved Yogi, Chidambaranatha was intuitively aware of the tremendous potential of his disciple, the epoch-making task that Muthuswami would be charged with in future and the eternal fame that would be his lot.

Muthuswami also had the opportunity of listening to Hindustani music at Kashi and imbibe its essential features. It is handed down through tradition that Muthuswami was away from his family for five years. It can therefore be safely assumed that Muthuswami spent between 3 ½ to 4 years at Kashi. It is quite possible that Chidambaranatha Yogi must have taken Muthuswami to many holy shrines in the North including Badrinath, but it is doubtful whether the future composer would have visited Nepal as that country was under the Gurkhas then and there were several fratricidal wars of succession raging regularly.

One day, Chidambaranatha Yogi and Muthuswami went for a bath in the Ganga. The Yogi asked Muthuswami to descend a few steps and put his hands into the water. When Muthuswami did so, his hands closed upon a vINA. Surprised, the lad turned towards his guru who beckoned him up the steps. Chidambaranatha Yogi informed Muthuswami that this was Ganga Mata's prasad to the lad and that She had blessed him. The unusual feature of this vINA is that its yali faces upwards and has the word 'Rama' inscribed on it in Devanagari script. Providence had directly presented Muthuswami this unique instrument which was to partner him in his renaissance work.



Chidambaranatha Yogi further informed the lad that he had attained mantra siddhi, was progressing well spiritually and that he had also attained further maturity in music. The Yogi instructed Muthuswami to return to his parents. The wide world now awaited his services and it was time the disciple took leave of the guru. Muthuswami was reluctant to leave the presence of the Yogi as he had become very much attached to him. He said that he had a lot more to learn from his guru and that the Yogi should guide him until he, Muthuswami, reached the fruition of his tapas. The Yogi softly and affectionately told Muthuswami that he had taught him whatever he knew and hereafter his grace and that of Ganga Devi would guide him in life. The Yogi further said that Lord Subramanya was Muthuswami's natural guru and that the lad should seek His grace. The Yogi also blessed Muthuswami and told him that the time was not faraway when destiny would seek out Muthuswami in order to further the cause for which he was born.

The Yogi then revealed to his shocked disciple that his own earthly sojourn was over. Leaving Muthuswami on the banks, the Yogi plunged into the Ganga and left this world.



Hanuman Ghat

The body was recovered from the river and was buried in the Hanuman Ghat where his Samadhi stands (the National Book Trust Biography by TL Venkatarama Iyer testifies to this. But "Marina" in his Tamizh version written

in the 1980s laments at his lack of success in identifying the memorial). Muthuswami was sorrow stricken at the loss of his revered guru.

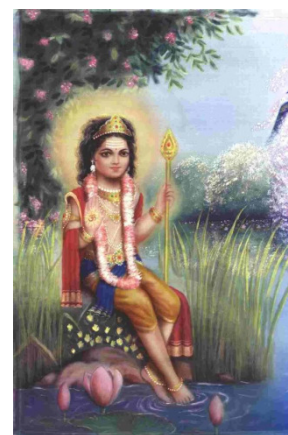
After completing the final obsequies, Muthuswami left Kashi and started his journey back home. The future bard was now about twenty years old. The stay at Kashi was the seed that resulted in the sprouting and subsequent flowering of a genius, a master who was instrumental, along with his illustrious contemporaries in developing the art of Carnatic music along new lines, solidifying it with fresh perspectives, thus assuring for it a status and glory that neither age can wither, nor custom stale.

Meanwhile things were happening at Manali. Muthu Venkata Vaidyanatha, grandson of the uncle of Venkatamakhi, visited Manali and was entertained by Venkatakrishna Mudaliar. He was pleased to find that Ramaswami Dikshitar and his sons were following the raga scheme as set forth by Venkatamakhi. Ramaswami Dikshitar took the opportunity to request Muthu Venkata for the caturdaNDi prakAshika and for the Raga Lakshanas manuscript which was in the latter's possession. Muthu Venkata, who was reluctant to part with what he considered as the intellectual property of his family, decided to test Ramaswami Dikshitar. He sang a rare raga and asked Ramaswami Dikshitar to identify it. Highly displeased at this unwarranted test, Ramaswami Dikshitar, nevertheless, asked his two sons Chinnaswami and Baluswami to identify the raga, which they easily did. A stunned but satisfied Muthu Venkata parted with the caturdanDi prakAshika and the manuscript of Raga Lakshanas. Ramaswami Dikshitar then composed a kriti, nannu parikShincu ela, referring to the uncalled for test. But for this visit of Muthu Venkata and Ramaswami Dikshitar's request, the caturdanDi prakAshika might have been permanently lost to the world.

It was also during this period that Ramaswami Dikshitar's second son Chinnaswami suddenly lost his vision as has been told in an earlier part. The family went on a pilgrimage to Tirupati and there, Ramaswami Dikshitar composed the kriti inka daya in vEgavAhini and a rAgamAlika in 48 rAgAs in praise of Lord Venkateswara. These two songs were prayers to Lord Venkateswara to restore Chinnaswami's eyesight. It is said that Chinnaswami regained his eyesight after this. Ramaswami Dikshitar and his family further visited Kalahasti, where he composed the Sahana kriti vAshi vAshi. After returning to Manali, Ramaswami Dikshitar, in recognition of the patronage afforded to him and his family by Venkatakrishna Mudaliar, composed the 108 rAgatAla mAlika in the latter's honour. A grateful Venkatakrishna Mudaliar performed a kanakAbhiShEkam (showering with gold coins) for Ramaswami Dikshitar. Thus, the family's stay at Manali was full of events and musically fruitful. It was to a fulfilled home that Muthuswami returned with his two wives.

Muthuswami's parents and brothers were overjoyed. Five years had elapsed and it was celebration time. They were delighted to hear about Muthuswami's experiences at Kashi. His knowledge of Vedanta and complete mastery of music earned their respect. Venkatakrishna Mudaliar was extremely distressed that his guru, the Yogi was no more, but was consoled by the fact that Muthuswami had inherited his mantle and had returned, musically and spiritually mature. Muthuswami spent sometime with his parents sharing his experiences. He also spent time at Manali studying the caturdanDi prakAshika and the manuscript on Raga Lakshanam. He however, was not content with remaining at Manali. His guru, Chidambaranatha Yogi had told him about the glory and grace of Lord Subramanya. Propelled by an inner urge Muthuswami decided to visit Tiruttani, one of the six abodes of Lord Subramanya. It might have been during this period that Muthuswami visited Tirupati and Kalahasti. This possibility notwithstanding, his compositions on these temples would have been later creations, for, the beginning of his life's work had to await the grace of Lords Subramanya at Tiruttani.

Sharing the secret of his inner voice with his parents, Muthuswami expressed his desire to them to visit Tiruttani. Ramaswami Dikshitar and Subbalakshmi blessed their first-born. Before long, Muthuswami was on his way to the hallowed hill shrine of Tiruttani in the company of his brothers. After having darshan of Lord Subrahmanya at the sanctum-sanctorum, Muthuswami took a vow to perform spiritual austerities for a manDala or forty days. Every morning he took his bath at the temple tank downhill and climbed the steps to begin his tapas. His time was thus spent in worship of the Lord and practicing deep meditation. It was the fortieth day of his stay at Tiruttani. While Muthuswami was repeating the *Shadakshari mantra*, he heard a voice near him say, "Muthuswami, open your mouth". Muthuswami opened his eyes and saw before him an elderly person whose whole being was suffused with spiritual splendour. The old man asked Muthuswami to close his eyes and then he put sugar candy in his mouth. When Muthuswami opened his eyes, to his amazement, the old man had disappeared from sight. Muthuswami was stunned at first but subsequently understood that it was Lord Subrahmanya Himself who had come to bless him. His joy knew no bounds and overwhelmed, he immediately burst into song.



The first song that he composed on the occasion was shri nAthAdi guruguH in mAyAmaLavagauLa rAgA. This composition is in praise of the concept of the Guru. Here Muthuswami Dikshitar mainly pays tribute to his Shri

Vidya Guru Chidambaranatha Yogi. The Yogi's Sri Vidya dIkSha name was shrinAtha and that of Dikshitar was cidAnandanAtha. Dikshitar refers to both in the pallavi of this composition.

Then followed seven more songs, the underlying theme of these too being the concept of Guru. The Guru is sung of as being Brahman Itself, as the Universal Consciousness. Incidentally, Dikshitar chose to compose his first song in mAyAmALavagauLa, the rAga in which musical lessons are traditionally begun. Another unique feature of this first composition is that it starts off with the ArOhaNa and avarOhaNa of the rAga. Dikshitar's first creation is technically flawless and artistically mature and aesthetic, apart from being poetically refined, grammatically perfect and philosophically profound.

The second composition he wrote was mAnasa guruguha in Ananda Bhairavi. Here, Muthuswami Dikshitar advises the spiritual aspirant that human birth is for the purpose of contemplating on the Supreme Truth and for this purpose, the aspirant needs to always cling to the Holy Feet of the Guru, chant his name and surrender to the Guru taking him to be the sole refuge, thereby destroying the tendencies that obstruct the Truth. Each and everyone of this group of eight songs composed in the eight Sanskrit declensions speak of the Supreme Truth, of the attributes of a Guru and is a musical gem. Rare ragas like pADi, bhAnumati, udayaravicandrika and balahamsa have been handled by Dikshitar with the depth and aplomb that were to become characteristic of him.

Muthuswami Dikshitar chose the medium of Sanskrit for his compositions. The following are the eight songs composed at Tiruttani. These are known as the Guru Guha vibhakti kritis:

**Composition - Raga**

1. **shri nAthAdi guruguho jayati jayati** - mAyAmALavagauLa
2. **mAnasa guruguha** - Ananda bhairavi
3. **shri guruNA** - pADi
4. **guruguhAya bhaktAnugrahAya** - sAmA
5. **guruguhAdanyam najAnEham** - balahamsa
6. **guruguhasya dAsOham** - pUrvi
7. **guruguha swAmini bhaktim karOmi** - bhAnumati
8. **shri guruguha mUrTE** - udayaravicandrika

These eight songs prove that Dikshitar had attained high maturity in his knowledge of Vedanta and had mastered the art of music even at that young age. They also show, that right from the beginning, his compositions were the outcome of his own deep spiritual experiences. They also afford ample evidence of the flowering of a rare human being whose multifaceted genius would transform the world of art in the years to come. It must be remembered that Dikshitar was only about 25 years old at this time.



The vision of Lord Subrahmanya had once and for all made Muthuswami Dikshitar resolve to take the Lord as his Guru. Guha is another name for Lord Subrahmanya. Guha also means cave. The Lord resides in the heart-cave of the devotee. This is the esoteric significance of the name Guha. The Sadguru is to be contemplated of as Brahman, as one's own Self. It is therefore appropriate that Muthuswami Dikshitar took Subrahmanya, the embodiment of Brahman itself, as his Sadguru and took on the mudra Guru Guha, thereby signifying that the Lord, his Guru, who was his own Self, was enshrined in the inmost recess of his heart. Another special aspect of his compositions is the raga mudra. Beginning with his first composition (mAyAmALavagauLAdidEsha), Dikshitar introduced the raga mudra wherever possible and in an appropriate manner. His heart filled with bliss, Dikshitar left Tiruttani.

One account of his life says that he went to Tirupati and Kalahasti from Tiruttani. At Kalahasti, which is one of the panchabhUta sthalas, representing the element vAyu (wind), he composed Sri kALahastIsha in the raga husEni and jnAnaprasUnAmbikE on the Goddess in kalyANI.

After this pilgrimage, Dikshitar returned to Manali. Ramaswami Dikshitar and Subbalakshmi were overwhelmed on listening to Dikshitar's experiences. Ramaswami Dikshitar felt after hearing about Lord Subrahmanya's grace at Tiruttani that his eldest born was not an ordinary human being. Being an accomplished musician and composer himself, the father could comprehend the uniqueness of his son's works. No less happy and proud was Venkatakrisna Mudaliar, the family's patron. The brothers Chinnaswami and Baluswami learnt the compositions thus far created by their eldest brother. The family spent a few fulfilled weeks. But Muthuswami Dikshitar's passion for Realisation of the Truth grew deeper, resulting in his yearning to perform rigorous spiritual sAdhana. He therefore increasingly felt the need for a more spiritually conducive atmosphere. Although married, that too to two wives, Dikshitar was least interested in the mundane affairs of life as has been seen before. Dikshitar also intuitively felt and resolved that his life's work was to sing of the Lord and His myriad forms and attributes.



Towards this end, he felt that it was time to leave Manali. The memories of Tiruvarur, his birthplace constantly visited him. But it was not possible to return to Tiruvarur immediately as he wished to visit the several shrines in the Tondaimandalam region and anyway, he had to travel through several great kShEtras on the way before reaching Tiruvarur. Further, Upanishad Brahmdendra, a great yOgi of Kanchipuram had invited the Dikshitar family to visit him. The days of their life at Manali were coming to an end. The family began making plans for leaving Manali.

Before leaving Manali, Muthuswami Dikshitar worshipped at the shrines in and around Madras. Tiruvotriyur, which is near Manali is famous for its temple dedicated to Lord Tyagaraja and Goddess Tripurasundari. In this temple, Adi Sankara had consecrated an arddha mEru underneath the pITham of the vaTTapArai amman, at whose shrine human sacrifices were stopped by him. In addition, a shrI cakra was consecrated by him under the feet of the Goddess Tripurasundari and he arranged for regular worship by Nambudiri brahmins. This tradition continues to this day. Here Dikshitar composed **AdipurIshvaram** in Arabhi, in praise of the Lord and Tripurasundari in the raga sAmA on the Goddess.

He then visited Triplicane where Lord Krishna gives darshan as Arjuna's charioteer Parthasarathi. Here, Dikshitar composed **Sri pArthasArathi** in shuddha dhanyAsi. Nearby is the shrine dedicated to Lord Siva as Tiruvateesvara. Dikshitar sang on Him the kriti tiruvaTishvaram in the raga gamakakriya. We do not know whether Dikshitar visited Mylapore and sang the praise of Kapaleesvara and Karpagambika. Most probably he might have, but no evidence in the form of kritis on Mylapore is available.

One fine day, Muthuswami Dikshitar and his family left for Kanchipuram. This pilgrim town, about 75 k.m. from Madras is one of the most important kShEtras of this country. It is one of the panchabhUta kShEtras representing the element prithvi or earth. Lord Ekamreswara is the lord of prithvi. Equally sacred to Saivites, Vaishnavites and Shaktas as also to Buddhists and Jains, Kanchipuram boasts of thousands of temples. It was also a great educational centre. The most important shrines are those of Ekamreswara, Kailasanatha, Varadaraja and Kamakshi. In Kanchipuram no Siva temple has a shrine for Ambal. The most important temple dedicated to the Mother Goddess is the Kamakshi temple. Adi Sankara during his travels stayed here for a few years and consecrated a shrI cakra in front of the Goddess to appease her then destructive power. A section of Sankara's devotees believes that he attained samAdhi at Kanchipuram. This sacred place is also the seat of the Kanchi Kamakoti mutt founded by the Adi Acharya as also that of a sannyasi and yogi, Upanishad Brahmdendra. Muthuswami Dikshitar and family took up residence in Kanchipuram and settled down. Upanishad Brahmdendra was a prominent and greatly respected scholar, sannyasi and advaitin of Kanchipuram. He was a philosopher who had made the Upanishadic wisdom his own and also had to his credit commentaries on them. He was a great devotee of Lord Rama. Being a friend of Rama Brahmam, Tyagaraja's father, Upanishad Brahmdendra it was who sent a shrImukham inviting Tyagaraja to Kanchipuram. He was also revered by the Dikshitar family.

Muthuswami Dikshitar saw in Upanishad Brahmdendra the answer to his deep desire of mastering the Upanishads and thus consolidating his knowledge. He accordingly requested the sannyasin to teach him the Upanishads which request the latter gladly agreed to. Upanishad Brahmdendra, besides being a great scholar was a highly evolved tapasvi too. He could therefore explain the Upanishads to Dikshitar not only theoretically but also through the broad spectrum of his practical wisdom and experience. His intuitive perception and the spiritual insights he had gained through his own sAdhana enabled Dikshitar to master the Upanishads. Upanishad Brahmdendra requested Dikshitar to tune his work rAma aShTapadi which he had composed in praise of his favourite deity. Dikshitar composed the music for this work which unfortunately is lost and therefore not available to music lovers.

Of course, for Dikshitar, Kanchipuram was rich, fertile territory as far as his life's work went. The city of temples was waiting to be sung of by him.



The Ekamreshwara temple houses the prithvi linga, the linga that represents the element of earth. It elicited from him the composition  **cintayamAkanda mUlakandam**  in the rAga bhairavi. It was his second composition in the series dedicated to the five elemental Sivalingas. Siva Ekamresha also secured from Dikshitar the song in gamakakriya,  **EkAmranAtham bhajEham** . The Kailasanatha temple in Kanchipuram is a sculptural wonder built by the Pallava kings. This temple elicited from Dikshitar two kritis,  **kailAsanAthEna**  in kAmbOji and  **kailAsanAtham**  in vEgavAhini. The Mother Goddess had a special place in Dikshitar's heart as She was his Guru's (Guha) Mother. More special to him was Kamakshi, because as a shrI vidya upAsaka, he was fascinated by the shrI cakra in front of the Goddess. Worship is done only to this shrI cakra and not to the Goddess directly.

The Goddess's countenance is bewitching and the inner shrine is absolutely powerful. The bilAkAsha here, a cavity, represents the highest Advaitic truth. Worshipped and sanctified by Adi Sankara himself, Goddess Kamakshi was the tutelary deity of Dikshitar's illustrious contemporary Shyama Sastri.

The speciality of Kanchipuram and the Kamakshi temple is that the deities of all the other temples in Kanchipuram face the Kamakshi temple. Also, there is no separate shrine for the Goddess in any of the Siva temples in Kanchipuram. It is no surprise therefore, that Dikshitar decided to compose some of his gems in praise of Kamakshi.



**nIrajaAkShi kAmAkshi** in hindOLam, **kancadaLAYatAkShi** in manOhari, **saraswati manOhari** in saraswati manOhari, **kAmAkshi** in sumadyuti, **EkAmrEshanAyikE** in shuddha sAVeri (this is now called karNATaka shuddha sAVeri), **kAmAkShi varalakshmi** in bilahari were some of the compositions he dedicated to the Goddess here. The bilahari composition refers to Maha Vishnu propitiating Goddess Kamakshi, living in a hole. There is a pillar in the inner sanctum of the Kamakshi shrine which has a hole at the bottom with a small icon of Vishnu inside. Dikshitar refers to this in the song as **kAmakOTi bila harinuta kamalE**, thereby also cleverly weaving the rAga mudra.

No less known for its Sri Vaishnava traditions, Kanchipuram houses one of the four shrines most sacred to Vaishnavites. The others are Tirumala, Melkote and Srirangam. The Varadaraja temple is a big complex and is famous for its garuDa sEva festival. Dikshitar paid homage to Lord Varadaraja with the sAranga kriti, **varadarAjam upAsmahE**. A unique feature is that all of the three members of the Trinity have composed on Lord Varadaraja; Shyama Sastri composed a varNam in Ananda bhairavi, **sAmi nI rammanavE** and Tyagaraja composed the swarabhUShaNi song, varadarAja ninnukOri. The other deities that have had the privilege of being sung by all the three are Goddess Kamakshi of Kanchipuram, Goddess Dharmasamvardhini of Tiruvaiyyaru and Goddess Nilayatakshi of Nagapattinam.

During his stay at Kancheepuram, Dikshitar must have visited Tirukkazhukunram, a hill shrine near Chingleput, famous for the two eagles that visit the temple everyday for partaking the Lord's prasAdam. The dhanyAsi kriti **vEdapUrIshwaram** is attributed to this temple. Dikshitar also visited the hill shrine of Sholingur, situated between Arkonam and Walajapet in the North Arcot district. This is a very famous temple dedicated to Lord Narasimha. Here, Dikshitar wrote the mOhanam kriti **narasimha Agaccha**. The cala nATa kriti **pavanAtmajAgacha** is attributed to the Anjaneya temple situated on this hill. The above two songs have a lot of common words and phrases in the sAhitya.

Sometime during the stay at Kanchipuram, Dikshitar decided to visit his ancestral village. Virinchipuram near Vellore in the North Arcot district is about 70 k.m. away from Kanchipuram. The village and its neighbouring ones were noted for their steadfast upholding of Vedic ideals. The people were scholars in the Vedas and allied shAstrAs. It was to Virinchipuram that Dikshitar's ancestors belonged and it was from this village that his grandfather and father had migrated to Tanjavur about 50 years ago. Muthuswami Dikshitar wanted to see his village and also have darshan of the deities enshrined at the famous temple there.

It is a small but charming shrine dedicated to Siva as Margasahaswara. Here, Dikshitar paid his tribute to the Lord by composing **mArgasahAyEshwaram** in the rAga kAshirAmakriya, maragatavalli in khAmbOji and **mArgahindOLa rAga priyE** in mArga hindOLam both in praise of the Goddess and pArvati kumAram in nATakurinji on Lord Subramanya there. The **bhUShAvali** kriti bhUShApatim which is in praise of Brahma is attributed by some to this shrine, but there is no reference to the kShEtra in the kriti itself, though the place itself - Virinchipuram - is named after Brahma and there is a rare shrine for Him here.

Life at Kanchipuram was smooth and exceedingly beneficial to Dikshitar. His artistic creations had acquired further maturity and finesse. The interaction with and scriptural tutelage under Upanishad Brahmendra also proved to be of great benefit in that it furthered Dikshitar's quest for the Ultimate Truth. Thus flew four years. Haunted again by thoughts of his native place, Tiruvarur and of Lord Tyagaraja and Goddess Kamalambika, Dikshitar decided to leave Kanchipuram. After obtaining the blessings of Upanishad Brahmendra, Dikshitar and his family left for Tiruvarur.

On the way were a number of shrines, that too, great and important ones. How could Dikshitar bypass them? First on the route from Kanchipuram, about 120 k.m. away was that great kShEtra, Tiruvannamalai where Lord Siva abides as a hill. Tiruvannamalai or Arunachala in Sanskrit, is the place where Siva manifested as a column of light, the top and bottom of which, Brahma and Vishnu went in search of but failed to find.

Siva manifested as the column of light in the month of Margazhi (December-January) when the moon was in Ardra star and He emerged from this column in the month of mAshi (February-March) on caturdashi (the fourteenth day

after the full moon, i.e., a day before the new moon). Brahma, Vishnu and the dEvas worshipped him on that day. This event is observed by the devout as shivarAtri. The gods requested the Lord to withdraw His Effulgence and abide as an immovable Linga for the welfare of the world, to which He agreed. Thus Siva assumed the form of the Linga of Arunachala. This is known as the Effulgent Linga (Tejolinga). Tiruvannamalai is the agni kShEtra.



The Arunachaleswara temple with the Tejolinga Arunachala Hill in the Background

The purANAS speak of Arunachala as being the fullest and the most potent manifestation of the Supreme Being. For, Siva Himself has declared, "Let this sacred Arunachala be a place where man can attain liberation. I ordain that those who live within a distance of three yOjanAs (about thirty miles) from this place shall become one with Me even without any kind of initiation or formalities. Those who see Me or remember Me from afar will realize the essence of the Vedanta. My effulgent form will shine here for ever as eternal, immovable Arunachala." The hill is thus considered as Siva Himself and as a physical representative of the Highest Truth. Once a year, in the month of krittika (November-December), a beacon is lit atop the Arunachala hill, signifying the quintessential wisdom of jnAna that the tEjOlinga represents.

The Arunachaleswara temple is one of the largest in India and over the centuries, most of the dynasties ruling South India have contributed to the building of the temple. The four Saivite saints and numerous others have sung the glory of Arunachala.

To such a kShEtra whose glory he was well aware of, came Dikshitar, had darshan of aruNacalEshvara, His consort apItakucAmba and the hill. In majestic sAranga, and rUpaka tALa, the bhakta as well as the follower of jnAna mArga that he was, the great composer sang the praise of the bestower of Liberation.

**aruNAchalanAtham smarAmi anisham** is one of the great classics composed by Dikshitar. 'smaraNAT kaivalyapada caraNAravindam' (the Lotus-Feet that bestow Liberation if one just thinks of Him), says Dikshitar at the start of the anupallavi, thus echoing the purANic promise that if one just thinks of Arunachala, he is sure to attain Liberation. Dikshitar refers to the effulgent nature of the Lord variously as svapradIpa, swaprAkasha, the Self-Effulgent One whose lustre excels those of the moon, agni and the sun (jita sOmAgnipatangam).

A strange fact is that Dikshitar did not compose a separate song on the Goddess Apitakuchamba here, whereas he has composed on the Goddesses at the other four panchabhUta kShEtras. He however refers to the Lord as apItakuchAmbA samEtam. He also refers to Parvati's manifestation at Arunachala as Aparna in order to merge with Her Consort (aparNAbja bhrngam).

The treatment of sAranga in this kriti is wholesome and complete, with all the important and beautiful phrases of the rAga incorporated. When sung in two kaLai, the composition invokes a grandeur befitting the effulgence of Arunachala, and a deep, sublime feeling befitting the highest truth as symbolised in Arunachala tattva.

After a soul-fulfilling experience at Tiruvannamalai and dedicating a classic unto the Lord, Muthuswami Dikshitar resumed his onward journey to Tiruvarur. The next great spiritual centre enroute was Chidambaram. There are not many kShEtras between Tiruvannamalai and Chidambaram, excepting for Tirukoilur which is the abode of Lord



Vishnu as Trivikrama and of Lord Siva as Veeratteswara and Atulyanatheswara. But Dikshitar, though he might have had darshan on the way of these temples, does not seem to have sung of them.

One of the most popular and celebrated Siva kShEtras in the country, Chidambaram is the confluence of the varied and significant streams of religion, philosophy and art. Nowhere else do we see such a congregation of yOgIs, philosophers, musicians, dancers, poets, composers and of course the simply devout, offering homage to the Supreme Being through the medium of their calling, as at Chidambaram. For, Lord Nataraja symbolises for all of them the ultimate in their chosen mode of worship. No other place is closely connected with the performing arts as Chidambaram, which for Shaivites is simply 'kOyil'. The Lord Himself is a dancer, a consummate Artiste as represented in the beautiful icon that adorns the citsabha. Nataraja is variously referred to as sabhAnAyakan (the Lord of the hall of Consciousness), ADalvallAn (the dancing God), naTEshan (the Lord of Dance) or simply sabEshan and by hundreds of other names. The esoteric significance of Nataraja is however nameless and formless; it is just Pure Consciousness, the substratum of all creation and is represented by His divine dance.



Lord Nataraja's dance encompasses the five acts, the panchakrityas: creation, protection, destruction, causing ignorance and granting of salvation. The Lord creates the world out of His own Shakti and at the end of creation, He withdraws Shakti unto Himself. The entire universe is dissolved and He alone shines in all His Glory. The screen in the citsabha when pulled aside reveals empty space. Behind the veil shines the Supreme Truth. This is the Chidambara rahasya and the significance of Akasa Tattva and Nataraja's dance.

Muthuswami Dikshitar must naturally have been thrilled when he arrived at Chidambaram. He had sung of numerous deities, all various forms of the Supreme Being. Nevertheless, here, at Chidambaram, the Supreme Being Himself was an Artiste and this fact was special. Being a panchabhUta kShEtra, Dikshitar decided to compose a kriti which would bring out the glory of both the kShEtra as well as of the Lord of Dance.

kEdArA is a rAgA that seemingly possesses very little scope. But not so for Dikshitar. It becomes quite obvious while contemplating on **Ananda naTana prakAsham**, that there is very little repetition in music throughout. Each line, each phrase, is fresh, full of the lilting beauty of kEdAram. The deep and powerful sAhitya is energised and fortified by the exquisite music, so that we have a work that, more than any other, portrays the joyous Ananda tAnDavA of Nataraja as much as it reflects the sublime truth that His dance signifies.

Dikshitar says that the Lord is present as AkAsha (space) in the Heart of devotees and grants them happiness in worldly life and Liberation too (bhukti mukti prada daharAkAsham). The Lord granted Patanjali and Vyaghrapada the vision of His raised foot (divya patanjali vyaghrapAda darshita kunjitaBja caraNam). Alluding to Chidambaram as the premier shrine for Siva, Dikshitar describes Him as being Lord of all kshetras beginning from Kedara, in the process introducing the rAgA mudrA too (shrI kEdArAdi kShEtrAdAram). The composer makes special mention of the priests of the shrine, the 3000 podu dIkshitaras who are said to have descended from the Lord Himself (bhUsura trisahasra munIshwaram). Dikshitar says that the Lord is the embodiment of the highest truth of the Vedas, and that He can be truly described and comprehended only in the purest advaitic terms. His Ananda Tandava performed to the accompaniment of music and instruments, expounds the profoundest of truths, that of the Supreme Self. As a special feature, this kriti has solkattu swarams, dance jatIs interspersed with swarAs. Listening

to this classic, what more could the Lord of Dance ask for from Muthuswami Dikshitar? Yet, there was more to come.

Dikshitar composed the song **shivakAmEshwarIm** in the rAgA kalyANI. A short but lilting song, this composition is noteworthy for its description of the actual significance of Goddess Sivakamasundari. The caraNa begins as 'shAnta kalyANa guNashAlini'. shAnta kalyANI is the name of the 65th mELakartA according to the kaTapayAdi formula followed by Venkatamakhi. In introducing the name of the rAgA in this song along with its kaTapayAdi prefix, Dikshitar, by a stroke of genius has alluded to the sthala purANA also. The Lord and Goddess Kali were engaged in a dance competition to determine who was the greater of the two. The Lord assumed the urdhva tAnDavA posture (i.e., with His right leg the Lord touched His right ear). On account of feminine modesty, Kali was not able to assume that pose. The Lord was therefore the victor. The Goddess's pride was quelled and She reverted to Her original self. As Kali She was asked to proceed to the outskirts of Thillai and reside there. As Sivakamasundari She joined Her Lord and is depicted as silently witnessing Nataraja's dance getting ready to merge with Him. She is therefore shAnta swarUpiNI, the very form of peace. This is alluded to by Dikshitar in the phrases 'shAnta kalyANa guNashAlini' and 'shAntyAtIta kaLA svarUpiNi'. The greatest art is being established in the Self which is beyond peace itself (shAntI atIta). The Goddess, says Dikshitar, is of the form of the art of being in that state that transcends stillness and peace. This describes the true state of Goddess Sivakamasundari and is just one of the numerous, amazing examples testifying to Dikshitar's vast erudition and his original, creative genius. **chidambara naTarAja** in kEdAram again and **cidambarEshvaram** in the rAgA bhinnaShaDJA, **chidambara naTarAjam**, a kriti in tanukIrti (here again, the significance of the formless Supreme is indicated as atanukIrtim, bringing the raga name and the core theme together), kanakasabhApatim in mALavashrI and a nOTTusvara piece(cintayEham sada) were his other offerings to Nataraja.

Dikshitar worshipped at the shrine of Govindaraja Perumal which is inside the Nataraja shrine and composed on Him too. Vishnu as Govindaraja, is seen to be reclining, which is neither sleep nor the state of waking. This signifies the state of turiya, the transcendence of the three states of existence, which manifests on the removal of mAya. Siva and Vishnu both exemplify the Supreme Truth of Chidambaram under the same roof. **gOvindarAjam** in mukhAri(which has the sthala purANA for this VaiShNava divya dEsha), **gOvindarAjAya** in suraTTi and **gOvindarAjENA** in mEca bauLI were the pieces Dikshitar wrote in praise of Vishnu here. The mukhAri and suraTTi have a veiled reference to the coexistence of the Vaishnavite and Shaivite shrines. In both kritis, Lord Govindaraja is described as a friend of Nataraja! The mEca bauLI kriti is perhaps the only one available in that rAgA.

In the first part of this series we had quoted the purANic truth:

jananAt kamalAlayE, darshanAt aprasadasi,  
smaraNAD aruNACHalam, kAshi tu maraNAN muktih  
that is,  
Birth at Tiruvarur, darshan of Chidambaram,  
thinking of Arunachala and death at Kashi result in liberation.

Dikshitar was born in Tiruvarur; through rigorous spiritual practice, his ego had perished in the Light of Consciousness that was Kashi; Arunachala as the Supreme Truth was ever manifest in his heart; and he had had darshan of Chidambaram, the true darshan of Cosmic Consciousness.

Vaideeswaran Koil on the way to Mayavaram is an important kShEtra and is closely connected with Muthuswami Dikshitar's birth. Lord Siva as Vaidyanatha is supposed to cure man of all his ills. The Goddess is Balambika and Lord Subramanya's name here is Muthukumara. Dikshitar was named after Him. He refers to this in his song on Goddess Balambika in kalyANI, '**bhajarE rE chitta bAlAmbikAm**' (guruguha rUpa muttukumAra janam). Dikshitar's other compositions at this kShEtra are, **bAlAmbikAyai** in nATakuranji, **bAlambikAyAh param** in karnATaka kApi and **shrI vaidyanAtham** in praise of the Lord in aThANA. The navagraha kriti **angArakam AshrayAmyaham** refers to the planet Mars having worshipped at the shrine here (pUjita vaidyanAtha kShEtram). Vaideeswaran Koil is considered to be the kShEtra where the planet angArakA is propitiated. In the karNataka kApi composition, Muthuswami Dikshitar refers to the Goddess as giving happiness to Lord Vaidyanatha who cures the illness of samsArA (bhavarOga hara vaidyapatIshwara sukhakarya). The kriti **kumArasvAminam** in asAvEri is attributed to the Subrahmanya Swami at this shrine, but there is no direct kshEtra reference.

Muthuswami Dikshitar then proceeded to Mayavaram, a very important place of culture and pilgrimage situated on the banks of the Cauvery. Almost at the end of Her long journey, during which She enriches the material lives and quenches the cultural thirst of millions, in the process sacrificing Herself, the Mother Cauvery at Mayavaram becomes narrower and looks somewhat emaciated. But, that is only on the surface. The tuLA snAnam during October-November attracts lakhs of pilgrims and is as religiously significant as it is at the river's source at Tala Cauvery in Coorg. The Cauvery is no less sacred at Mayavaram than She is at Tiruchi, Tiruvaiyyaru or

Kumbhakonam. Mayavaram is one of the cultural bastions of the Chola region and has produced many artistes, poets and composers besides eminent literary figures.

The most important temple at Mayavaram is dedicated to Lord Siva as Mayuranathaswami. His Consort is Goddess Abhayapradambika. The sthala purANA says that the Goddess worshipped Siva taking the form of a peahen (mayUra), hence the name Mayuranatha for the Lord.

From the numerous compositions of Muthuswami Dikshitar on this temple, it can be surmised that he not only held this shrine as being hallowed and very sacred, but also that he must have visited the temple several times. Mayavaram or Mayuram or Mayiladuthurai as the place is referred to is not faraway from Tiruvarur. Anyway, for devout residents of the Chola dEshA, an annual pilgrimage to Mayavaram for thulA snAnam in the Cauvery there has always been mandatory. Dikshitar's father Ramaswami Dikshitar had stayed in Mayavaram for quite sometime before he settled permanently at Tiruvarur.

Dikshitar composed the well known dhanyAsi song **mAyUranAtham** and the lesser known songs in **Ananda bhairavi** and **kEdAragauLa**, both beginning as abhayAmbA nAyaka, in praise of the Lord. For the Goddess he had a special plan. One of his notable vibhakti kriti groups was composed in praise of Goddess Abhayamba. The way Dikshitar has handled the music in these compositions is truly path breaking. Each of these songs is a classic in that rAgA and explores little known or handled nuances in that particular melody. The tODi kriti dAkShAyani begins on the mandra dhaivata making it a swarAkShara and giving the song an ethereal beginning. The kalyANI song is a veritable treat and is noteworthy for the different way in which the rAgA is handled. We will have occasion to discuss these aspects while writing on Dikshitar's music. sAhitya-wise, the Abhayamba kritis afford evidence of the deep learning and scholarship of Dikshitar. We also understand his greatness as a poet and marvel at his felicity and the masterly way in which he has handled the Sanskrit language. The kEdAram song is an example not only of all the above, but also of his command over tantric doctrines and of his practical and deep spiritual experiences.

The following constitute the Abhayamba vibhakti kritis:

dhyAna kriti: **sadAshrayE abhayAmbikE** - cAmaram (ShaNmukhapriyA)

1. **abhayAmbA jagadamba** - kalyANi
2. **AryAm abhayAmbAm** - bhairavi
3. **giriJaya aJaya** - shankarAbharaNam
4. **abhayAmbikAyai** - yadukulakAmbhOji
5. abhayAmbAyA - kEdAragauLa
6. **ambikAya abhayAmbikAya** - kEdAram
7. **abhayAmbAyAM bhaktiM karOMi** - sahaNa
8. **dAkShAyaNi abhayAmbikE** - tODi

The series ends with a mangaLa kriti, **shrI abhayAmbA**, in shrI which Dikshitar has composed in manipravALam, that is a mixture of Sanskrit, Tamil and Telugu.

There are many temples in and around Mayavaram which Muthuswami Dikshitar visited and composed on, but we shall have occasion to write about them later. Now, shall we follow the great composer to his native place, to the hallowed kShEtra which was going to witness the development of his great art and his evolution into a great spiritual soul? The distance between Mayavaram and Tiruvarur is just about 40 kms. His birthplace beckoned Dikshitar to hasten, and hasten the composer did, for, with what anxiety had he anticipated the moment of his setting foot again on that holy ground which he and his parents had left about fifteen years earlier?

One of the nerve centres of the Chola region, not only of religion and spirituality, but of art and commerce too, Tiruvarur is even today a calm and peaceful town. One can imagine the kind of atmosphere that prevailed about a couple of centuries ago. The big temple complex with its huge sea-like tank, the Kamalalaya, is the nucleus around which life revolves. Not far from the tank and towards the north of it is Vadambokki street, towards the west of which flows the Vadambokki river, a tributary of the Cauvery. The river is the lifeline of this important kShEtra and generously waters the lands of a vast area. A small house stood on Vadambokki street, the house of Ramaswami Dikshitar. This was the house where Muthuswami Dikshitar was born and where he was returning to, after almost 15 years.

The citizens of Tiruvarur known for their piety and religiosity and their reverence for art and artistes, looked forward to welcoming one of their ilk back home. They had heard tales of Dikshitar's accomplishments in music and, familiar with his pious ways even as a lad, now eagerly awaited his arrival. Of course, the father's achievements were also significant, though fate would decree that those of the son overshadow them.

The Tiruvarur temple had special reason to be proud of the Dikshitar family as Ramaswami Dikshitar had organised music for nAgaswaram and other instruments there. The grateful temple officials and others attached to the temple also joined the general public in eagerly expecting the family. One fine day Ramaswami Dikshitar and his family

returned to Tiruvarur. It was a day of rejoicing and of celebration mainly at the thought that Dikshitar would thenceforth be living at Tiruvarur. The citizens of the town could be proud of the fact that two other natives of that holy soil were making waves in the field of art though no longer living there anymore. Now, the youngest of the three had returned to permanently settle down to add to the glory of the place.

It was quite possible to live a life of piety, austerity, devotion and righteousness in those days, two hundred years ago. For, though alien rule had established itself on the soil, it had not yet become strong enough to strike at the roots of tradition or orthodox religion or at right conduct. The days of the upper crust of society, charged with the task of preserving and protecting the Vedic dharma, being lured by the spoils of an alien civilization and falling prey to it had not yet arrived. sadAchArA was still followed in all its splendour and its votaries were still respected and revered. The brahmin home reverberated with the Vedas, yagnAs and religious and spiritual practices. The other communities were no less religious or spiritual and they played a great role in working for the prosperity of the entire region. The temple was the place where all congregated in common devotion to God and all in society had a role to play in the preservation and growth of its cherished traditions. The arts of music and dance, not to speak of divine poetry, found their true home in the temple. This was a glorious tradition established by the Cholas in their region and was continued by the Nayaks and the Marattas.

Thus, a divinely inspired composer like Muthuswami Dikshitar could be assured of a congenial climate for the pursuit of his life's work. Of course, this is not to discount dark fate that always lurked by, waiting for the moment to strike at the pious. Two of the Trinity were targeted by fate which perhaps calculated that they were soft targets for its mischief. If backbiting by detractors was Tyagaraja's lot, Dikshitar suffered the pangs of poverty. The path of the spiritual aspirant is however, not a bed of roses as has been the case with several of them whether be they pure aspirants with the single-minded pursuit after truth or whether they were poets or musicians or artists besides. Tyagaraja and Dikshitar too had to suffer and this, they very well knew. But to the role played by such cruel fate in Dikshitar's life, we shall have occasion to revert later.

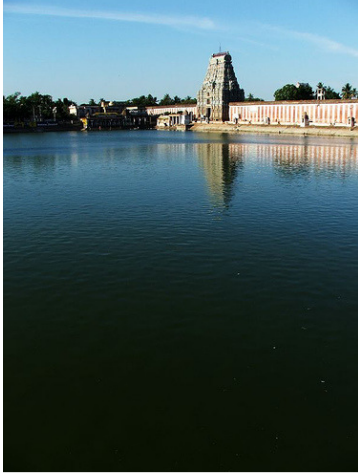
Apart from the nitya karmAs that were prescribed for a brahmin, like the regular performance of sandhyA and the sacrificial fire, Dikshitar had his daily pUjAs too to perform. As he was a shri vidyA upAsakA, Dikshitar had to adhere to strict norms and regulations that were prescribed. The time left after such daily obligations was spent by him at the Tyagaraja temple. Dikshitar, right from his younger days, was attached to Lord Tyagaraja and Goddess Kamalamba. The peaceful atmosphere of the temple radiating immense spiritual power naturally attracted him very much and he was wont to spend long hours in its precincts, praying, singing and meditating. When his artistic inspiration welled up from within, Dikshitar burst into song. The composition would, of course, be gone over repeatedly and chiselled and perfected over time.

Thus passed by peacefully, Muthuswami Dikshitar's early days at Tiruvarur.

Crossing the Kollidam river, Muthuswami Dikshitar entered the Tanjavur region. Sirkazhi was the kShEtra on the line. Though Dikshitar might have visited that shrine and offered worship there, no kriti of his is extant on any of the deities at Sirkazhi. In passing, it may be appropriate to point out that his contemporaries Tyagaraja (nivanTi deivamu ShaDAnana in tODI) and Shyama Sastri (dayAnidhE mAmava in bEgaDA) have composed on Lord Subramanya at Sirkazhi.

Vaideeswaran Koil on the way to Mayavaram is an important kShEtra and is closely connected with Muthuswami Dikshitar's birth. Lord Siva as Vaidyanatha is supposed to cure man of all his ills. The Goddess is Balambika and Lord Subramanya's name here is Muthukumara. Dikshitar was named after Him. He refers to this in his song on Goddess Balambika in kalyANI, '**bhajarE rE chitta bAlAmbikAm**' (guruguha rUpa muttukumAra jananIm). Dikshitar's other compositions at this kShEtra are, **bAlAmbikAyai** in nATakuranji, **bAlambikAyAh param** in karnATaka kApi and **shrI vaidyanAtham** in praise of the Lord in aThANa. The navagraha kriti **angArakam AshrayAmyaham** refers to the planet Mars having worshipped at the shrine here (pUjita vaidyanAtha kShEtram). Vaideeswaran Koil is considered to be the kShEtra where the planet angArakA is propitiated. In the karNataka kApi composition, Muthuswami Dikshitar refers to the Goddess as giving happiness to Lord Vaidyanatha who cures the illness of samsArA (bhavarOga hara vaidyapatIshwara sukhakaryA). The kriti **kumArasvAminam** in asAvEri is attributed to the Subrahmanya Swami at this shrine, but there is no direct kshEtra reference.

Tiruvarur has several names. Chief among them are, srIpuram, kamalApuram, mUIAdhAra kShetra, hATaka kShetra, chatatArapuram, etc. It is said that the Thyagaraja temple is built as Vishnu swarUpA and that in the centre of it is situated the main shrine of Thyagaraja. Siva as Lord Thyagaraja is supposed to dance in the heart-lotus of Vishnu. The mahAnArAyaNa upaniShad itself mentions this.



The Thyagaraja temple is a massive complex and is reputed to exist for more than 1500 years, though, until the 9th century, the temple was supposed to be an ordinary brick and mud structure with the various shrines as separate units.

It was after the 9th century that the Cholas started building the mammoth stone edifice and created the intricate and imposing architecture and sculptures that we see now. Later additions were made by the Vijayanagara kings, the Nayaks and the Marattas. Each deity enshrined in the temple has its own significance, its own mode of worship, festivals etc. The Tiruvarur temple was supposed to have employed the largest number of musicians and dancers (hundreds, literally) in its days of yore, according to an inscription in the Big temple of Tanjavur.

The Tiruvarur temple also houses the largest hall dedicated to the art of painting. It has besides, very rare musical instruments that are still being played during festivals. Being a storehouse of the arts it is no wonder that this was Dikshitar's favourite shrine. It is also not surprising that Dikshitar dedicated the largest number of songs to this temple.

The presiding deity is Lord Thyagaraja. The purANA says that the icon was worshipped by Vishnu Himself. He then gave it to Indra who in turn gave it to King Muchukunda who installed it at Tiruvarur. This is one of the two Siva temples where He is depicted with form in the main shrine itself, the other being Chidambaram. The linga representation is the valmIkalingam, the linga of the anthill. The valmIkalingam is one of the five lingAs enshrined in the Thyagaraja temple complex representing the five elements. The other four are **sadAchalEshwara**, **hATakEshwara**, **AnandEshwara** and **sIddhIshwara**. On the main valmIkalingam, Since Tiruvarur kShEtra is dedicated to the concept of birth or manifestation (jananAt kamalAlayE), the five primordial elements without which no life is possible on earth, are supposed to have their origins here, hence separate shrines for them at this temple. Dikshitar wrote **srI valmIkalingam** in khAmbOji. He dedicated four other songs, one for each of the other elemental lingAs. These are, **sadAchalEshwaram** in bhUpALam, **hATakEshwaram** in bilahari, **AnandEshwarEna** in Ananda bhairavi and **sIddhIshwarAya** in nIAmbari.

Lord Thyagaraja is said to symbolise the highest truth that the Vedas speak of. His name itself suggests that He is the Lord of Renunciation. The name of the Lord, the significance of His dance and the mystical significance of Tiruvarur are closely interlinked. It is enough to be born in Tiruvarur to be assured of Liberation. For those born at Tiruvarur, that birth is supposed to be the last one, which means that their vAsanAs (latent tendencies), are in the last stages of existence. Much of their ego has already been destroyed, sacrificed at the altar of puNyA (good deeds) performed in their previous births. The Lord's name symbolises this sacrifice of which He Himself is the King. The renunciation of the ego, of ignorance, results in the shining of the Pure Atman that He is. The Lord's dance at Tiruvarur is known as ajapA naTanam or hamsa naTanam, the wordless dance or the dance devoid of syllable, the dance of the true Self, of the Great Soul in Perfect Silence, without the trappings of the ego. In other words, ajapA symbolises the All-Pervading, Pure, Undiluted Nature of Brahman. Thus are the name of the Lord, the import of His dance and the esoteric significance of the place interrelated.

The purANA says that Siva dances in the heart of Vishnu who is in yOga nidrA on Adishesha. The esoteric significance is that the already highly evolved soul (represented by Vishnu) is ready to merge into the Eternal Soul (represented by Siva). Muthuswami Dikshitar refers to this esoteric truth in his compositions on Lord Thyagaraja. In the nIAmbari composition, **tyAgarAjam bhajEham**, Dikshitar refers to Vishnu as yOgi and adds that other yOgIs too worship Thyagaraja (yOgi nArAyaNa Adi upAsitam). The icon of Thyagaraja is of sOmAskanda, i.e., of Siva, Parvati and Subramanya together. Only the face of the Lord is visible. From the face downwards the body of the Lord is covered by alankArAs, garlands and jewellery and further down is sealed by a box like structure. His dance is not revealed, it cannot be witnessed by the outer eye. That it is the most secretive dance, the dance of the Self, which has to be cognised in one's inner being, is symbolically shown by concealing the Lord's form from the shoulder downwards.

As mentioned earlier, one of the names of Tiruvarur is mUIAdhAra kShEtra. This too has deep esoteric significance. It is in the mUIAdhAra that the kunDalini shakti is said to be coiled in sleep. The kunDalini is represented outwardly by Adi Sesha or Ananta, the seat of Lord Vishnu and symbolises the latent, unmanifest tendencies of man. All in all, the metaphysical concept of Tiruvarur reveals the primordial, natural state of man, that of birth, the true Birth of the Soul. All these mystical symbolisms are appropriately brought out by Dikshitar in his numerous compositions on Thyagaraja, the five songs on the panchalingAs and other kritis composed in the Tiruvarur temple.

Eight of the songs on Thyagaraja he chose to compose in the eight declensions of the Sanskrit language. Thus the Thyagaraja vibhakti kritis comprise:

1) **tyAgarAjO virAjatE** aTANA

- 2) **tyAgarAjam bhajarE** yadukulakhAmbOji
- 3) **tyAgarAjaEna samrakShitOham** sALaka bhairavi
- 4) **tyAgarAjAya namastE** bEgaDA
- 5) **tyAgarAjAd anyam najAnE** darbAr
- 6) tyAgarAjasya bhaktO bhavAmi rudrapriyA
- 7) **tyAgarAjE krityAkriyam arpayAmi** sArangA
- 8) **vIra vasanta tyAgarAja** vIra vasantA

The compositions on Lord Tyagaraja are masterpieces in the respective rAgAs. Each of these songs contains deep vEdAntic import. Besides the above, he composed a song in shrI, tyAgarAja mahAdvajArOha, detailing the various festivals of the temple. tyAgarAja yOga vaibhavam in Ananda bhairavi is an epic composition, though short, in terms of music, sAhitya, poetry and philosophy. Dikshitar employs the gOpuchha and srOtOvaha yati patterns. Besides being a poetic marvel, the yati phrases reveal deeply significant philosophy. tyAgarAjam bhajEham in nIAmbari is a delightful composition which, like the above song in Ananda bhairavi consists of only the samaShTTi charaNam. Another composition with only the samaShTTi charaNam is tyAgarAja pAlayAshumAm wherein Dikshitar refers to the ajapA naTanam as being understood and worshipped by yOgIs. Though a short composition, the gauLA rAgA in this song is exhaustively treated. The three rare rAgAs in this series are vIra vasanta, sALaka bhairavi and rudrapriyA.

Tyagaraja has two consorts here, Goddess Kamalambika, who is depicted as performing penance in order to attain the Lord and Goddess Nilotpalambika, who is depicted as being married to the Lord.

The kamalAmba navAvaraNa kritis can be referred to as the magnum opus of Dikshitar. Since Kamalambika does penance here in order to become one with Siva, She is depicted in the yOgic posture. That Dikshitar chose to dedicate the navAvaraNa kritis to Kamalambika shows not only the deep reverence he had for Her, but also highlights the fact that Tiruvarur being a mukti kShEtra, shrI vidyA, which is the core of the kritis is the Knowledge that leads to the Ultimate Goal of mukti. In this group too, Dikshitar has chosen to compose in the eight Sanskrit declensions. For the ninth kriti pertaining to the ninth and last AvaraNA, he employs all the eight declensions. Besides, this group has a dhyAna kriti as well as a mangaLa kriti. Dikshitar employs the rare rAgA ghanTA for the eighth composition. This group of eleven compositions can be said to be the culmination of the best of music, poetry and intricate philosophy and can be easily classified as being the greatest contribution of Muthuswami Dikshitar to the art and science of music.

The kamalAmbA navAvaraNa kritis comprise:

1. **kamalAmbikE dhyAna** kriti tODi
2. **kamalAmbA samrakShatumAm** first AvaraNA Ananda bhairavi
3. **kamakAmbAm bhajarE** second AvaraNA kalyANi
4. **shrI kamalAmbikAyA** third AvaraNA shankarAbharaNam
5. **kamalAmbikAyai** fourth AvaraNA kAmbOji
6. **shrI kamalAmbikAyA** param fifth AvaraNA bhairavi
7. **kamalAmbikAyA:** sixth AvaraNA punnAgavarALi
8. **shrI kamalAmbikAyAm** seventh AvaraNA sahAnA
9. **shrI kamalAmbikE avAva** eighth AvaraNA ghanTA
10. **shrI kamalAmbA jayati** ninth AvaraNA Ahiri
11. **shrI kamalAmbikE** mangaLa kriti shrI

Dikshitar paid his tribute to Goddess Neelotpalambika, the other consort of Lord Thyagaraja, in a unique way. He offered Her too eight songs in the eight Sanskrit declensions, but introduced a novel concept as far the rAgAs he used were concerned. He employed the eight variations of gauLa. These are referred to by some as gauLa kritis, though, these belong to different mELAs. The rAgAs chAyagauLa and pUrvagauLa are rare melodies and Dikshitar kritis are the only reference points for these rAgAs.

The Neelotpalamba kritis comprise:

- 1) **nIIOtpalAmbA jayati** nArAyaNagauLa
- 2) **nIIOtpalAmbaAm bhajarE** rItigauLa
- 3) **nIIOtpalAmbikayA** kannadagauLa
- 4) **nIIOtpalAmbikAyai namastE** kEdAragauLa
- 5) **nIIOtpalAmbikAyA param** nahIrE gauLa
- 6) **nIIOtpalAmbikAyAstava dAsOham** mAyaAmALavagauLa

- 7) **nIIOtpalAmbikAyAm bhaktim karOmi** pUrvagauLa  
 8) **nIIOtpalAmbikE nitya shudhAtmikE** chAyagauLa

There is another composition which does not belong to the above group. srI nIIOtpalanAyikE in rItigauLa is a masterpiece in that rAgA.

Another group of kritis are those on the ShODaSha (sixteen) Ganapati shrines in the temple. Apart from the fact that Lord Vinayaka is propitiated at the beginning of any activity, be it of religious nature or of the mundane, He is specially worshipped by a sect of sanAtana dharmIs who are called gANapatyAs. For this sect, Vinayaka is the Supreme Being. tAntric practices form part of their worship of the elephant-faced God. 16 forms of Ganapati are worshipped, each having its own significance and each of the 16 has separate shrines at the Tiruvarur temple. Muthuswami Dikshitar wrote in praise of all these 16 forms. An examination of the sixteen composition reveals Dikshitar's wide knowledge of the intricacies of gANapatyA worship.

Sundaramurti Nayanar was one of the greatest of shaivite saints and one of the greatest devotees of Lord Siva. His life was closely connected with Tiruvarur. He is therefore honoured with a separate shrine in the temple. Dikshitar paid a special tribute to the saint by composing a song in raga Takka - sundaramUrtim AshrayAmi. This is the only composition extant in this raga, other than Tyagaraja's rAka sashivadana.

Dikshitar composed the dhanyAsi song mangaLadEvatayA in praise of Goddess Lakshmi and refers to Her as being established at Kamalalaya, Tiruvarur. Once, Maha Vishnu through the curse of Sage Brighu was separated from his consort Lakshmi. He was advised to perform penance in order to rejoin Her. Lakshmi too performed penance at Tiruvarur. Kamala is another name for Lakshmi, hence Kamalalaya. Therefore, in the manner of his bilahari composition kAmAkShi varalakShmi at Kanchipuram (reference to which has been made in the sixth part of this series), Dikshitar looks at Mahalakshmi as Kamalambika Herself. In his hiraNmayIm lakshmiIm (lalita) he refers to her as shrI kamalAmbikAm parAm. There is a temple dedicated to Goddess Renuka Devi, popularly known as Mariyamman in Tamil, in the Vijayapuram area of Tiruvarur. On this deity, Dikshitar wrote the kannada bangaLa song rENukADevi samrakShitOham. This raga is again a very rare one and we have only the above Dikshitar kriti as reference.

Greatness in art certainly does not go unnoticed, and there were any number of enthusiasts desirous of undergoing tutelage in music under Muthuswami Dikshitar. The musicians and dancers attached to the temple were naturally attracted by his music. They found that it was different, not just the melody of it, but the language and the theme too. Familiar as they were with padas in Telugu and Tamil which eulogised kings or zamindars or other patrons, they found Dikshitar's compositions which he himself and his brothers sang at the temple, breaking fresh ground. The dignified sAhityA which was always in praise of God, or which spoke of mysticism, the subtle yet dignified and soulful beauty of the music in slow tempo and the elegant poetic nuances were, whether regarded individually or collectively, revolutionary, affording new vistas of delight and sublime experiences, both aural and mystical. It was thus that slowly, a few Nagaswara Vidwans and Devadasis belonging to Tiruvarur and adjoining villages decided to sit at Dikshitar's feet and imbibe his art.

Dikshitar's decision to teach students belonging to all communities was a revolutionary step and one in the right direction. Considering that Brahmins in those days were very particular about upholding orthodox principles and especially that Dikshitar had to observe certain principles of AchArA as he was a shrI vidyA upAsakA, his throwing open his doors to students of all communities was a decision that demanded extraordinary courage and one that must be hailed as trailblazing. It had far reaching consequences on the status of music and its future. In the years ahead, the Nagaswara vidwans, Devadasis, people belonging to the Parashaiva community and the Natyacharyas could significantly enhance not only their repertoire, but the quality of their music too underwent a lot of change for the better, gaining in maturity, depth and beauty. One of the earlier disciples was Shuddha Maddhalam Tambiappan who belonged to the Parashaiva community. nAgaswara vidwan Koorainadu Ramaswami Pillai, another eminent nAgaswara vidwan of those times Terazhundur Bilvavanam, Tiruvarur Ayyasami Nattuvanar who was a Natyacharya, Tevur Subramania Iyer, Tirukkadayur Bharati, a Tamil scholar, Vilvavanam Ayyasami and the then eminent vINa vidwan Avudayarkovil Venkataramayyar were some of the early disciples. Ammani of Vallalar Koil and Kamalamba of Tiruvarur, both of whom belonged to the Devadasi community were the two prominent lady disciples.

It is significant to note that Dikshitar's disciples not only came from all communities and belonged to both sexes, but also that they comprised not only vocalists but instrumentalists too. The traditional community of musicians and dancers were naturally equipped to learn and handle the intricate compositions of Dikshitar. Centuries of total dedication and devotion over several generations ensured that art flowed in their veins, becoming part of their bloodstream.



Tambiappan was one such artist. He played the Shuddha Maddhalam, an instrument that belonged almost exclusively to the Tiruvarur temple. For generations Tambiappan's ancestors played this rare instrument at the Tiruvarur temple and he continued that glorious tradition. The Shuddha Maddhalam is an instrument that resembles the mridangam but is longer in size than the latter. The right side of the Shuddha Maddhalam has a greater quantity of the black paste which results in the instrument giving out a deeper tone and resonance. Shuddha Maddhalam is one of the five instruments of the Pancha Vadyam of Kerala but is a rarity in Tamilnadu temples. Tambiappan's discipleship under Dikshitar was significant in more ways than one.

One important aspect of Tambiappan's tutelage under Dikshitar was that, he sired many disciples, some of whom became prominent musicians and composers. Many of these in turn, taught Dikshitar kritis to a number of people. Tambiappan therefore, played no mean part in the spread of Dikshitar compositions. Perhaps the most important contribution of Tambiappan to the Dikshitar saga was his role in the navagraha kritis.

Tambiappan once suffered from severe stomach ailment. Medical treatment did not relieve his acute suffering. He therefore sought the advice of his guru. Muthuswami Dikshitar perused Tambiappan's horoscope and discovered that he was running a very bad period then and that the planet Jupiter was afflicted in the horoscope. The great composer spent sometime in deep reflection. Medicines had failed to cure Tambiappan's disease. The alternative was to perform elaborate navagraha shAnti. As one endowed with rare insights, an extraordinary idea occurred to Dikshitar. He decided to compose a kriti praising Jupiter. Such was the intuitive genius of that great man, that in keeping with the highly beneficent and expansive nature of Jupiter, its nobility and grandeur, a raga that possessed all these qualities sprang from his innermost depths. The raga dEvatA of aTHANA stood before Dikshitar, ready to perform his command. She gave her all, revealed her majestic splendour, elegantly caressing the superb poetry. The result, brihaspatE, was a grand, consummate work that was the harbinger of a new form of prayer which the devout and the musically minded could utilise in order to cure themselves of ills that visited them on account of the bad placement of planets. It also gave rise to the creation of six more compositions in praise of the other members of the solar system. Dikshitar bid Tambiappan sing the kriti on Jupiter. Needless to say he got completely cured of his stomach ailment within a few weeks. The efficacy and practical utility of Dikshitar kritis is proved by this incident.

The vAra kritis comprise yet another major corpus in Carnatic music that stands out for the exemplary and exhaustive treatment of some of the most important ragas. The seven compositions are set to the sULAdi sapta tALAs, yet another distinctive feature of Dikshitar's genius. They also reveal the vast learning and erudition of Muthuswami Dikshitar. A master of astrology himself, Dikshitar has incorporated the essential details concerning the planets in these compositions. The navagraha kritis comprise:

Composition - Raga - Tala - Planet

- 1) **sUryamUrTE** - saurAShtram - dhruva - Sun
- 2) **candram bhaja mAnasa** - asAvEri - maTYa - Moon
- 3) **angArakam AshrayAmyaham** - suruTTi - rUpaka - Mars
- 4) **budham AshrayAmi** - nATakurinji - jhampa - Mercury
- 5) **brihaspatE** - aThANA - tripuTa - Jupiter
- 6) **shri shukra bhagavantam** - paras - aTA - Venus
- 7) **divAkara tanujam** - yadukulakAmbOji - Eka - Saturn It is said that the kritis on Rahu and Ketu, the nodes of the moon were not composed by Dikshitar but were later interpolations.

We do not know how comfortably or otherwise Dikshitar was placed in those early years after his return to Tiruvarur. His father Ramaswami Dikshitar was a recipient of the Tanjavur king's munificence earlier. Whether this continued in full measure after the family returned to Tiruvarur is not known, though it can be surmised that some kind of allowance must have been offered by the palace in lieu of Ramaswami Dikshitar's services to the cause of music. What can be said with some authenticity is that the Tiruvarur temple would have catered to the needs of the Dikshitar family.

As already pointed out earlier, Ramaswami Dikshitar, and later on Muthuswami Dikshitar, were both associated with organising the temple music. Nevertheless, because of Dikshitar's peripatetic life, the temple might not have been able to regularly provide for his family. For, in those days, travelling to a place entailed either walking or taking a bullock-cart. Travel from Tiruvarur to Mannargudi for example, about 25 miles away, would take about a day or two depending on whether one engaged a cart or footed the distance.

Of course, in those good old days there were chatrams (choultries) where a pilgrim could stay comfortably and could also cook. There were philanthropists who provided food, either raw or cooked, for the benefit of pilgrims. There were separate anna chatrams too. (Choultries where food was served to pilgrims). The tradition of the 'UTTuppura' of Kerala flourished in Chola Desha too. These choultries built during the Nayak and Mahratta regimes were solid structures, artistically built and some of the big ones could house hundreds of pilgrims.

Remnants of such choultries can still be seen all over Tanjavur district, neglected and left to rot without anyone to care for their preservation - a grim reminder of the pathetic times we live in. But simultaneously, they remind us of the glorious times that were. Times when philanthropy reigned, when there was true respect and regard for the artist, for the spiritually inclined, when society felt it was its duty to support such souls. Without worrying about where the next meal came from, the pilgrim or artist whose sole aim was to realise the Ultimate Truth through his chosen pursuit could attend to the cravings of his soul. Though things had already begun deteriorating with the advent of British rule and artists and spiritually inclined people of the 18th century were the early casualties, as long as there were large hearted individuals and as long as people depended on their feet for travelling, the tradition of free hospitality continued to flourish.

One can be sure that Muthuswami Dikshitar made use of such facilities during his pilgrimages.

His fame as composer having spread across the region, authorities of many temples in the surrounding areas invited Muthuswami Dikshitar to visit their temples and compose on the deities there. The frequent pilgrimages of Dikshitar resulted in short or long absences from Tiruvarur. But Tiruvarur was his base, not only because he was born there and had a home and that his parents were living there, but also because of his extreme attachment to the deities of Tiruvarur.

We shall now travel with the Pilgrim to some of those hallowed shrines situated in the Cauvery delta.

Kuzhikkara is a village about 5 miles from Tiruvarur on a side road off the Tiruvarur-Mannargudi road. This village has a charming little temple dedicated to Lord Siva. Vishveshwara or Viswanatha and Vishalakshi are the names of the deities. This kshEtra is known as Madhya Kashi and Gartateeram. The temple was a private property owned by Vaidyalinga Mudaliyar. It still remains a private property and is managed by Vaidyalinga Mudaliar's descendants. Vaidyalinga Mudaliyar once decided to perform the kumbAbhiShEkham of the temple. He had heard about Muthuswami Dikshitar and his immortal compositions, and invited the composer to his village to grace the occasion. Dikshitar participated in the kumbAbhiShEkham and partook of the grace of the Lord and the Goddess. Vaidyalinga Mudaliyar showed him great respect and reverence and also performed kanakAbhiShEkham for Dikshitar. A desire rose in his heart to have his glory sung by the great composer. This request was conveyed to Dikshitar who had never sung in praise of a mere mortal. He point blank refused the Mudaliyar's request and composed instead the masterpiece shrI vishvanAtham, a garland for the Lord in 14 ragas. In the verse in bhUpAla raga which is the 14th raga, Dikshitar referred to the Lord as the protector of Vaidyalinga Mudaliyar (vaidyalinga bhUpAla pAlanam). Dikshitar also composed kAshi vishvEshvara in khAmbOji, as also annapUrNE visAlAkshi in Sama at this temple.

The main lingam is a bANalingam which is similar to the one at Kashi. The tank is gartatIram or kuzhikkara. A bath in this tank is supposed to remove leprosy. Dikshitar in his kAshi vishvEshvara, describes the kshEtra as 'kAshi kshEtra sadrushAdikaphaladam' meaning, equal to Kashi and capable of bestowing greater boons. He also says 'kuShTarOgApaha gartatIra shambhO', meaning that a bath in this tank removes leprosy. From Dikshitar's compositions on this temple, it can be surmised that the Kuzhikkara temple must have been a powerful shrine. It is now neglected and in utter disrepair with the existing descendant of Vaidyalinga Mudaliar not being able to effect any restoration or improvement.

Mannargudi is an important pilgrim centre about 25 miles from Tiruvarur. In days of yore, especially during the reign of the Cholas, Nayaks and the Mahrattas, Mannargudi was at the pinnacle of its glory. During the Nayak and Mahratta rule, Mannargudi was the artistic capital of the Chola region. It was here that artistes were given houses by the kings and a large number of musicians and dancers belonging to the Tanjavur court lived here.

The Vaishnava shrine dedicated to Rajagopala Swami is a huge and very ancient one. The beautiful utsava icon of the Lord incorporates Ambal too and is therefore an arghanArIshwara mUruti. Hence the Lord's name here is Sri Vidya Rajagopala. The esoteric significance is that, Vishnu and Ambal are one and the same shakti and represent jointly the act of preservation and protection of life. After a satisfying darshan of the deities, Muthuswami Dikshitar dedicated a couple of songs to the temple. shrI rAjagOpAla in sAvEri is one of Dikshitar's exquisite compositions. Along with Tyagaraja's rAma bANa and Shyama Sastri's durusugA, Dikshitar's shrI rAjagOpAla provides an exhaustive portrait of the sAvEri rAga. The kriti also provides complete details about the Lord. The esoteric significance of shrI vidyA rAjagOpAla swAmi is brought out in the anupallavi madhyamakAla lines, 'dakShiNa dvArakApura nilaya vishiStAdvaita advaita Alaya'. Dikshitar also speaks about the huge and beautiful temple tank called haridrA which he refers to as a river (nIra sampUrNa haridrA nadi). This kriti is also noted for its beautiful alliterations and delectable poetry. Dikshitar also composed the piece shrI vidyA rAjagOpAlam in the rare rAga jaganmOhanam in praise of the Mannargudi Perumal. In addition the kriti rAjagOpAlam in mOhanam was also composed here.

Between Mannargudi and Kumbhakonam lies Needamangalam, where there is a temple dedicated to Sri Rama who is here known as Santana Ramaswami. This is a hallowed VaiShNava kShEtra in praise of which Muthuswami Dikshitar wrote the song santAna rAmaswAminam in the rAgA hindOLavasantam. He then proceeded to Kumbhakonam where he must have stayed for quite some time.

Kumbhakonam is praised in the purANAs as being a very sacred place. It is sacred to both shaivites as well as vaiShNavites. Next to Kanchipuram, Kumbhakonam boasts of the largest number of temples. The Kumbheswara and Nageswara are the two important Siva temples, while the Sarangapani and Ramaswami are the two famous Vishnu temples here. All around Kumbhakonam one comes across kShEtra after kShEtra, each with its own ancient lore, its captivating architecture and its importance as a place of pilgrimage. Kumbhakonam was and still is the cradle of the unique culture of Tanjavur. The Cauvery flows across the heart of the town after paying homage to the Gods at various shrines, after watering vast tracts of land to render them lush and green, after quenching the thirst of several millions, after giving Her all, thereby becoming quite slender at Kumbhakonam, though not emaciated. Several of Her tributaries like the Arashalar and the Veera Chozan take off at various points before Kumbhakonam and form a beautiful garland around the town that represents the best that has to be had in religion, spirituality, art, culture, education, cuisine and hospitality. Choultries, mutts and mantapas stand grand testimony to the munificence and piety of the empires that ruled the region. Kumbhakonam still retains the charm, the air still smells of that mystical quality of yore.



Muthuswami Dikshitar worshipped Lord Kumbheswara and His Consort Mangalambika. The ghaNTA piece mangaLAmbikAm was dedicated by Dikshitar to the Goddess. Dikshitar is said to have written a song in kalyANI on Kumbheswara but the authenticity of this piece is doubted by some. He must have surely worshipped at the temples of Nageswara, Sarangapani and Ramaswami. But there are no compositions available on these deities. About five miles west of Kumbhakonam on the road to Tiruvaiyyaru is situated the famous shrine Swamimalai, dedicated to the Divine Child of Siva and Parvati. This is one of the six hallowed kShEtrAs for Subramanya and here He is known as Swaminatha, the Preceptor to His Father Himself. Muruga taught the import of the praNava mantra to Lord Siva here. For Dikshitar whose guru was Lord Subramanya, this shrine and the Lord's manifestation here must have held deep significance. Two songs shrI bAlasubramaNyA in bilahari and shrI swAminAthAya in khamAs were dedicated by Dikshitar to his guru who dispenses grace standing as an elegant, majestic brahmachAri here.

East of Kumbhakonam, about six miles on the road to Mayavaram, there are several sacred shrines, foremost of which is Madhyarjuna or Tiruvidaimarudur. Lord Siva is known here as Mahalingaswami. This is a prominent centre of bhakti and advaita which was sanctified by the visit of Adi Sankara and by the peerless devotion of the 17th century saint Sridhara Venkatesa Ayyaval of nearby Tiruvisainallur, Tiruvidaimarudur was also the capital of the Mahratta king Amarasimha. Not only was it a great centre of religious and literary learning, resonating with the chanting of the Vedas and Upansihads and the Tamil Thirumurais, it was also a great centre of culture and the arts. Several artists made their home here. Remnants of that great culture of yore can still be seen at Tiruvidaimarudur in the form of palaces, choultries, mutts and music and dance halls. The Mahalingaswami temple is famous for its grand festivals and processions of deities. To this great centre of pilgrimage came Muthuswami Dikshitar. The scintillating composition in paras, cintayE mahAlinga mUrtim and the deeply sublime paradEvata brihatkucAmba in dhanyAsi were his offerings to Lord Mahalinga and Goddess Brihatkuchamba. Though rarely heard, the paras composition is a masterpiece in that rAgA and is one more proof of Dikshitar's versatility and genius in handling scholarly rAgAs. The rAgA mudra is deftly woven in the anupallavi lines 'antaranga bhaktajanAnAm atisamIpa rju mArga darshitam'. The Lord is described as revealing to the close, staunch devotee, the direct and the surest path to salvation. He is also described, in the madhyamakAIA of the charaNam, as taking on various forms such as

Somaskanda at Tiruvarur, Nataraja at Chidambaram, as Bhairava, the Lord of Kali and as Swaminatha of Swamimalai. This composition is a wonderful blend of poetic beauty, musical wealth and deep philosophical concepts. The dhanyAsi piece on the Goddess explores the colourful and deep images of that rAgA.

Near Kumbhakonam is a shrine to Lord Siva called Sri Vanchyam. Here, Dikshitar composed the suraTi song shrI vAncanAtham on the Lord and mangaLambikAyai in mALavashri and shrI mangaLambikE in kalyANI on the Goddess. To the south-east of Kumbhakonam, very near Semmangudi, is a village called Tirukkannamangai where there is an important Vaishnava shrine. Here Dikshitar dedicated an elaborate composition, bhaktavatsalam, to Lord Bhaktavatsala in the mELa rAgA vamshavati, which describes the temple and its environs in great detail. In the sanctum there is a large beehive. The bees are believed to be the Devas, worshipping the Lord. This is mentioned in the line "suramayamadhumakshikArAdhitam".

Dikshitar had already visited Mayavaram and stayed there for some time on his way back from Kanchipuram to Tiruvarur. He nevertheless must have visited the town a few times in his life for, Mayavaram was eminently sacred, both religion and culture wise. There are several important shrines near Mayavaram. Tirukkadayur is the place where Lord Siva as Amritagateswara subdued Yama, the Lord of Death. The manOhari song shankaram abhirami manOharam is on the Lord and Dikshitar makes mention of the special abhiShEka performed with 1008 conches here. Goddess Abhirami is considered powerful here and She is celebrated in the rare song abhirAmIm in the rAgA bhUShAvati. On another side of Mayavaram is the Siva shrine of Vallalar Koil. The dEvagAndhAri masterpiece vadAnyEshwaram was dedicated by Dikshitar at this place. This composition is one of the most beautiful ones in dEvagAndhAri. The ancient kShEtra of Shvetaranya or Tiruvenkadu is situated near the ancient Chola port at Pumpukar where the Cauvery ends her journey and merges into eternity. Here, the Eternal Pilgrim dedicated to Lord Shvetaranya, the Arabhi song shvEtAraNyEshwaram and a song in kalyANI on the Goddess Brahmavidyamba. Terezhundur near Mayavaram is famous for its Vaishnava shrine to Lord Parimala Ranganatha. The beautiful and moving North Indian rAgA hamIr kalyANI (hamvIru in Venkatamakhi's parlance) was the medium chosen by Dikshitar to pay homage to Vishnu. His parimaLa ranganAtham stands testimony to his supreme talent in utilising a Hindustani melody for a major composition.

Around Tiruvarur there are several important shrines which Muthuswami Dikshitar visited and sang of. Pulivalam is a VaiShNava kShEtra which is revered as a local Tirupati. Here, Dikshitar composed a song in Manipravalam, a mixture of Sanskrit, Tamizh and Telugu. vEnkaTAcalapate in kApi (now called karNATaka kApi) is a masterpiece both in sAhitya and sangIta and it is heartening that the original music of this piece is preserved intact without being corrupted to the Hindustani version of the rAgA. shrI vEnkaTagirIsham AIOkayE in suruTTi was also composed here. The varALI peice shESHAcala nAyakam also has a reference to Pulivalam.

At Kivalur on the Tiruvarur-Nagapattinam road there is a shiva kShEtra where the Lord is known as Akshayalinga Swami (kEDiliappar in Tamizh). This is associated with a miracle in Dikshitar's life. It is said that Dikshitar composed the shankarAbharaNam piece akShayalinga vibhO in praise of the Kivalur deity and went to the temple to offer it to Him. It was noon time and the services were over. The priest was preparing to close the inner shrine. Dikshitar requested the priest to keep the doors of the Lord's shrine open a little while so that he could sing the piece he had composed and worship the Lord, as otherwise he would have to wait until evening. The priest was unmoved and told Dikshitar that the heavens would not fall if he came later to offer the song. The Lord was not going to run away. So saying, the priest closed the doors. The disappointed Dikshitar nevertheless sat down and began singing the composition. The priest was surprised at the doggedness of Dikshitar and with an amused but irritated countenance watched the composer offer the sublime shankarAbharaNam song to the accompaniment of his own vINA. A few others who were within hearing distance came near to listen to what was by now beginning to captivate them. It is said that no sooner had Muthuswami Dikshitar completed the song than the doors of the inner sanctum opened by themselves revealing the majestic Lord and of course proving to the world that His grace was always available to Dikshitar. The stunned priest fell at the composer's feet and begged his pardon. The other listeners followed suit. News of the incident spread in no time and people gathered to revere the pilgrim who had honoured their village not only with his visit but by his inimitable composition. Kivalur is a charming little village tucked away in the south-eastern corner of Tamilnadu with lush green fields carpeting the whole region. The Akshayalinga temple stands tall and proud at having secured from one of the greatest art composers of all time, a matchless gem, a work of timeless literary and musical quality.

Further on the road to Nagapattinam is the shrine of Sikkal dedicated to Lord Subramanya. The youthful beauty of Singaravadivelan, as the name itself suggests, elicited from His disciple-devotee the composition shringAra shaktyAyudha in the rAgA ramAmanOhari.

Muthuswami Dikshitar then proceeded to Nagapattinam on the sea coast. Nagapattinam is an ancient trading port and is also a pilgrim centre. The Kayarohanesa temple is dedicated to Siva and to the Goddess who is known as Neelayatakshi.



Muthuswami Dikshitar composed the dEvagAndhAram song kAyArOhaNEsham in praise of the Lord and amba nIIAyatAkShi in nIIAmbari as an offering to the Devi.

Nilayatakshi is one of the three deities who has elicited compositions from all three members of the Music Trinity, Shyama Sastri, Tyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar (The other two are Goddess Kamakshi of Kanchipuram and Goddess Dharmasamvardhini of Tiruvaiyyaru. In addition, Lord Varadaraja of Kanchi shares this distinction). Soundararaja Perumal is the name of Vishnu at the Vaishnava shrine in Nagapattinam. Dikshitar dedicated the brindAvani song soundararAjam AshrayE at this shrine.

From Nagapattinam Dikshitar visited Vedaranyam, further south on the coast. Vedaranyam is reputed to be the place where Siva and Parvati gave darshan of their wedding ceremony to Sage Agastya. As the purANA tells us, Agastya was asked by Siva to go to the south to balance the earth as the whole universe had gathered at Kailasa for the divine wedding. Siva promised the sage that he could witness the marriage from the south. Dikshitar has not mentioned the name of the kShEtra in his bauli kriti srI pArvati paramEshvarou vandE. But the kriti is on the Divine Couple and the composer mentions Agastya as having worshipped them (IOpAmudrEsha archita charaNou - Lopamudra was Agastya's wife). Therefore this kriti can be attributed to Vedaranyam.

Dikshitar was already past forty now. He had married off his only child, a daughter, to a boy at Trichy. His parents were old now and the pious, caring son that he was, Dikshitar took care of them well. It was 1817. Ramaswami Dikshitar was past eighty. On the Sivaratri day of that year Ramaswami Dikshitar left this earth leaving behind his compositions and his illustrious son. A few months later Subbulakshmi, ever the faithful wife, joined her husband. The brothers were shattered at this loss. An important era in their lives had come to an end.

After the demise of Ramaswami Dikshitar, whatever little maintenance was provided by the Tanjavur king was stopped. Times of real distress began. The wolf was at the door. Apart from some land that was gifted to Ramaswami Dikshitar, the family had nothing to fall back upon. But who would till the land and raise crops? The composer was absolutely uninterested in such occupations. The other two brothers also knew no other work. Music was what they knew, and in the absence of any inclination on the part of Dikshitar for composing in praise of kings or zamindars, the art was of no pecuniary benefit to them. Added to this was the imposition of a yearly tax on landowners.

*(This may have been a British ruling. Ever since 1799, when Sarabhoji was pensioned off, it was agreed that the English East India Company would handle the administration of Tanjore and would also be responsible for the collection of kishit (tax) on the fasal (cultivation). The King was to get 1/5th of the total amount so collected as his pension. It is likely that the family of Dikshitar were asked to pay tax, after an assessment of the quality of land they held and the produce that could be expected - Editor.)*

When not even a grain was produced how could Dikshitar pay tax on the land? When this dilemma stared him in the face he decided to donate the land to someone. After some thought Dikshitar decided upon a pious brahmin who was his teacher when he was young. The brahmin teacher who deserved the gift both because of his piety and his privation was extremely grateful to his former pupil. Dikshitar felt a great burden lifted from his shoulders.

A saga of such supreme sacrifice in the face of personal adversity to oneself, and especially when Dikshitar did not know where his next meal was going to come from, is very rare. In the entire history of humanity we come across but a handful of such noble souls. It is this spirit of sacrifice that the Ruler of Dikshitar's Tiruvarur, Lord Tyagaraja, symbolises through His Name. It is this spirit of sacrifice and renunciation that has lent to Dikshitar's story and his works the immortality that time cannot obliterate.

One day, Muthuswami Dikshitar was teaching his disciples. Among them was the dEvadAsi Kamalam. The two wives of Dikshitar signalled to her and called her to the kitchen. "Kamalam, there is absolutely nothing in the house to eat. There is no rice even. We can't cook. All of us may have to go hungry today". Though she was aware of her guru's poverty, Kamalam was shell-shocked as she had not expected things to get this bad. For the first time she understood the gravity of the situation that had enveloped her guru's home. Kamalam immediately removed some of her jewels and gave them to the ladies.

Meanwhile, Dikshitar who had noticed Kamalam having a hushed conversation with his wives, demanded to know what it was and got the truth. Sad and distressed at the pathetic situation, Dikshitar with utmost compassion told his dear disciple, "Kamalam, it is the duty of a guru not only to give his disciples knowledge but also food.



However, because of my poverty, I am not able to feed my disciples. But that does not mean that I should depend on my disciples to sustain myself. Much as I appreciate your pure love and your noble intentions, I must refuse your help. You may be able to help us out today, but you can't provide for us throughout our lives. It is the duty of God to protect His devotees. If I have been truly devoted to Lord Tyagaraja, He will certainly help me and remove my distress".

Thus rejecting the offer of Kamalam, Dikshitar went to the Tyagaraja temple and sang with great fervour before the Lord. It is said that the yadukulakAmbOji composition **tyAgarAjam bhajarE** was composed by him on this occasion.

No sooner had he returned from the temple, a cartload of provisions arrived at Dikshitar's house. The surprised composer enquired of the person who had accompanied the cart. It transpired that an official of the Tanjavur king had planned to camp at Tiruvarur for a few weeks on official duty. Provisions were bought in large quantity and stocked. But the visit of the officer was cancelled. The local official who had arranged for the stay and hospitality of the king's representative immediately decided that the provisions should be sent to someone who was most deserving and who else could he think of but Muthuswami Dikshitar? Dikshitar was moved at the grace of the Lord. When the truly pious are in distress or in need, Providence certainly comes to their rescue. This episode also reveals the reverence and the devotion that Dikshitar's disciple Kamalam had for her guru.

It was for Kamalam's arangEtram that Dikshitar wrote the Telugu varNam in tODi, rUpamu jUCi in praise of Lord Tyagaraja and the daru in shrIranjani, nI sATi in praise of the Valmikalinga representation of the Lord. Kamalam was now qualified to offer her dance at the shrine of the Lord. With her guru's blessings, Kamalam's arangEtram was successfully conducted. Four brothers witnessed the dance performance of Kamalam and fascinated by the two exquisite pieces composed by Dikshitar, visited him the next day. Chinniah, Ponniah, Sivanandam and Vadivelu were Natyacharyas who belonged to Tanjavur. They told Dikshitar that they had heard a lot about him and now they were witness to his greatness. The brothers prayed that they be accepted as disciples. They also prayed that Dikshitar visit Tanjavur and stay with them. The capital would benefit by the presence of a Nadopasaka, a Mahapurusha. Dikshitar and his brothers who had not yet completely recovered from the loss of their parents agreed that staying at Tanjavur for some time would certainly be a good idea. Dikshitar agreed to teach the four brothers and promised them that he would, in the near future visit Tanjavur.

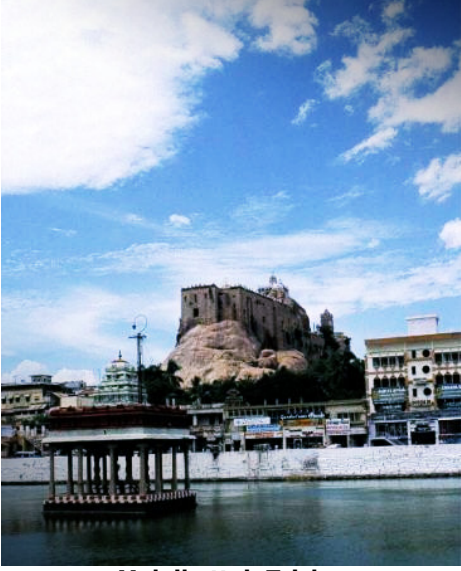
Before settling down to a prolonged stay at Tanjavur, Dikshitar decided to visit Tiruchirappalli. His only child lived there with her husband, and though the very epitome of dispassion, Dikshitar had a special place for his daughter in his heart. It was to his daughter that, before he left this world, Dikshitar bequeathed his priceless possessions - the vINA that Ganga Devi gave him and his pUJA which included the shrI cakra mahA mEru.

Tiruchirappalli or Trichy was a great centre of the ancient Chola empire that had its early capital at Woraiyur (now inside the city). The city is ornamented by the Cauvery river that is expansive here. Trichy was a great centre of education as well as trade, as it is now. It was also a great cultural centre. Situated in the heart of Tamilnadu, Tiruchirappalli boasts of three of the greatest temples of South India.

The Matrubbhuteswara temple situated inside a fort atop a rock is dedicated to Siva who took the form of a Vaisya woman and helped her daughter in her confinement. The woman lived on the other side of the river promised her daughter that she would come soon. By the time she started, the Cauvery was in floods and she was stranded on the opposite bank. As time went by, the daughter was in her throes of labour. The Lord then went to her home taking her mother's form and played the role of midwife. The Lord is therefore referred to as Matrubbhuta or Tayumanavar in Tamil. Dikshitar refers to this in his monumental piece **shrI mAtrubhUtam** in kannada (vaishya jAti strI vESha dharaNam).



Temple Entrance



**Malaikottai, Trichy**

The temple inside the fort presents quite a different sight from other temples. From the large windows all around the scenery is awe-inspiring and elevating. Matrubbhuteswara lords over the picturesque Cauvery with the majestic Tiruvanaikkaval and Srirangam temple towers on the other side of the river. Dikshitar must have been inspired by these grand sights as also by the imposing Matrubbhuteswara Lingam to compose the kannada masterpiece. Not only does the rAgA discover its own abundant potential, but Dikshitar has etched a moving panorama of varied though unspoken emotions in this piece. The passion underlying the music of this song is palpable and reflects the deep reverence which Dikshitar had for the Lord who came in the form of the mother (mAtrubhUtEshwara). The phrase guruguha antaranga lingam in the madhyamakAlA of the anupallavi reflects this emotion. **shrI sugandhikuntaLambikE** in the rare rAgA kuntaLa was Dikshitar's tribute to the Goddess of the Rock Fort.

Crossing the Cauvery, Dikshitar went to Tiruvanaikkaval, the panchabhUta kShEtra representing appu or water. The unique kriti in yamuna kalyANI, jambUpatE, was his tribute to Lord Jambukeswara.

The Goddess here was supposed to possess a fiery nature. Adi Sankara during his travels visited the place and appeased the Goddess by fixing two shrI cakrAs on Her ears and also by placing Her son Lord Vinayaka right in front of Her. The Goddess shed Her fiery nature and became tranquil.

Goddess Akhilandeswari is nevertheless powerful and Her spiritual grace is a tangible experience in Her presence. To such a Mother, the true bhakta offered the classic **shrI mAAta** in bEgaDA. In the pallavi itself Dikshitar refers to the shrI cakrAs worn by the Goddess on Her ears (shrI chakra rUpa tATankE). Full of abstruse philosophy and alliterative beauty, this song in bEgaDA ranks as one of Dikshitar's best efforts at composition.

Not only for Vaishnavas, for others too, Srirangam is one of the holiest shrines. Situated between the Cauvery and its tributary the Coleroon, near Tiruvanaikkaval, Srirangam is one of the most vibrant symbols of Hindu religious movement. The icon of Ranganatha was worshipped by Sri Rama's ancestors and by the Prince of Ayodhya Himself and given by Him to Vibhishana, Ravana's brother, as a parting gift after His coronation. Legend has it that Vinayaka in the form of a small boy tricked Vibhishana, who was returning to Lanka from Ayodhya, into putting down the icon on the banks of the Cauvery. The Lord did not move from there but promised Vibhishana that he could have His darshan from Lanka itself. The massive temple complex is a city by itself, intelligently conceived and intricately designed with the streets around it built specially for religious celebrations and processions and named after the different festivals. The Lord reclines on Adi Sesa, facing south, the famous golden vimAnam above Him representing OM, the Eternal Truth. Sung by all the twelve Alwars, Srirangam was the residence of the Vaishnava Acharya and the preceptor of Vishishtadvaita, Sri Ramanuja who was reverentially referred to as uDayavar. The temple also houses the Acharya's Samadhi. There is an air of deep mysticism surrounding Srirangam and it is no wonder that the place attracted Tyagaraja and Dikshitar as it did numerous other great personages.



**ranganAyakm bhAvayEham** in nAYaki in praise of Ranganatha, **shrI bhArgavi** in the rare mangala kaishiki in praise of Goddess Ranganayaki and **rangapura vihArA** in brindAvana sArangA in praise of Kodandarama in the temple complex were Muthuswami Dikshitar's offerings to Srirangam. The nAYaki kriti is one of his masterpieces and incorporates the kShEtra details such as the golden vimAnam (praNavAkAra divya vimAnam), the icon worshipped by Sri Rama (dinamaNikula bhava rAghava ArAdhanam), Vibhishana's devotion (nata vibhIShaNam) etc. The handling of nAYaki is masterly and soulful. About twenty years after Dikshitar sang of Ranganatha, his contemporary, the bard of Tiruvaiyyaru was to visit Srirangam and dedicate five exquisite compositions to the Lord.



There are three temples dedicated to Siva in the Akhanda Cauvery region, about twenty-five miles from Trichy. On the southern bank of the river is the town of Kulittalai on the Trichy-Coimbatore road. Siva resides here as Ratnagirishwara on the Ratnachala hill. The mukhAri classic pAhimAm ratnAchala nAyaka was penned here. In this composition, the composer refers to the daily practice of the priests bringing water from the Cauvery in pots uphill and performing the Lord's abhiShEka with it. A little further away is the kaDamba kShEtra. Dikshitar wrote nIlakaNTam bhajEham in kEdAragauLa in praise of Lord Kadambeshwara here. On the Goddess here, Dikshitar wrote the suraTTi song bAlakucAmbikE. In both the mukhAri and the kEdAragauLa kritis, Dikshitar refers to the Cauvery river as being very broad (akhaNDa kAvEri). The river in its entire course is the broadest here and presents an awesome sight. Almost exactly opposite to Kulittalai on the northern bank of the Cauvery, just about three miles beyond Musiri on the Trichy-Salem road, is a hill called Tiruvenkoimalai. Dikshitar is supposed to have written the vasantA kriti maragatalingam here. But though the Lord's name is Maragateswara, there is no kShEtra reference in the kriti. Tradition has it that the above three temples should be visited in a single day, the Ratnagirishwara in the morning, the Kadambeswara in the afternoon and the Maragateswara in the evening. A stickler for tradition, Dikshitar must surely have followed this. With these three temples, Dikshitar had completed his pilgrimage of the kShEtrAs of the Chola region.

A major shrine outside of the Chola region, in Chera country, is Tiruchengode, about twenty-five miles from Salem. This famous shrine where Siva and Parvati give darshan as Ardhanarishwara is situated atop a hill. The kumudakriyA piece ardhanArIshwaram was Dikshitar's offering here.

Why Dikshitar ventured as far as Tiruchengode which is about 80 miles from the Kulittalai-Musiri region is not known. He does not seem to have visited the other shrines in that part of the Chera region, nor does he seem to have ventured further west towards Coimbatore. Nevertheless, the kumudakriyA piece stands as testimony to his visit to Tiruchengode. Dikshitar returned to Trichy and stayed with his daughter for some more time. On an auspicious day, he, his wives and his brothers left for Tanjavur. The present highway of 35 miles between Trichy and Tanjavur was not built then. One had to travel on the traditional Trichy-Pumpuhar route on the banks of the Cauvery, via the Grand Anicut, an absolutely delightful and inspiring experience, to reach Tanjavur.

## TANJAVUR

The later capital of the Cholas and thereafter of the Nayaks and the Marattas, Tanjavur possesses a glorious history. Its hoary past speaks of mammoth temples, the most famous of which is the Brihadeeswara or simply, the Big temple, built by the enlightened Chola Emperor Raja Raja, anna chatrams, palaces, giant granaries and the like. The renowned Saraswati Mahal Library founded by the 19<sup>th</sup> century Maratta king Saraboji II houses ancient and valuable manuscripts on almost all subjects under the sun. Tributaries of the Cauvery flow just outside Tanjavur and innumerable moats and irrigation channels criss-cross the town. The maNTapAs and chatrams on the banks of these waterways provide ample testimony to the existence of a golden era that spanned several centuries. The arts flourished like in no other region. Kings as benefactors of art were lavish in their encouragement and patronage of artists. The Tanjavur court under the Cholas, Nayaks and the Mahrattas witnessed tremendous strides being made in music, dance, painting, sculpture, theatre and literature. Most of the great musicians of the South, why, even of the North, considered it a great honour to perform at the Tanjavur court. It was an atmosphere where talented artists thrived, with money, gifts, name and fame literally showered on them.

Remaining outside the purview of royal patronage were two musician-composers, their song reserved for the Muse alone. Shyama Sastri who lived in Tanjavur and Tyagaraja who lived in nearby Tiruvaivaru now had a soul mate in the poor pilgrim-composer who settled in their vicinity. The West Main Street, not far from the Brihadeeswara temple, always resonated with the chanting of the Vedas. Colourful temple processions, feeding of pilgrims in the chatrams, kAlakShEpAs, music concerts and the daily activities at the temples made the street a veritable religious and cultural nerve centre. Goddess Bangaru Kamakshi of Kanchipuram, after a chequered journey through several regions for three centuries, finally found Her home in Tanjavur on the West Main Street in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. In a small, enclosed agrahAram just behind the temple lived Her devotee-composer Shyama Sastri. The agrahAram is still there without much change, retaining the 19<sup>th</sup> century charm. Shyama Sastri's house too has been maintained well by their family.

Further down the street is the Konkaneswara temple opposite to which lived Gangamuthu Nattuvanar, his son Subbaraya Nattuvanar and the latter's four sons. Subbaraya Nattuvanar was a veteran Natyacharya attached to the Tanjavur court and was responsible for training dancers of the court as well as those of the Brihadeeswara temple. Subbaraya Nattuvanar and his four young sons welcomed Dikshitar with great reverence and provided a house adjacent to theirs for the composer to stay. Overwhelmed by the veneration and love shown by the Nattuvanar family, Dikshitar settled down in the house with his wives and brothers. Gangamuthu Nattuvanar and Dikshitar's father Ramaswami Dikshitar were friends and mutual admirers. It is no surprise therefore that the composer found the atmosphere quite congenial.

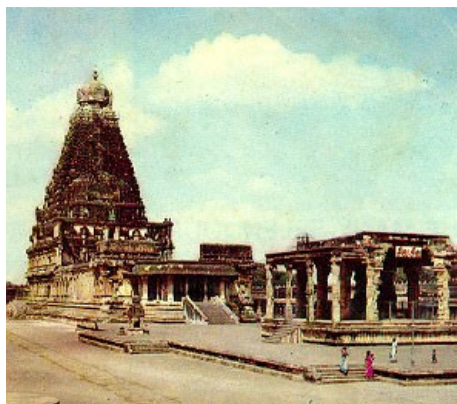
Chinnayya, Ponniah, Sivanandam and Vadivelu, though very young at that time, had already gained considerable insight in music and dance. They had their tutelage in the twin arts from their grandfather as also from their father. Chinnayya and Ponniah used to assist their father in conducting dance performances and both the youngsters had even then won accolades from the discerning connoisseurs of Tanjavur. Dikshitar accepted the four brothers as his disciples.

There is a tradition in Shyama Sastri's family that it was Shyama Sastri who gave shri vidya dIksha to Muthuswami Dikshitar. It is not possible to say as to how far this is true. One thing that can be said with some authenticity is that, Shyama Sastri's family and Dikshitar's family were well acquainted with each other. Especially, the fathers of both were said to be friends at Tiruvarur. Shyama Sastri and Dikshitar renewed the old ties at Tanjavur. Thus was to begin an association that was to prove of great significance to Carnatic music. Both were Devi upAsakAs who engaged themselves in elaborate worship of the Goddess for hours on end and celebrated Her glory in song.

Dikshitar would ask his brothers to sing his compositions. Shyama Sastri would ask his son Subbaraya Sastri, who was just 18 years old then, to sing his compositions. Both appreciated each other's works. Shyama Sastri had already visited Madurai by then and had composed the Minakshi Navaratnamalika in praise of Goddess Minakshi. One day, while father and son were delighting in Dikshitar's company, Shyama Sastri asked his son to sing his composition in shankarAbharaNam. Subbaraya Sastri sang sarOjadaLa nEtri. Dikshitar appreciated the rendition and the delightful gait of the song, whereupon Shyama Sastri remarked to his son, 'Look, does not Dikshitar have a partiality for viLamba kAIA? Will he not relish the other kriti in shankarAbharaNam more?' Whereupon Subbaraya Sastri sang the slow tempo masterpiece of his father, dEvi mInanEtri, also in praise of Goddess Minakshi. The highly pleased Dikshitar appreciated the young lad's keen and deep perception of music.

Sensing that the time was appropriate, the Kamakshi dAsa of high nobility requested Muthuswami Dikshitar to accept his son as disciple. An overwhelmed Dikshitar respectfully accepted his elder contemporary's request. Subbaraya Sastri began learning from Dikshitar. A few years later, Subbaraya Sastri was to become an important disciple of the bard of Tiruvaiyyaru, thus endowing himself with a unique qualification. None else in the history of Carnatic music learned from all the three members of the Trinity. The tutelage under the three great ones resulted in Subbaraya Sastri assimilating their varying styles and incorporating the various elements of their eternal art in a judicious manner in his compositions. The immortality of Subbaraya Sastri's works is due to his being a disciple of the Tiruvarur Trinity. The Dikshitar influence on Subbaraya Sastri can be seen in the latter's kritis like vEnkaTashaila vihArA (hamIr kalYANi), intanucu varNimpa (shankarAbharaNam) and shrI kAmAkShi (vasantha).

There was another outcome of this unique relationship between the two composers. Years earlier, Muthuswami Dikshitar's father Ramaswami Dikshitar had composed a varNam in the rAgA shrI ranjani which he had left unfinished with just one svara passage in the caraNam. Muthuswami Dikshitar requested Shyama Sastri to complete the caraNam. Shyama Sastri after composing the second svara passage, requested Muthuswami Dikshitar's younger brother ChinnaSwami Dikshitar to compose the next one, which the latter did. Shyama Sastri then called upon Dikshitar himself to compose the fourth and final svara passage. The creativity of two members of the inimitable Trinity invests the shrI ranjani varNam of Ramaswami Dikshitar with a singular greatness.



Dikshitar took the opportunity of his sojourn at Tanjavur to visit the temples in that town. The massive Brihadiswara temple naturally attracted him and full of admiration for the artistic splendour of the temple and reverence for the Lord, he composed quite a few pieces in praise of Brihadiswara and His Consort Brihannayaki. It was during his stay at Tanjavur that Dikshitar decided to compose songs in all the 72 mELakarta rAgAs. His aim in doing so was to give a practical example for each of the rAgAs so that they did not remain as academic concepts but acquired a live, melodic presence in the music world. In this monumental task, he succeeded to a very great extent. Dikshitar breathed life into abstract, dry theoretical scales each of which acquired a distinctive melodic character. This was one of Dikshitar's great contributions to music. Many of the songs in this genre, especially those in vivAdi rAgAs, were composed in praise of deities in and around Tanjavur.

Some of the deities who received homage from the great composer through song are: Brihadiswara and Brihannayaki in the Brihadiswara temple, Prasanna Venkateswara, Goddess Jnanambika at the Konkaneswara temple on the West Main Street and Goddess Anandavalli on the Vennar bank. Dikshitar utilised rare mELakarta rAgAs like gAnasAmavarALi, sEnAgrANI, vATi vasantabhairavi, chhAyavati, kiraNAvali, nAgAbharaNam, gangAtarangiNi, bhOgachAyanATa, nabhOmaNi, kumbhini, ravikriyA, stavarAjam, jIvantika, dhavaLAngam, bhUSHAvati, santAnamanjari, rasamanjari etc., for his compositions on the Tanjavur deities. In the song in rasamanjari Dikshitar mentions the 72 rAgAnga rAgAs. This proves that Dikshitar had undertaken this task

specifically in order to illustrate the mELakarta rAgAs. It must be said here that Tyagaraja also undertook the task of composing in rare mELa rAgAs though he did not compose in all of them. If today, the rare mELakarta rAgAs, especially the vivAdi rAgAs and their rare janyAs each possess a characteristic personality of their own, it is entirely due to the pioneering work of Tyagaraja and Dikshitar.

There were other rare rAgAs too that Dikshitar employed to compose in praise of the Tanjavur deities. The gunTAKriyA piece is in praise of Brihadiswara and the song mentions the fact of the temple being built by Raja Raja Chola in the pallavi itself (rAjarAjEndra cOLa pratiShTitam). Another rare but charming piece is in AndhALI rAgA and is in praise of Brihannayaki. The lalitA song agastIshvaram is on Agasthiswara on the Vennar bank.

Meanwhile, the Tanjore Nattuvanar brothers continued their music education under Dikshitar. With the solid foundation they had, the brothers mastered many of their guru's compositions and were keen to present them to the public. Dikshitar, satisfied with their progress, gave the go ahead for their arangEtram. The four brothers had their formal concert debut at the Tanjore palace amidst a galaxy of great musicians and scholars of various disciplines.



Saraboji II (reigned 1798-1832), that great patron of arts was the king then. Being pensioned off by the British who took over the administration from him, thereby rendering him free of political preoccupation, Raja Saraboji could devote his time and efforts towards patronising and encouraging art and literature, a noble endeavour which he undertook and performed with missionary zeal.

Saraboji's court was adorned by great musicians such as Pallavi Gopala Iyer who was given the task of judging the merits of a musician who either wanted to join the court or had his debut there. Other musicians like Sonti Venkataramanayya, Vina Subbukutti Iyer, Todi Sitarammayya, Sankarabharanam Narasayya, Talanayar Krishna Iyer and Rettai Pallavi Sivarama Iyer were also AsthAna vidwans of the Tanjore court.

It was no easy task to secure the approval of these stalwarts. The Tanjore Quartette however, banking on their strength of being Dikshitar's disciples, came out with flying colours. Their music was highly appreciated and approved by all the artists of the court. They were suitably honoured and appointed as court musicians by Saraboji.

At this point of time, there came a few visitors, well to do landed gentry, from Madurai. They had come to visit the kShEtrAs of Tanjavur. Being art lovers, they took the opportunity of listening to the music that was available at the palace. They had heard glowing reports of Dikshitar's music. They were already familiar with Shyama Sastri's music at Madurai as he had visited that place and sung at the temple. The landed gentry met both composers. Expressing deep appreciation of the music of the Tanjore Quartette, they requested Dikshitar to visit Madurai and stay with them for sometime. Dikshitar stated that he was keen on having darshan of Goddess Minakshi but that would have to wait for some time as he had to visit quite a few more shrines near Tanjavur. He also had to return to Tiruvarur for a while to be with his beloved Tyagaraja and Kamalamba. Dikshitar however asked his brothers to accompany the gentlemen and assured them that he would join them soon. Chinnaswami Dikshitar and Baluswami Dikshitar started for Madurai.

Tiruvaiyyaru. That hallowed kShEtra ever resonating with the chanting of the Vedas and the Tamil Tirumurais. That beautiful land washed by five rivers and surrounded by canals, green fields, banana and coconut groves. The Cauvery, that Queen of all rivers, presents a majestic and ravishing sight here, surrounded as She is by Her four offspring over whom She fondly lords, both Her banks dotted with sculpturesque manTapAs and bathing ghats. Tiruvaiyyaru epitomizes the finest that can be experienced of natural beauty and the exquisite art and culture of Tanjavur. That great bard of Tiruvaiyyaru says in two of his exquisite compositions, one on the river and the other on Tiruvaiyyaru itself, that his beloved Rama should be proud of Tiruvaiyyaru which is washed by the Cauvery, who after prostrating at Ranganatha's Feet and worshipping several shrines on the way, hurries to wash the Feet of Goddess Dharmasamvardhini and Lord Panchanadeeswara. The Divine Consort considered this place, where the holy and the pious performed hOmas amidst the sweet call of cuckoos, worthy of occupying says Tyagaraja. Was it just the sublime music of the cuckoos that made Tiruvaiyyaru worthy of living? Did not the Holy Trinity of Siva, Parvati and Rama take their abode in the midst of the five rivers in order to savour the music of that great devotee-composer too?

One of the most ancient temples of the Chola region, the Panchanadeeswara temple is a huge one that for centuries has attracted the devout. Praised by the Nayanmars and in the Tevaram, Panchanadeeswara (the Lord of the five rivers) as Pranatartihara (the One who removes the obstacles of his beloved devotees) has been sung of by Tyagaraja and Dikshitar. His Consort Goddess Dharmasamvardini has been praised in song by Shyama Sastri also, besides Tyagaraja and Dikshitar.

Muthuswami Dikshitar's creations in praise of the Lord were praNatArtiharam in nAyaki and praNatArtiharaAya in sAmantA. His madhyamAvati composition dharmasamvardhani in praise of the Goddess is a classic in that rAga.

An account is traditionally handed down of the meeting between Tyagaraja and Dikshitar. It is said that when Dikshitar was singing his madhyamAvati composition at the temple, a few of Tyagaraja's disciples were present there. Savouring the exquisite music, they enquired of one of Dikshitar's disciples and gathered details about the composer. They then hurried to their guru and told him of Dikshitar and his music. It was not that Tyagaraja was hearing about Dikshitar for the first time. Great mahApuruShAs are certainly aware of each other, only that they do not reveal their inner cognition. Dikshitar too must have heard of Tyagaraja from many people and most certainly from Shyama Sastri. He must also have listened to the bard's compositions. Tyagaraja asked his disciples to invite Dikshitar home. The bard's disciples returned to the temple and informed Dikshitar of Tyagaraja's invitation, which the former accepted. Tyagaraja regularly recited the Valmiki Ramayana. On that day he had come to the episode of the coronation of Sri Rama. Could there be a greater occasion for the two puruShOthamAs of music to meet than the paTTAbhiShEka day of the Purushothama Himself? Tirumanjana vIdhi is just a stone's throw from the Panchanadeeswara temple.

The bard rose to meet his younger, nevertheless equal contemporary. After mutual respects were over, Tyagaraja requested Dikshitar to stay on and witness the puJa which he performed after the Ramayana recitation. The Rama dAsA's worship on that paTTAbhiShEka day thus acquired a special sacredness. A big crowd of disciples and residents of Tiruvaigyaru gathered to witness that momentous event. It was a surcharged atmosphere. After the puJa, dIpArAdhanA and ShODasha upachArAs, Tyagaraja bade his disciples sing. It was to be his bhairavi masterpiece koluvaivunnADe. The whole of Tirumanjana street resonated with the song of its renowned resident. Tyagaraja slowly turned to Dikshitar and requested him to sing on 'my Rama'. The small but majestic, centuries old paTTAbhiShEka icon of Rama with Sri Sita, Bharata, Lakshmana and Shatrugna, complete with the maNTapa and worshipped by Tyagaraja's ancestors and bequeathed to him as heirloom is truly awe-inspiring. Its spiritual power is quite discernible to those who approach it with utmost reverence. What wonder then that Dikshitar sat enraptured?

Was it the mystical power of the icon or the deeply religious atmosphere that pervaded the entire place or the bard's own powerful spiritual presence? It was perhaps a combination of all the three that inspired Dikshitar to dive deep within, to tap his innermost artistic resources. The strain that came out of his very depths, out of his very being had to be special. And it was. The rare maNirangu discovered itself. Dikshitar built a grand edifice for the rAga and bestowed immortality on it. It was an extraordinary edifice, a grandly decorated manTapa (maNirangavalli alankrita maNTapE) studded with the gems of exquisite gamakAs and phrases that Dikshitar gifted to the rAga and made it fit for Tyagaraja's Rama to revel in. The misra chApu tALa that Dikshitar chose for its rhythm was the most appropriate foil. mAmava paTTAbhirAma, a classic par excellence was Dikshitar's tribute to Tyagaraja's beloved Rama. The song describes the coronation of Sri Rama in exactly the same manner as Valmiki's Ramayana. The kriti was also appropriate to the occasion and the spirited, sublime music coupled with the majestic sAhitya enshrined the presence of the Lord in the hearts of those who had the great fortune of listening to it. The residents of Tiruvaigyaru who witnessed the momentous meeting between the two high priests of art music felt elevated and the event took eternal place in their hearts. Such rare, sublime occurrences are seldom spoken of too. The Eternal Cauvery, whose privilege it was to host this great event must have felt proud at the meeting and outstanding accomplishments of Her two children, one, the Eternal Pilgrim, the other, the Eternal Minstrel.

His soul filled with rare peace, Muthuswami Dikshitar took leave of his illustrious contemporary and returned to Tanjavur. He continued to interact with Shyama Sastri, teach the Quartette and compose songs in the 72 mELakartAs. Four years passed by in a milieu that was surcharged with the highest and noblest of art which did Tanjavur proud. It was 1822. Dikshitar, haunted by thoughts of his beloved Tyagaraja and Kamalamba decided to return to Tiruvarur. It was a poignant farewell that the Quartette and the art lovers of Tanjavur gave Dikshitar. For, were not the town and its surroundings enriched by the noble presence of that great master of music?

Back in Tiruvarur, Dikshitar spent most of his time in the temple, teaching his disciples and continuing to produce compositions of eternal grandeur.

A year passed by in quiet contemplation and spiritual practices. It was 1823. An unconfirmed report from Madurai reached Tiruvarur that Chinnaswami Dikshitar had passed away. In those days of a near absence of any communication facilities, one had to rely upon word-to-mouth transmission of news. Muthuswami Dikshitar was



perturbed. Here was this shattering news that disturbed his life of tranquillity, his daily routine of worshipping Lord Tyagaraja and Goddess Kamalamba, his teaching his beloved disciples and more importantly his spiritual progress. Though a man of great detachment, Dikshitar was a normal human being given to brotherly affection. Even a man of the maturest wisdom would have found it difficult to cope with the loss of dear ones. Dikshitar also did not hear about his youngest sibling Baluswami. He decided to find out about Chinnaswami as also to trace Baluswami.

Dikshitar and his two wives left for Madurai. This ancient city is about 150 miles from Tiruvarur. There are not many important kshetras on the way, excepting the hill temple of Palani in the west, and further, Dikshitar was also in a hurry to reach Madurai. We can therefore safely surmise that either Dikshitar visited Palani after a few days sojourn at Madurai or he did so while returning to Tiruvarur from Ettayapuram.

Madurai is known as Pandya Naadu and as 'Alavai' in the Puranas. There is mention of the Pandyas in the two great epics, Ramayana and Mahabharata. Mention is also made in stone inscriptions of Emperor Ashoka in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century B. C. about the Pandya kingdoms. These testify to the ancientness of the Pandya empire and the city of Madurai. Ancient Tamil literature also corroborates the antiquity of the Pandya empire. The Pandyas established Tamil Sangams (Academies) for the purpose of patronising literature. It was the Sangam that fostered the Tamil language. Great religious personalities such as Sundaramurti Nayanar, Tirujnanasambandar and Manikkavachakar were associated with Madurai and with the Pandyas. Later the Nayaks ruled Madurai and during an unfortunate interregnum, the Mohammedans too ruled the place.

The composer enquired of people at Madurai about his brother but could not get exact details. One can only imagine the great man's plight. We do not know how psychologically affected Dikshitar became, but it should also be borne in mind that he was well advanced on the spiritual path and the vairagya, the dispassion that he developed as a result of his tapas must certainly have stood his mind and heart in good stead. Therefore, putting aside his grief and anxiety Dikshitar decided to have darshan of Goddess Minakshi.



Lord Siva ordained that the temple be built by the king Kulasekhara Pandya which the latter did. Parvati was born as daughter to Kulasekhara Pandya's son Malayadvaja Pandya and married the Lord at the appropriate time. The Divine Marriage took place in Madurai. A large part of the Madurai Minakshi temple was built between the 13<sup>th</sup> and the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. This is one of the largest temples in India and is famous throughout the country as an important pilgrim centre. This is perhaps the only Siva temple which is widely known not by the Lord's name but by that of His Consort. The other famous Siva temples are referred to as Natarajar kOvil (Chidambaram), Annamalaiyar or Arunachaleswarar kOvil (Tiruvannamalai) or Tyagarajar kOvil (Tiruvarur), but the Madurai temple is not referred to as Somasundareswarar kOvil but as Minakshi kOvil. This testifies not only to the great importance of the Goddess but also Her religious and spiritual power. The icon of Goddess Minakshi is a beautifully sculpted one and holds one in thrall. With Her fish-like eyes and the parrot in Her hand, the green hued Minakshi arrests the minds of Her devotees and occupies a permanent place in their hearts. Such is the beauty and power of the icon that one cannot take one's eyes off it. The Upanishads speak of three types of spiritual initiation by the guru and gives three species belonging to the animal kingdom as examples. The bird hatches its eggs by sitting on them. This is compared to the guru's initiation by touch. The fish hatches its eggs by merely looking at them. This is initiation by glance. The tortoise hatches its eggs by just thinking of them. This is initiation just by thinking. The deep inner meaning of the name of the Goddess is that She, the fish-eyed, grants Her supreme grace to the devotees who

have Her darshan and takes them into Her fold. No wonder that Dikshitar too was fascinated by the Goddess's mien and overwhelmed by Her spiritual power.

His masterpiece in the rAga gamakakriyA (now referred to as pUrvikalyANi), mInAkShi mEmudam dEhi, reflects his deep devotion and the music literally moves one's heart, so sublime is the creation. Dikshitar here refers to Goddess Minakshi as one who cuts asunder the bonds of passion and liberates Her devotees. This song was to play an important role in the last moments of Dikshitar's life. The varAli composition mAmava mInAkShi is a charming little piece as is shrI mInAkShi gauri in the rare rAga gauri. The mOhana song kAdambari priyAyai is also his tribute to the Goddess. Dikshitar also composed a series of eight songs on Minakshi. These are called the madhurAmba series. One of them is in the rare 46<sup>th</sup> mELa rAga stavarAjam. The others are in devakriyA, dEsi simhAravam, bilahari, bEgaDa, kalyANi, aThANA and paraju



On Lord Somasundareswara, Dikshitar composed the song sOmasundarEshvaram in the rare rAga shuddha vasanta. As seen before, Madurai was the place where the Goddess, who was born to MalayadhwaJa Pandya, married Lord Sundareswara. Maha Vishnu gave His sister, the Goddess in marriage. Therefore Vishnu too is important at Madurai. He is known as Azhagar in Tamil and as Sundararaja in Sanskrit. It is significant that the names of both Siva and Vishnu here contain the term 'sundara' meaning beauty. Lord Sundararaja has His temple about eight miles away from Madurai at Azhagar Koil, beautifully set at the foot of the Pazhamudirsholai hills, one of the six sacred abodes of Subramanya. True to the name given, the icon of Lord Vishnu is imposing and is a sculptural beauty. Dikshitar visited Azhagar Koil and composed the kAshirAmakriya song shrI sundararAjam.

Tirupparankunram on the outskirts of Madurai is another of the six abodes of Subramanya connected with His marriage to Devayani. Dikshitar must have visited Tirupparankunram. Two compositions are attributed to this shrine, gajAmbA nAyakO in jhanjUTi and gajAdIshAdanyam in nATakurinji though there is no mention of the kShEtra in either song.

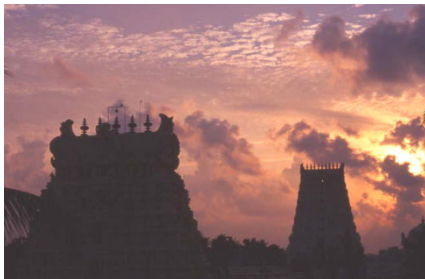
The river Vaigai originates from a lake at what is now called Tekkadi in the western ghats and flows eastward through the very heart of Madurai city. On its banks is a temple for Vinayaka. In His praise, Dikshitar wrote the bilahari song 'Ekadantam bhajEham' referring to the temple being on the banks of the river Vaigai at Madurai.

The kriti sarasa souvIra in the rare rAga souvIra is said to have been composed by Muthuswami Dikshitar at the shrine of Pushpavaneswara in the village of Pushpavanam near Madurai.

It is said that once when Muthuswami Dikshitar was singing the kritis mInAkShi mEmudam and mAmava mInAkShi at the Madurai temple, the priests of the temple asked him as to where he hailed from. Dikshitar's disciple Tevur Subramania Iyer who had accompanied his guru told the priests that they were from Tiruvarur and that the composer of the kritis that they had just heard was the personage in front of them and that his name was Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar. The priests and other devotees after paying their respects to the great man then said that two musicians hailing from Tiruvarur had visited the temple a few times and that the elder of them, Chinnaswami Dikshitar had passed away and that the younger one, Baluswami Dikshitar, distressed at the loss, had gone on pilgrimage to Rameswaram. Dikshitar immediately decided to visit Rameswaram in order to meet his youngest brother.

A pilgrimage to Kashi is enjoined upon every devout Hindu. But the pilgrimage to Kashi is not complete without visiting Rameswaram and performing abhiShEka to the Lord with the holy water of the Ganga. Rameswaram is an island situated about 100 miles from Madurai. The island is shaped like a conch and stands at the edge of the Palk Straits. The Bay of Bengal meets the Indian Ocean at Dhanushkoti, a few miles from Rameswaram. Rameswaram and its surrounding areas are popularly connected with the story of Sri Rama. It was from here that the Prince of Ayodhya marched to Sri Lanka to wage war against Ravana and rescue his Consort Sri Sita. After the victorious battle with Ravana, Sri Rama on his way back to Ayodhya, arrived at Rameswaram. To atone for the sin of killing Ravana, Sri Rama decided to offer worship to Lord Siva and bid his lieutenant Hanuman to bring a Linga from the Himalayas. Since Hanuman was delayed, Sri Sita made a Linga out of sand. This is the Ramanatha Linga. Meanwhile Hanuman returned with a Sivalinga and was upset that his efforts were in vain. Sri Rama, in order to pacify him, gave the name Viswalinga to Hanuman's Linga and ordained that it should be worshipped first. Thus the sanctum contains two Sivalingas. A bath in the sea, in the 22 tIrtas inside the temple and at Dhanushkoti island are considered mandatory for a Hindu and are supposed to wash away one's sins. The Lord is Sri Ramanathaswamy (worshipped by Sri Rama) and the Goddess is Parvatavardhini.





**East Gopuram of Rameswaram temple**



**Ramanathaswamy with Parvatavardhini**

Dikshitar, as a devout follower of sanAtana dharmA must certainly have followed the shAstraic injunctions. After the performance of the prescribed rituals, Muthuswami Dikshitar had darshan of the deities and composed the kAshirAmakriya kriti rAmanAtham bhajEham in praise of the Lord and parvatavardhani in sAma rAga in praise of the Goddess. At the temple Dikshitar heard from certain people that Baluswami Dikshitar had visited Rameswaram and stayed for a few days and that he regularly sang at the shrine. They also told him that during this period, the Raja of Ettayapuram had visited Rameswaram and attracted by the music had requested Baluswami to accompany him to Ettayapuram which invitation the latter had accepted. Dikshitar was happy as he now knew the exact whereabouts of his brother.

On the way, between Rameswaram and Ramanathapuram, is the village of Tiruppullani. This was where Sri Rama worshipped the Mother Goddess. The Prince of Ayodhya slept on a bed of grass and performed intense tapas in order to secure Her blessings for the success of his mission of rescuing Sri Sita. Hence the place is called Tiruppullani in Tamil or Darbhashayanam in Sanskrit. There is a beautiful temple to Sri Rama here. Offering worship to the Perumal, Dikshitar wrote the song srI rAmam ravikulAbdi sOmam in the rAga nArayaNagauLa. This is an exceptional composition and is a veritable lesson in that rAga.

Dikshitar continued his journey in the direction of Ettayapuram. One has to pass through extremely arid regions on the way. The entire territory is permanently drought affected. The earth is parched and rarely does one come across a shade giving tree. The situation has not changed over time. He then took some rest at a chatram where he espied a few priests who were discussing about a marriage to take place at Ettayapuram. Dikshitar enquired of them and discovered that Baluswami Dikshitar, who was now an AsthAna vidwAn of the Ettayapuram court was to get married and that they were on their way there. The festivities promised to be grand and brahmins could hope to be fed and compensated well. Dikshitar then revealed that the bridegroom was none other than his own younger brother. The priests were delighted and said that they would be happy to take Dikshitar to Ettayapuram along with them. Thus, Dikshitar, his two wives and the earnest disciple Tevur Subramania Iyer who followed Dikshitar like a shadow, much like Lakshmana of Ramayana fame, accompanied the priests.

A few miles from Sattur, the party sat down at a grove for rest. Dikshitar was tired and thirsty. The owner of the grove after offering water to Dikshitar and attracted by the latter's divine mien, related the heartrending tale of the people of that region. For many years now there was scanty rain. The fields were parched and so were the throats



of the people. Poverty and hunger were quite common. Listening to the hardship of the people Dikshitar's heart melted. As a divine personage, it occurred naturally to him that he should do something about the situation. What better way than to appeal to the Supreme Power through song? Then and there, Muthuswami Dikshitar created a new rAga and composed a song in it. In the song he appealed to the Mother Goddess to pour rain as amritA (amritEshwari salilam varShaya, varShaya, varShaya). Appropriately named, the rAga amritavarShiNi is Dikshitar's gift to the music world. Which mother can resist the earnest appeals of her son? Much less the Divine Mother. As Dikshitar prayed and sang 'AnandAmritAkarShiNi', the skies darkened accompanied by lightning and thunder. Rains poured to the happiness and satisfaction of the people of that area. They fell prostrate at Dikshitar's feet and sought his blessings. Though seemingly a miracle and somewhat incredible, such occurrences are not rare, especially when the individual concerned is a mahApuruSha as Dikshitar.

Dikshitar and party continued their journey and reached Ettayapuram.

Ettayapuram was officially granted zamindari in 1803. The zamindar had his jurisdiction over 650 square miles. The Ettayapuram zamindari, at the time of Muthuswami Dikshitar's visit, consisted of about 350 villages whose welfare, the Rajah, as the zamindar was called, oversaw. The chief business of Ettayapuram was export of black cotton which grew on its soil. Ettayapuram was named after Ettappa Nayakkan who was the commander of the Vijayanagar empire at Chandragiri in North Arcot district. After the Vijayanagar empire fell, Ettappa Nayakkan fled to Madurai, where the then king gave him refuge and allotted him lands in Tirunelveli district. This was the beginning of the Ettayapuram zamindari. Venkateswara Ettappa who was the zamindar at the time of Dikshitar's visit, was considered by the British to be a very honourable and generous man. He is supposed to have initiated a lot of developmental works, including building bridges and chatrams, in his fiefdom. The zamindar's palace at the eastern end of the town is a series of heterogeneous buildings. Right opposite the main gate is the kalyANa mahAl and on its left is the spacious darbAr hall. Beyond these are the private residences of the Rajah's family. Besides his generosity and charitable nature, Venkateswara Ettappa was also well known for his liberal patronage of the arts and artists. Numerous musicians, composers and dancers adorned his court, as did poets and littérateurs. It was to such a place that our great composer came.

One can only imagine the joy and happiness that Baluswami Dikshitar experienced on beholding his eldest brother. Of course, though a symbol of true tapas and therefore a picture of divinity itself, Muthuswami Dikshitar was not above affection or love, especially towards his blood relations. The delight of the Rajah of Ettayapuram Venkateswara Ettappa was palpable. The Rajah who had until then only heard of Dikshitar and listened to his compositions from Baluswami was alacrity itself and exhibited great reverence towards the composer. He was also happy that the eldest brother had arrived in time to bless his sibling on the latter's marriage. The poets, musicians and composers of the Ettayapuram court exhibited no less veneration towards Dikshitar. The festivities connected with Baluswami's marriage were spread over five days as was the custom of those times. The marriage was celebrated in a grand manner and needless to say that the ceremonies and the attendant music and dance concerts gained more honour because of the divine presence of Muthuswami Dikshitar.

After the festivities were over the Rajah requested Dikshitar to make Ettayapuram his home and thus bestow eternal honour on his small kingdom. How could Dikshitar accede to this request? Being the child of Lord Thyagaraja and Goddess Kamalambika, Dikshitar could not bear the thought of relocating from Tiruvarur. Further, he had responsibilities towards his disciples. Many of them were at an advanced stage of their musical education under him. Shudda Maddalam Tambiyappan, Tevur Subramania Iyer, Kamalam and Ammani were among these. A few young disciples had just begun their tutelage under him. Besides, there were frequent interruptions in their musical education because of Dikshitar's pilgrimage to various shrines. His recent sojourn of four years at Tanjavur had also resulted in some of the disciples not being able to learn from him directly, though Tambiyappan, one of the senior most disciples of Dikshitar, taught the juniors. But how could anyone replace the great master? Dikshitar explained to Venkateswara Ettappa that he could not bear to be separated from Lord Thyagaraja and Goddess Kamalambika. He also had his commitments towards his disciples. He would therefore leave his second wife at Ettayapuram to be of help to Baluswami. But, he with his first wife and disciple Tevur Subramania Iyer would have to return to Tiruvarur. The call had come, the call of his home soil. Nevertheless, there would come a time when he, Dikshitar, would be able to spend some more time at Ettayapuram. Though disappointed, the Rajah had to agree. For the scholars, poets, musicians and dancers of the court, the few weeks that they spent with the great man were invaluable. They too reluctantly bid him farewell. Dikshitar left for Tiruvarur with his first wife and his disciple Subramania Iyer. On the way Dikshitar once again had darshan of the great temple of Madurai and paid homage to Lord Sundaeswara and Goddess Minakshi.

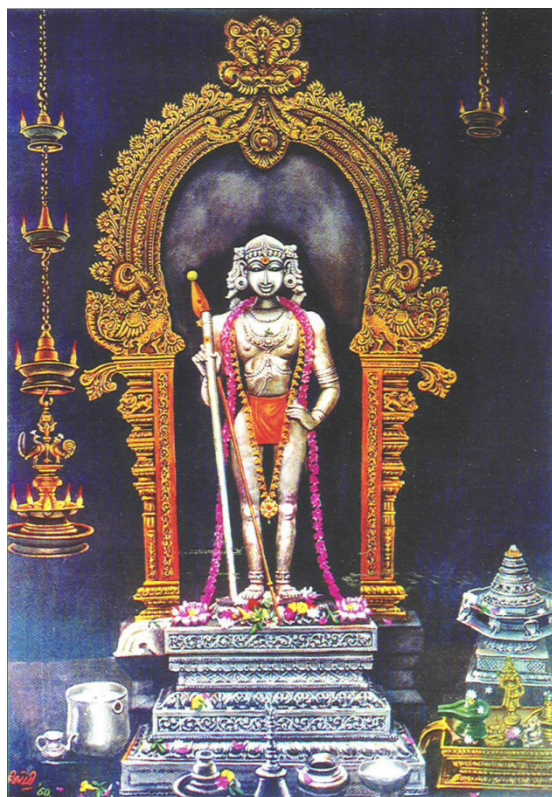
He then visited Palani, the most famous hill abode of Lord Subramanya. Palani is about 120 k.m. from Madurai and nestles between the Kodaikanal hills and the Western Ghats of Kerala. It was to the hillock here that Lord Muruga repaired after a quarrel with his Divine Parents over a fruit that they gave to their elder son Vinayaka.



The beautiful Ananda bhairavi kriti danDAYudapANim is dedicated to Lord Subramanya here. Though the kriti does not directly refer to Palani, there are references to the kShEtra that place it as a song in praise of Lord Dandaydapani here.

The beautiful idol of Muruga that adorns the inner sanctum was made out of the nine poisons, navabhASHANam by the great Bhoga Siddha. Dikshitar refers to this indirectly as 'mAYa mUlaka andam', i.e., bound together by the poisons. After a fulfilling darshan of Lord Subramanya, Dikshitar left for Tiruvarur. It was 1825.

Dikshitar resumed his normal routines at Tiruvarur. Visiting the great temple, singing at the shrines of the Lord and Goddess, visiting the nearby shrines whenever possible and teaching his disciples, the composer lived a peaceful life. He was 50 years old now, spiritually ripe. His life's work was progressing well and was almost nearing completion. New disciples came and joined him to partake of the nectar of the divine art that he liberally bestowed upon the sincere, devoted student. A youngster, not more than 15 years old, came to Dikshitar with the desire to learn from him. Panchanada Iyer belonged to Sattanur near Tanjavur. Well versed in the Vedas and sAshttras, Panchanadam, nevertheless, was more interested in pursuing music. Panchanadam was Dikshitar's last and youngest disciple. He joined Dikshitar towards the end of the third decade of the 19th century.



மூலவர் - அருள்மிகு தண்டாயுதபாணி சுவாமி

After about a year at Ettayapuram where she remained in order to assist Baluswami Dikshitar and his wife, the second wife of Muthuswami Dikshitar returned to Tiruvarur.

Baluswami himself came to Tiruvarur and spent a few months with his elder brother, imbibing more of the latter's works. Baluswami also conveyed the Ettayapuram Rajah's request that Dikshitar return to Ettayapuram and make that place his home.

Two years after his return to Tiruvarur, Dikshitar heard of the passing on of his illustrious contemporary Shyama Sastri at Tanjavur and was much aggrieved. The departure of this exceptional phenomenon from this earth made him ponder over his own life again. As an expert in astrology Dikshitar already knew that he would not live to be beyond 60. Which meant that there were just seven or eight years left for him.

During the late 1820s, Muthuswami Dikshitar's two wives left this world one after another. He now had no other commitments. He could spend all of his time for the rest of his life in spiritual contemplation. There was also no one to look after him and his needs. Of course, the disciples did their best but none could be expected to live full time with the master and serve him, for, they also had their commitments to their respective families. Dikshitar therefore left for Ettayapuram after taking leave of his disciples and blessing them. The decision to permanently leave the presence of Lord Tyagaraja and Goddess Kamalamba would not have been an easy one to make,

nevertheless, the Divine Couple were enshrined in his heart. It would be safe to conclude that Dikshitar did not at this stage require outward support for his spiritual goal. Being a staunch, practising advaitin, he knew that he had to someday give up the attachment even towards the gods.

Dikshitar was received with great enthusiasm at Ettayapuram. The joy of the Rajah, Venkateswara Ettappa and his court was greater this time, as they knew that the composer had come to Ettayapuram for good. Some of Dikshitar's disciples like Tevur Subramania Iyer, Tirukkadayur Bharati and Sattanur Panchanada Iyer accompanied him and they too were received enthusiastically by the gentry of Ettayapuram. The Rajah gave Dikshitar a house to live in. This was very near the palace and it was next to this house that more than 50 years later, the revolutionary Tamil poet Subramanya Bharati was to be born.

Dikshitar made use of his sojourn at Ettayapuram to visit nearby places of pilgrimage. Kankashaila or Kazhugumalai (the hill of the vulture) is on the road from Kovilpatti to Sankarankoil. The topography of the whole area is typical Tirunelveli, with rocky outcrops dotting the region. Kazhugumalai is a huge rock about 300 feet high. The temple is a rock cut one, a cave temple, veTTuvAn kOvil, as they call it locally. It has beautiful sculptures adorning its inner walls and its dome. Lord Subramanya at Kazhugumalai is the tutelary deity of the Ettayapuram zamindars and the temple belongs to them. It was on this Lord that Dikshitar wrote the shuddha dhanyAsi composition 'subramaNyEna rakShitOham'.

Dikshitar then visited Sankarankovil where both Siva and Vishnu give darshan as Sankaranarayana. Here Dikshitar wrote shankaranArAyaNam in the rare rAga nArAyaNa dEsAkShi. The shore temple of Tiruchendur is the biggest for Lord Subramanya and it is one of the six main temples (paDai vIDu) for the Divine Son of Siva and Parvati. It is situated on the Bay of Bengal coast. The sUrasamhAram festival is very famous here. It was here that Adi Sankara, the preceptor of Advaita, composed his subramaNya bhujangam. Dikshitar paid tribute to this deity in the tODi song 'srI subramaNyO'. Herein he refers to the temple practice of giving vibhUti prasAdam on dry leaves to devotees. Adi Sankara too mentions this practice in his poem.

Dikshitar then visited Tirunelveli where there is a big temple for Lord Siva as Nellaiyappar. On Nellaiyappar he wrote 'shAlivATIshvaram' in dEvagAndhAri. On the Goddess here, he wrote the dEshi simhAravam piece shrI kAntimatim. Dikshitar is also supposed to have visited the nearby village of Kallidaikurichi and composed the AbhOgi song 'shrI lakshmi varAham' in praise of Lord Vishnu who gives darshan here as varAhA, the boar. Accounts of Dikshitar's life say that he also visited Sabarimalai and Trivandrum and composed the songs 'hariharaputram' in vasanta on Sashta at the former shrine and 'pannagashayana' in madhyamAvati at the latter.

Dikshitar returned to Ettayapuram. A son was born to Venkateswara Ettappa at this time and as a tribute to Dikshitar, the Rajah named him Muthuswami. Early in 1835, the marriage of the eldest son of the Rajah was celebrated. A grand festival of music and dance was held. Muthuswami Dikshitar blessed the festivities. Later that year, Navaratri was also celebrated at the Ettayapuram palace with great devotion and grandeur. The festivities were marked by music and dance performances. Taking advantage of the resurgence in art due to the presence of Dikshitar, many composers and Natyacharyas presented new compositions and works at this festival. The renaissance of music and dance in the Tirunelveli region and the later invaluable contributions of artists and composers of the Ettayapuram court to art can be most certainly attributed to Dikshitar's stay at Ettayapuram and his blessings.

Amidst all this Dikshitar knew that his end was nearing. He was 60 years old. He was fully satisfied with the accomplishment of his life's mission. He had bequeathed to the world his immortal music, eternal works of bhakti and vEdAnta. The time had come for him to leave.

21st October 1835. It was dIpAvali, naraka chaturdashi day. A day of lights, when the darkness of ignorance is dispelled and the lamp of True Knowledge shines. Dikshitar got up very early in the morning and as per tradition had his ritual bath, the gangA snAnam. He then sat down for pUja. Just then the Rajah of Ettayapuram came running to Dikshitar's house. He was deeply perturbed. The royal elephant named Kangeyan had broken its chains and running amuck through the town had gone to the crematorium on the outskirts where it lay, not allowing anyone, even the mahout, to come near it. According to traditional belief, such a happening was inauspicious and it indicated trouble and suffering for the Rajah and his fiefdom. Venkateswara Ettappa asked Dikshitar whether the incident of the elephant lying at the crematorium portended any danger to him or his kingdom. Dikshitar replied that neither he, the Rajah, nor his kingdom, would come to grief. So saying, Dikshitar blessed Venkateswara Ettappa. Greatly relieved at this blessing from Dikshitar whom he considered as his guru, the Rajah returned to his palace.

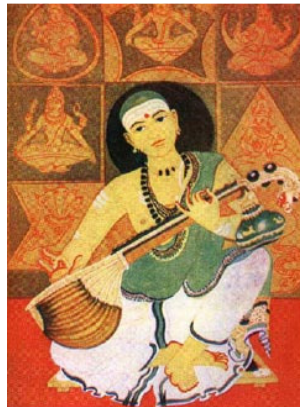
Dikshitar performed navAvaraNa pUja elaborately. After the pUja was over he asked for his vINa to be brought and played a few of his own compositions for some time. He then asked his disciples, including his brother Baluswami, who had gathered around him, to sing and specifically asked for his gamakakriyA masterpiece 'mInAkshi

mEmudam dEhi'. While the disciples were singing the anupallavi lines 'mInalOcani pAshamOcani', he asked them to repeat it again. When the disciples were singing the said lines again, Dikshitar breathed his last. His soul was free of its moorings. Muthuswami Dikshitar's pilgrimage on earth was over. The Eternal Pilgrim had merged with Eternity. The brother and the disciples who did not expect Dikshitar to leave them so soon were dumbstruck.

The Rajah rushed to Dikshitar's house on hearing of the sad news. He lamented that he had not understood the true import of the prophetic words of the master. What greater tragedy could befall him and his kingdom than the passing away of his guru whom he revered as God Himself? Arrangements were made for the last journey of Muthuswami Dikshitar. His mortal remains were cremated and the ashes were buried on a piece of land next to the palace. A samAdhi structure was put up over the urn containing the ashes.

Not everyone is blessed with such a manner of death. It is only the truly blessed, the true children of God, the staunch unremitting devotee and the true follower of the highest spiritual practices that are fortunate enough to leave this world in a manner that is as sublime as it is a striking message for everyone present on the occasion and for those who listen to it. With the Lord's name in his mind, with a song on his lips and with profound peace within his heart, the great composer, in the manner of his death, left none in doubt that he had merged in the Eternal Soul.

In the pUrvi rAga kriti 'shrI guruguhasya dAsOham', a song belonging to the guru guha vibhakti series, Dikshitar says that he is a dAsa or servant of the guru, but immediately, in the next line says that he, i.e., Dikshitar is guru guha Himself. The real Guru is the Eternal Soul enshrined in the cave of the heart. This is what is meant by the term 'guru guha'. For the musically inclined, whether an artist or rasika, Muthuswami Dikshitar is the Eternal Guru ever enshrined in our hearts, as are his two equally great and illustrious contemporaries Shyama Sastri and Tyagaraja.



*The Music of  
Muthuswami  
Dikshitar  
S. Sreenivasa Rao*





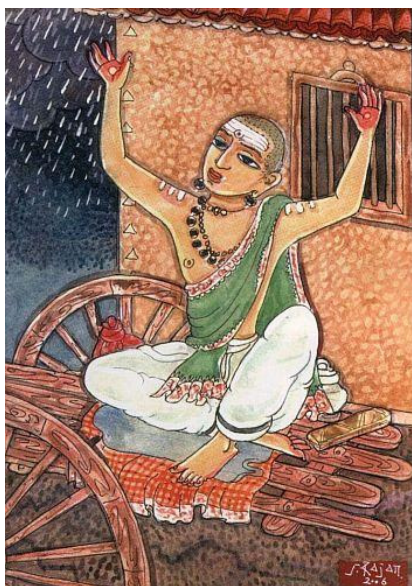
Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar was a versatile intellect. He was open to a variety of influences. His works reflect some of those influences rather explicitly while some others shine through in a subtle way. Before we get into a discussion about Dikshitar's creations, we need to recognize a few features that influenced him.

- Muthuswami Dikshitar was a *vainikagayaka*, a musician who sang as he played on the Veena. He was well trained both in vocal and instrumental music. Naturally, the graces, the rich *gamaka prayogas* of his compositions structured in slow tempo shine in mellow glow when played on the Veena.
- In his childhood he received training in the *lakshya* and *lakshana* aspects of Carnatic music. The *lakshana gitams* and *prabandhas* of Venkatamakhi formed an important input of his training. Later, as a composer, he chose to follow Venkatamakhi's system of Mela\_classification of ragas.
- He spent seven years at Varanasi, in the prime of his youth. He was captivated by the grandeur, the spaciousness and the purity of the ancient Drupad School. He learnt Dhrupad diligently; and that left a lasting impression on his works.
- Earlier in his teenage he gained familiarity with Western music; and traces of its influence can be noticed in the movement of his songs.
- He had a good command over Sanskrit; and learnt to use it to express his ideals and aspirations in pristine poetry. He had a fascination for *sabdalankara*, beautifully turned phrases and wordplay. He had the composure of a yogi and the heart of a poet. Dikshitar's kritis are therefore adorned with poetic imagery, tranquil grace, a certain majesty steeped in devotion.
- Dikshitar had acquired a fair knowledge of *Jyothisa*, *Ayurveda*, and iconography and of temple architecture.
- He was unattached to possessions or to a place (*jangama*). He was a virtual pilgrim all his life. He visited a large number of shrines and sang about them and the deities enshrined there.
- He was intensely devotional yet not overly affiliated a particular deity. He composed soulful songs in praise of a number of gods and goddesses.
- He had a fascination for composing a set of kritis exploring the various dimensions of on a particular, as if he had undertaken a project.
- He was an Advaitin well grounded in Vedanta.

And above all,

- Dikshitar was an ardent Sri Vidya *Upasaka*; a *Sadhaka*, an intense devotee of Devi, *the divine mother*. He was a master of Tantra and of Yantra puja. The Tantra ideology permeates all through his compositions.

It is the harmonious confluence of these influences that one finds in Dikshitar's music.



**Anandamruthavarshini by Shri S Rajam**

### Output

Muthuswami Dikshitar was prolific; about 479 of his compositions have now been identified, spread over 193 ragas. These include four *Ragamalikas* and about forty *Nottuswara sahithya* verses. The great Venkatamakhi who formulated the 72 *Mela\_kartha* ragas is reported to have wondered "of the 72 Melas only a few are known and found in practice... and will the permutation be a waste.?" (Dr.V Raghavan: paper presented at All India Oriental conference, at Hyderabad, 1941). It was the genius of Muthuswami Dikshitar that gave form and substance to all the 72 *Mela\_kartha* ragas, fulfilling the dream of Venkatamakhi. He gave expression to nearly 200 ragas of that system.

Muthuswami Dikshitar was a pilgrim virtually all his life. He visited a large number of shrines and sang about them and the deities enshrined there. He was intensely devotional yet not overly affiliated to a particular deity. He composed soulful songs in praise of a number of gods and goddesses. About 74 of such temples are featured in his kritis; and there are references to about 150 gods and goddesses. The most number of his kritis (176) were in praise of Devi the mother principle, followed by (131) kritis on Shiva. Dikshitar was the only major composer who sang in praise of Chaturmukha Brahma.

Some scholars have said that Dikshitar's songs are summaries of Durga Suktam, Sri Suktam and Purusha Suktam. He built in the mantras in a few krithis like *Sri Raaja raajeshwari* (madyamavathi), *pavanatmaja aagaccha* (naatta). For the benefit of those who couldn't practice rituals he composed vaara krithis on *navagrahas*. Similarly, he opened the doors to the secret world of Sri Vidya, for the benefit of all, through his Kamalamba navavarana kritis.

Dikshitar had a fascination for composing sets of kritis on a composite theme, perhaps in an attempt to explore the various dimensions of the subject. In some of these, he employed all the eight *Vibhaktis*, the various cases that delineate a noun. No other composer has attempted so many group kritis in such a planned, orderly, meticulous fashion. The following are some Important Krithi Groups

- Guruguha Vibhakti krithis
- Kamalamba Nava Varnams
- Navagraha Krithis
- Nilotpalamba vibhakti Krithis
- PanchalingaKshetra kritis
- Rama vibhakti Krithis
- Tiruvarur Pancalinga kritis
- Thyagaraja vibhakti Krithis
- Abhayamba vibhakti Krithis
- Madhuramba vibhakti Krithis

The selection of raga and tala; and the diction of these kritis demonstrate his musical skills and intellectual refinement.

It is rather difficult to arrange Dikshitar's compositions in a chronological order. His *Nottuswara Shitya* verses were, of course, composed in his early years while his family lived at Manali a small town near Madras. His first composition as *Vak\_geya* Kara was *Srinathandi* in Mayamalava gaula at the hill shrine of Tiruttani; and his last composition was *Ehi Annapurne* in Punnagavarali, while he was at Ettayapuram during his last years. It is believed that the set of Vibhakti kritis followed his first composition. Thereafter he travelled to Kanchipuram, Mayuram, Chidambaram, Vaidyanatha koil and Kumbhakonam. He often visited Tiruchirapalli (where it is said his daughter lived). He spent his productive years at Tiruvavur and his final years in Ettayapuram. In between, he is believed to have visited about 70 temples and sung the glory of those deities. It is however not possible to arrange those kritis in a sequence.

### Ragas

Dikshitar followed the *mela paddhati* (a system of classifying ragas) devised by Venkatamakhi, to whose school he belonged. In handling the *vivadi melas*, Dikshitar followed Venkatamakhi and avoided unharmonious expressions, *prayogas*. Further, since Kharaharapriya was not a part of venkatamakhi's scheme, there is no known composition of Dikshitar in that raga. The twenty-second melakarta was Sri Raga; the mangal kriti of Navavarana series is composed in Sri Raga. Again, Venkatamakhi tradition treated Bhairavi and Anandha Bhairavi as *upanga* ragas; so did Dikshitar.

Some scholars opine that Dikshitar's major service to Carnatic music is that he gave expression to nearly 200 ragas of Venkatamakhi. He also breathed life into a number of ancient ragas that were fading away. Several ancient ragas found a new lease of life through Dikshitar's kritis. To name a few of them: *Mangalakaisiki*, *Ghanta*, *Gopikavasanta*, *Narayana Gaula*, *Sulini*, *Samantha*, *maargadheshi* and *mohana naatta*. Even today their *lakshanas* are illustrated mainly through Dikshitar's creations.

There are many *ragas* which are employed only by Dikshitar; for instance; *Saranganata*, *Chhaya Goula*, *Poorvi*, *Padi*, *Mahuri*, *Suddhavasanta*, *Kumudakriya*, and *Amritavarshini*. In *Dwijavanti*, *Chetasri* and *Akhilandeshwari* stand out in solitary splendor.

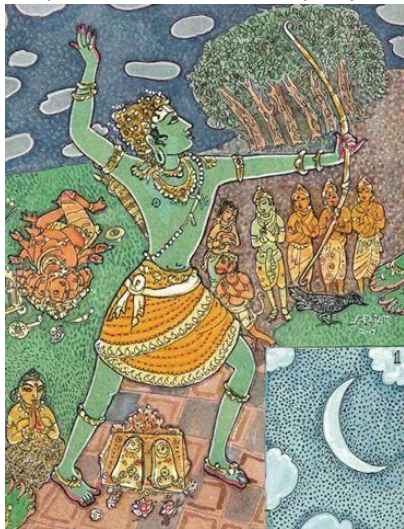
He transformed many Outhareya, the Hindustani ragas into Carnatic form through his creative genius. His interpretation and rendering of ragas like *Dwijavathi*, *Ramkali*, and *Yamakalyani*, *Hamirkalyani*, and *Brindavan*

*sarang* are highly original and creative. He made them into his own. His *Cheta sri* is so wonderfully well adapted to Carnatic *raga\_bhava* that one scarcely notices the *Outthereya* traces in its character. He took in the best aspects of the other system, transformed them and enriched both the systems.

Shankarabharanam scale appears to have been his forte; there are as many as 96 kritis based on that scale. The kritis in Harikambhoji scale number about 63; while 57 kritis are in Kharaharapriya scale. He had a special affinity for Mayamalava\_gaula in which he composed about 51 songs. The derivatives of that scale such as Saalanga Nata, Paadi and Mangala Kaishiki would have been lost but for Dikshitar.

## Taala

Dikshitar was accomplished in the matter of talas, the rhythmic patterns. He is the only composer to have set his music in all the seven basic taalas. He employed all the Saptha Talas in his *Vara-Stutis* i.e. a song for each day of the week. He is said to have used ten improvised varieties of taalas in his compositions. The majority of his compositions are set in Adi (190) and Rupaka (139) taalas.



## Music

The most fascinating aspect of Dikshitar's songs is the grandeur and majesty of his music, sublime lyrics, intellectual brilliance and the overall technical sophistication. They exude a tranquil joy. His vision of the ragas and their structure is inspiring.

Dikshitar was blessed with the heart of a poet and the composure of a yogi. He was an intense devotee but undemonstrative. There is therefore certain composure, measured grace, dignity and a mellow joy glowing through his music as in his life. The Drupad way of elaboration captured his imagination. The tempo of his songs is mostly the *Vilambakala*- slow, measured and majestic; rich in *gamaka* just as the meends on a Veena. Dikshitar aptly called himself "*Vainika gayaka guruguhanuta*".

Dikshitar's treatment of the raga exemplifies the essence of *raga bhaava* and brings out its delicate shades. It is as if the musician is immersed in contemplative meditation. The graces, the rich *gamaka prayogas* of his compositions structured in slow tempo shine in mellow glow when played on the Veena.

This is amply reflected in his works ; for instance in *Cheta Sri* (Dvijawanthi), *Balagopala* (Bhairavi), *Sri Rajagopala* (Saveri), *Meenakshi Me Mudam* (Poorvikalyani) and in *Sri Subramanyaya Namasthe* (Kambhoji). The other compositions of this genre are *Dakshinamuthe* (shankrabharanam), *Manasaguruguha* (anandabhiravi), *EhiAnnappaurne* (punnagavarali), *Amba Neelayatakshi* (nilambari) and each of the nava\_varana kritis. These are monumental works.

It is not all slow and spacious. He built into his compositions exhilarating bursts of speed and sparkling delight as if in celebration of the divine spirit, towards the end. Certain kritis are interlaced with *Madhyamakala Sahitya*, passages in tempo faster than the rest of the kriti (E.g. *Mahaganapatim* in Nata). Dikshitar redefined the treatment of even the traditional Carnatic ragas by way of elaborate beginning, rich in gamakas resembling the sliding *meends as*, for instance, in the slow paced majesty of *Akshyalinga Vibho* (Shankarabharanam) or in *Balagopala* (Bhairavi), portraying the beauty of the divine child, Krishna. His *Nirajakshi Kamakshi* in Hindolam with *dha flat* entirely changed the way *Hindolam* came to be sung by his contemporaries and by the later Carnatic musicians. Dikshitar was well versed in the *alapana paddhati* and followed it in the elaboration of the kriti. The musicologists have said "The most outstanding aspect of the compositions of Dikshitar is their richness in *raga bhava*". His sense of selection of the apt *sancharas* of the raga to bring out the true emotion is remarkable. They range from the *mandra* to the *tara sthayi* and give a complete picture of the raga. It is said that if you sing his kriti in *akara*, it can bring out the character of the raga. His kritis are virtually, *raga alapana*, chiseled to fit in with tala and dressed in *sahitya*.



**Ranganayakam by Shri S Rajam**

### Structure of kritis

His kritis are well structured, close knit and written in graceful Sanskrit. Dikshitar's kritis do not have more than one Charanam; and as many as 157 of his creations are *Samasti-charanams* carrying no Anupallavi or the Anupallavi acting as Charanam. His rhythm is subtle and lyrics are divine.

Each of his compositions is unique, brilliantly crafted and well chiseled work of intricate art. It is incredible how delicately he builds into his tight-knit kritis a wealth of information about the temple, its deity, its architecture and its rituals; and about jyothisha, tantra, mantra, Sri Vidya, Vedanta etc. He also skillfully builds into the lyrics, the name of the raga (*raga mudra*) and his Mudra, signature.

### Language and wordplay

Except for one kriti in Telugu and three *Manipravala* kritis (Sanskrit+Telugu+Tamil) all his other compositions are in Sanskrit. Dikshitar had a good command over Sanskrit; and learnt to express through it his ideals and aspirations in pristine poetry. He had the composure of a yogi and the heart of a poet. Dikshitar's kritis are therefore adorned with poetic imagery, tranquil grace, a certain majesty steeped in devotion.

He had a fascination for *Sabdalankaras*, adorning his poetry with beautifully turned phrases ringing sweetly like temple bells; captivating rhymes of *Prasa* and *Anuprasa*. He loved the intricate play of words and to coin sweet sounding phrases.

Look at the *pada lalithya*, a grand procession of enchanting phrases:– *Akalanka darpana kapola vishesha; Mana matrike maye marakata chaye; Devi Shakthi beejodbhava matrikarna swaroopini*, and *Komlakara pallava pada kodanda Rama*. The rhyming and ringing phrases – *Shyamalanga, vihanga, sadayapanga satsanga*- are of unparalleled beauty.

He often structured his lyrics in geometric patterns. He enjoyed a childlike delight in employing Yatis (geometric patterns) such as Gopuccha (tapering like the tail of a cow) or it's opposite, the Srotovaha (broadening like the flow of a river) for structuring his lyrics. For instance, in his *Sri Varalakshmi* (Sri) and *Maye Twam Yahi* (Sudha Tarangini) he used the tapering pattern of Gopuccha.

Sarasa Pade,  
Rasapade,  
Sapade,  
Pade.  
de  
Sarasa Kaye  
Rasakaye  
Sakaye  
Aye

In his kriti *Tyagarajayoga Vaibhavam* (Anandabhairavi), Dikshitar uses both the Yatis - Gopuccha Yati and Srotovaha. The phrases are:



Gopuccha Yati (like a cow's tail)

Tyagaraja Yoga Vaibhavam  
Agaraja Yoga Vaibhavam  
Rajayoga Vaibhavam  
Yoga Vaibhavam  
Vaibhavam  
Bhavam  
Vam

And the Srotovaha Yati (Flowing as a river)

Sam  
Prakasham  
Svaroopaa Prakasham  
Tattva Svaroopaa Prakasham  
Sakala Tattva Svaroopaa Prakasham  
Sivasaktyadi Sakala Tattva Svaroopaa Prakasham

Dikshitar at times used *Swaraksharams* i.e., the words matching with the syllables of the notes. For instance, Sadasrita (in *Akshayalinga Vibho*) could be tuned as Sa Da Pa Ma; and Pashankushsa Dharam (in *Siddhi Vinayakam*) could be tuned as Pa SA Ga RI Ni SA.

Muthuswami Dikshitar set the trend for embedding *raga mudra*, the name of the raga, in the lyrics. This served the purpose of establishing the raga of the kriti; and it also added a novel lyrical beauty. Sometimes the *raga mudra* could be as simple as *Brindavana Sarangendra*; or *Satchidananda Bhiravisham*; or *Krithika Suddha Dhyanyena*. But, at times he would ingeniously suggest the raga by hiding it in a complex word, through *shlesha*, a skillful play on words. For instance, as in:

(Veena+Abheri) to suggest Abheri;  
(Panchamukha+arishadvarga\_rahita) to suggest Mukhari; and  
(Chidbimbou+lilavigrahou) to suggest Bouli

Dikshitar also specialized in the use of different *vibhakti* (the various cases that delineate a noun) running parallel. A striking example is the first batch of eight kritis he composed in praise of Lord Subrahmanya of Tiruttani. Sanskrit language employs eight cases (*vibhaktis*) for the declination of a noun, namely nominative (*prathama*), accusative (*dvitIya*), instrumental (*tritIya*), dative (*chaturthi*), ablative (*panchami*), genitive (*Shasti*), locative (*saptami*) and vocative (*sambhodhana*). The eight cases for the noun guruguha would be: guruguhah (guruguho), guruguham, guruguhena, guruguhaya, guruguhah, guruguhasya, guruguhe and (hey or Oh..!) guruguha.

## Guruguha

The *mudra*, the signature for his kritis occurs as Guruguha not only in his classic creations commencing with *Srinathadi*, but also in his earlier Sanskrit verses grouped under *Nottuswara Sahitya*. The term Guruguha means the Guru dwelling in the cave of my heart; and it normally refers to Kartikeya. The term however acquires shades of other meanings depending on the context. Dikshitar was an Advaitin and in that context Guru refers the Supreme Principle Brahman. In his *Sri Guruguha dasoham* he says "I am Guruguha".

Dakshinamurthy the yogic incarnation of Shiva is often referred to by Dikshitar as Guruguha. Again, in his Jambupathe (yaman kalyan) he refers to Shiva the Guru in *nirvikalpa Samadhi* as Guruguha the attribute-less (*nir-vishesha*) blemish-less (*niranjana*) supreme consciousness (*chaitanya*) - (*nir-vishesha chaitanya niranjana guruguha guroo*)

Dikshitar was also a yogi; in his *Shrinathadiguruguho Jayati*, the *Guruguha* is the Lord is seated in his Sahasrara-Lotus and drinking the nectar of his sweet music.

In *Shakta* tradition, the universe is an interplay of shiva and shakthi. The guru is shiva the body and shakthi the energy as guhya shakthi, the intrinsic power. Guruguha is at times a wordplay based on this principle.

Dikshitar was also a *Srividya Upasaka* and as per its tradition he submitted his salutations to that *Guruparampara*. Sri Vidya graduates the evolution from the most subtle form (*Shukshma*) to the gross in 36 steps; the first being *Shiva\_tatva* and the final one being *Prithvi\_tatva*. According to this School, Shiva is Adinatha the progenitor; Shiva is *Adi\_guru*. The tantric texts identify the guru and the mantra with the deity; the three are one. The mantra represents *manas* (mind), the Devata stands for the *prana* (vital force) and the guru represents the aspirant's own self (*atman*). That is the reason Dikshitar in his *Sri Guruguha dasoham* he says "I am Guruguha".

In the Sri Vidyatradition, the Guru is not an abstract concept. Guru is an individual. He also symbolizes the hoary tradition *Sampradaya* in a succession of masters. The human guru is the contemporary master; who has descended in an unbroken line of gurus beginning from Adi Guru Shiva himself. He not only reveals the transcendental reality to the disciple but helps him realize his own essential reality (*svārtha –parārtha-prakāṭana paro guruḥ*). Devotion to the human guru is to purify the mind and fortify it with the spirituality of the guru. In his *Anandeshwara (Anandabhiravi)*, Dikshitar refers to his guru who initiated him as the incarnation of Guruguha (*jnana pradana guruguha\_rupa*).

Dikshitar refers to the Guruparampara as *Adi guruguha varena*. He mentions Paramashiva, Durvasa, Agasthya, Hayagreeva and other gurus of Sri Vidya tradition. Elsewhere he makes a mention of twelve upasakas in three schools of worship in Srividya –Kadi, hadi and sadi- in his line *Kamadi dwadasha \_bhi rupasthitha kadi hadi sadi mantra rupinya iharena navanathena adyena*. Shiva is *Adi\_guru*, the guruguha who resides in the cave of the heart.

### **Influence of Advaita**

Muthuswami Dikshitar was well grounded in Vedanta and he was an Advaitin. The influence of that school of Vedanta is visible in several of his kritis; for instance in *Girijayaa ajayaa* (Shankarabharanam), *saadhu Jana* (purna panchamam), *Sri Guruguha murthe* (udhaya ravichandrika), *Guhad anyam* (Balahamsa), *Ambhikaya Abhayambikaya* (Kedara) and *Abhayamba Jagadamba* (Kalyani) etc.

In these compositions, he speaks about the identity of jiva and Brahman; the superimposition, *Adhyasa*; the seemingly real yet not- real (*maya*); the errors in perception, each atom being the microcosm of the universe (*chidvilasa koti koti cidabhasa*) and other Advaita concepts. In his *Kamalamba Navavarana* kritis in Shankarabharanam he declares "I am guruguha".

### **Influence of Sri Vidya**

Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar was a Devi Upasaka and was well versed in all aspects of Sri Vidya Upasana. His kritis permeated with Sri Vidya are too many to be listed here. The prominent among this genre is the *Kamalamba navavarana* kritis, rich in celebration of the deities and traditions of Sri Chakra worship, expounding in each of the nine kritis, the details of the each avarana of the Sri Chakra. According to him, Sri Vidya protects the devotee: *Bhaktanam Abhayapradam*; and is his way to well being and also the way to liberation (*bhukti mukti prada margam*). He sings in inspired devotion; and beseeches the Divine mother to protect him and guide him along the right path.

There are references to Shaktha tradition in his Nilothpalamba Vibhakthi compositions, the Guruguha Vibhakthi and Abhayamba Vibhakthi compositions, in addition to references in several individual compositions.

Dikshitar composed about 40 kritis spread over four sets of compositions on the subjects related to Sri Vidya; *Kamalamba Navavarana* (11+ 2 kritis); *Nilothpalamba* kritis (8 kritis); *Abhayamba* kritis (10 kritis) and *Guru Kritis* (8 kritis). Of these the *Kamalamba* set of kritis, is highly well organized and is truly remarkable for its classic structure, majesty and erudite knowledge.

Let us talk more about Sri Chakra, Sri Vidya and their influence on Dikshitar, in the next sections.

Muthuswami Dikshitar was a many splendored genius. He gave form and substance to all the 72 *Melakartha ragas*. Besides, he breathed life into several ancient ragas that were fading away from common memory. He redefined the

paradigm of Carnatic music. Each of his compositions exemplifies the essence of *raga bhava* and captures the depth and soulfulness of the melody. His vision of the ragas and their structure is sublime.

His compositions are crisp, well chiseled and rich in knowledge. His Sanskrit is delightfully captivating. His synthesis of Carnatic and Hindustani Music systems is creative and original. He took the best in the other systems and adorned the Carnatic System; enriching both. Dikshitar revolutionized Carnatic classic ethos while firmly positioned within its orthodox framework.

He excelled in all the four aspects of the traditional music viz. Raga, Bhava, Tala and Sahitya. The technical sophistication, intellectual brilliance and the majesty of his music is unsurpassed.

Dikshitar was a scholar well grounded in good tradition (*sampradaya*). To him, music was more than an art; it was serene contemplation, a way of worship in tranquility and it was also an outpouring of his soul in celebration of the divine. He described the divine as embodiment of Raga, Bhava and Tala (*Bhava raga tala \_swarupakam*). He was a yogi, with the heart of a poet; there is therefore a certain composure and majesty in his music along with sublime poetic imagery adorned by grace and enchanting beauty. His kritis exude with soulful repose, peace and transcendental joy.



# *Nada Sudha Rasa*

*A Blog By*

*Musical Scientist: Sai Prasad  
Viswanathan*



Friday, December 29, 2006

### Sri Gurubhyo Namaha



I, being an avid Carnatic music lover and a Muthuswamy Dikshitar fanatic, thought it would be most appropriate to start my first blog with my salutations to the great musical genius (if not the greatest ever)..Nadhajyothi Shri Muthuswamy Dikshitar. So here I begin with a small introduction about the man behind the music.

On 25th March, 1775 on a beautiful day in Panguni Maasam, Krithikka Nakshathram, God of music descended on earth in the form of Dikshitar, the youngest of the trinity, to etch his name forever in the history of music and give us the pleasure of listening to all of his wonderful compositions. He came from a family of distinguished musicians. His father, Ramaswamy Dikshitar was a great scholar and he is believed to have created the raga Hamsadhvani. His brother, Baluswamy Dikshitar is believed to have been the first to adapt the violin to Carnatic music.

Coming from a family with such rich heritage, Muthuswamy learnt music and different languages from his father.

He was spiritually inspired by Chidambara Yogi who took him to Varanasi, where he learnt Tantric Yoga, Sastras and the Dhrupad style of singing. Muthuswamy Dikshitar composed his first krithi after having a vision of Lord Subramanya and henceforth adopted the mudra of Guruguha. He composed the Vara krithis, which are seven in number, one for each day of the week. These are set to the Sooladi Sapta talas. Drawing inspiration from Oothukadu Venkata Kavi, he also composed the Navavarana krithis in praise of Devi (Kamalamba), one for each of the nine days of the Navarathri festival. These Navavarana krithis, written in all the eight declensions show his prowess in Sanskrit. His songs are normally slow in tempo and bring out the depth and beauty of the raga using ornamentation (*gamakas*). He also used what is known as *Madhyamakala* (medium tempo) Sahitya very effectively in his compositions.

He mostly composed in Sanskrit and a few krithis in Telugu. He has also composed *Manipravala* krithis which are a mixture of the four primary languages, namely, Sanskrit, Telugu, Tamil and Kannada. He set out on a mission to revive dying ragas like Narayanagowla, samantha, andhali, salaganaata etc. From the middle of the 18th century to the beginning of the 20th century, the members of the Dikshitar descent, known as the 'Dikshitar Pentad' made rich and varied contributions to what may be called the Periclean age of Carnatic Music. These comprise of hundreds of compositions, 14 Ragamalikas including 2 of the longest, in South Indian music, Pada varnams suited to dance, darus and nottuswara sahityas, based on captivating English band tunes. All the 72 Raganga ragas introduced by Venkatamakhin have been covered by this illustrious family.

Finally, quoting Smt. Sulochana Pattabhiraman "Dikshitar's greatest service to Carnatic Music was that that he gave body and shape to nearly 200 ragas of Venkatamakhin. He has employed 191 ragas for 460 compositions, out of which 219 have been printed with notation by Subbarama Dikshitar in his monumental "Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini". The raga and thala mudras woven skilfully into the krithi fabric are exclusive to the songs of Dikshitar. No other composer has written so many group krithis in such a planned, orderly, meticulous fashion. He was a cosmopolitan, so far as deities were concerned and he fully deserved to be called the "*Shanmata Sthapanacharya*", after Adi Shankara. There is such an incredible wealth of astrological details, mantra sastra data, Puranic lore, Sri Vidya philosophy and temple rituals in his songs, that it is an education by itself to study them. "

Every year, around Deepavali, coinciding with the mukthi thithi of Dikshitar, an annual series called *guruguhanjali* is conducted in an effort to thank and honour the invaluable contributions of the great composer. **Sri Gurubhyo Namaha**. Henceforth, I will share my thoughts and whatever little bit of knowledge I have about Carnatic music and in my upcoming blogs, I will try to shed some light on some of those wonderful compositions in Carnatic music with a "Dikshitar" (I fondly refer to him as "*thalaivar*" meaning "captain/king") bias of course.

Sunday, December 31, 2006

### Sri Naadhadhi Guruguho

As the title of the blog indicates, I am going to discuss about Dikshitar's first krithi, "Sri Naadhaadhi guruguho" composed beautifully in the raga "MaayamaalavaGowlai". I will try my best to explain the meaning of each line of the song and some intricacies I observed. Being Dikshitar's first krithi, it is pretty simple though filled with a lot of references to vedas and upanishads. Dikshitar basically portrays Lord Subrahmanya as the Lord of the Universe in this krithi. Alright..enough talking..lets get down to business..



#### Pallavi:

*Sri Naadhadhi Guruguho Jayathi Jayathi  
Sri Chidaananda Naathohamithi  
Santhatham Hridini Bhaja*

#### Meaning:

Victory ("Jayathi") to Lord Guruguha, who is adorned ("bhaja") by all Gods ("Santhatham") beginning with Lord Vishnu ("Sri Naadhadhi"). Oh mind!! ("Hridini"), constantly contemplate ("Bhaja") that ("ithi") you are the infinite consciousness and infinite bliss ("chidaananda").

Anyone who learns carnatic music will be taught "Maayamaalavagowlai" as one of the first ragas as it is a simple and symmetric raga and will be easy for a beginner to grasp. Sri Dikshitar aptly composes his first krithi in this raga. Further, the first line of the pallavi is a simple "Sa Ri Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni Sa Ni Dha Pa Ma Ga Ri", that is, the ascending and descending parts of the raga (aaroohanam and avarohanam) itself and covers 3 kaalams (3 speeds)..This is the essence of all Dikshitar krithis..simple yet extremely powerful and soulful.

#### Anupallavi:

*Naanaa Prapancha Vichithrakaro  
Naamaroopa Pancha Bhoothakaro  
Agyaana Dhvaantha Prachandha Bhaaskaro  
Gnyaana Pradhaayako Maheshwaro  
Madhyamakala Sahithyam:  
Dheenavanodyuktha Divyatharo  
Divyaughaadhi Sakala Deha Dharo  
Maanasaanandakara Chathuratharo  
Madh Guruvaro Mangalam Karothu*

#### Meaning:

He is the originator of different ("naana"), diversified ("vichithra") forms ("aakaro") of the worlds ("prapancha"). He manifests ("roopa") as the five ("pancha") elements ("bhootha") and as the named ("naama") and famed ones. He is the mighty sun ("bhaaskaro") destroying ("prachandha") the darkness ("dvaantha") of ignorance ("agnyaana"). He is the bestower ("pradhaayako") of spiritual knowledge ("gnyaana"). He is the almighty ("Maheshwara"). He is the divine ("divya") Kalpaka Vruksha ("vanodyuktha") for the afflicted ("dheena") ones. He bears ("deha dharo") the sacred rivers ("divya ugaadhi"). He is adept in granting happiness to the heart ("manaasaanandhakara") of His devotees. May my Guru ("Madh guruvaro") bless me ("mangalam karo").

#### Charanam:

*Maaya Maya Visvaadhisthaano  
Maathmakathadhi Mathaanusthaano  
Maalini Mandalaantha Vidhaano  
Mantraadyajapaa Hamsa Dhyaano  
Maayaakaarya Kalanaa Heeno  
Maamaka Sahasra Kamalaasino  
Maadhurya Gaanaamruta Paano  
Maadhavaadhyabhaya Vara Pradaano  
Maayaa Sabalitha Brahma rupo  
Maarakoti Sundara Svarupo  
Madhimathaam Hrudaya Gopura Dipo*

*Matthra Suraadi Jayaprataapo*  
*Madhyama Kala Sahityam:*  
*Maayaamaalavagaulaadesha*  
*Mahipathi Pujitha Pada Pradesha*  
*Maadhavaadyamara Brunda Prakaasha*  
*Maheshasya Mahaarthopadesha*

**Meaning:**

He (who) is the substratum ("adhistaano") for this illusory ("maayaa maya") world ("vishwa"). He (who) is to be invoked through mantra ("mathaanusthaano") beginning with "Ka" ("kaadi"), ending with "ma" ("maathmaka"). He (who) resides ("vidhaano") in the center ("mandalaantha") of the Malini-Chakra. He (who) is to be meditated ("dhyano") upon as the swan ("Hamsa") representing the Ajaapa Mantra. He who is an expert in obliterating ("hino") the result ("kalana") of Maaya, the illusion. He resides in my heart which is like a thousand ("sahasra") petalled lotus ("kamalaasino"). Who enjoys the nectar ("amruta") of mellifluous ("madhurya") music ("Gaana"). He provides ("pradhaano") shelter ("abhaya") and boons ("vara") to Maadhava and others. Whose Brahmasvarupa is veiled ("sabalitha") by Maaya. Whose beauty ("sundara svarupo") excels that of crores ("koti") of Cupids ("mara"). Who shines as the light ("deepo") atop the tower ("gopura") like the heart ("hrudaya") of his devotees ("mathimathaam"). He who vanquished the proud ("matta") sura and others ("adi"). His place of abode is worshipped by the kinds ("mahipathi") of Mayamalavagowla Desha. Who shines ("prakaasha") as surrounded by Vishnu ("maadhava") and other Gods ("brundha"). Who impounded ("upadesha") the real truth ("mahaartha") of Pranava to His father, Mahesha.

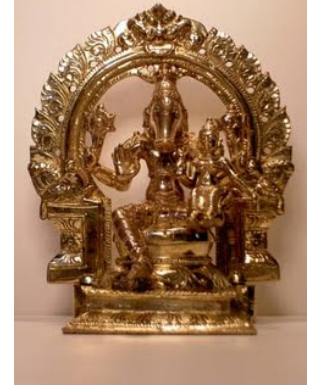
We can clearly see the Raga mudhra in the madhyamakala sahityam of the charanam. Also, one can notice the numerous references to upanishads, veda parayanas and yoga shastras. Especially in the charanam, he talks about the paramaathma (Lord) residing in the astral body of the humans (Jivaathma), thereby enforcing the thought of advaita. By the reference to the Swan ("Hamsa") in the charanam, Dikshitar alludes to the yoga shastras. The Hamsa represent perfect union, balance and life. A constant repetition of the word "hamsa" changes it to "Soaham", which means "That I am". Hence the hamsa is often identified with the Supreme Spirit or Brahman. The flight of the Hamsa also symbolizes the escape from the cycle of samsara. The bird also has special connotations in the monistic philosophy of Advaita Vedanta - just as the swan lives on water but its feathers are not wetted by water, similarly an Advaitin tries to live in this material world full of Maya, but is unsoiled by its illusionary nature. Also, Dikshitar refers to the "sahasradhaara chakra", the thousand petaled lotus which is believed to be the chakra near the heart/mind of the astral body, which when enlightened with the energy from the kundalini ("coiled snake") enriches the soul and elevates the person to realise the God within himself (himself).

Thus, we can see the richness and puranic lore incorporated into dikshitar's krithis. I have tried my best to explain the meaning and the content of dikshitar's first krithi. I am sure there is much more meaning and depth in what "thalaivar" wants to convey. But being a mere mortal (unlike Nadhajothe) and not being fortunate enough to be steep enough in knowledge, this is the best I could do and I hope my fellow mortals reading this are satisfied.

Tuesday, January 9, 2007

### Sri Lakshmi Varaham

As titled, I am going to talk about the krithi "Sri Lakshmi Varaham" in the raga "Abhogi". Dikshitar composed this krithi when he visited the Lakshmi Varaha Swamy temple in Kallidaikurichi on the banks of river "Taamaraparani"(the river named so because it was supposed to be filled with lotuses). Incidentally, this is my grandmother's birthplace(and in some sense becomes mine too). It is a beautiful small village named aptly as kal+idai+kurichi translating to "town sandwiched between hills". The Lakshmi Varaha Sannidhi here is a world famous one and the sannidhi for Lord Kubera is supposed to be very special. With this introduction, I will start off with translating the entire krithi and explaining certain subtleties as I progress.



#### Pallavi:

*Shree Lakshmi Varaaham Bhajeham  
Shree Lakshmi Sahitham Srithajana Shubha Pradham*

#### Meaning:

Dikshitar sings "I worship("Bhaja"+"aham") Lord Lakshmi Varaha, who is in the company("Sahitham") of Goddess Lakshmi and gives happiness and prosperity("Shubha pradham") to those who take refuge in him("Srithajana")." Once again we can observe the simplicity of his composition. The pallavi goes as "Sa Dha Ma Ga Ri Sa" which is the descending part(avarohanam) of abhogi raga scale. Also, the "Sa Dha Ma" notes are sung flat and simple but the sangathi sounds so beautiful and ornamented. That is the beauty of the great composer. The pallavi is a wonderful introduction to the song. In the Anupallavi he embellishes the Lord further.

#### Anupallavi:

*Neela Megha Ghana Shyamala Gaathram  
Neela Bhudevi Sthuthi Paathram  
Neelakanta Shiva Guruguha Mithram  
Nikhila Bhaktha Jana Bhayaarathi Daathram*

#### Meaning:

Dikshitar beautifully describes the Lord as follows: " Whose body("Gaathram") is a dark blue-black("Shyamala") colour resembling the dark rain-bearing clouds("Neela Megha"), who is the object of praise("Stuthi Paathram") of Niladevi and Bhudevi. He is the friend("Mithram") of the blue necked("Neela kanta") Lord Shiva and Lord Subrahmanya. He removes("Daathram") fears and miseries("Bhayaarathi") of all his devotees("Nikhila Bhaktha Jana")."

In the anupallavi, there is an explicit reference of the Lord's skin colour to the dark rain clouds. We may also interpret this as an implicit reference to the Lord's love which he showers on his devotees just like rain from the clouds. Further, we can observe the mudhra "guruguha" beautifully intertwined as he refers to Lord Subrahmanya.

#### Charanam:

*Mangalaalayaa Abhogi nutha Padam  
Pungava Budhajana Natham Vedanutham  
Shankara Priya karam Kubera Pratheeshtitham  
Shanka Chakra Dharam Krupaakaram*

*Madhyamakalasaahithyam:*



*Pankajaasana Pramukha Sevitham  
Pankaja Mukha Bhaargavee Bhaavitham  
Bhanga Hara Thaamraparnee Theerastham  
Sankata hara Sadaananda Sahitham*

**Meaning:**

*He refers to the Lord as One who's feet("Padham") is ornated by the auspicious("mangalaalaya") Raga Abhogi, as one praised by the Virtuous and knowledgable("Budhajana") and the Vedas and scriptures. He pleases Lord Shankara("Shankarapriya karam") and enriches the wealth of Lord Kubera. He is also the bearer of the conch and the divine disc("Shankachakradhara"). Worshipped and served("Sevitham") by Lord Brahma("Pankajaasana"-the one sitting on lotus) and other important Gods("Pramukha"); Meditated upon("Bhaavitham") by the Lotus-faced("Pankajamukha") Goddess Lakshmi("Bhargavi"). Along the banks of the river Tamaraparanee, the Lord removes("Hara") all the obstacles and worries("Sankata") and is always("Sadha") filled with("sahitham") bliss("aanandham").*

The charanam is brilliant description of the Lord. Dikshitar beautifully brings in the Raga mudhra in the first line of the charanam and refers to the auspicious quality of the raga. He also makes sure he includes the reference to the special sannidhi to Kubera swamy in the temple. The madhyamakala sahithyam is another good vocal exercise to the singer. On the whole, the krithi is filled with simplicity but beautiful at the same time, a quality of all Dikshitar krithis.

Next, I am planning to take up some popular krithis on Lord Ganesha like "Vaathapi" in Hamsadhvani and "Mahaganapthim" in Naatai by thalaivar Dikshitar. These krithis are popular invocations without which no concert begins. Salutations to the great "Nadhajyothi"-Vaazhga Thalaivaa!!

Friday, January 19, 2007

### Vathapi Ganapathim Bhajeham



Today, let's talk about that wonderful Hamsadhvani krithi which almost every other concert begins with. A salutation to Lord Ganesha to begin the concert with and ofcourse the brilliance shines through. My friend Hari(guitar god) says if you can play the song with all those nuances, you definitely are one of the best in the business. So here we go..

**Pallavi:**

*Vathapi Ganapathim Bhajeham  
Vaaranaasyam Vara Pradham Sri*

**Meaning:**

First of all, Vathapi(the modern day Badami of Bijapur district) is the place where Lord Ganesha is supposed to have been born to Lord Shiva and Parvathi. This is one of the 16 songs composed by Dikshitar on Lord Ganesha and since it is in the Raga Hamsadhvani, it is considered very apt to begin the concert with. The song has many "prayogams" that it is another great vocal exercise and hence acts as a good brisk voice opener for the vocalist.

Now coming to the meaning of the pallavi, dikshitar sings: "I worship('Bhaje+aham') Lord Ganapathi hailing from Vathapi, he who has the face('haasyam') of an elephant('vaara') and showers('pradham') his devotees with boons('varam')". It is a simple pallavi with the first line starting with the characteristic "Ga Ri Sa" phrase of Hamsadhvani. Transcending generations, musicians have added numerous sangathis to these two lines of the song alone displaying the open ended flexibility characteristic of any dikshitar composition. Moving on to the Anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*Bhoothaadhi Samsevitha Charanam  
Bhootha Bhautika Prapancha Bharanam*

**Madhyamakala Sahityam:**

*Veetharaaginam Vinutha Yoginam  
Vishwakaaranam Vigna Vaaranam*

**Meaning:**

Dikshitar sings "All the elements('bhoothas' as in panchabhoothas) worship('sevitha') his feet and surrender('charanam'). He pervades('Bharanam') the world consisting of the five elements('Prapanchabhootha bhauthika'). He is beyond('raaginam') desires('veetha') and is praised('vinutha') by all the yogis. He is the cause('kaaranam') of creation('vishwa' as in world) and is the destroyer('vaaranam') of all obstacles/sorrows('vigna')". Here again, one can see the simplicity and beauty of the song and scope for a lot of sangathis. He employs an oxymoron referring to the Lord as both the creator and destroyer in the same line, just another display of his grammatical prowess. The charanam follows as

**Charanam:**

*Puraa Kumbha Sambhava Munivara Prapoojitham Trikona Madhyagatham  
Muraari Pramukhaadhyupaasitham Moolaadhaara Kshetrasthitham  
Paraadhi Chathvaari Vaagaathmakam Pranava Swaroopa Vakrathundam  
Nirantharam Nithila Chandrakandam Nijavaamakara Vidhrutekshu Dandam*

**Madhyamakala Sahityam:**

*Karaambujapaasha Beejaapooram Kalushavidooram Bhoothaakaaram  
Haraadhi Guruguha Toshitha Bimbam Hamsadhvani Bhooshitha Herambham*

**Meaning:**

The Charanam is filled with upanishidic references and beautiful description of Lord Ganesha. I will first explain the word by word meaning and then the fundaes behind each description. Dikshitar refers to sage agasthya in the first line of the charanam alluding to him as the sage('muni') born('sambhava') out of a jar of water('puraa kumbha') and sings "He(Lord Ganesha) is worshipped('prapoojitham') by sage agasthya(described as above). He resides in the middle of('madhyama') of the mystic triangle('trikona') and is praised and worshipped('upaasitham') by Lord vishnu('murari') and other important gods('pramukhaas'). He is present('sthitham') as an important deity('mooladhara') in all divine places('kshethrams'). Starting with 'puraa', he is present in the form('aathmakam') of the four varieties('chathvaari') of sounds('vaagaa'). He has a twisted trunk('Vakrathundam') and has on original form('swaroopam') of a 'pranavaa'. He always('Nirantharam') bears('Nithila') a crescent('Chandra') on his forehead('gandam') and possesses a sugar('ikshu') cane('dandam') on his left hand('vaama kara'). In his lotus-like('ambuja') hands('karam'), a noose('paasha'), a goad and fruits('beejapooram'). He drives away('vi+dhooram') all evils('kalusha') and has a gigantic form('bhoothaakaaram'). His form('bimbam') is adored('toshitha') by the gods like Hara,guruguha and all others. He is the Lord Heramba ornated('Bhooshitha') by the Raga Hamsadhvani."

The charanam in my opinion has so much depth that it could have been composed as another separate song itself. Dikshithar sings of Lord Ganesha as one who resides in the middle of the mystic triangle. Here, he is possibly referring to yogic practices. The first step towards meditation is concentrating on the space between the eyebrows which is also referred to as the mystic triangle, a source of infinite energy, also called as the '*agnyaa*' (meaning command) chakra (in the astral body). Dikshithar also sings as Lord Ganesha to be present in all divine places which is very evident from the fact that whichever hindu temple you go to, there is always a '*sannidhi*' for Lord Ganesha and this will be the first sannidhi you will pray to even before entering the '*praakaaram*'.

The description of Lord Ganesha in the charanam is beautiful as he goes from top to bottom, completely describing all the things possessed by the Lord and his twisted trunk. Please see the picture above and you will be able to visualise the Lord perfectly. By describing the Lord to be in the form of '*pranavaa*' he refers to the brahma mantra '*Om*'. Many would have seen pictures of Lord Ganesha being portrayed as circumscribed by the symbol '*Om*' and one can easily visualise the Lord as representing the divine brahman. Also, completing his reference to the mystic triangle (explained above) and pranavaa ('*om*'), you can get the complete picture by looking at this image where the pranavaa ('*om*') is considered as the beeja mantra of the mystic triangle of aathma (soul), shakthi (energy) and prakrithi (nature), repetition of which excites the *aagnya chakra* in the astral body (explained above). He concludes with the raga mudhra completing the music garland.

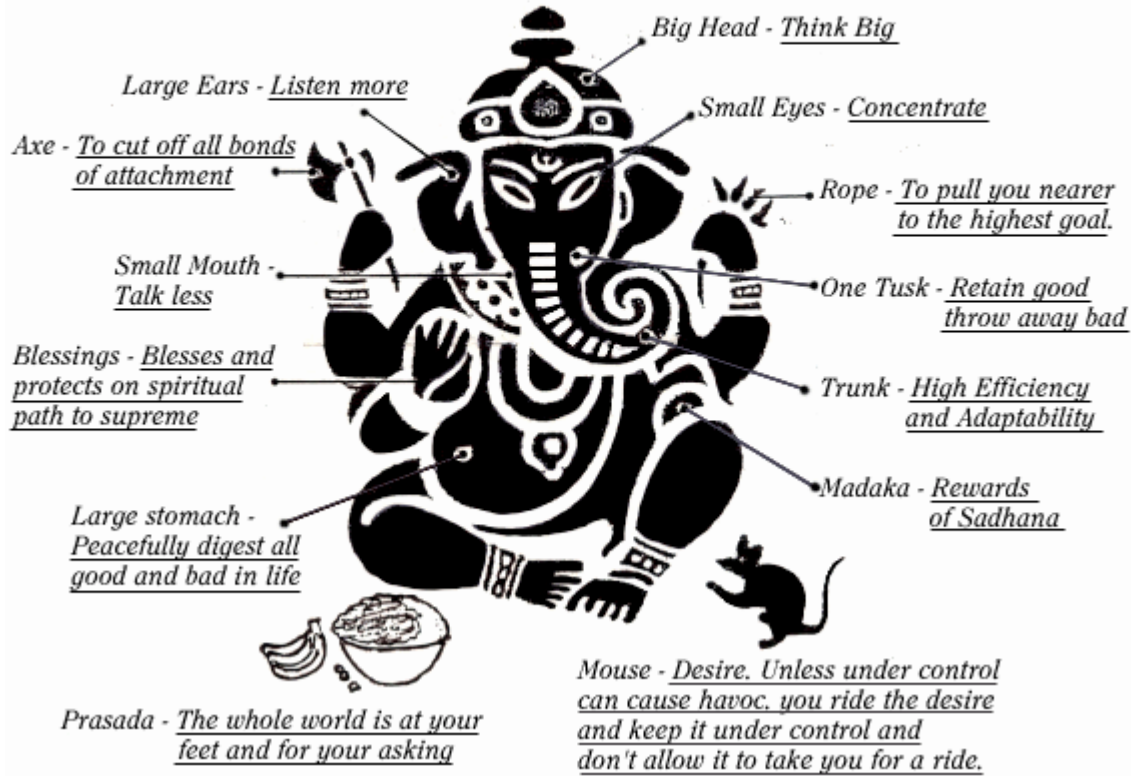
Overall, this easily becomes the best invocation song ever composed as it salutes the main deity (Lord Ganesha), composed in an auspicious raga and pretty challenging to sing, hence serving as a brisk throat-warming exercise. All I can do is stare with my mouth wide open as I continue to be amazed by the brilliance of Dikshithar and hence conclude that he's not mortal as usual. :) It has taken me one whole day just to explain this song, imagine how brilliant a mind with what great a '*paandithyam*' could have composed 481 such masterpieces. Meanwhile, I have been stung by the kambhoji bug and am listening like a madcap to kambhoji for the past 2 days. Currently listening to "*Evari Maata*", a beautiful thyagaraajar krithi, rendered by my brother..pure bliss.

In the next blog, I plan to combine two more famous songs on Lord Ganesha by dikshithar.. '*Mahaganapathim*' in raga '*Naatai*' and '*Vallabha Naayakasya*' in raga '*Begada*' as both these songs are pretty small having what are called as "*samaashti charanams*". Signing off as usual with the traditional "thalaivar rocks"!!

Sunday, January 21, 2007

Mahaganapathim and Vallabha Naayaksya

# Ganesha Symbolism



I will start off with 'Mahaganapathim' in Raga 'Naatai'. A small and very beautiful invocation krithi popularly being adopted into many tamil cine songs these days. The Pallavi describes the Lord as a center of meditation as

**Pallavi:**

*Mahaganapathim Manasa Smaraami  
Vashista Vaamadevaadhi Vandhitha*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar starts off with a very small pallavi singing "I meditate and recite ('Smaraami') with my whole heart ('Manasa') on the supreme Lord Ganapathy, he who is worshipped by ('Vandhitha') sage Vashista, Vaamadeva and others ('aadhi')". Very simple but extremely open-ended for improvisation and I have heard so many different versions of the pallavi alone which once again is because of the flexibility characteristic of all dikshithar krithis. The entire scale and important phrases of the raga are brilliantly captured in the opening lines itself. Moving on to the samaashti charanam now,

**Anupallavi/Charanam:**

*Mahadevasutham Guruguhanutham  
Maarakoti Prakaasham Shaantham*

**Madhyamakala Sahithyam:**

*Mahakaavya Naatakadhi priyam  
Mooshika vaahana modhaka priyam*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar continues describing Lord Ganesha as "He is the son ('sutham') of Lord Mahadeva, adored ('nutham') by Guruguha. He shines ('Prakaasham') like crores ('koti') of cupids ('maara') put together. He is the peaceful one ('Shaantham') and loves ('priyam') literary epics ('Mahakaavya') and other arts like Drama ('Naataka'). He uses a

mouse('mooshika') as his vehicle('vaahana') and loves modhakam(a popular sweet)." Not much to explain in the charanam except for the beautiful inclusion of the raga mudhra ingeniously incorporated in the word 'Naataka' referring to drama. On the whole, a simple composition.(With all due respect to Lord Ganesha), maybe Dikshithar composed this while he was asleep or something :). The characteristic 'Sa Ri3' phrase embellishes this composition.

Now moving on to another short "samaashti charanam" krithi on Lord Ganesha by thalaivar. The song "Vallabha Naayaksya" in 'Begada' is yet another beautiful invocation krithi. It is yet another simple composition with lot of scope for improvisation. The pallavi goes as

**Pallavi:**

*Vallabha Naayaksya Bhaktho Bhavaami Vaanchithaartha dhaayakasya Varamooshika Vaahanasya*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar sings "I became('Bhavaami') a devotee('bhaktho') of the hero/husband('Naayaka') of Vallabha who is the bestower('dhaayaka') of boons('vara') desired by devotees('vaanchithaartha') and uses the mouse('mooshika') as his vehicle('vaahana')." Thalaivar brings in some controversy by referring to Lord Ganesha as 'Vallabha Naayaka' because Lord Ganesha is supposed to be an ideal bachelor. However, he is also know to have had many consorts such as 'siddhi', 'buddhi'. Dikshithar refers to Lord Ganesha in a similar way in a few other krithis and I have to do more research to unearth more facts.

**Anupallavi/Charanam:**

*Pallavapadha mridhutharasya Paashaankushaadhi tharasya Mallikajaadhi Champaka harasya manimaalasya*

**Madhyamakala Sahithyam:**

*Valli Vivaaha kaaranasya Guruguha poojithasya Kaali Kalaamaalini Kamalaakshi Sannuthasya*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar describes the Lord beautifully as "His feet('padha') are as soft('pallava') as the tender shoots('mridhuthara'). He possesses a noose('paasha'), a goad('ankusha') and other weapons in his hand('tharasya'). He is ornated with garlands('harasya') of Jasmine('mallika') and champaka and is also decorated with necklace of gems('manimaala'). He is the cause('kaarana') of the marriage('vivaha') of Valli and is worshipped('poojitha') by Subrahmanya. He is adored('sannutha') by goddess Kaali, Saraswathi('kala+maalini') and the lotus('kamala')-eyed('aakshi') Lakshmi." Dikshithar talks about the delicate side of the Lord and his timely helping tendencies referring to his hand in the marriage of guha and valli. The best part of Dikshithar's compositions are the ways he refers to Gods metaphorically. Here, he calls Saraswathi as 'kalaamaalini', the goddess of arts and Lakshmi as 'kamalaakshi'. The madhyamakala sahithyam portrays the fast,racy phrases of 'Begada'. On the whole, yet another brilliant piece by dikshithar.



Sunday, March 18, 2007

### Kamalaamba Nava Avarnams

I will start off with a brief introduction about the Nava Avarnams(which would consume this entire blog i think).

These are a set of 11 krithis-9 krithis talking about the 9 avarnas of the Sri Chakra and Sri Vidya Upasana, 1 dhyana krithi(*Kamalambike-thodi*) and 1 mangala krithi(*Shri Kamalambike Shive-Sri*). These krithis are extremely powerful and filled with yoga and gnana marga fundas for self-realization; the very purpose of a human being's birth. A spiritual aspirant needs to find a Guru and be initiated into the practice of Sri Vidya Upasana. To find a way to explain these fundamentals in an easy and meaningful way, I searched for a reliable resource on the web and I have found this wonderful article on wikipedia which makes the purpose of this blog unnecessary. Please read the wikipedia article below to learn about the greatness of the Nava Avarna krithis giving wonderful details about Sri Chakra and explaining how each krithi relates to each avarana and chakra.

#### Kamalamba Navavarna Kritis

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

The Kamalamba Navavarna Kritis by Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar (1776-1836) are some of the most famous pieces of music in the Carnatic system of Indian classical music. They are treasures which embody not only the technical brilliance of the composer but also offer a peep into the advaitic school of Hindu philosophy and elements of Tantric rituals. They are very elaborate compositions which may be well compared with major symphonies in the Western system.

#### Overview

These songs are set in praise of the Goddess Kamalamba who is enshrined in Tiruvavur in the Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu in South India. The Goddess is the reference to the Divine Mother of the universe, or the Supreme Consciousness. The lyrics and the descriptive details are loaded with the mystical symbolism of the Vedantic (advaita) tradition and the chakras of the human system are closely linked to the evolutionary aspects described in the compositions that reflect the scholarly reach, musical depth and mystical significance of the composer.

Musically, they are par excellence and the majestic sweep of well known ragas (melodic forms) like Todi, Kalyani, Kambhoji, Sankarabharanam, Sahana, Anandabhairavi and Bhairavi are offset against haunting melodies in lesser known ragas like Punnagavarali, Ghanta and Ahiri.

Dikshitar uses several talas (time measures) although Rupakam (3 beats) seems to be his favourite. Ata talam (14 beats) and Misra Jampa (10 beats) in the Kambhoji and Bhairavi pieces are rarely used because of the technical difficulty in executing these. An added element is the use of different case endings (which Dikshitar uses in his other group kritis, like the Abhayamba and Nilotpalamba set). The Dhyana (invocatory) kriti in Todi is in the vocative case, followed by the Anandabhairavi in the nominative, Kalyani in the accusative, Sankarabharanam in the instrumental, Kambhoji in the dative, Bhairavi in the ablative and so on. The ninth avarana kriti in Ahiri has all the cases; interestingly the raga itself has all the 22 Sruti (notes) in the octave. It is believed that such a fusion of all melodic and temporal elements in the same kriti is a musical way of expressing the advaitic ideal of "aham Brahmasmi" or complete union with the Absolute. Indeed the Ahiri composition is very unusual musically especially the pallavi which has a repeating and distinctive prose sections, are seamlessly put together.

The set concludes with a short and sweet mangalam (auspicious conclusion) in Sri ragam set in Khanda Ekam (5 beat talam). The entire set consists therefore of the dhyanam (invocation), the nine avaranas, and the mangalam (conclusion), a total of 11 pieces.

#### Kritis

The 11 kritis are as follows:

1. Kamalambike - Todi - Rupakam
2. Kamalamba Samrakshathu - Anandabhairavi - Misra Chapu
3. Kamalambaam Bhajare - Kalyani - Adi
4. Sri Kamalambikayam - Shankarabharanam - Rupakam
5. Kamalambikayai - Kambhoji - (Khanda) Ata
6. Sri Kamalamba param - Bhairavi - Misra Jampa
7. Kamalambikayaastava - Punnagavarali - Rupakam
8. Sri Kamalambikayam - Sahana - Tisra Tripata
9. Sri Kamalambike - Ghanta - Adi
10. Sri Kamalamba Jayati - Ahiri - Rupakam
11. Sri Kamalambike - Sri - Kanda Ekam

The rendering of these Kritis are considered to be extremely challenging owing to the complexity of the words and the notations. The D.K. Pattamal and D.K. Jayaraman school are considered to be specialists in the rendering of these compositions. It requires years of training to render them to perfection.

Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar was a great Devi Upasaka and was well versed in all aspects of Sri Vidya Upasana. Out

of his devotion to Sri Kamalamba, (one of the 64 Sakti Peethams in India), the celebrated deity at the famous Tyagaraja Temple in Tiruvarur and his compassion for all bhaktas, Sri Muthuswamy Dikshitar composed the Kamalamba Navavarana kritis, expounding in each of the nine kritis, the details of the each avarana of the Sri Chakra, including the devatas and the yoginis. Singing these kritis with devotion, sraddha and understanding would be the easy way to Sri Vidya Upasana.

### Chakras

The details of Chakras covered are as follows:

(1) The first Avaranam is Bhoopuram and the Chakram is Trailokyamohana chakra 'enchants the three worlds'; The yogini is Prakata, the mental state of the aspirant is Jagrata, Chakra Iswari is Tripura and the Saktis are 28 that include the ten starting with Anima, the eight starting with Brahmya and the ten Mudra Saktis. [Ragam Anandhabhairavi: Kamalamba Samrakshatu]

(2) The second Avaranam is Shodasa Dalam, and the Chakram is Sarvasaparipuraka chakra, 'fulfills all expectations'; The yogini is Gupta Yogini. The mental state is Swapna, the Chakra Iswari is Tripurasi and the Saktis are the sixteen starting with Kamakarshini. [Ragam Kalyani: Kamalambam Bhajare]

(3) The third Avaranam is Ashtha Dalam; The Chakram is Sarvasamkshobana chakra, 'agitates all'; the Yogini is Gupta Tara Yogini. The mental state is Sushupti, the Chakra Iswari is Tripura Sundari and the Saktis are the eight starting with Ananga Kusuma. [Ragam Sankarabharanam: Sri Kamalambikayaa Katakshitoham]

(4) The fourth Avaranam is Chaturdasaram; the Chakram is Sarvasaubhagyadayaka chakra, 'grants excellence'; the Yogini is Sampradaya Yogini. The mental state is Iswara Vicharam, Chakra Iswari is Tripura Vasini and the Saktis are the fourteen starting with Samkshobhini. [Ragam Kambhoji: Kamalambikaayai Kanakamshukayai]

(5) The fifth Avaranam is Bahirdasaram; the Chakram is Sarvarthasadhakachakra, is the 'accomplisher of all'; the Yogini is Kulotteerna yogini. The mental state is Guroopa Sadanam; the Chakra Iswari is Tripura Sri and the Saktis are the ten starting with Sarva Siddhi Prada. [Ragam Bhairavi: Sri Kamalambikayaha Param Nahi re re chitta]

(6) The sixth Avaranam is Antardasaram; the Chakram is Sarvaraksakara chakra, 'protects all'; the Yogini is Nigarbha Yogini. The mental state is Upadesam; the Chakra Iswari is Tripura Malini and the Saktis are the ten starting with Sarvagnya. [Ragam Punnagavari: Kamalambikayastava Bhaktoham]

(7) The Seventh Avaranam is Asthakonam; the Chakram is Sarvarogahara chakra, 'cures all ills'; the Yogini is Rahasya Yogini. The mental state is Mananam; the chakra Iswari is Tripura Siddhaa and the Saktis are the eight, starting with Vashini. [Ragam Sahana: Sri Kamalambikayam Bhaktim Karomi]

(8) The eighth Avaranam is Trikonam; the Chakram is Sarvasiddhiprada chakra, 'grants all perfection'; the Yogini is Ati Rahasya Yogini. The mental state is Nitidhyasanam; the Chakra Iswari is Tripuramba and the Saktis are the three starting with Kameshwari. [Ragam Ghanta: Sri Kamalambike Avaava]

(9) The ninth Avaranam is the Bindu and the highest Chakram is Sarvanandamaya chakra, 'replete with bliss'. The mental state is Savikalpa Samadhi; the Chakra Iswari is Maha Tripura Sundari and the Shakti is Maha Tripura Sundai, the very personification of Para Brahman. [Ragam Ahiri: Sri Kamalamba Jayati]

Now that the article has been read by you(hopefully) and now that you have understood the inner meaning and objective of each of these kritis(hopefully once again : ) , I will continue with the explanation for the dhyana krithi in Thodi. I will slowly work my way through the entire set and end with the mangala krithi hopefully in a month's time. I am publishing this blog so that I give some time to all of you who are really interested in the Navavarna kritis to read through the wikipedia article and get some basics right so that it will be easier and more meaningful for me to explain and for you to understand. I conclude this post here with a sense of dissatisfaction that I did not have the wonderful opportunity to explain the depths already covered by the wikipedia article. I know I am leaving this post sort of incomplete and I will explain in depth about the "kamalaambike" dhyana krithi in "thodi" in my next post-hopefully tonight or at the worst tomorrow morning. Till then, take care and have fun... Catch you guys/gals in a bit!!

Tuesday, March 20, 2007

**Kamalaambikae-Thodi**

The Kamalamba Navavarnams are a brilliant display of dikshitar's pandithyam and his grasp of grammar. With each krithi set in the 8 declensions(cases-vibhakthis) of the proper noun "kamalamba" and the concluding krithi of the set being a mixture of all the 8 declensions, Dikshitar shows his mastery of the language. Please read this beautiful article for more details about the set.

The set of compositions popularly known as kamalAmba navAvaraNa consists of eleven kritis composed by the illustrious composer, Muthuswami Dikshitar, in praise of Goddess kamalAmba of the mammoth temple at Tiruvarur. In this set of kritis, the composer is at his best, and the lyrics are *par excellence*! While in many of the group kritis that Dikshitar is believed to have composed, some kritis are missing (perhaps lost to us forever), the kamalAmba navAvaraNa series has fortunately come down to us in a complete form.

It consists of a benedictory (dhyAna) k.rti, followed by eight compositions, one in each of the eight declinations of the proper noun "kamalamba" (or sometimes kamalAmbika) in feminine gender, continuing on to a tenth k.rti which employs all the declinations (vibhakti-s) of the Sanskrit language; the series concludes with an auspicious maN^gaLa k.rti, appropriately set in the auspicious rAga srIrAgam. Each of the nine songs is on one of the nine enclosures (AvaraNam) of the shrIcakra (the auspicious wheel). In each k.rti, Dikshitar carefully brings out the name of the cakra, its geometry, many salient features specific to the cakra, and the devata-s associated with it. On many occasions, Dikshitar cleverly indulges in very lengthy word constructions, which to a layman may seem like a tongue-twister. The word "guruguha" (used in several meanings) appears in all these compositions as the composer's signature or *mudra*. The rAga mudra is incorporated (through the art of shleSha (double meaning), in most of these compositions. The dhyAna k.rti in toDi does not feature a rAga mudra, and the kritis in Anandabhairavi (first AvaraNam), and shaN^karAbharaNam (third AvaraNam) have only partial rAga mudras (the word "Ananda" for the former, and shaN^kara for the latter). The kambhoji, sahAna, and Ahiri compositions have disguised rAga mudras (kAmbhoja, shAna, Ahari, respectively). All other kritis have the proper rAga mudra.

The kritis of the kamalAmba navAvaraNa series are as follows:

1. dhyAna k.rti in saMbodhanA vibhakti (vocative case) - **kamalAmbikE, toDi, rUpaka tALa**
2. The first AvaraNa k.rti in prathamA vibhakti (nominative) on **trailokyamohana cakra - kamalAmba saMrakShatu mAM, Anandabhairavi, tripuTa tALa**
3. The second AvaraNa k.rti in dviTiyA vibhakti (accusative) on **sarvAshaparipUraka cakra - kamalAmbAM bhaja re, kalyANI, Adi tALa**
4. The third AvaraNa k.rti in tritIyA vibhakti (instrumental) on **sarvasaMkShobhaNa cakra - shrIkamalAmbikayA, shaN^karAbharaNam rUpaka tALa**
5. The fourth AvaraNa k.rti in caturthI vibhakti (dative) on **sarvasaubhAgyadAyaka cakra - kamalAmbikAyai, kAMBhoji, aTa tALa**
6. The fifth AvaraNa k.rti in pa~ncamI vibhakti (ablative) on **sarvArthasAdhaka cakra - shrI kamalAMBAYAH, bhairavi, jhaMpa tALa**
7. The sixth AvaraNa k.rti in ShaShThI vibhakti (genitive) on **sarvarakShAkara cakra - kamalAmbikAyAH, punnAgavarALi, rUpaka tALa**
8. The seventh AvaraNa k.rti in saptamI vibhakti (locative) on **sarvarogahara cakra - shrI kamalAmbikAyAM , sahANA, tripuTa tALa**
9. The eighth AvaraNa k.rti in saMbodhanA vibhakti (vocative) on **sarvasiddhiprada cakra - shrI kamalAmbike, ghaNTa, Adi tALa**
10. The ninth and last AvaraNa k.rti in all eight vibhaktis (cases) on **sarvAnandamaya cakra - shrI**

**kamalAMbA jayati, Ahiri, rUPaka tALa**

(The pallavi employs prathamA vibhakti, the anupallavi, the dvitIya and tritIya vibhaktis, while the caraNam has one line each in caturthI, pa~ncamI, ShaShThI and saptamI vibhaktis. The line set in caturthI vibhakti also incorporates the sambodhana, while the two lines sung in madhyamakAla return to the prathamA vibhakti.)

11. The final auspicious maN^gaLa k.rti - **shrI kamalAmbike, shrIrAgam, khaNDa eka tALa**

**The shrI cakra:**

Since each of these compositions is on one of the nine AvaraNams (enclosures) of the shrI cakra, we will now quickly describe the geometry of the cakra. The shrI cakra, or the auspicious wheel is a geometrical diagram employed in the worship of Goddess Tripurasundari, according to Tantric rituals. It is more than a mere diagram, and has mystic powers and great significance in the shakti worship tradition. The outer portion of the shrI cakra consists of four units - the outermost layer gateway of three rectangular walls (bhUpura), three circles (trivalaya, or v.rttatraya), a sixteen petaled rose (ShoDashadaLa padma), and an eight-petaled rose (aShTadaLa padma). The core of the shrI cakra consists of numerous triangles - a set of fourteen triangles (manukoNa), two sets of ten triangles (bahirdashAra and antardashAra), a set of eight triangles (vasukoNa), and the innermost sole triangle (trikoNa). In fact these various triangles are formed by the intersections of four isosceles triangles with vertex pointing upwards (called the shiva group), and five isosceles triangles with downward vertices (called the shakti group) all situated inside the eight petaled rose. The culmination of all these is the bindu, a single dot placed at the center. Each sub-cakra bears the name of its presiding deity, as well as the subordinate deities (yoginis) associated with it.

A quick definition of the shrI cakra can be found in Adi Sankara's famous work, Saundaryalahari (verse 11) as follows:

*caturbhiH shrIkANThaiH shivayuvatibhiH pa~ncabhirapi*  
*prabhinnAbhiH shaMbhornavabhirapi mUlaprak.rtibhiH |*  
*catushcatvAriMshadvasudalakALashratrivalaya*  
*trirekhAbhiH sArDhaM tava sharaNakoNAH pariNatAH ||*

It is customary to sing the kamalambA navAvaraNa group kritis, first by invoking Lord Ganesha through the k.rti, "shrImahAgANapatiravatu mAm" in rAgA gauLa, followed by a salutation to Lord SubrahmaNya (guruguha) through the composition "bAlasubrahmaNyam" in rAgA suraTi. These two particular kritis might have been chosen, not for any particular reason, but perhaps one of the oldest books on kamalAmba Navavaranam by Kallidaikkuricci Vina Sundaram Iyer (supplement volume 16) has printed these songs preceding the AvaraNa songs.

The kamalAMbA navAvaraNa kritis are very auspicious, deep in meaning and content, and bring out the deeper insights into the shrI vidyA upAsana. Dikshitar has packed numerous tantric and shrIvidyA details in these songs, which makes it difficult to translate them adequately into English. While the meanings may be straightforward for those who have adequate knowledge of shrIvidyA upAsana and have contemplated on it, for ordinary people, it is a hidden treasure.

Moving on to the krithi now, this dhyana krithi in thodi is written exclusively in the vocative case or the fifth case ("sambhodhana vibhakti"), a case used to directly address the Lord and describe her qualities. The pallavi goes like

**Pallavi:**

*Kamalaambikae Aashritha Kalpalathikae Chandhike*  
*Kamaneeya Arunaam Shuke Kara Vidhrutha Shuke Maamava*

**Meaning:**

Dikshitar sings " Kamalaambika!! You are the divine wish-yielding magical creeper ('kalpa lathikae') who protects those who surrender ('aashritha jana') to you". He describes the Goddess as Chandhika, the fierce ('ugra') one. He continues to describe the sannidhi by singing "You wear the attractive ('kamaneeya') red-coloured ('arunaam') garment ('shuke'), holding ('vidhrutha') the parrot ('shuke') in your hand ('kara'). I pray you protect

me('maam'+ 'ava'). The word-to-word meanings are pretty easy to understand in the pallavi but there are deeper esoteric meanings which I have to touch upon to fully explain the krithi. The reference to the red-coloured garment suggests the 'ugra' nature of the Goddess, 'rajo guna', an essential aspect for the normal operations of the world. The employment of both the meanings of the word "shuke" to refer to garment and parrot in the same line is yet another display of brilliance from the great man. The parrot is supposed to be an allusion to the human soul. The parrot, instead of being trapped in a cage(just like how the human soul is trapped in this maya world), is free in the hands of Shakthi indicating that the Goddess will destroy the ignorance of all her devotees and help them reach the ultimate goal of God-realization. A beautiful pallavi with deep meanings and preserving the depth of the raga providing ample scope for 'sangathis'.

Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*Kamalaasanaadhi poojitha kamalapadhe bahuvaradhe*

*Kamalaalayatheertha vaibhave shive karunaarnave*

**Meaning:**

Dikshitar sings "Worshipped('Poojitha') by Brahma('Kamala(lotus)'+ 'aasana(seated)') and other deities('aadhi'), with your lotus('kamala') feet('padhe'), you shower('dhe') numerous('bahu') boons('vara'). You are enshrined('aalaya') in all your majestic beauty('vaibhava') on the kamalaalaya tank and thereby bestowed it with great powers. You are the auspicious one('shive'-also can be interpreted as consort of Shiva) and an ocean of mercy and compassion('karunaarnave')." The anupallavi is perhaps a wonderful demonstration of alliterations in Sanksrit with Dikshitar repeatedly employing the word 'kamala'. The anupallavi is simple and builds up wonderfully to a big,complicated charanam.

**Charanam:**

*Sakala loka Naayikae Sangeetha rasikae*

*Suka vithva pradhaayikae Sundari Gathamaayikae*

*Vikalebara mukthidhaana nipunae Aghaharanae*

*Viyadhaadhi bhoothakiranae Vinodhacharanae Arunae*

*Sakalae Guruguhakaranae Sadhashivaantha karanae*

*Akachathapaadhi varnae akandaika rasapoornae*

**Meaning:**

Dikshitar sings "You are the ruler('Naayikae') of the entire universe('sakala loka') and you are the one rejoicing in music. You bestow('pradhaayikae') the wonderful poetic('sukha') skills('vithva') in all composers. Oh beautiful one('Sundari'), you are the one creating the delusions('maya') but you yourself have transcended it('gatha') because you are the Supreme Soul. You are adept('nipunae') in granting('dhaana') salvation('mukthi') without body('vikalebara'-videha mukthi) and destroying('harane') the biggest sin of man, that of identifying him"self" with his body('agha'). You are the one from whom the five elements('bhootha'), sky('viyadh') and others('aadhi') emanate('kiranae'). You shine brilliantly in red('arunae') and your feet('charanae') give the highest bliss('vinodha') known to man. You are the one who manifests as All('sakalae') and you are the cause('kaaranae') for the birth of Lord Subrahmanya('guruguha'). You are the heart('antha') of Lord Shiva('sadashiva'). You are the embodiment('varnae') of all the letters a, ka, cha, ta, tha, pa, etc.('akachathapaadhi') that are the basics of all mantras. You are the one who is forever filled with('poorna') that infinite and indivisible('akanda+eka') bliss('rasa')."

The charanam is a beautiful mix of simple descriptions of the God like "mother of guruguha"(hence ingeniously incorporating the mudhra) and "wife of Lord Shiva" as well as complicated descriptions of the Goddess with deep yogic and "sukshmic" meanings. He talks about vikalebara mukthi, that is, the nirvikalpa samadhi where the enlightened soul leaves the body never to return to this cycle of rebirths. He refers to the Goddess as the heart of the embodiment of supreme bliss(sadashiva) and further declares her auspicious feet as the one giving the highest bliss of jeevathma reaching/realizing the paramaathma. On the whole, the krithi is a wonderful display of erudition enlightening mortals on the path to follow in life and the ultimate goal to reach in this human birth. A treat for the singers/instrumentalists to showcase their talents and at the same time, beautiful sahithyams for the divinely motivated and spiritually aspiring people.

As a closing note, to summarize the power of the dhyana krithi, I quote from Sri Dikshitha keerthana mala "The dhyana krithi helps dispel all difficulties, overcome obstacles and awards fulfilment of desires and helps one realize the bliss of salvation by drinking the nectar of sat-chit-anandam. By singing this krithi, one gains the mercy of the Goddess, achieving complete knowledge of Brahman and Atman and freedom from the cycle of birth and death." I



will continue with the Kamalamba Navavarnams taking up the beautiful "Kamalamba Samrakshathu maam" krithi in Anandhabhairavi, a wonderful krithi with soul-stirring sahithyams and sangathis. Catch you all in my next post!!

Saturday, April 7, 2007

**kamalAmbA samrakshathu-Anandhabhairavi**



Continuing with the the Nava Avarnams, I will take up the beautiful "kamalAmbA samrakshathu mAm" in Anandhabhairavi written in the prathamA vibhakthi(nominative case) on the "thrailokyamohana chakra". The extensive usage of the shuddha deivatham in this krithi adds to its grandeur. The pallavi goes like

**Pallavi:**

*kamalAmbA samrakshathu mAm hruth kamalAnagara nivAsini*

**Meaning:**

The pallavi is simple to understand. It goes like "Let Goddess kamalAmbA, the one who resides("nivAsini") in the heart("hruth") of kamalAnagara(alluding to the lotus in which the Goddess sits) protect me("samrakshathu mAm)". The most striking and beautiful part of the pallavi is the Sa Ni Sa phrase at "Sam Ra" which keeps to oscillate for eternity before moving on to Ni Sa ma. Beauty defined at its best. Moving on to the anupallavi(btw..my favourite part of the song), we will find the right mix of the majestic(masculine) as well as the gentle and beautiful(feminine) parts of the rAgA.

**Anupallavi:**

*SumanasArAdhithAbhjamukhi sundaramana-priyakarasakhi  
kamalajAnandha bodhasukhi kAnthATHara panjarashukhi*

**Meaning:**

The anupallavi starts off with a gentle PMPSPNPMGM phrase which upon singing/playing yields that "high" and that "kick" which no earthly material can give. Dikshitar sings "Her lotus face("Abhja") is praised and worshipped("sArAdhitha") by all learned and virtuous people("sumana")." He continues to beautifully describe the Goddess as the dearest and beloved("mana-priya") consort("sakhi") of Lord Shiva("sundara"). He sings "She revels in the joy("Anandha") obtained from knowledge and wisdom("bodha")" and compares her beauty to the parrot once again as he describes her as the parrot("shukhi") in the cage("panjara") of life("ThAra").

The anupallavi is yet another display of this grammatical skills. He maintains the rhyme scheme with every word ending with a "khi" as mukhi,sakhi,sukhi and shukhi. The second line of the anupallavi has deep esoteric meanings once again. Notice how he describes the Goddess herself as the "bodhasukhi", the one who enjoys through wisdom, indicating how one can realize God within oneself through the "gnana mArga". He also compares Her beauty to the parrot and explicitly says She is the one around whom this entire world and life of ours revolves. He calls this world a cage thereby emphasizing on the necessity to reach the divine and hence realize this mAyA and escape from the rebirth cycles. Moving on to the charanam now,

**Charanam:**

*thripurAdhichakreshwarI animAdhisiddhIshwarI  
nithyakAmeshwarI kshithipura thrailokyamohanachakravarthinI  
prakatayoginI suraripu mahishAsurAdhimardhinI  
nigamapurAnAdhisamvedhinI*

**Madhyamakala Sahithyam:**

*thripureshI guruguhajananI thripurabhanjanaranjanI  
madhuripusahodharI thalodharI thripurasundharI maheshwarI*

**Meaning:**

The charanam as usual comes with the right flavour of upanishadic and yogic references by Dikshitar. He describes Her as the queen("IshwarI") of the thripura and other("Adhi") chakras in the astral body" and the Goddess for all siddhi powers such as anima(the power by virtue of which a yogi can reduce his body's size to smaller than the smallest particle and hence go through matter like doors,walls,etc.). Dikshitar sings "She is eternal("nithya") and the beloved of Kameshwara. She is the ruler("varthini") of the earth("Kshithipura") and the thrailokyamohana chakra(literally translating to the ring that is the reason for existence of mAyA in the three worlds). She is the manifestation of yogic power("prakatayogini") and the destroyer("mardhini") of the enemies("ripu") of the Gods("sura") such as Mahishasura and others. She is described completely("samvedhini") in the holy("nigama") scriptures("purAna"). She is the consort of Lord Shiva("thripureshi") and the mother of guruguha("guruguhajananI"). She rejoiced("ranjani") in the destruction("bhanjana") of thripura. She is the sister("sahodhari") of Lord Vishnu(the enemy("ripu") of the evil madhu). She is slender("thalodhari") and the spouse of Lord Maheshwara."

The charanam, as one can observe, has deep meanings and allusions to the path of kundalini yoga through which one attains self-realization and union with the divine. Siddhis like anima, lagna, prapthi etc. come along on the way as the yogi meditates and as the kundalini slowly ascends from the moolAdhAra chakra at the bottom of the spine, through the swAdhishtAna, manipUra, anAhitha, vishudha, AgnyA, finally culminating in the sahasrAra, the thousand petalled lotus in the head. Meditating on the devi seems to be the path which dikshithar used for self-realization. The seven swaras of carnatic music are supposed to stand for these seven chakras in the astral body. Thus, Dikshithar was truly in control of all his chakras both in the physical world (through his music) and in the astral plane (through his meditation and yogic life). Salute the great men who have become God like Dikshithar.

The exquisite usage of both the sAdhArana gAndhAram and the anthara gAndhAram adds a special grandeur to the charanam. Notice the absence of raga mudhra in this krithi though, unlike the dhyAna krithi where he doesn't use the raga mudhra at all, he uses a partial raga mudhra in "Anandha" in this krithi. The madhyamakalasaahithyam starts off with a wonderful ss PP grrs sns phrase thereby setting a nice rhythm. Quoting the Dikshithar keerthanamAIA, " By singing this krithi, one shall achieve (i). The full mercy of Sri Lalita Mahatripurasundari (ii). The captivation of Swarga, Madhya and PAthAla lokAs."

I will continue to explore the Nava Avarnas with the beautiful "kamalAmbAm Bhajare" krithi in kalyAni in my next post which I hopefully should put up in a few days. The dikshithar maniac in me seems to be growing infibounds everyday and with the wonderful association of friends with whom I continue to put sessions through the nights, I am very happy that I am heading in the right direction in life. Imagine..If I learn 2 krithis in 1 month (which seems to be a decent estimate), I should have learnt all the 481 krithis of dikshithar in 20 years. But more than the learning part, the listening and enjoying experience I get is immense and indescribable. All I can say is "Come, let us celebrate the beauty of carnatic music and revel and drown especially in the treasure of perhaps the greatest composer of all times and across all genres of music-Nadhajyothi Sri Muthuswami Dikshithar". See you all in the next blog. Shri Gurubhyo Namaha!!

Thursday, April 12, 2007

**kamalAmbAM bhajare-KalyAni**



I will continue my attempt to explain in detail the wonderful Nava Avarna krithis . Today, I will handle the beautiful second Avarana krithi in kalyAni, kamalAmbAM bhajare written in the dwithiyA vibhakthi(accusative case) on the "sarvAshA paripUrnaaka chakra". Hari says this is by far the best krithi ever composed in kalyAni,defining in entirety the beauty of this rAgA and I am sure all junta will agree on that. The pallavi starts off beautifully with a Ga Ma Pa phrase :). When listening to this pallavi, one realises that Dikshithar must have been in high spirits of union with God when he composed this krithi as he starts off by asking the mind to renounce worldly pleasures.

**Pallavi:**

*kamalAmbAM bhajare re mAnasa kalpithamAyAkAryaM thyaja re*

**Meaning:**

As I mentioned earlier, Dikshithar sings " Oh("re") mind and heart!!("mAnasa") worship("bhajare") Goddess kamalAmbA and hence please abandon("thyaja re") the attachment to worldly desires which are illusory("kalpitha"+"mAyA"+"kAryam")."

It is a simple beginning stating the basic purpose of one's birth..to realize that this entire world is a mAyA and move on to the higher astral plane. Apart from the spiritual meaning, the wonderful NDMG DMGRS phrase of kalyAni is showcased while singing "kalpithamAyAkAryaM" sahithyam. On the whole, it is a nice pallavi and acts as a good platform on which he builds the anupallavi in which he describes the beauty of the Goddess.

**Anupallavi:**

*kamalAvANisevithapArshvAM kambujayagrIvAM nathadevAM*

*kamalApurasadhanAM m.rdhugadhanAM kamanIyaradhanAM kamalavadhanAM*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar describes the Goddess as "She is flanked on both sides("pArshvAM") and served by("sevitha") Lakshmi("kamalA") and Saraswathi("vANi"). The beauty of her neck("grIvAM") surpasses("jaya") that of the conch("kambu") she holds. She is worshipped("natha") by the devAs("devAM") and resides("sadhanAM") in the lotus("kamalApura"). She is characterized by tender("mrdhu") speech("gadhanAM"), has charming and beautiful("kamanIya") teeth("radhanAM") and has a lotus-like("kamala") face("vadhanAM")."

I love this anupallavi..I personally feel it is the most beautiful part of the song. It is exquisite with characteristic kalyAni phrases and the sAhithyam just fuses amazingly with the thAlam and is a treat to sing/play. :). Dikshithar sings of the true beauty-portraying Goddess kamalAmbA as the mother of all mortals. One can vividly imagine the kamalAmbA sannidhi at the thiruvArUr temple listening to this anupallavi; which is yet another characteristic feature of all dikshithar krithis. In the charanam, as usual, Dikshithar delves into the deeper esoteric part of the krithi combined with some beautiful references to mythology. Things to look out for in the charanam are the mention of the chakra on which the krithi is composed and the mudhras. The second Avarana of the Sri chakra consists of a circular arrangement of 16 lotus petals. The sixteen yoginis residing in this chakra are called the gupta yoginis(hidden yoginis) and Dikshithar alludes to all this in the charanam.

**Charanam:**

*sarvAshAparipUrakachakraswAminIM paramashivakAminIM*

*durvAsArchithaguptayoginIM dukhaddhwamsinIM hamsinIM*

*nirvANanijasukhapradhAyinIM nithyakalyAnIM kAthyaAyanIM*

*sharvAnIM madhupavijayavenIM sadhguruguhajananIM niranjanIM*

*garvithabhaNDAsurabhanjanIM kAmAkarshiNyAdhiranjanIM*

*nirvisheshachaitanyarUpinIM urvIthatvAdhiswarUpinIM*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar describes kamalAmbA as the "Goddess of the sarvAshAparipUraka chakra". This is the second chakra in the sri chakra and on a word to word translation means the fulfiller of all the wishes("sarva"+"AshA"+"paripUraka"). He continues to describe Her as "the beloved("kAminIM") of the lord paramashiva". He says "She is the mystic("gupta") yogini worshipped by sage durvAsA. She destroys("DhwamsinIM") all sufferings and miseries("dhukka") and one who rides the swan("HamsinIM"). She is

the bestower ("pradhAyini") of true ("nija") bliss ("sukha") in the form of salvation ("nirvANA"). She is forever ("nithya") auspicious ("kalyAnIM"-hence the rAga mudhra). She is the daughter of sage kAthyAyanA ("kAthyAyanIM") and the consort of Lord shiva ("sharvAnIM"). The beauty of her black hair ("venIM") surpasses ("vijaya") the blackness of a swarm of bees ("madhupa"). She is the mother of the great guruguha ("sadhguruguhajananIM"-also the mudhra) and one who is unblemished and unattached ("niranjanIM"). She is the one who destroyed ("bhanjanIM") the demon BhANDa, the one who was obsessed with vain glory and arrogance ("garvitha"). She is the one who delights ("ranjanIM") kAmAkarshini and other shakthis. She is the embodiment ("rUpinIM") of the unqualified ("nirvishesha"), infinite and supreme ("chaitanya") consciousness and is the manifestation ("swarUpinIM") of the elements of the earth etc. ("urvi thathvaadhi").

The charanam is by far the most complete description of the Goddess I guess. The beautiful fashion in which he incorporates the raga mudhra referring to the Goddess as nithyakalyAni shows his skill at the language. The reference to the Goddess as "Hamsini" (the one who rides the swan) has deep meaning. As I once mentioned in my previous blogs, repeatedly uttering the word "hamso" (the root of hamsa), we get "so-ham" which stands for "I" (or the self). Goddess kamalAmbA hence rides the "hamsa" (soul) and is on top of the astral plane which is the final destination of a human being's soul. Personifying Her beauty by comparing Her tresses to the blackness of the swarm of bees shows Dikshitar's abilities to visualise and employ similes and metaphors once again displaying his vivid imagination and grasp of the sanskrit grammar. I love the "nirvisheshachaitanyaroopam" phrase in the charanam. On the whole a beautiful krithi embellishing the kalyAni raga. To conclude, I quote from the "Dikshitar kIrthana mAIA" which says that by singing this krithi, "one shall get the entire satisfaction of all desires, all auspicious things and ambAL's protection."

I will take up the beautiful third Avarana krithi in shankarAbharanam-"Shri kamalAmbikAyA katAkshithoham" in my next post. Till then, may Goddess kamalAmbA protect the entire world as she has been for eternity and let some sanity return to the Indian cricket team. Shri Gurubhyo Namaha!!



Friday, April 20, 2007

**shrI kamalAmbikayA katAkshithoham-Shankarabharanam**

I will take up the beautiful third Avarana krithi in shankarAbharanam, shrI kamalAmbikayA katAkshithoham composed exclusively in the thrithiyA vibhakthi (instrumental case) on the sarva samkshobhana chakra. As RR says very correctly in her blogs, dikshithar's compositions are basically hymns written with unbelievable meter, brilliantly fused with a wonderful display of the rAga bhAvams using both characteristic as well as uncharacteristic phrases of the rAga..each krithi being a masterpiece showcasing the pAndithyam of Dikshithar..grammatically perfect and musically unparalleled thereby stirring the soul directly. To put it in short..shtud\_max/sAshtAnga namaskAras :)

The pallavi of the krithi is perhaps the best status message/signature a person can set on orkut/gtalk. DIkshithar starts off with the direct reference to the advaita principles in the pallavi.

**Pallavi:**

*shrI kamalAmbikayA katAkshithoham  
sachchidhAnandha paripUrna brahmAsmi*

**Meaning:**

As I mentioned earlier, Dikshithar seems to say-"Lets get down to business" with these lines. He sings "By the grace of the auspicious Goddess kamalAmbA, I ("aham") am graced and protected ("katAksha"). I am now identified ("asmi") with the absolute ("paripUrna") Brahman, the completeness of existence ("sath"), consciousness ("chith") and bliss ("Anandha")." There is nothing much to interpret from these lines except for the direct meaning dikshithar conveys. The pallavi as usual is beautiful and has a wide scope for improvisation. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*pAkashAsanAdhi sakala devathA sevithayA  
pankajAsanAdhipancha krithyakrith bhAvithayA  
shokahara chathurapadhayA mUkamukhyavAkpradhayA  
kokanadhavijayapadhayA guruguhathathraipadhayA*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar sings "Lord Indra ("pAkashAsana") and all other devAs worship ("sevithayA") her. She is contemplated ("bhAvithayA") by Lord Brahma ("PankajAsana"-the one who sits in the lotus) and others by whom the five cosmic acts ("pancha krithya") are actually performed ("krith"). Her feet ("padha") are adept ("chathura") in destroying ("hara") grief and misery ("shoka"). She restored ("pradhayA") speech ("vAk") in mUka and made him a poet. Her feet ("padhaya") conquers ("vijaya") the beauty of red lotuses ("kokanadha"). She is the embodiment of the three-worded mantra tatva-tvam-asi ("thathrai") given by Lord Guruguha."

One can clearly see the grammatic splendour as he sticks to the instrumental case with all words ending with "yA". He seems to reinforce the advaita fundamentals once throughout this krithi referring to tatva-tvam-asi ("you are who you are") -ringing another bell, calling for self-realization. Moving on to the charanam,

**Charanam:**

*ananga kusumAdhyashta shakthyAkArayA  
arunavarna samkshobhana chakrAkArayA  
ananthakotyAndanAyaka shankaranAyikayA  
aShTavargAthmaka gupthatharayA varayA  
anangAdhi upAsithayA aShTadhaLABjasthithayA  
dhanurbhANadharakarayA dhayAsudhAsAgarayA*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar refers to the Goddess as an embodiment ("AkArayA") of *anangakusuma* and the other eight shakthis ("anangakusuma+Adhi(others)+ashta(eight)"). He alludes to Her as the dawn ("aruna(sun) varna(colour)"). Dikshithar employs a double entendre in "arunavarna" here. He sings "arunavarna samkshobhana chakrAkArayA", i.e., "She is enshrined in the reddish samkshobhana chakra". He continues to describe the Goddess as "the beloved ("nAyika") of Lord Shiva ("shankarA-partial raga mudra") who is the master ("nAyaka") of all the millions of universes ("anantha(entire)+koti(crore)+anda(worlds) " "). Dikshithar describes her as "the embodiment of the eight sets ("aShTavarga") of alphabets" and says "she is more clandestine ("guptha") than the

previous chakra and is supremely divine("varayA"). A yogi would understand this perfectly. As he progresses spiritually, he slowly unlocks the mystery of each chakra. Dikshithar continues "She is worshipped("upAsithayA") by Lord kAmA("ananga") and others and she resides("sthithaya") in the eight petalled("ashta dhala") lotus("abja"). She carries("dhara") a bow("dhanu") and arrow("bAnA") in her hands("karayA") and she is a nectareous("sudhA") ocean("sAgara") of compassion and mercy("dhayA")."

While singing krithis of such pristine grammar filled with perfection in every sense, it just leaves me wondering how is it humanly possible for a mind to compose something like this which inevitably always leads to the most logical answer that "he must be HE, the God of music". If a rasika like me with limited technical knowledge and zero professional experience has so much to take from these krithis, I cant even imagine the pleasure a technically trained artiste would feel while rendering it..sheer bliss. But then again, how can a human mind not feel the bliss in listening and trying to learn these krithis. What can you do when you see such an authoritative display of control from someone? I feel helpless..all I can do is surrender myself and fall at His feet..the greatest composer to have walked on God's green earth. "Shri Gurubyo Namah".

Sunday, June 10, 2007

**kamalAmbikAyai-kAmbhoji navAvarnam**

The best way to describe kamalAmbikAyai would be to call it as a majestic krithi. Written exclusively in the chaturthi vibhakthi(dative/fourth case), the central idea of the krithi is *kamalAmbikAyai namasthe*("salutations to kamalAmba"). Hence all the phrases in the krithi end with "yai" addressing the Goddess. The chakra being referred to is the sarvasowbhAgyadhAyaka chakra. As the name indicates, it grants all auspiciousness. It is also called "manukoNa" consisting of the 14 manu triangles and it enshrines 14 shakthis.

**Pallavi:**

*kamalAmbikAyai kanakAmshukAyai  
karpuravITikAyai namasthe namasthe*

**Meaning:**

Its a simple start to this beautiful krithi, more of a calm before the storm I would say :). DIkshithar shows his respect for the Goddess by singing "Oh kamalAmba!! I salute you again and again(*"namasthe namasthe"*). He beautifully describes her as "one who is clad in golden(*"kanaka"*) robe(*"amshukha"*) and one who chews betel leaves flavoured with camphor(*"karpUravITikAyai"*).

An exquisite slow and beautiful kAmbhoji is all i see in these opening lines of the krithi. The sAhiyam just fuses in. As usual Dikshithar displays his brilliance and authority in this simple pallavi. The DKJ/DKP version of the krithi is highly recommended for listening pleasure :). The anupallavi is again a passionate description of the Goddess talking about her different attributes and capturing folklore.

**Anupallavi:**

*kamalAkAntha anujAyai kAmeshwaryai ajAyai  
himagirithanujAyai hRImkArapUjyAyai  
kamalAnagaravihAriNyai khalasamUhasaMhAriNyai  
kamanIyathnahAriNyai kalikalmshaparihAriNyai*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar addresses the devi as "the younger sister(*"anuja"*) of Vishnu, the husband(*"kAnthA"*) of Lakshmi(*"kamalA"*)". He sings "You are Goddess kAmeshwari and you are not born of anyone(*"ajAyai"*). You are the daughter(*"thanuja"*) of the mountain(*"himagiri"*) and are worshipped(*"pUjyAyai"*) by the mystic sound(*"akAra"*) *"hRIm"*

. The one who dwells(*"vihAra"*) in the lotus(*"kamalAnagara"*) and the one who destroys(*"saMhAriNyai"*) the entire group(*"samUha"*) of dishonest people(*"khala"*). You wear a garland of beautiful(*"kamanIya"*) jewels(*"rathna"*) and you dispel the sins(*"kalmsha parihAriNyai"*) committed by the poison of this kali yuga."

The first thing one notices about the anupallavi is the subtle cum glaring oxymoron employed by the genius. He refers to the Goddess as the daughter of the mountain and at the same time says she is not born of anyone. This is a direct implication that Gods do not suffer or gain from karma. They are beyond the birth-death cycle, the ones running the show actually. But in different incarnations come down to earth in human form to solve problems by being one among us. The hRImkAra mantra is an extremely powerful sound about which I should write a separate blog soon. As for now, I would just like to say that if Om is considered as the silent divine father, then hRIm is the active divine mother. It is basically a bIja mantra which encompasses all our sorrows and questions about the ultimate truth..basically a call from the creations to the creator addressing the purpose of creation. As i said, I will write a separate blog on this mantra once I finish with the navAvarnams and will try to explain the deep meaning of this mAyA mantra and how it has been effectively used by dIkshithar. Moving on to the charanam, I am in tears now listening to this absolutely soul-stirring version of kamalAmbA samrakshathumAm by TMK..aahaa..the Anandabhairavi is killing me..>--<-0 @thalaivar.

**Charanam:**

*sakalasowbhAgyadhAyakAmbhojacharaNAyai  
samkshobiniNyAdhi shakthiyutha chathurthyAvaraNAyai  
prakata chathurdasha bhuvanabharaNAyai*

*prabala guruguha sampradhAyAnthah karaNAyai  
akalankarUpa varNAyai aparNAyai suparNAyai  
sukharadruthachApabANayai shobhanakaramanukoNAyai  
sa kunkumAdhi lepanAyai charAcharAdhi kalpanAyai  
chikurvijitha nIlAghanAyai chidhAnanda pUrnanaganAyai*

**Meaning:**

As i told you the pallavi and anupallavi are the calm before the storms. The charanam is a monster but nevertheless the most beautiful part of the krithi. It is just mind-boggling for me to even read and interpret such quality grammar..think of the brilliant brain that should have composed this. Anyway..coming back to the krithi, Dikshithar beautifully fuses the rAga mudhra in the first line by addressing the Goddess as "one who possesses lotus-like("ambhoja") feet("charanAyai") which grant("dhAyaka") all auspiciousness("sakala samkshobhana")." What a beautiful way to employ the rAga mudhra as "dhAyakAmbhoja charana". He continues to describe Her as "one who resides in the fourth enclosure("chathur yutha") consisting of shakthis such as samkshobhina and others." He sings "you rule("bharaNAyai") the fourteen("chathurdasha") created("prakata") worlds("bhuvana"). You are at the cause and the main reason("anthah kAraNAyai")of the well-known("prabala") tradition("sampradhAyai") to which Lord guruguha belongs. You are the one who possesses blemishless("a+kalanka") beauty("rUpa") and complexion("varna"). You are the one also known as aparNa and also the beautiful swan("suparNAyai")." Please refer to my previous posts for information on how the swan is a mystic bird. He continues "Your lovely hands("sukara") hold("dhrutha") the bow("chaapa") and arrow("bANAyai"). You are the one who resides in the effulgent("shobhanakara") chakra consisting of the fourteen manu triangles("koNA"). You are besmeared("lepanAyai") with red kumkum etc. and you are the reason("kalpana"-creator) for the existence of movable("chara") and unmovable("achara") objects. Your black hair("chikura") is resplendently superior("vijitha") to the blue-black clouds("nIlaghana") and you are the full("pUrna") essence("ghanAyai") of consciousness("chith") and bliss("Ananda")."

As i mentioned, its a huge, complex charanam which is loaded with facts, folklores and allusions. For example, the Goddess is also called *aparNa* because there is a story that inorder to please the Lord, She, in deep penance, did not take any food, not even consuming the fallen leaf and hence the name "*a-parNa*". On the whole its a defining kAmbhoji which is a sheer bliss to listen to. I am feeling a little hungry now and so will cut it here and run for cooking dinner. I am listening to "Shri kAnthimathi" in hemAvathi now..another beautiful krithi. I guess the word guruguha itself stands for sheer paramAnandam :). I will take up one of my most favourite dikshithar krithis next, the bhairavi navAvarnam-"Shri kamalAmbikAyAh paramnahi re". The krithi has yet another monster of a charanam. I have to go to work for the next 5 days and so it will take me sometime to post it i guess. Till then take care ppl..have a wonderful week and spend your life listening to dikshithar krithis if you have not so far..trust me..its the best bliss you can give this human form. "No dIkshithar, No fun; Know dIkshithar, Know fun". :)

Saturday, June 16, 2007

**shri kamalAmbikAyAH-Bhairavi**

Today I am going to try to interpret the 5th Avarna of the navAvarNams, "shri kamalAmbikAyAh param" in Bhairavi. The krithi is written exclusively in the fifth case ("*panchama vibhakthi*"/*Ablative case*). The central theme of the krithi is "*kamalAmbikAyAh param nahi re, re chiththa*" ("Oh mind!!there is nothing greater than Goddess kamalAmbA"). The krithi is about the "sarvasiddhi pradha" chakra which gives all powers to the human soul. In the Sri chakra, it is the outer set of 10 triangles and is hence also known as "*bahirdashAra chakra*". As you would have observed in all of the navAvarNams, the charanams are completely loaded with grammar, esoteric references, raga mudhras..everything. This krithi is no different..infact I would say it is by far one of the most tongue-twisting charanams I have ever heard. This is where you must appreciate and understand the pristine quality of grammar in dIkshithar's krithis. All the different words fused in such exquisiteness that it makes one's soul reverberate with reverence and love for the man behind the music.

**Pallavi:**

*shri kamalAmbAyAH param nahi re re chiththa*  
*kshithyAdhi shivAntha tathva swarUpiNyAH*

**Meaning:**

DIkshithar starts off in a simple manner. He sings "Oh mind!! ("*re chiththa*") , there is nothing greater than ("*param nahir re*") the auspicious Goddess kamalAmbA. She is the quintessence ("*tathva swarUpam*") of all the principles, from the earth ("*kshithi*") to the ultimate ("*antha*") Lord shivA."

In this pallavi, I love the way he commands his mind. He just calls upon it and instructs it that Goddess kamalAmbA is the ultimate thus sending out a message to all of us. On the musical aspect of things, I would say the krithi builds up beautifully from here. It is a majestic bhairavi and there is ample scope for a qualified musician to sing the pallavi alone for 10 minutes or so. Moving on to the anupallavi now,

**Anupallavi:**

*shrIkaNTa viShNu virinchAdhi janayithryAH*  
*shivAthmaka vishwakarthyAH kArayithryAH*  
*shrIkara bahirdashAra chakra sthithyAH*  
*sevitha bhairavi bhArgavi bhArathyAH*

**Meaning:**

DIkshithar pays her the ultimate compliment by calling her "the divine creator/mother ("*janayithryAH*") of shivA ("*shrIkaNTa*") , viShNu, Brahma ("*virinchi*") and others." He further describes her as "the one who created ("*karthyAH*") the universe ("*vishwa*") of which Lord shivA is the essence ("*shivAthmaka*")" and as "the one who is responsible for ("*ithryAH*") all the actions ("*kAraya*") which take place here." DIkshithar sings "She resides ("*sthithyAH*") in the auspicious ("*shrIkara*") chakra containing the outer 10 triangles ("*bahirdashAra*") and she is served by Bhairavi, bhArgavi and bhArathi (Parvathi, Lakshmi and Saraswathi)."

From this wonderful anupallavi one can see that dIkshithar must have been at heights of bliss while composing it. He has attributed the creator, protector, destroyer and their respective consorts to being the creations of Goddess kamalAmbA indicating that she is the basic reason for the universe's existence. He beautifully embeds the rAga mudhra in the anupallavi itself. I guess this serves as a warning for the coming earthquake of a charanam..a ground shaker. So here goes..

**Charanam:**

*nAdhamaya sUKShmarUpa sarvasiddhipradAdi dasha shaktyArAdhitamUrteH*

*shrotrAdi dashakaraNAtmaka kuLakauLika bahuvidhopAsitakIrteH*

*abheda nitya shuddhabuddhamukta-saccidAnandamaya paramAdvaitasphUrteH*

*Adi madhyAntarahitAprameya guruguhamodita-sarvArthasAdhakasphUrteH*



*mUIAdi navAdhAra vyAv.rtta dashadhvanibhedaj~na yogib.rnda saMrakShaNyAH*

*anAdi mAyAvidyA-kArya kAraNa vinodakaraNa paTutarakaTAkSha vIkShaNyAH*

**Meaning:**

First of all I must apologize for the non-readability of the charanam in the format as posted above. The *sandhis* are so intricate that splitting them in other fashion would lead to misinterpretations and dangerous results. :) So bear with it..this is the best I could do. Well..if someone wants to learn how to compose krithis of infinite meter and unimaginable vedantic and adwaithic references, I would say this is the best possible 6 lines one could get. If you think singing such a charanam is difficult, imagine the mind that should have composed this..what can you say except fall at his feet. Anyway, I will try to split the sandhis to the best of my abilities and explain..hope it is satisfactory.

Dikshitar sings "Sound("nAdha") is the subtle("sUkshma rUpa") form of her and she is worshipped("ArAdhitha") by the ten shakthis-sarvasiddhipradha and others. She, who is famous("kIrthe") for being worshipped("upAsitha") in distinct forms("bahu vidha") such as kuLa, kauLa and for being the embodiment("Atmaka") of the ten organs("dashakaranAthmaka"-(five sensory and five organs of action)). She who is the manifestation("spurthe") of the supreme non-dual("advaita"), non-differentiated("abheda") ,eternal("nitya"), pristine ("shuddha"), enlightened ("buddha") and liberated self ("muktha"), characterized by existence("sadh"), consciousness ("chidh") and bliss ("Anandham").

She who is an integral whole ("a-prameya") without ("rahita") any beginning ("Adhi"), middle ("madhya") or end ("antha"). She who is knowledgeable and is entertained ("moditha") by Guruguha, she manifests ("spUrthe") as the Sarvartthasadhaka Chakra, achieving ("sAdhaka") all ("sarva") purposes ("artha"). She who protects ("samrakshanyA") the yoginis ("yogi brindha") residing in the nine ("nava") centers ("AdhAra") of the astral body such as Muladhara, etc ("Adhi"). and who, surpassing these ("vyavr.ttha") are adept at how to pierce them through the knowledge of the ten sounds ("dashadhvani"). She, who with her mere glance ("aksha") is capable ("paTutara") of dispelling ("vikAsinyAH") beginningless ("anAdhi") delusion ("mAya") and ignorance ("avidhya") and the laws of cause ("kArana") and effect ("kArya")."

Now was that what i call the biggest monster charanam ever..but isn't she a wonderful monster..a real beauty :). dikshitar sings of Her praise and establishes her presence in the physical, astral and the causal planes. The fact that he describes Her as the "paripUrna", as the one without a beginning or an end and attributes Her to the ten sensory and motor organs(physical plane), the nine chakras(astral plane) and as the one who destroys "mAya", "avidhya" and the "kArana-kArya" cycle(causal plane) establishes Goddess kamalambA as the God. I would even go as far as saying that dikshitar is sure to have meditated and loved Her as his God..the divine romance which finally took him to salvation and beyond. This and the Ahiri navAvarNams are testimonials to this fact.

How can one not notice the beauty and authority of this krithi..filled with musical, vedantic, grammatical grandeur and what not..what more can one want from a krithi? With all due respect to all the other composers, how can one not sing/play this krithi as the main piece when he/she sings/plays bhairavi in a concert. I have heard it being sung very few times and it is a disturbing fact. So if some artist is reading this post, I kindly request you to sing this as your main when you sing bhairavi in concerts. I feel that it is the duty of each soul which learns and listens to carnatic music to popularize these masterpieces which cannot be eroded by trivial factors such as time.(feeling really really emotional as i write this)

I will continue on this noble endeavour to try to shed light on these beautiful krithis by the greatest composer ever!! It is my birthright. So I will blog about the punAgavarALi navAvarnam in my next post..yet another gem from the great God of music..Shri gurubhyo namaH!!

Sunday, June 17, 2007

**kamalAmbikAyAH thava-PunnAgavarALi**

I just have one word to describe the punnAgavarALi navAvarNam..exquisite. dIkshithar could not have chosen a better rAga to compose this navAvarNam because it perfectly conveys and carries the devotion in the central idea of the krithi "kamalAmbikAyAH bhaktha"("I am the devotee of Goddess kamalAmbika"). The krithi, written in sixth case("shashti vibhakthi") deals with the sarvarakshAkara chakra("the one which protects all") in the srI chakra.It consists of the inner set of ten triangles("anhardashAra").

**Pallavi:**

*kamalAmbikAyAstava bhakto.ahaM  
shaNkaryAH shrIkaryAH saNgItarasikAyAH shrI*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar sings "I am("aham") the devotee("bhaktho") of Goddess kamalAmbika. She, the beloved("aryAH") of shaNkara, is the one who bestows auspiciousness, prosperity("shrIkaryAH") and She is the one who enjoys("rasika") divine music("sangItha").

A majestic opening to this krithi which aptly evokes the bhaktha rasa is visible. In these lines dIkshithar seems to request the Goddess to accept his devotion in the form of the divine music he is composing in Her praise. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*sumasharekShu kodhaNDa pAshANKusha pANyAH  
athimadhuratharavANyAH sharvANyAH kalyANyAH  
ramaNIyapunnAgavarALi vijitha veNyAH shrI*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar starts to beautifully describe the Goddess as "She is the one who possesses flower("suma") arrows("shara"), sugarcane("kodhaNDa"), the noose("pAsha") and the goad ("ankusha") in her four hands("pANyAH"). Her speech("vANyAH") is excessively sweet("athimadhura"). She is the wife("ANyAH") of shivA("sharva") and she is kalyANi, the eternally auspicious one. Her braided hair("veNyAH") is superior to("vijitha") the lovely("ramaNIya") black bees("varALi") that swarm around the puNNaga tree".

The highlight of the anupallavi is the beautiful "slesham"(double meaning) employed by dikshithar to fuse in the rAga mudhra and at the same time use a simile to directly compare the Goddess's beauty to the black bees. It is these small(or large-depends on the way you see it) things and intricate details about dIkshithar's pAndithyam that makes him so special and he yet again proves that he is the undisputed king of sanskrit grammar. As usual, the charanam that follows is intricately woven and it clearly reverberates with that "dIkshithar effect" and leaves you amazed as usual.

**Charanam:**

*dashakalAtmaka vahniswarUpa prakAshAntardashAra-  
sarvarakShAkara chakreshvaryAH tri-dashAdhinutha-  
kachavarga dvayamaya sarvaj~nAdhi dashashakthi sametha-  
mAlinIchakreshvaryAH tridashaviMshadhvarNa garbhiNI kuNDalinyAH  
dashamudrA samArAdhitha kauLinyAH  
dasharathAdhinutha guruguhajanaka shiva bodhinyAH  
dashakaraNa v.rtti marIchi nigarbhayoginyAH shrI*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar goes into the kundalini yoga mArga and talks about the vedanthic and spiritual aspects governed by the Goddess in the charanam. He sings "She is the one whose essential nature("swarUpa") is the light of the ten-fold("dashakAla") fire("vahni"), manifest("parAkAsha") in the sarvarakShAkara("all protective") chakra consisting of the inner ten triangles("anhardashAra"). She is the goddess governing the mAlinI chakra, worshipped("nutha") by the thirty deities("thridasha") residing in the chakra which has the ten shakthis including sarvAj~nya and others("Adhi") representing the ten alphabets("dvaya maya") of the "ka" and "cha" groups("varga"). She is

kundalini, encompassing the 50 letters("thridasha vimshadh varna"). She is Goddess kaulini who is worshipped("samArAdhitha") by the ten("dasha") mudhrAs. She is worshipped("nutha") by Dasharatha and others and is the one who imparts knowledge("bOdhiNyAH") on the nature of Shiva, the father("janaka") of guruguha. She is the one who is hidden("yOgiNyAH") in the manifestations("nigarbha") which constitute the functioning("vr.tti") of the ten senses and motor organs("dashakarana" 5 j~nanendriyAs and 5 karmendriyAs)."

Apart from the kundalini yoga and scriptural references, the beauty of the charanam lies in the exquisite meter dikshithar employs with the sAhithyams falling nicely in place for the rUpaka thAla. Also, one can notice the intelligence of dIkshithar as he refers to rAmAyanA implicitly(or explicitly-depending on how one sees it) in one line when he says She is worshipped by Dasharatha and beautifully brings in the word "janaka" which stands for father here but in rAmAyanA, king janaka is the father of Seetha. On the whole a charming krithi for any artiste to render and ofcourse a real treat for the rasika.

In my next blog, I will take up my second favourite navAvarnam("first being the Ahiri navAvarnam"), the scintillating sahAnA navAvarnam-perhaps the best sahAnA defining krithi i have heard. Till then, keep singing the praise of the Nadhajyothi and ofcourse his krithis!! Shri gurubhyo namaha.

Tuesday, June 26, 2007

**shrI kamalAmbikAyAm-sahAnA**

I am drowning myself in supreme bliss as I am typing this. I am listening to Seshu's version of soundararAjAm, perhaps the best ever krithi composed in brindAvana sArangA, and I am achieving that state of samAdhi in every sangathi and every word of this wonderful dIkshithar krithi. I find myself incapable to explain in words the feeling, which is mostly the situation i find myself in while listening most of dIkshithar's krithis. The grandeur just gets to me. Last week was wonderful. SK's(our AsthAna vidwan) renditions of the kalyANi, ghaNTA, Ahiri and punnAgavarAli navavarNams are still ringing in my ears. I had to fight back tears while listening to these beautiful and powerful krithis sung with manOdharma and bhakti. As I always say, at some point of time in all dIkshithar krithis, I get this feeling of helplessness and "Oh..let this life end right now" kind of thoughts and I surrender myself completely to the genius. That is the power he enforces on a rasikA. And he overpowers you into complete submission with the sahAnA navAvarNam too..the grammar, the musical and the vedantic precisions become too much to handle for a mortal like me.

I love sahAnA... it is my favourite rAgA and I have heard almost all krithis ever composed in the rAgA and I would say shrI kamalAmbikAyAm is perhaps the best krithi I have heard in sahAnA. The krithi, composed exclusively in the seventh case("sapthami vibhakthi/locative case") is yet another masterpiece from the grandmaster of all composers. dIkshithar seems to emphasize his devotion to the Goddess in this krithi with the central idea being "ahaM kamalAmbikAyAm bhakthim karomi"(I offer my devotion to Goddess kamalAmbA). The chakra addressed in this krithi is the *sarvarogahara* (destroyer of all miseries and illnesses) which consists of 8 triangles. The pallavi begins as,

**Pallavi:**

*shrI kamalAmbikAyAM bhaktiM karomi  
shritakalpavATikAyAM chaNDikAyAM jagadambikAyAm*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar surrenders and sings "I offer ("karomi") my devotion ("bhakthiM") to Goddess kamalAmbA, the auspicious one ("shrI"). She, who resides in the garden ("vATikAyAM") and is fulfilling the wishes ("shritakalpa") of all the devotees who take refuge in her. She is the fierce one ("chaNDika") and the mother of the universe ("jagadambikAyAm")."

Quite typical of all the navAvarNams we have seen so far, in this krithi also, dIkshithar starts off with a pretty simple pallavi. But this is where the performer can excel and improvise. The pallavi has so much scope that I have heard atleast some 10 sangathis of the first line itself. The first line captures almost all of the characteristic phrases of the rAgA which makes it the most beautiful opening lines of a sahAnA krithi according to me. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*rAkAchandra vadanAyAM rAjIva nayanAyAM  
pAkArunata charaNyAM AkAshAdi kiraNayAm  
hrIMkAra vipina hariNyAM hrIMkAra susharIriNyAM  
hrIMkAra taruma~njaryAM hrIMkAreshvaryAM gauryAm*

**Meaning:**

Dikshithar beautifully describes the Goddess in the anupallavi. He says "Her face ("vadanAyAM") is like the full moon ("rAkAchandra") and her eyes ("nayanAyAM") are like the lotus bud ("rAjiva"). Her feet ("charaNyAM") is worshipped ("nutha") by Lord Indra ("pAkAri") and she radiates ("kiranAyAm") as the five elements such as sky ("AkAshA") and others. She is the deer ("hariNyAM") that roams in the forests ("vipina") of the HRIM sound and her form ("kAra") is the embodiment ("sushaririNyAM") of the hrim sound. She is the beautiful bunch of flowers ("manjaryAM") in the tree ("tharu") of Hrim. She is the Goddess ("EshvaryAM") of HrIm and she is gowri, the fair one."

What a beautiful anupallavi. Everytime I hear this krithi, I listen to the anupallavai atleast twice before i move on to the charanam. It is wonderful as it encompasses all the major phrases of sahAnA. Further, we can evidently see the supreme state of bliss in which dikshithar must have been when he composed these lines. Apart from his usual

way of using beautiful similes to describe the Lord, he starts to describe the devi as different forms of the hrIm sound (for which I will write a separate blog soon) and finally he says she is Ishwari of the hrIm sound itself implying Her to be the creator of all that is available today. He also tries to emphasize the formless and boundless nature of the Goddess in these lines. Really beautiful :). Anyway, life has to go on and so I will move on to the charanam now.

**Charanam:**

*sharIratraya vilakShaNa sukhataara svAtmAnu bhoginyAM  
viri~nci harIshAna harihaya vedita rahasya yoginyAm  
parAdi vAgdevatArUpavashinyAdi vibhAginyAM  
charAtmaka sarvarogaharanirAmaya rAjayoginyAm  
karadh.rtavINAvAdinyAM kamalAnagaravinodinyAM  
suranaramunijanamodinyAM guruguhavaraprasAdinyAm*

**Meaning:**

Dikshitar beautifully sings "She rejoices ("*bhoginyAm*") in Her own ("*swa*") self ("*AtmAnu*") of supreme bliss ("*sukhatara*") , the self which transcends ("*vi-lakshana*") the three ("*traya*") states of existence ("*sharIra*") : the casual, the subtle, and the gross. She who is the secret ("*rahasya*") yogini, known only ("*vedita*") to Brahma ("*virinchi*") , Vishnu ("*hari*") , Shiva ("*haya*") , and Hayagriva ("*harishana*"). She is distinguished ("*vibhAginyam*") as the Shakti Vasini, etc ("*para-Adi*"). and as the deity ("*devata-rUpa*") of pure speech ("*vAk*"). She is the healing Raja Yoga which destroys ("*hara*") all ("*sarva*") transient ("*nirAmaya*") illnesses ("*roga*"). She, who plays ("*vAdhinyAm*") the Vina, which She holds ("*druta*") in Her hands ("*kara*"). She who resides and delights ("*vinodinyAm*") in Kamalanagara. She charms ("*modhinyAm*") the Gods ("*sura*") , men ("*nara*") and sages ("*munijana*"). She grants Guruguha the boon ("*prasaadhinyAm*") of Her grace ("*vara*")."

For a navAvarNam, I would say that this charanam is very very simple. As he does in all the other navAvarNams, dIkshitar describes the chakra and how the Goddess is the real yogini residing in these chakras. He finally describes Her as the raja yoga itself. There is a partial rAga mudhra in "*harIshAna*". The madhyamakala sahithyams are really beautiful in this krithi and they just follow suit one after the other in great grandeur and finally fall exquisitely in place leading to the pallavi. On the whole, It is yet another masterpiece from the great man. My personal advise is, If you are someone who loves sahAna, then you must listen to this krithi. It is by far the best defining krithi for the rAga.

Thanks to my friend Vijay Bashyam, I am now in possession of a software which enables me type text in sanskrit. So most probably from the next post, I will be posting the lyrics in sanskrit. I will take up the majestic ghaNTA navAvarNam in my next blog and try to do as much justice as I can. If you have not listened to this krithi yet, I would highly recommend you to do that as early as possible. :) I am feeling terribly sleepy today..I dont know why..anyway, passing on from one bliss to another..music to sleep :). Take care all of you and keep listening to dIkshitar krithis in order to make your life more colourful and meaningful :) shrI gurubhyo Namaha indeed!! :)



Saturday, June 30, 2007

**shrI kamalAmbikE avAva-ghaNTa**

Continuing with the kamalAmbA navAvarNams, I will discuss the beautiful " श्री कमलाम्बिकेऽवाव" in raga ghaNTa. Composed exclusively in the sambhOdhana vibakthi(vocative case), the central idea that dIkshithar wants to convey is "shrI kamalAmbike ava ava Alokaya mAm"(Oh kamalAmbA, protect me and glance at me)". The krithi deals with the sarvasiddhipradha chakra which happens to be the innermost triangle of the srI chakra that encompasses the dot(bindu) at the center. The rAgA ghaNTa is classified as a janya of nArirIthigowla(the equivalent of natabhairavi in the dIkshithar school). I guess the rAgA has been revived and has been preserved for posterity by this wonderful krithi. Personally, it is one of my favourite krithis no doubt and when Shreekrishna sings it, the bliss becomes too much for these mortal ears to bear. The pallavi starts off as

**Pallavi:**

श्री कमलाम्बिकेऽवाव शिवे करधत्तशुकशारिके

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "May Goddess kamalAmbA, the auspicious one and the spouse of Lord Shiva("shivE"), the one who holds("dhrutha") parrot("shuka") and mynah("shArikE") birds in her hands, protect me("avAva")."

It is a simple pallavi which is an excellent display of the majestic gait characteristic of the rAgA. The use of both the shuddha deivatham and the shatshruthi deivatham seems to bring in an extra magic thereby casting the listeners in a spell of beauty often leading to a trance from which rasikas fail to wake up for eternity. Moving on to the anupallavi now,

**Anupallavi:**

लोकपालिनि कपालिनि शूलिनि लोकजननि

भगमालिनि सकन्दालोकय मां सर्वसिद्धि-

प्रदायिके त्रिपुराम्बिके बालाम्बिके

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "She is the protector of the world("lokapAlini") and she is adorned by skulls("kapAlini") and a trident("shUlini"). She is the mother of all worlds("lokajanani") and is also known as bhagamAlini. May her cast her glance("Alokya") on me("mAm") and bestow me with all the powers("sarvasiddhi"). Oh mother tripura and balAmbika."

The anupallavi is extremely sweet and must be heard in order to understand how beautifully the sAhityams fuse into the rAgA. The "let this world end now" kind of feeling starts to creep in at the end of the anupallavi. I am getting goosebumps even as I type this. I am reminded of the wonderful renditions by SK which will ring in my ears till I leave my mortal coils. GhaNTa gives a totally different kind of feeling..a feeling of deep reverence, submission and surrender to the Lord. The charanam which ensues makes sure that you wont wake up from this trance for 2 days atleast. It is filled with beautiful descriptions of the Devi, references to the scriptures and perhaps the best ever possible way of using the rAgA mudhra which are testimonials to the repeated displays of brilliance from dIkshithar.

**Charanam:**

सन्तप्त हेम सन्निभ देहे सदाखण्डैकरसप्रवाहे

सन्तापहर त्रिकोणगेहे सकाम्श्वरि शक्तिसमूहे

सन्ततं मुक्ति घण्टामणि घोषायमान कवाटद्वारे

अनन्त गुरुगुह विदिते कराःप्युलि नखोदय विष्णु दशावतारे

अन्तहकरणेषु कार्मुक शब्दादि पःन्च तन्मात्र विशिखात्यन्त

रागपाश दवेषाःपुकुश धरकरे अतिरहस्य योगिनीपरे

**Meaning:**

Before the charanam starts, I just want to say that dIkshithar is God, once again. It is definitely not possible for a human to compose such stuff which makes you wonder what the hell you have been doing in life... a sure step towards salvation. He beautifully describes the Goddess as "Her body ("dehe") is effulgent ("sannibha") as molten

("santApta") gold ("hema"). You are the eternal ("sadha") flow ("pravAhe") of uninterrupted ("akhanda") and unique ("eka") bliss ("rasa"). You reside ("gehe") in the triangle ("trikona") that removes ("hara") all sorrows ("santhApa"). You are in the company of ("samuhe") kameshwari, vAmeshwari and bhagamAlini." These are just general descriptions of the Goddess till now. He sings that Goddess kamalAmbA is eternal bliss and this statement is further corroborated by the lines that follow. dIkshithar sings "Forever("santhatam"), You are the wide("kavAta") doorway("dwAre"), announced("ghoshAyamAna") by the jewelled bell ("ghaNTAmani") as the path to salvation and liberation("mukthi"). You are known ("vidhithe") to guruguha and anantha. The nails ("nakho") of your ten fingers ("anguli") in your hands("kara") are the source ("daya")of the ten incarnations("dashAvathAre") of viShNu. You are the supremely ("athi") secret ("rahasya") Yogini, who holds ("dhara") in Her four hands ("kare") the sugar cane ("ikshu") bow ("kArmuka") symbolising the mind ("antahkarana"), five arrows symbolising the five ("pancha") Tanmatras - essences, sounds ("shabda") etc ("Adi") of the five elements, the noose ("pAsha") symbolising attachment ("rAga"), and the goad ("ankusha") symbolising repulsion ("dvesha")."

The first thing I would like to mention is the way in which he employs the rAga mudhra..using ghaNTA as ghaNTAmani..wow!!what a brilliant mind this man should have. It is evident that dIkshithar was at the heights of bliss when he composed these lines praising the Goddess and picturing her as the doorway to salvation. He also seems to reiterate lalitha sahasranAmam when he says that the ten avatars of vishnu emanated from Her finger nails. Again, the beautiful way in which he relates the four hands and the possessions of the Devi to the things in the physical and mental planes of this world, show that she is the ruler of the world having all these under her control and hence if we want to break free from these, we have to surrender to her which is again enforcing the fact that She is the doorway to salvation. The logical conclusion that a carnatic music rasika can come to after listening to this soulful krithi is that as long as there are such wonderful meaningful krithis which convey the essence of life and death and the purpose of one's birth, the world need not fear about losing carnatic music which is not just something that is pleasant to the ear but beautiful to the soul. I am seriously feeling these vibes as I am typing these lines. SK's voice, those beautiful lines..aahaa..supreme bliss. Let life stay this way forever..complete surrender to dIkshithar.

What a wonderful way to spend a weekend. Listening to dIkshithar krithis, being with friends and ofcourse eating, sleeping etc..bliss in all physical, mental and astral planes. I am now planning to play my guitar for sometime and then put myself to sleep breathing dIkshithar. I will discuss the authoritative Ahiri navAvarNam in my next post. That is yet another krithi which stirs your soul with the absolute truth "shrI kamalAmbA jayathi". Let the brilliance of dIkshithar spread all over the world and let every soul experience the same bliss as I do. shrI gurubhyo namaha :)

Saturday, July 14, 2007

**shrI kamalAmbA jayathi-Ahiri**

I will now continue with the kamalAmbA navAvarNams by taking up the Ahiri navAvarNam which in my view is perhaps the best of the lot. Be it rAga bhAva, bhakthi rasa, sanskrita pAndithyam..dIkshithar has just overloaded this krithi with all of these and much more. dIkshithar must have been in a trance and in perhaps the highest bliss a human being could experience, in communion with God and only his sub-conscious mind could have composed something so powerful as this krithi. The first time I heard this krithi was on April 1st, 2007 at around 4 am EST thanks to SK(the wonderful fool's day session which lasted for 8 hours straight from 11 pm to 7 am) and I could not hold back my tears. I have never been moved so much by anything in my life and I truly felt the power of dIkshithar's genius. My hair stands even now as I am typing these lines. The feeling of bliss is inexplicable.

Moving on to the krithi, *shrI kamalAmbA jayathi* is the last AvaraNa and it is about the sarvAnandamaya chakram which is the bindu(dot) at the centre of the srI chakra signifying the supreme bliss..the chakra in which resides parApara rahasya yogini..which can be reached only by the highest of the yogis who strive for constant God communion and this was perhaps what dIkshithar reached and felt when he scripted this masterpiece. This krithi employs all the eight vibhakthis. The pallavi is in the nominative case, the first 3 lines of the anupallavi are in accusative case and the rest of the anupallavi is in the instrumental case. The first line of the charanam is in the dative case with each of the following lines employing the ablative, genitive and locative cases. The madhyamakAla sAHitya is once again in the nominative case in order to smoothly transition into the pallavi once again. The pallavi starts off as below:

**Pallavi:**

*shrI kamalAmbA jayati amba shrI kamalAmbA jayati  
jagadAmbA shrI kamalAmbA jayati  
sh.rNgArarasakadamba madamba shrI kamalAmbA jayati  
chidbimba pratibimbendubimba shrI kamalAmbA jayati  
shrIpurabindumadhyastha chintAmaNimandirastha  
shivAkAramanchasthita shivakAmeshANkastha*

**Meaning:**

Since some of my friends told me that they had font issues in the browser while reading my previous post in which I had used the sanskrit fonts, I am reverting to the old style of transliteration. dIkshithar sings "Goddess kamalAmbA is victorious("jayathi"). Hail("jayathi") my mother("amba") Goddess kamalAmbA. Hail the mother of the universe("jagath+amba"). Hail Goddess kamalAmbA, my mother("madamba") who is the essence("rasa") of flower("kadamba") of love("sh.rNgAra"). Hail Goddess kamalAmbA who is of the form of pure consciousness("chidbimba") and who is the reflection("bimba") of the original ("pratibimbendu")consciousness residing in the bindu. She is seated on the throne("mancha") which is a form("AkAra") of shivA, in the embrace("ANkastha") of shivA, the Lord of desire and she resides("astha") in the wish fulfilling gem("chinthAmani") temple("mandira")-the bindu chakra which is the center("madhya") of auspiciousness("shrI").

First of all, we can clearly see right off the bat that this is no ordinary krithi. It by far has the biggest pallavi among the navAvarNams and perhaps even among all of dIkshithar's krithis. Secondly, we can see a sense of urgency..a flow of thoughts which seem as if dIkshithar just saw the Goddess while he was meditating, woke up from a trance and let his subconscious mind script what he saw. He hails the Goddess proudly as his mother and the mother of the universe which is yet another indication that he reached the supreme bliss state and maybe his kundalini rose and touched the sahasrara chakra in the astral body prompting him to burst out with this praise. On the whole, the pallavi is a masterpiece of its own and if you keenly listen, you can feel the pulse of dIkshithar in these lines and that very feeling makes your soul tingle and a chill runs down your spine resulting in titillations. Going on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*shUkarAnanAdyarchita mahAtripurasundarIM  
rAjarAjeshvarIM shrIkarasarvAnandamaya-  
chakravAsinIM suvAsinIM chintaye.aham  
divAkara shItakiraNa pAvakAdi vikAsakarayA  
bhIkara tApatrayAdi bhedana dhurINatarayA  
pAKaripu pramukhAdi prArthitasukaLebarayA*

*prAkaTaya parAparayA pAlito dayAkarayA*

**Meaning:**

Dikshitar beautifully describes the Goddess as "mahA tripurasundari, the one who is worshipped("archita") by varAhi, the goddess with the boar face("shUkara") and others("anAdhi") and the ruler of all rulers("rAjarAjeshwari"), who dwells in the auspicious("shrIkara") sarvAnandamaya chakra and the auspicious one("suvAsinIM")" and he says "I meditate("chinthaye") upon you". dIkshitar continues to describe the Goddess as "the one who is the reason("karayA") for the manifestation("vikAsa") of the sun("divAkara"), moon("shItakiraNa") and fire("pAvaka"). She is adept("tarayA") at removing("durIna") the three("thraya") terrible sufferings("thApa"),namely,the physical, mental and supernatural. She is the one with the beautiful form("sukaIE bharayA") taken in order to grant the prayers("prArthitha") of Indra("pAKA") and other("Adhi") important Gods("pramukha"). She is manifest("prAkatyA") as both the supreme("apara") and empirical("para") objects." And finally dIkshitar says "I am protected("pAlitho") by the ever compassionate("dayAkarayA") one."

As always, the rich gait of the madhyamakAla sAhithya stands out. dIkshitar describes the devi in her entirety and he offers himself in total surrender which he indicates in the very first line of the krithi by saying Goddess kamalAmbA wins. dIkshitar says we all lose..we lose ourselves and our souls in the Goddess finally and that is the purpose of a human's birth in this world of mAyA. What can be more truer than those beautiful opening lines of the krithi. When the anupallavi is sung in the pace that it is supposed to be sung in, the feelings one gets and the experience of bliss for the rasika are just indescribable. Anyway, life has to move on and here comes the charanam.

**Charanam:**

*shrImAtre namaste chinmAtre sevita rama harIsha vidhAtre  
vAmAdi shaktiUjita paradevatAyAH sakalam jAtam  
kAmAdi dvAdasha-bhirupAsita kAdi-hAdi-sAdi-  
mantra rUpiNyAH premAspada shiva guruguha jananyAm  
prItiyuktamaccittaM vilayatu brahmamayaprakAshiniI  
nAmarUpavimarshiniI kAmakalApradarshiniI sAmarasya nidarshiniI*

**Meaning:**

He sings "I bow to Her ("namaste"), the auspicious ("shrI") mother ("mAtre"). You are the pure ("mAtre") consciousness ("chin"). She is worshiped by Lakshmi ("rama"), Vishnu ("hari"), Rudra ("Isha"), and Brahma ("vidhAtha"). Everything ("sakalam") is born ("jAtam") of the supreme ("para") deity ("devatAyAH") who is worshiped ("pUjitha") by the Shaktis such as Vama, etc ("Adi"). She has the form ("rUpiNyAh") of the Mantra which begins ("Adi") with the letters Ka, Ha, Sa, ("kaadi, haadi, saadi") etc., the mantra which is worshiped and meditated upon ("upAsita") by the twelve ("dvAdasha") savants ("bhir"), Kama and others. Let my ("mA") mind ("chiTham") with pleasing grace, be dissolved ("vilayatu") in Her, whose beloved ("prema") is Shiva, and who is the mother ("jananyAm") of Guruguha. You embody the light ("prakAshini") that is Brahman, are the divine omniscience ("vimarshini") that reveals all forms and their names ("nAma"). You reveal ("pradarshini") KAmakala and the insights ("rasya") revealing ("nidarshini") one's perfect identity ("sAma")."

Wow..I never knew that writing about something beautiful can get you so excited. I am basically shivering now..just beauty!! First of all, one can evidently see how much dIkshitar is into what he has written about. He was a yogi for sure..I have no doubts about that. It is not just pure bhakthi that is seen here, it is more of a gnAna that I can feel too. Just too much. In the musical aspect, see how he has beautifully fused the rAga mudra in the phrase "ramAhari". He wants his mind to dissolve in Her..yet another indication of total surrender. He calls Her the embodiment of Brahman and finally says She reveals one's own true identity. dIkshitar has seen his samAdhi in her at this point. A state of sabikalpa or even perhaps nirvikalpa samAdhi. He is in complete equilibrium with his own self("sama+Adi"). What a noble, liberated soul dIkshitar must have been to have had such an experience and to have penned it down to be preserved and cherished for posterity.

Just Amazing..and ofcourse, the madhyamakAla sAhityam just floors you. By the time the charanam ends you are on total high and I can bet that a true rasika wont be able to hold back tears at this stage. To kill you more, the way the pallavi starts after the charanam with a chatshruthi deivatham is just too much to take. I have no words to describe what I experience each time I hear this. It is a must hear. Long live dIkshitar and ofcourse "shrI kamalAmbA jayathi" indeed. And obviously dIkshitar wins too..I have surrendered myself and merged so many times with the nAdhajyothi. I lose for the good :)!! shrI gurubhyo namaaha!!

Saturday, July 28, 2007

**shrI kamalAmbikE shivE-shrI**

I am going to take up the beautiful, kutti, cute shrI kamalAmbikE shivE in shrI rAgam which happens to be the mangala krithi of the majestic navAvarNams. This concluding krithi is in the vocative case and this is the only samAshTi charnam krithi in the navAvarNam set. The central theme of the krithi is "Oh kamalAmbA, protect me". As one would've observed, the navavArNams follow a definite pattern. The pallavi is usually small and dIkshithar would seek the blessings or protection of the Goddess. The anupallavi is usually an exquisite description of the Goddess, Her different forms and the charanam would be a long paragraph talking about the chakrams in the srI chakram and hence the esoteric, yogic connection that a human must establish to surrender himself and completely merge with the paramAthma. This mangala krithi is extremely "light" in comparison to the other krithis. A cool conclusion to the hot matter conveyed in the whole set :). The pallavi begins as:

**Pallavi:**

*shrI kamalAmbike shive pAhi mAm lalite  
shrIpati vinute sitAsite shivasahite*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar starts off as "Oh auspicious("shrI") kamalAmbikA, the spouse of shivA("shive"), protect me("pAhi mAm"). You are worshipped("vinute") by Lord viShNu("shrIpati"-husband of Goddess Lakshmi). You are both fair and dark("sitAsite") and you are always with("sahite") shiva."

The rAga mudhra is repeatedly employed in the pallavi just to symbolize the auspiciousness of this set of krithis. Other than that there is nothing much to explain in these simple lines. Moving on to the samAshTi charanam now,

**samAshTi charanam:**

*rAkAchandramukhi rakshithakolamukhi  
ramAvANIsakhi rAjayOgasukhi  
shAkAmbari shAthodhari chandrakalAdhari  
shankari shankaraguruguha bhaktha vashankari  
EkAkari bhuvanEshwai IshApriyakari  
shrIkari sukhakari shrI mahAtripurasundari*

**Meaning:**

The charanam is beautiful. It has a wonderful rhythm and rhyme scheme which keeps the flow tight and simple. The charanam is basically a summary of the various forms of the Goddess and is yet another display of the grammatical and poetic skills of the nAdhajothe. He describes Her as "one whose face("mukhi") resembles the full moon("rAkAchandra")" and as "the one who protects("rakshitha") the kolamukhi(the boar faced varAhi)". "You are the friend("sakhi") of Lakshmi("rama") and saraswathi("vANI") and the one who enjoys("sukhi") the supreme bliss of rAjayOgA. You are the Earth Goddess, the mother dressed in lush vegetation("shAkAmbari"). You are the one who has a slim waist("shAthodhari") and the one who is adorned("dhari") by the crescent("chandrakala"). You are the benevolent one who grants auspiciousness("shankari") and the one who cherishes("vashankari") the devotees("bhaktha") of shiva and guruguha. You are the single syllable("EkAkari"-Om) and the ruler of the universe("bhuvanEshwari"). You are the beloved of shivA("IshApriya") and the one who bestows("kari") auspiciousness, prosperity("shrI") and happiness("sukha"). You are the supreme tripurasundari."

I love the mukhi, sakhi and sukhi rhyme scheme :) Its really sweet. I also love the looping kind of sAhityam employed in shankari and vashankari :). Though there are many other words in sanskrit that dIkshithar could have used to convey the same meaning, he chooses these beautiful words which just fuse in with the krithi and maintain that rhythm. Thats where dIkshithar stands out in this krithi. Also, everyone know that shrI rAgam is considered as the 22nd mela instead of karaharapriya in the venkatamakhin school. The deivatham in the avarohanam was added to make it a melakartha and hence it is to be used sparingly. dIkshithar sticks to this tradition too in all of his shrI rAgam krithis. In this krithi, he uses the deivatham only once; in the last line of the charanam shrIkari sukhakari shrI mahAtripurasundari which goes as P; D N P N P M R G R S; R N S R M P N and beautifully merges with the beginning of the pallavi. On the whole, this is a really cute krithi which serves as a worthy conclusion to the brilliant navAvarNams.

You would have also noticed that dIkshithar has handled the 5 major melakartha rAgAs in the form of these 11 krithis.

JanatODi/hanumatODi(8) in the form of tODi and punnAgavarALI navAvarNams



nArirItigowLa/naTabhairavi(20) in the form of Anandabhairavi, Ahiri, ghanTA and bhairavi navAvarNams shrI/karaharapriya(22) in the form of the shrI and sahAnA navAvarNams harikEdAragowLa/harikAmbhoji(28) in the form of the kAmbhoji navAvarNam shankarAbharanam(29) and mechakalyAni(65) in the form of the respective navAvarnams. On the whole, it is definitely the best set of krithis ever composed and rightly establishing dIkshithar as the best composer ever across all genres of music.

There have been many a time in the past 10 months when I have found myself stunned,surrendered, terribly short of words, highly emotional(sadness and supreme bliss), drowned, helpless, blessed, what not..simply because of the richness, beauty, brilliance and what not :) of these krithis which will serve as a testimony to the great genius the nAdhajyothi is..thalaivaaa..I surrender myself and throw myself at your pAdhAravindham. These krithis and dIkshithar will rule the universe as long as it exists!! This is the ultimate truth and every soul will realize this.

I consider myself to be extremely fortunate and blessed to have been able to post blogs about these 11 gems. I do feel satisfied that I have atleast scratched the surface of this deeply rich set of krithis. I thank God and dIkshithar for having made me take steps to analyse and put efforts to explain these beauties. However ultimately, I would like to conclude by saying that almost 99% of the feelings a rasika experiences while listening to these krithis cannot be described in words. It is something to be felt and experienced. I thank all my friends who have encouraged and spurred me with their thoughts and comments on these krithis. Thanks a lot for the support. I will continue to post many many more krithis of the great genius. I plan to take up some shtud krithis like soundararAjam and ranganAyakam in my next posts and then take up another set of vibhakthi krithis..maybe nilOtpalAmbA. shrI gurubhyo nama:!!

Sunday, July 29, 2007

**shrI subrahmanyAya namaste-kAmbhoji**

Thanks to my friend Ramaa Ramesh, I came across this beautiful commentary of dikshithar's shrI subrahmanyAya namaste by Sri Chandrashekhara Saraswathi, ParamAchArya of kanchi kamakoti mutt. After reading this article, I found it absolutely unnecessary and disrespectful for a mere, lowly mortal like me to even talk about this krithi. Hence, I have just copy-pasted the entire commentary below. I have heard many times that this is paramAchArya's favourite krithi and he has written a separate book for this krithi alone. Hence, obviously this is by far the best translation possible for this wonderful krithi. After all, what could be more fitting than a genius translating another genius's composition? This is going to be a long post and it will take you some 30 minutes to read and understand, but I request all rasikas to patiently read through the entire commentary which is complete and replete with all the information one ever needs to know about this krithi in particular and Lord Subrahmanya in general. I am sure all of you will find this a blissful and an enjoyable read, as equally as/perhaps even more than I did. Enjoy!! I will take up soundararAjam, the best ever brindAvana sArangA in my next blog post. shrI gurubhyo namaha!!



*Raga: kAmbhOji / Tala: tishra Ekam*

**Pallavi:**

*shrI subrahmaNyAya namastE namastE manasija kOTi kOTi lAvaNyAya dIna sharaNyAya*

**Anupallavi:**

*bhUsurAdi samastajana puJitAbja caraNAya vAsuki takSakAdi sarpa svarUpa dharaNAya vAsavAdi sakaladEva vanditAya varENyAya dAsajanAbhISTapradadakSatarAgragaNyAya*

**Charanam:**

*tAraka simha mukha shUra padmAsura samhartrE  
tApatraya haraNanipuNa tatvOpadEsha kartrE  
vIranuta guruguhAyAjHnAna dhvAnta savitrE  
vijayavallI bhartrE saktyAyudha dhartrE*

*dhIrAya natavidhAtrE dEvarAja jAmAtrE bhUrAdibhuvanabhOktrE bhOgamOkSapradAtrE*

**Translated from an article in Kalki Deepavali Malar of 1990: A memorable incident when Sri Chandrasekarendra Saraswati, Paramacharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Mutt, gave a wonderful commentary on Muthuswami Dikshitar's kriti on Subrahmanya to Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar. The article appeared in Ariyakkudi's Centenary year and Kanchi Paramacharya was in his 97th year.**

In June 1961, Paramacharya was camping at Devakottai (in Pudukkottai district of Tamil Nadu). He was in deep penance for several weeks, not talking or even communicating by gesture. One could not know if he even heard the devotees' words. One morning, some people from nearby Ariyakkudi ('Nagarathar') had their darshan of Him, and in the course of their talks, it came out that Ariyakkudi Ramanuja Iyengar, the famous carnatic musician, and known simply as 'Ariyakkudi', was currently in Karaikkudi. To the surprise of every one, Paramacharya signaled to them, asking if they can bring Ariyakkudi over to meet Him. They agreed and left.

That afternoon by three o'clock, Ariyakkudi was at the camp. He was so excited and tense, as Paramacharya had asked to meet him in the midst of his 'kAshta mounam' (vow of rigorous silence) Is not Paramacharya known for His simplicity? So His accommodation at the camp was very simple. His room was on the garden side of a small house. Devotees had to have His darshan through a small window, after passing through dirt and bushes. May be that was His way of admonishing those of us who have grown used to the luxuries of life. On being informed that Ariyakkudi had arrived, Paramacharya signaled to bring him to the rear window. He came, and paid obeisance by falling full stretch at His feet. That was it. To every one's joy,

Paramacharya opened His mouth and started talking in a torrent. "Heard of your receiving the Rashtrapathi award. You would have walked on a red carpet, and been honored in a gathering of eminent persons. But me, I have made you walk on stones and bush and made you sit in a dinghy room. Why I called you is, I long have had a desire to listen to 'ShrI SubrahmanyAya namasthE' rendered perfectly. On hearing you are around, the desire has re-surfaced. Perfect rendition means both the music and the lyrics (sangItham and sAhityam). Many people disfigure the words of Sanskrit and Telugu kirtanas to the extent that we wish they never sang. The music part (swarAs), the rhythm part and the 'sAhitya chandas' - what is called 'chandam' in Tamil - would be given for most songs.

The proper way to split and combine words would also be given. The musician has to take care to synchronize the music, rhythm and chandas and split and combine the words correctly so as not to spoil the meaning. The compositions of good composers definitely allow this (padham pirichu pAdaradhu) but many musicians simply concentrate on the music and rhythm, and ignore the meaning, sometimes leading to ridiculous meanings! "Even in this song 'ShrI SubrahmanyAya namasthE', we have a line 'guruguhAyAgnAna dwAnta savithrE'. This must be split as 'guruguhAya agnAna dwAnta savithrE' i.e. 'the one who is the sun for the darkness of ignorance'. Some sing it as 'guruguhAyA.....

gnana dwAnta savitrE', 'one who is the sun for the darkness of knowledge!' "I do not know if you sing the kriti 'SankarAchAryam' (Sri Subbarama Sastri's Sankarabharanam kriti), but Veena Dhanamma's family, Semmangudi Seenu, MS sing this. There is a line 'paramAdvaita sthApana leelam' - means 'one who so easily, like a game, founded the great Advaita philosophy' - it is to be sung with stress on the 'A' of 'Advaita' (Paramacharya sings this line) to give the intended meaning. If we really cared, we can, even without proper training, sing with proper meaning. Those I mentioned above also sing properly. But those who do not care, stretch the 'paramAAAA' and then sing 'dwaita sthApana leelam', converting the Advaita Acharya to Dwaita Acharya! (laughs heartily for a long time) "No doubt, in music, there is no Dvaita - Advaita difference. Only music is important. And music makes the mind of the singer into unison with the song - the protagonist of the song. That is why, 'ShrI SubrahmanyAya namasthE' is attached to you - a Vaishnavite - or you are attached to it! I have heard you sing that song. I do not have to say anything about your musical ability; and the sahitya part too you do correctly. Which is why I have called you here.

"In my dharbar there is only stones and bushes. There is no accompaniment, not even sruti. But please do sing that kriti for me, in spite of all these." When Paramacharya stopped his torrent, Ariyakkudi was in tears. He prostrated once again, and said "there is no other prestige for me than to be asked by 'periyavA' to sing, and singing for periyavA. I have no words to express the magnanimity of PeriyavA, considering me as somebody and giving me this chance. PeriyavA's grace has to fill in for the sruti and accompaniment and enable me to sing to the level I am expected to", and readied himself to begin the song.

Paramacharya asked "the raga of this kriti is said to be Kambodhi, but the name given in books is Kambhoji, right?" When Ariyakkudi said yes, Paramacharya continued, "Many of us know Kambhojam is Cambodia (in S E Asia), and that Bharat culture had taken deep roots there. If we inferred that Kambhoji is a raga 'imported' from that place, researchers like Sambamurthy (the late Prof P Sambamurthy) disagree. Cambodians might have imported many things from us, but not we, far advanced in civilization, from them; definitely not in music, where we were much advanced whereas they had mostly folk music. Then why the name 'Kambhoji'? "I have a thought here - there is another place called 'Kambhojam along India's northern border. Kalidasa, no ordinary poet and quite knowledgeable too, tells Yasha to go this way and that in his 'mEgha SandEsam' - good enough to plot a map! In his Raghuvamsam, describing Raghu's invasions and victories, he has mentioned one 'Kambhojam', beyond the Indus and along the Himalayas. From this, we deduce that, within the extended India (akand Bharat), there was one Kambhojam near the Hindukush mountains. May be our Kambodhi raga was from this place? "Many ragas are named after places, right? Sourashtram, Navarasa kannada, even Kannada, Sindhu Bhairavi, Yamuna Kalyani, like this Kambodhi might have come from Kambhojam region. Researchers say ragas like Mohanam and Kambhoji have been around in most civilizations from time immemorial. Later, may be the raga was given the name of the place that 'polished' it well. Kedaram is a place in the Himalayas - you know Kedarnath. Gowla - Gowda region - Bengal. We have ragas in both names, and even Kedaragowla. But all three ragas have been in South Indian music - how? May be the names came from musicians who 'specialized' in these ragas and came from those regions? People in general, musicians in particular, are referred to with their native places. For instance Ariyakkudi means you! From this, can we say that some these rags - Kedaram, Gowla, Kannada, Kambhoji etc. - were popularized by musicians from these regions? "Are you interested in research into ancient music?" Ariyakkudi replied "Not much".

"But you have set Tiruppavai to tune! But unlike for Devaram songs, tunes have not been specified for Tiruppavai songs, and those whose who recited, did not use a tune. Since only Brahmins have been reciting Divyaprabandham songs, they have recited only with a kind of up-down delivery (Ethal-Irakkal prAsam). You set the tune for Tiruppavai according to your manodharma (imagination)?" "To the best of my little ability" "But it has become the standard and accepted and sung by other vidwans as well! It seems our ancient ragas have been preserved in their original form (roopam) only in the Devaram songs. Just as the Vedas have been preserved to a note by the Vaidikas through generations, the Odhuvamurthis have preserved Devaram songs - not just the lyrics,

but the tunes too. What was a service to devotion, has also been a service to music! The ragas Sankarabharanam, Neelambari, Bhairavi etc. have all been identified as different 'pann's. This list includes Sowrashttra, Kedaragowla, Kambodhi also. Kambodhi used to be called 'ThakkEsi' or something like that. Kambodhi is not a mela raga?" "No. Harikambhoji is the mela raga; Kambhoji is its janya raga" "But Kambodhi is more famous! Just like the son being more famous than the father. Some other janya ragas too are like this?" "Yes, Bhairavi is a janya raga, derived from Natabhairavi" "OK, you sing. I have been wasting time in useless chat preventing you from doing what you came for!" Ariyakkudi rendered the song "ShrI subrahmanyAya namasthE" - a rare musical feast. Even without sruti or accompaniments, it still was wholesome. Paramacharya listened to the song with full concentration, eyes closed. Then, "Only because you sang alone (no sruti/accompanists) the song came out with all its beauty. And the words were crystal clear. I say 'thrupthOsmi' (Totally satisfied). Please sing once more - you know why? I will give you the meaning line by line, you stop after every line. Not that you do not know; but let me have the pleasure of dissolving my mind in Sri Dikshitar's lyrical beauty for some more time! More over, others here can also learn the meaning and beauty behind the creations of geniuses." Ariyakkudi sang one more, this time line-by-line. Presented below is Paramacharya 's commentary, plus appropriate pieces from some of his other lectures.

'shrI subrahmaNyAya namastE namastE' Obeisance to Lord Subrahmanya - every one knows. Starts auspiciously with ShrI and has a double namasthE. If you say something more than once, you have said it infinite number of times (not just 100, as Rajnikant thinks! - ananth). We have seen 'pOtrri pOtrri' and 'Jaya Jaya Sankara', and BrahmasUtram's every phrase ends with twice- repeated words.

'namasthE namasthE'. 'thE' - to you; 'nama:' - obeisance. 'nama:thE' becomes 'namasthE'. The whole kriti goes in the fourth person(?) (nAlam vEtrumai). Obeisances to you, SubrahmanyaA, infinite number of obeisances. Who is Subrahmanya? True, learned Brahmanya. We generally take 'brahma' to mean the true, absolute form of the Lord (paramAtma svarUpam), but there is another meaning - Vedas. That is why, Upanayanam, the ceremony to begin Veda lessons to a child, is called 'BrahmOpadEsam'; by learning Vedas, the child becomes 'BrahmachAri'. Likewise 'Brahmayagnam'. Brahmins are a set that recite the Vedas. Subrahmanya is the symbol of the Divine, the end point, the God of Vedas, and the special God of the Brahmins.

What is the special feature of Veda recitals? Worship of agni, fire. And Subrahmanya is the God who is in 'agni swarUp'. He was created by the six sparks of fire (nEtragni) from the (third) eye of Shiva. Hence He is the Deva of Vedas, and the God of Brahmins, whose sole duty is to recite and teach Vedas. Adisankara in his 'Subrahmanya Bhujangam' says 'mahIdEva dEvam, mahAvEda bhAvam, mahAdEvabAlam'. 'mahIdEva' are Brahmins; 'mahIdEva dEvam' is God of Brahmins. In Thirumurugattrupadai, one of the oldest Tamil scriptures, this point is underlined. Nakkeerar, the author, stating that each of the six faces of Shanmukha grants devotees' wishes in one different way, says 'oru mugam manthra vidhiyan marapuli vazhA anthanar vELviyOrkkumme' And when describing Thiruveragam (Swamimalai), he says learned and pious Brahmins perform rituals with fire towards Subrahmanya. Brahmins who participate in 'yagna karma' are called 'rithvik'. Of the sixteen types of rithviks, one is named 'Subrahmanya'. From all these, it is evident that Subrahmanya is the God of Vedas.

Muthuswami Dikshitar has much connection with Subrahmanya. He has been to, and sung in praise of, many kshetras and Gods, just as Adisankara has. But in his devotion (upAsana), he has been known to be a 'dEvi upAsaka' - he even breathed his last singing 'mIna IOchani pAcha espressoni' on Meenakshi. But his birth, beginning of his composing career, were all associated with Subrahmanya.

His very name, Muthuswami, is that of Muthukumaraswami, the deity at Vaidheeswaran koil. His father, Ramaswami Dikshitar - scholar, musician and Srividya devotee - was without an issue till he was forty. He visited Vaidheeswaran koil with his wife and fasted for 45 days (one mandalam). His wife then had a dream as if someone was tying coconut, fruits and other 'mangalavastu' on her womb. And soon she became pregnant. The couple understood that Subrahmanya had granted their wish and that the dream meant this. And a boy was born on 'krithikai' day in the month of Phalguni or Panguni. That boy was Muthuswami. He grew up, had his musical training, Srividya Abhyasam (training in the worship of Devi) and gurukula vAsam at Kashi (Benares). His guru at Kashi, before dying, told Muthuswami, "Go back to the south. First visit Tiruttani. Subrahmanya will show you the way to your life's purpose". So Muthuswami went to Tiruttani. He had his bath in the temple tank and was climbing the hillock, when an elderly Brahmin gentleman called him by name, and told him to open his mouth. When Muthuswami did so, he dropped a piece of sugar candy (karkandu) in his mouth and disappeared. Muthuswami understood who it was that came, and his life's mission began that moment - his musical creativity had been woken up. On the spot, he sang eight kritis. (in eight different 'vEtrumai's) Also note that his 'mudra' is 'guruguhA', a name of Subrahmanya. Guha resides deep inside a cave - guhai; and guruguha resides in the deep cave of the human heart of Muthuswami Dikshitar.

Dikshitar's life on earth ended on a Deepavali day. The sixth day from Deepavali is 'skanda shashti'. Some people fast these six days, beginning on Deepavali day and ending it on the shashti day. So in his death too we see the Subrahmanya association.

Dikshitar went from place to place and sung in praise of the God there, be it Ganesha, Vishnu, Devi, Shiva. And in each kriti, there would be some internal evidence about the place where it was composed - the name of the God, some historical fact, or manthra rahasyam. Our 'ShrI SubrahmanyAya namasthE' has no such internal evidence - we do not know where it was composed. May be he unified the deities of all Subrahmanya temples in this one kriti, so sparkling is it. So he has started with innumerable obeisances; then 'manasija kOTi kOTi lAvaNyAya' Like two 'namasthE's, two koti's. koti-koti is koti (one crore) multiplied by crore. manasija koti koti - crore\*crore manmadhA's.

manasijan=manmadhan; he is born out of mind - manas. Love - kAmA - comes from the mind, right? There is a puranic story too - Manmadhan is the son of Mahavishnu. But very strangely, he was not born to Mahalakshmi out of Vishnu's love, but from Vishnu's mind directly - the moment Vishnu thought of him! And Vishnu's other son, Brahma, was born directly too, from Vishnu's navel (nAbhi). See, Vishnu has this funny habit of doing strange things always! Manmadhan is famous for his good looks. So 'manasija kOTi kOTi lAvaNyAya' is some one who is crore\*crore times as beautiful as Manmadha.

But is this not funny?! I mean, Subrahmanya being 'manasija kOTi kOTi lAvaNyAya'. Who is Subrahmanya? He is the son of Shiva, who reduced Manmadha to ashes with a fire of fury from His eye. And from that same nEtragni, is born Subrahmanya! But He was born to gnAna (wisdom), not kAmA.

'Kumar' is a special name for Him. Just as in the South 'pillai' (son) means pillaiyar (Ganesha), Kumar in the North refers to the younger son, Subrahmanya. In the South also, we say 'kumaran' or 'kumAraswAmy'. Nowadays, half of the boys are named 'Kumar'! The term 'Kumar' is particularly applied to Subrahmanya. In Valmiki Ramayana, Vishwamitra tells the story of Subrahmanya to Rama and Lakshmana and calls it 'KumAra Sambhavam'. And Kalidasa has named his own epic after this phrase used by the great sage Valmiki. Another interpretation for the word 'Kumar'. Manmadhan is also called 'mAran'; and 'kumAran' some one who puts mAra to shame - is more beautiful than him. 'kutsitha-mara:' - 'kumAra:'. So 'kumAra' by itself means 'manasija kOTi kOTi lAvaNyAya'! The Tamil people just love Him. They have given Him a beautiful name - 'Murugan' - Murugu=beauty. After kAmA was burnt to ashes, Devi took over his role, donning his sugarcane bow and floral arrows - 'kamEshwari' - this led to the birth of Subrahmanya. And how else would be but 'lAvaNyAya'? - Devi Herself is called 'sundari - thripurasundari'. 'dhIna sharaNyAya' Is mere beauty enough? What we want is 'aruL' - grace. Subrahmanya is the refuge of we, the sufferers. 'dhIna' - those that are poor, humble, suffering, scared. 'dhIna sharaNyAya - lAvaNyAya - SubrahmaNyAya' - similar sounding - edhugai or mOnai or something in Tamil - it is edhugai only but edhugai on the ending of the words rather than on the beginning. 'yAya' - andhya prAsam - 'to Him' (fourth vEttrumai) It is usual to go back to the first line with a fast 'manasija kOTi kOTi', after beginning in slow tempo - chowkha kAlam or vilamba kAlam. Vilambham - a nice Sanskrit word. I prefer this word to 'chowkam'. Slow tempo, giving scope to the musician to explore the raga's various nuances, is a hallmark of Dikshitar's kritis. And the majestic Sanskrit language helps too, creating the impression of a grand elephant procession.

But aren't we all always in a hurry? By the mind and by the body? So we find such slow tempo boring after some time. And for this, Dikshitar provides relief with some fast movements at the end of most phrases. Madhyama kAlam comes as a relief to chowkha kAlam, as a piece of clove in a sweet-sweet laddu! In this kriti, both the pallavi and charanam have madhyama kAla endings. But in his most other kritis, we find madhya kAla phrases only at the end of anupallavi and charanam. Why? Subrahmanya is a vibrant young man (endrum iLaiyAi), so wants to go running right from the word 'go!' 'bhUSurAdhi samasthajana pUjithAbja sharaNaya' - one whose lotus feet are worshipped by Brahmins and other people (add namasthE of the pallavi to this) 'bhUSurAdhi' - Brahmins and ...others. 'bhUSurA' - Brahmins. 'bhU' is earth, surA are devAs. And Brahmins are the 'earthly DevAs' as they, by their chanting and rituals, bring the blessings of the Devas to earth.

We have already seen that Subrahmanya is the God of Brahmins (mahIdeEva is same as bhUsura). But is He the God of Brahmins only? Not so; He is the God of all people. Of his two wives, one is the daughter of Indra, the king of Devas, and the other, daughter of a tribal chieftain (suramagal and kuramagal). Some might say, He is a Tamil God (Dravidaswamy), and others that He is the God of Brahmins only - His name itself is testimony. But the truth is otherwise. There is no doubt that He is the God of all people. And Dikshitar takes this line only. We should all unite in the name of God, not fight one another. 'pUjithAbja sharaNaya' - to the worshipped Lotus Feet. Abja is lotus; 'Ab' is water and that which grows in water is abjam. We also call it jalajam, ambujam, sarojam, neerajam (jala, ambu... are all other names for water). Also vanajam - vana is forest. But does lotus grow in forest? But vana has another meaning - water. 'Kam' is also water - kamjam is lotus (eg. kamjalOchanE, kamjadhalAya dAkshi).

vArijam, too, is lotus. OK, all I have tried to say is 'abjam' is lotus! 'vASuki thakShakAdhi sarpa swarUpa dharanAya' - one who takes the form of snakes like Vasuki and Thaksha.



Literally 'sarpa' means 'kundalini' - the Energy of Life. Snake has a wriggled, spiral-like form, so does our kundalini, in normal circumstances. But if we perform concentrated penance, it wakes up in full glory, and then merges with the Ultimate.

Subrahmanya's weapon is the spear - 'vEl', also known as Shakti Ayudham. No other deity's weapon is as much identified with that deity, as vEl is with Subrahmanya. And His connection with snakes is apparent in more instances - if we see a snake in our dreams, elders tell us to perform Subrahmanya pooja for preethi. And Shashti Pooja to Subrahmanya is also done some times as Nagarjuna Pooja, in particular for Puthrabhagyam. Subrahmanya was born at the request of Devas who wanted a powerful commander-in-chief; and we pray to Him for puthrabhagyam! In Andhra and Karnataka, they do not have Subrahmanya idols in temples; rather, He is worshipped in snake form. You know a place called Subrahmanya in Karnataka - there also it is this way. Telugus fondly say 'subbarAyudu' meaning Subrahmanya as well as snake. Let us see if Adisankara has brought out this Subrahmanya-snake connection. (laughs) The title itself is 'Bhujangam'! Snake does not have legs, and uses its whole body as hands - bhujam, and moves about in a wavy rhythm. The 'chandas' similar to a snake's movement is called 'bhujanga prayAdham'. Acharya has sung bhujangams on many Gods, but when we simply think of bhujangam, what comes to our mind immediately is 'Subrahmanya Bhujangam'. On other Gods, He has also composed ashtakam, pancharatnam etc, but on Subrahmanya, only this Subrahmanya Bhujangam - may be to prove that Subrahmanya is Himself the bhujangam.

Dikshitar mentions the famous snakes Vasuki and Taksha. Shashti Pooja is performed by worshipping seven great snakes. Vasuki is the snake who adorns the role of Nagaraja in Nagalokam. And when the Sea of Milk (pArkadal) was churned with Manthragiri, this Vasuki snake was used to tie that hillock. Funny, isn't it, a poisonous snake helping to extract nectar! Again, what is Subrahmanya's vehicle (vAhanA)? peacock, dire enemy of the snakes! Goes to show that, in His presence, all enmity vanishes. So too, elephants are mortally scared of lions - a 'simha swapna' terrorizes an elephant. But we have an elephant sitting on a lion! Heramba, one of the many forms of Ganesha, has a lion as His vAhanA. Or take Vishnu - His bed is a snake (Adishesha) and his vAhanA, Garuda, enemy of snakes! We are told the story that a snake eats the moon during lunar eclipse, but we have a snake and a moon adorning Shiva's head! Strange, again, are the Parvati-Shiva couple. Will a lion leave a bull go? But we have Shiva on the Rishaba (bull) and Devi on Simha (lion)! The philosophy behind all these is, all beings lose their tendency to hate (dwEsha bhAvam) at the Lord's sannidhi.

OK, let us continue our 'vAsuki takshakAdhi' - some say Vasuki is the same as Adishesha; some disagree. Anyhow, Adishesha and Subrahmanya are definitely connected. Venkataramanaswamy at Tirupati has much connection with Subrahmanya. The hillock Tirupati-Tirumala is also called Seshagiri, Seshachalam, Seshasailam. 'sarpa swarUpa dhara' Subrahmanya is Himself is the Tirupati hill. Or take Ardhanarishwara at Tiruchengode. Subrahmanya is also worshipped here, as He made the (united) couple into a trio - Somaskanda. This Tiruchengode is also called Nagachalam and Nagagiri, meaning the same as Seshachalam. 'vAsavAdhi sakala dEva vandhithAya' Now he talks about the real 'suras', not earthly suras. 'bhUsurAdhi' was in the lower octave and 'vAsavAdhi' in the upper octave. The meaning is 'One who is worshipped by Vasava and other Devas'. Vasava is Indra. Of the Devas, there is one class called Ashtavasus. They are Indra's followers (parivAram), so Vasava is Indra. When he himself worships, all other Devas have to follow suit (yathA rAjA thathA prajA); moreover, when Surapadma drove off the Devas and ascended Indra's throne, Subrahmanya was the one who saved them. So they have much reason to worship Subrahmanya. Not just worshipping - Indra gave off his daughter Devasena in marriage to Subrahmanya. So Deva-senapathi became Devasena-pathi! Dikshitar also points this out later in the kriti (dEvarAja jAMatrE) Reminds me - Devasena is said to be Indra's daughter, and Valli, the daughter of Nambirajan, tribal king (suramagal, kuramagal) but in fact, both of them are Vishnu's daughters but for some reasons grew up with Indra and Nambirajan.

Who is Vishnu? Devi's brother, Subrahmanya's uncle. So Subrahmanya has married his uncle's daughters perfectly in accordance with custom. Arunagirinathar says as many times 'marugOnE' (nephew/son-in-law) as he says 'murugOnE'. Even though Ganesha too is Vishnu's nephew, 'mAl marugOn' - Vishnu's nephew - denotes Subrahmanya only.

Another example of unity-in-diversity - Vishnu, whose son Manmadha died in the netragni, has given His daughters in marriage to Subrahmanya - born out of the same netragni. Further, we will see that Saiva-Vaishnava difference also vanishes, and it would not be strange that this kriti is a Vaishnavite's masterpiece. Is it not quite expected, as Subrahmanya is the son-in-law of Vishnu? Would you not love and respect your son-in-law? One step further - Devi Herself is Vishnu's sister. Who gives off Meenakshi in marriage to Sundareshwara (thArai vArthu kodukkaradhu)? A world famous sculpture at Madurai tells us who... First Dikshitar said samasthajana pUjithAya, then sakaladEva vandhithAya. Among Devas too, there are several sects - Vasus, Rudhras, Adithyas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, etc. And finally, 'varENyAya' - means THE BEST. This appears in Gayathri Mantra. To bring out the superlative nature, Dikshitar has used this word from Gayathri, which is but the essence of the Vedas. And 'varENyAya' continues the 'andhya prAsam' of SubrahmanyaAya-lAvaNyAya-charaNyAya, and as it comes at the height of the anupallavi, he has used the word from the essence of the Vedas.

The beginnings of each line, too, have 'edhugai prAsam' - 'shrI Su', 'bhUsu', 'vAsa', 'dhAsa'. This is the speciality of great composers - their rachana visesham (not 'rasana' - appreciation). rachana means lyrical beauty - the unified effect of sound and meaning, each falling into its place at ease. 'Composed', 'composure' itself means peace, ease. (In Tamil, we say quite beautifully, 'sollamaidhi, porulamaidhi'). We can deduce a composer's rasanA from his rachana. 'dAsajanAbhISta-prada-dakSatarA gra-gaNyAya' Having certified His stature with a superlative, Dikshitar mounts more superlatives one after the other to bring out His kindness to devotees. 'dhAsajana apIshta pradha' - one who fulfills his devotees' wishes. Dikshitar could have stopped here, but was not quite satisfied! After 'pradha', we have 'dhaksha', 'thara', 'agra' - a stream of superlatives.

'apIshta pradha dhaksha' is one who is very good at fulfilling his devotees' wishes. Stop here? No. 'dhaksha thara' - the best among those who are good at fulfilling their devotees' wishes. 'thara' - better in comparison. (in Tamil we say 'tharamAnadhu'). Yes, there may be many such capable Gods (and their supporters may come fighting) so let us avoid controversy here. After all, God and music and kritis are but for unity and peace. So let Subrahmanya be the #1 among all such Gods, thought Dikshitar. So he says 'agragnaNyAya' - another superlative! 'agra' - first place; 'gaNyAya' - held in or esteemed to be in. 'thAraka simhamukha sUrapadmAsura samharthRE' - one who vanquished Tharaka, Simhamukha and Soorapadma (add 'namasthE' here) Pallavi and anupallavi had all the words in the fourth person (nAIAm vEttrumai in Tamil). Now charanam has words ending in 'ru' - a weak, half 'u' (kutrialugaram in Tamil). 'Samharthru - upadEsakarthru - savithru' - in 4th person these do not become 'yAya' but take the 'E' sound - 'harthRE - karthRE'. Tharaka, Simhamukha and Soorapadma are brothers. Tharaka is elephant- faced, Simhamukha obviously lion-faced, and Soorapadma has an ugly rAkshasa face. In the South, Soorapadma is the king of Asuras, and the chief villain. We even celebrate Soorasamharam. But in the north, Tharaka takes this place. Kalidasa in his 'Kumarasambhavam' says that Subrahmanya was born for the purpose of vanquishing Tharakasura. And in Subrahmanya Bhujangam, Adisankara mentions all three. Dikshitar follows the 'southern line'.

OK; Dikshitar has spoken of His beauty (kOti kOti manasija lAvaNyAya), kindness (dhInacharanyAya, apIshtavarapradhAkshagrahaNyAya) and valour; what next? What signifies Dikshitar's kritis? What is his mudhra? 'Guruguha'.

This is Subrahmanya's greatest quality. He is the one who teaches us the path to the Ultimate. He even teaches His father, Shiva ('guruvAi ararkkum upadEsam vaiththa' - Arunagiri) - He is 'thagappan swAmi - swAminAthaswAmi - 'gnAnapandithaswAmi'.

'thApa-thrya harana nipuna thathvOpadEsa karthRE' Jeevatma - human soul - has three kinds of desires - thApathryam. They are Aadhyatmikam, Aadhiboudhikam, Aaadhidhaivikam. And all three lead to suffering; the first to suffering within our soul. The second is brought about by other (human/animal) beings. The last, Aadhi dhaivikam, literally means God's work, but here stands to mean our fate - vidhi. Subrahmanya teaches us how to win over them - he is an expert - nipunA - at such teaching.

'vIranutha' Wisdom and valour - we ignorantly that they are different. But the truly wise man - gnAni - can take any form, but still be a gnAni inside. Krishna tells Arjuna to take his bow and shoot (gAntIpathai edudA ambai thodudA) in the midst of Gita which is essentially a Gnanopadesham. Subrahmanya is a 'gnAnavIra' - the wise warrior, c-in- c of the devasena and worshipped by all brave and wise men.

Hence 'vIranutha'. 'nutha' - one who is worshipped. One more interpretation - He has nine deputies whose names all start with 'vIra' - vIrabAhu, vIrakEsari, vIramahEndra etc. So also He is 'vIranutha'. 'guruguha' After valour, again gnAna! Subrahmanya's abodes are mostly hillocks or caves - guhai ('kuringkadvul' in Tamil). Philosophically, He is the Divine Truth residing deep in the cave that is the human heart.

And when He comes out and preaches, he is 'guruguha'. This is also Dikshitar's mudhra, having flown spontaneously out of his heart into his words. 'agnAna dwAntha savithRE' 'dwAntham' - darkness; Savitha - Sun. Just as Sun drives out the darkness, He drives out the darkness of ignorance. The use of the word 'savithA' for Sun is significant here. Sun - Surya - has several other names - Aadithya, BhUsha, Bhaskara, Bhanu, Marthanda, Dinamani (more to be found in Aadhithya Hridayam). Of these, the name savithA appears in Gayathri Manthra. Roughly translating, in Gayathri, we pray that the brilliant wisdom light of the Ultimate, likened to the glow of the Sun, should awaken our inner wisdom and make it glow, too. Speciality of the name is, Savitha does not talk of the destructive-of-darkness nature of the Sun, but of the creative nature. Savitha - literally one who creates. (prasavam - giving birth - same root here). Sun not only destroys darkness, dirt, insects etc, but also induces rain, growth of vegetation, our good health and even our mental growth. Similarly, Subrahmanya vanquishes darkness (of the mind), but also fills in this void space with wisdom. The use of the word Savitha has come out beautifully. (ThirumurugAtruppada starts with a similar simile of dawn) I think the whole point of this kriti is to show Subrahmanya to be the essence of Gayathri, which is itself the essence of Vedas. The kriti starts with Brahmanyaya; at the high point of the anupallavi we have 'varENyAya' and the high point of charanam has 'savithru'. The kriti touches its peak at this point. And then, 'vijayavalli barthRE' This is fun! the real fun with real

gnAni is he can be anything outside; brave, beautiful, kind, anything. He is SURasamhAramUrthi, the valiant victor at Tiruchendur; a sanyAsi at Palani; a Brahmachari boy at Swamimalai; Devasena's and Valli's husband at Tirupparankundram and Tiruttani. Vijayavalli is none but Valli. (Devasena is Jayanthi). So He has Jaya and Vijaya as His consorts! Valli Kalyanam is a jolly good anecdote. But the philosophy there? He frees the mind, caught between IndriyAs (the tribal folk in the story) and merges it with Himself. Goes also to show how much of a 'dhInacharanyA' He is - He, the Son of Universe's first couple, took on many different roles and what not, just to please the deep, innocent love of a tribal girl. 'sakthyAyudha dhartrE' - one who wears the powerful spear - ShaktivEl. 'dhIrAya' We generally take this to mean strength, fearlessness; of course that is correct. But another meaning is sharp intellect. And this 'dhI' sound is found in Gayathri too! Gayathri's use of 'dhI' refers to our intellect, which, pray, be induced by the Ultimate Light (paramAthma thEjas). The root meaning of the word 'gAyathri' is 'that which protects/elevates the one who sings it'. Sing? The recital of Vedas, in up-down fashion, is itself like a song. And Dikshitar probably made this kriti as a kind of musical Gayathri, and hence borrows many words and ideas from Gayathri Mantra.

Which is the first and basic swara of the saptaswara? Shadjam. The cooing of peacock is likened to Shadjam, and peacock reminds us of what? Him! (Arunagiri says 'maragadha mayUra perumAl KAN'). If He is the Lord of Shadjam, the base note, is He not the Lord of music too? And must He not have a Sangeetha Gayathri on him? Which is why, He created Dikshitar, started him off with a sugar candy and got him to sing this kriti! 'natha vidhAtrE' Vidhatha is Brahma. natha here is the same as nutha in vIranutha - means one who is worshipped. We all know the story. Subrahmanya asked Brahma for the meaning of Pranava Mantra; Brahma could not give a satisfactory answer. And our young boy imprisoned Brahma and took over his duty of Creation. In some temples, we can see Subrahmanya donning the japamAla and kamandalu of Brahma (eg. Kanchi Kumarakkottam). Shiva came to Brahma's rescue, "OK my son, Brahma does not know; you tell me the answer, if you know". Pat came the reply, "I can not be talked to like this; if you want the answer, ask like a student does, not like a teacher". Even great people take pleasure in losing to their offspring! Shiva went down to Subrahmanya and got 'PranavOpadEsha'. A lesson to all of us - in pursuit of knowledge, there is no shame. Having now realized Subrahmanya's greatness, Brahma worshipped Him and was released back to his job. 'dEvaraja jAmathrE' - son-in-law of Indra, we have already seen this. 'bhUrAdhi bhuvana bhOktrE' 'bhUrAdhi' - earth and other; bhuvana - worlds. It is customary to classify the infinite number of worlds into 14, of which seven are below, and further summarizing as 'bhUr-bhuvu-suvar' ie lower, middle and upper worlds. Recognize these? Gayathri again! We add a 'Om' to it and recite as part of many our rituals. The idea is that the fruits of our rituals should reach all of the people in all of these worlds. 'bOkthA' means ruled by, enjoyed by. Are not the happenings- on in all these worlds at and for His pleasure? (leelAnubhavam) Finally, 'bhOga mOksha pradhAtrE' As seen, He is the one who rules over and enjoys all good things in this world, while giving us the illusion that we too enjoy various pleasures like wealth, position and fame. 'dhAthA' - one who gives. 'pradhAthA' - expert at giving. In the fourth person, it becomes 'pradhAtrE'. As long as this illusion - drama - is on, it is fine for us to enjoy, and for Him to give. But if we delude ourselves into thinking that this drama is the real thing, we are fools. Once the drama is over, should we not go back to our real selves? This is the state when the mind (manas), the drama stage, dies and the Atman alone exists. He gives us this state too - as 'agnAna dwAnta savithA', 'mOksha pradhAthA'.

If we seek moksha from Dhanalakshmi, or from Santhanalakshmi, we are not going to get it. And Dakshinamurthi would not give us wealth or offspring, either. Subrahmanya gives us both bhogam and moksham. There is nothing more to say after this sentence, and the kriti ends.

Paramacharya further tells Ariyakkudi and the gathering at large, "I'm happy to see that you, coming from a good guru-sishya parampara, are preserving good music. You must also bring up good disciples and keep the tradition going. A Brahmin, having learnt Veda, has a compulsory duty to teach atleast one more person (athyApanam). This can apply to other sastras and arts too.

"One more point about musicians. You should sing the Telugu and Sanskrit kirtanas fully aware of their meaning. It is not fair to say that Tamil songs alone are enough. Great composers in this country have created hundreds of Telugu and Sanskrit songs of much musical and lyrical beauty. If we ignore them, the loss is ours. Do not defend by saying, 'I do not understand them!' - if only we desire, do we not spend time and energy on all sorts of useless things? If musicians dedicate themselves to pure music and proper rendition of words without losing the 'osandha artha visEsham', language can not be a barrier. Now that you are #1 in the music world, do your best towards this. May Subrahmanya's Grace be with you in this endeavor." Ariyakkudi was totally moved. He took leave saying, "This has been the best day in my life". And Paramacharya went back to his penance the next moment.

Sunday, August 5, 2007

**soundararAjam AshrayE-brindAvana sArangA**



Now before I start off with this krithi, I would like to share some interesting correlations to recent happenings. This krithi adds a new dimension to the already multi-faceted dIkshithar... one of a scientist :) . The disastrous tsunami that hit the coramandel coast on 26th December, 2004 has a unique correlation to dIkshithar and tyAgarAjA. They both were known to have visited nAgapattinam, a temple town along the coast, which was one of the towns that was the hardest hit by the tsunami. In tyAgarAjA's beautiful krithi in sAveri, "karmamE balavanda mAyA", he sings "vAridi madi garvinchi yIvasudhaku tA rAnEnanchi ninnu" which means "when the sea spurred by arrogance, threatened to attack the land, you humbled his onslaught". And the great nAdhajyothi, in this krithi "soundararAjam AshrayE" sings "ambudhi garva nigraham" which means "suppressed the pride of the ocean". I dont know whether there was a similar tsunami in the late 1700's or early 1800's(highly unlikely), but both the geniuses have talked about the mighty ocean threatening the town..maybe there were huge cyclones. Nevertheless, an interesting info and I thought I will share it with you all :)

Going to the krithi itself, as I mentioned it was composed at the soundararAja perumAl swamy temple at nAgapattinam in the praise of Lord SoundararAja. The krithi is heavily loaded, capturing the expanse of this rAgA in its entirety. The pallavi starts off with a wonderful R M R S phrase and the rendu kalai rUpakam gets its beauty in this krithi. Every word falls beautifully in the samam and it is a real treat to sing. Please visit <http://tributes.sangeethapriya.org/dikshithar> to listen to DKP's and Seshu's versions of this krithi. The rich gait is fully displayed by DKP's rendition and Seshu in his usual style presents a beautiful brindAvana sArangA including the kAkali nishAdham in his rendition and ofcourse the beautiful kalpanaswaras at the end of his rendition are just mind blowing.(typical seshu :))..real treats for the rasika.

**Pallavi:**

*SoundararAjam AshrayE gaja brindAvana sarAngA varadharAjam*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "I seek the refuge("AshrayE") in Lord SoundararAja, the one who protected Lord Gajendra("gaja") in the beautiful forest("brindAvana") of elephants("sAranga") and the one who is the most superior("rAjam") in the bestowing boons("varadha")."

I would say it is one of the most toughest pallavis to sing. Though it may look like just one single line, the infinite scope with each word having so many sangathis and the single line running for 2 octaves makes the pallavi really tough to sing. It may take 3 to 5 minutes to sing all the different prayOgams for the pallavi which otherwise tends to leave a feeling of incompleteness. The repeated S N phrase at rAjam is just too good and it feels as if time stops there, giving a dhruvad effect of this hindustani rAgA :). Ofcourse, needless to say, dIkshithar once again shows his grammatical brilliance by beautifully bringing in the rAgA mudhra in the very first lines of the krithi. If the pallavi doesnt give you the kicks, which I am sure is not the case, wait for the beautiful anupallavi and charanam that follow.

**Anupallavi:**

*Nanda nandana rAjam nAgapattana rAjam  
sundarI ramArAjam suravinuta mahi rAjam  
mandasmitamukhAmbujam mandaradara karAmbujam  
nandakaranayanAmbujam sundaratara padAmbujam*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Lord as "He is the dear son("nandana") of nanda and the ruler("rAjam") of nAgapattinam." He continues as "He is the husband("rAjam") of he beautiful("sundarI") Goddess Lakshmi("ramA"). He is the one worshipped("vinuta") by all the Gods("sura") and the master("rAjam") of the universe("mahi")." In the madhyamakAla sahityam (one of my favourites), dIkshithar beautifully describes the Lord as "The one whose lotus-like face("mukhAmbujam") is lit with smiles("mandhasmitha") and the one whose lotus hands("karAmbujam") holds("dhara") the mandara mountains. The one whose lotus-like eyes("nayanAmbujam") gives happiness and pleasure("nandakara") to everyone and the one who possesses beautiful("sundarathara") lotus-like feet("padAmbujam")."

An exquisite anupallavi..isnt it :). dIkshithar repeatedly uses the word rAjam in the first two lines employing the different meanings of the same word such as husband, ruler, superior etc. He then follows a similar pattern in the madhyamakAla sAhityam comparing the face, hands, eyes and feet of the Lord to the lotus flower and hence portrays Him as a very soft and delicate God :). The P M S N P M R M P phrase at "*mandhasmithamukhAmbujam*" is too good :). Simple and beautiful anupallavi is followed by a sweet and rich charanam.

**Charanam:**

*shambhara vairi janakam sannuta shukha shounakam  
ambarIshAdi viditham anAdhi guruguha muditham  
ambujAsanAdi nutham amareshAdhi sannutam  
ambudhi garva nigrham anritha jada dukhApaham  
kambu vidambana kaNTam khaNDI kritha dashakaNTam  
thumburunutha shrIkaNTam durithApaha vaikuNTam*

**Meaning:**

DIKshithar as usual fills the charanam with lots of references and metaphors. He sings about the Lord as "the father ("*janakam*") of the enemy ("*vairi*") of Lord Shiva ("*shambhara*")" referring to kAmadeva who was reduced to ashes by Lord Shiva. He continues to describe the Lord as " He is worshipped ("*sannuta*") by shukha and sage shaunakha. He protects ("*viditham*") devotees like ambarIsha, etc. and he epitomizes the eternal ("*anAdhi*") joy ("*muditham*") of guruguha. He is worshipped ("*nutham*") by Lord Brahma, the one who is seated on the Lotus ("*ambujAsana*") and others ("*Adi*"). He is praised ("*sannutam*") by Lord Indra ("*amaresha*") and other celestials. He suppressed ("*nigraha*") the pride ("*garva*") of the ocean ("*ambudhi*") and he is the destroyer ("*apaham*") of all miseries ("*dukha*") arising out of falsehood ("*anrutha*") and ignorance ("*jada*")." In the madhyamakAla sahyam, he starts of by describing His beauty as "the one whose beautiful neck ("*kaNTam*") equals the beauty of a conch ("*kambu vidambana*")." He portrays the fearsome face of the Lord when he says "he destroyed ("*kaNDikritha*")the ten headed ("*dashakaNTam*") rAvanA." dIkshithar finishes the charanam by singing "He is Lord shrIkaNTa, the one praised ("*nutha*") by sage tumburu. He removes ("*apaha*") all sorrows ("*duritha*") and resides in vaikuNTam."

Ever since I was a kid, brindAvana sArangA has fascinated me. I first heard the rAgA in the form of the mahAbhAratha teleserial's title song and theme music. Ofcourse the other dIkshithar krithi "rangapuraviahArA" is another masterpiece :) and when MSS sings it with all that devotion, I have seen people crying. A beautiful rAgA completely portrayed and further beautified in this wonderful dIkshithar krithi. Though it is supposed to be a hindusthani raga, dIkshithar has handled it so beautifully(especially with the extensive usage of the kaishiki nishAdham") that one doesnt get that feeling at all. He has made it completely carnatic. :). This will remain one of my all time favourite krithis forever.

I will take up the brilliant ranganAyakam composed in nAyaki next. That krithi does something to me each time I listen to it. The slow, subtle feel brought in each word of the krithi is just amazing..yet another gem from the great dIkshithar :)Thalaivar that he is..he never fails to satiate my hunger for rich, pure carnatic music :). shrI gurubyo namaha indeed!!



Sunday, August 12, 2007

ranganAyakam - nAyaki



ranganAyakam is a masterpiece composed by dIkshithar to show to the world how a beautiful rAgA like nAyaki is to be handled. Trust me, if you learn this krithi properly and sing it, you will never be confused about nAyaki and darbAr. It will be etched in your mind..period. ranganAyakam is one of the shrIranga pancharathna krithis composed by the nAdhajyothi. The other 4 krithis are "shrI ranganAthAya(danyAsi)", the famous "rangapuravihAra(brindAvana sArangA)", "shrI ranganAtham(pUrnachandrikA)" and the majestic "shrI bhArgavI(mangALa kaishiki)"..all real gems. nAyaki is a very, very soft rAgA and dIkshithar beautifully uses it to portray the soft, delicate side of ranganAthaswAmy :). The essence of the rAgA is captured in its entirety in the pallavi itself. A single line of sAhityam which melts the heart of a rasika and makes the brain of the performing artiste to work hard :). It is a real charm to hear DKP's version of the krithi. The pallavi goes like,

**Pallavi:**

*ranganAyakam bhAvayEham shrI ranganAyakI samEtham shrI*

**Meaning:**

The sukha and soukhyam aspect of music resides in these lines. Just amazing and I cant describe in better words..some things are to be experienced and I leave it there. dIkshithar sings "I meditate(*"bhAvayEham"*) on the Lord ranganAyaka(the hero of shrIrangam), who is accompanied on the side(*"samEtham"*) by the auspicious ranganAyakI thAyAr."

These lines bring the beautiful shrine and the sannidhi right in front of your eyes..aahaa..pure bliss. The " R P M P R" start for the krithi is just too beautiful and when it comes to the "P D" phrase in nAyakI, you are literally in tears with scintillations all over your body. How can someone fuse a rAgA mudhra so beautifully without spoiling the musical aspect or the sAhityam aspect of the krithi. He is a genius. The smooth flow of the krithi is just amazing and the feelings induced are just indescribable. The looping type of sAhityam makes the entire krithi so much more tight and beautiful. I am including SK's thoughts here. Quoting SK "*RanganAyakam is one song that is indeed very very close to my heart. To me, the slow enchanting melody of nAyaki resonates with the serene waves of the kAvEri who is washing the lord's feet eternally, as he relaxes with grandeur. She is just so fortunate !!*

*I would like to add to the content, the aptness of the choice of nAyaki for the song. Musicologically, nAyaki is very very devoid of brighams and is a rAgA which flows ever so beautifully. Reminds me of the small ripples on kAvEri again. It is that rAgA which is most serene to capture the "anantashayana" posture of SrI ranganAtha, which in my opinion, portrays the "sthithi" of the universe. There is no better rAgA to capture the infinite beauty in even the sleeping posture of God, wherein he just "is", than nAyaki, which is so ethereally beautifully, again by just "being".* What a beautiful way to put it SK..amazing pa!!

Reluctantly I move on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*angaja tAtamanantham athItham  
ajendrAdhya amaranutham sathatham  
utthuNga vihaNga turaNgam  
kripApANGam ramAntharangam shrI*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar beautifully describes the Lord in the anupallavi as "He is the father(*"tAtam"*) of cupid(*"angaja"*). He is the infinite and endless one(*"anantham"*) and the rare one who transcends everything(*"athItham"*). He is praised(*"nutham"*) by the immortal celestials(*"amara"*) like Lord Indra(*"ajendra"*) and others. He is the eternal one(*"sathatham"*). He has the majestic, superior bird(*"utthuNga vihaNga"*), Garuda, for his vAhanam(*"turaNgam"*) and his eyes(*"pAngam"*) are filled with compassion and mercy(*"kripA"*). He is the innermost, the closest to the heart(*"antharangam"*) of rAmA(Goddess Lakshmi)."

The anupallavi is a treat for a musician to sing. It is slow and nAyaki just takes complete shape. The rendu kalai Adi tAlam is a charm for the percussionist to play and ofcourse it is a real treat for the rasika..you can take my word for it :) :). In the anupallavi, dIkshithar brings in folk lore and Hindu mythology as usual. He refers to the Lord as the father of manmatha. shrI ranganAthar is supposed to be much more beautiful than manmatha and he gave cupid a part of his beauty to take this form. Time stops at "anantham" for me. An epic charanam follows,

**Charanam:**

*pranavakAra divya vimAnam prahlAdAdi bhakthAbhimAnam  
ganapathi samAna vishvaksEnam gaja turaga padAdhi senam  
dinamanikulabhava rAghava-arAdhanam mAmaka videhamukthi sAdhanam  
maNimaya sadhanam shashi vadhanam phanipathi shayanam padma nayanam  
aganitha suguna gananatha vibhIshanam ganatharakoustubha maNi vibhUshanam  
gunijanakritha vedapArAyanam guruguhamudhitha nArAyanam shrI*

**Meaning:**

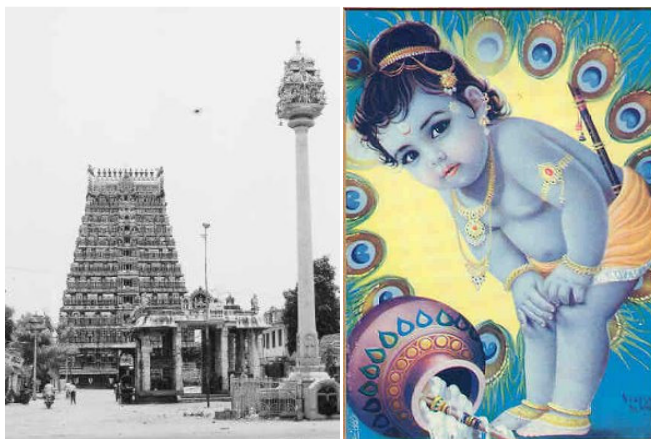
The charanam is a beautiful monster and makes the krithi a complete epic. It is filled with purAnam and yogic allusions. dIkshithar sings " The Lord's divine vehicle("divya vimAnam") is in the form of("AkAra") the pranava mantra". This pranava mantra reference is from the eleventh canto of the epic called bhAgavatham in which the Lord himself describes on how to meditate upon Lord Vishnu for moksham. The pranava mantra is a vehicle which the yogi uses to visualize and ultimately reach the Lord. dIkshithar continues "He is respected and revered("abhimAnam") by devotees("bhaktha") like prahlAdA. Similar("samAna") to how Lord Ganapathi is the primary deity for shivA, vishwaksEna is for Lord ranganAthar. His army("sEnam") consists of elephants("gaja"), horses("turagam") and infantry("padhAdhi"). He is worshipped("ArAdhanam") by Lord rAghava who is born of the solar dynasty("dinamaNi") race("kula"). He is my source and path("mAmaka") for attaining("sAdhanam") salvation("mukthi"). His abode("sadhanam") is filled with gems("maNimaya") and his face("vadhanam") is beautiful like the moon("shashi"). He rests("shayanam") in the serpent bed("phanipathi") and his eyes("nayanam") are like lotus("padma"). He is worshipped by vibhIshana, one who possesses infinite("aganitha") good("suguna") virtues("gananatha"). He is ornamented by("vibhUshanam") countless("ganathara") kausthuba gems("maNi"). His ardent devotees("gunijana") keep reciting and propagate("pArAyanam") the vedAs. He is sriman nArayaNa, the eternal delight("mudhitham") of guruguha".

It is just one amazing charanam and I am lost..I dont know where to start and what to talk about now :). The first half of the charanam is completely a yogi's perspective of the Lord and shows the yOgi in dIkshithar. The next half is an ardent bhaktha's perspective describing the Lord's beauty and compassion. dIkshithar displays his mastery of the sanskrit language yet again with usage of similar sounding words, a sort of alliteration- like, vishwaksEnam and sEnam, sAdhanam and sadhanam, etc. On the whole, it is yet another charanam packed with punch and a beautiful krithi that is sure to be added to any rasika's top krithis list.

Since this post has already become too long, I will stop my rambling here :). I will take up the beautiful bhairavi krithi "bAlagOpAla" next. It is one of my personal favourites and I just love the krithi :). I listen to DKP's and TNS's versions of the krithi..simply mind-blowing and entirely different styles of rendering the same krithi. I guess S.K. will take up the navagraha krithis and post them as and when he finds time. Have a wonderful week ahead people. A proud dIkshithar dAsa signs off!! :) :)

Sunday, August 19, 2007

**bAlagOpAla - bhairavi**



Coming to the krithi bAlagOpAla, it is a masterpiece which leaves me a little confused about what aspect of the krithi to praise and rave..whether the beauty of bhairavi or the brilliance of sAhityams or the divine bhakthi flowing through the krithi. I can see that dIkshithar himself is very proud about this composition because he ends the charanam with an authoritative reference to himself as "vainika gAyaka guruguha". Since I was in tODi mood today, I was singing the krithi in tODi :). It was funny but I was able to find some beautiful sanchArAs and prayOgams.

The krithi was composed by dIkshithar in praise of the Lord at the beautiful rAjagOpAlaswamy temple at mannArguDi. This puNya sthalam was visited by dIkshithar and he has further embellished the temple's beauty with 2 other masterpieces..shrI rAjagOpAla in sAveri(perhaps the best sAveri ever) and hiranmayIm lakshIm(perhaps the best lalithA ever). mannArguDi is called "dakshina dwArakA" and is equivalent to being the birthplace of Lord Krishna. This shrine's specialty is that if you spend 1 night at this sthalam, you get the puNyam equivalent of giving a 1000 cows as dhAnam. Pulasthiyar explains this to bhIshma in the mahAbhAratha as "thathrOshya rAjanImaikAm go-sahasra balam bhavEthi". The famous OothukADu compositions are also in praise of the deity here.

Coming to the krithi itself, the pallavi is as usual a shtud one-liner in which dIkshithar captures the rAga bhAva in its entirety. The simple sAhityam fused with the rAga gives an artiste infinite scope to improvise and show all his/her skill and knowledge in just the pallavi itself.

**Pallavi:**

*bAlagOpAla pAlayAshu mAm bhaktavatsala kripAjaladhE hari*

**Meaning:**

"Oh Lord bAlagOpAla, protect("pAlayashu") me("mAm"). You are the ocean of compassion and mercy("kripAjaladhE") guiding all your devotees and children("bhaktavatsala")."

Just a simple start from dIkshithar as usual. I can visualize this as if he is entering the temple and just throwing himself at the feet of the Lord seeking refuge. The kalAnidhi("treasure-house of arts") surrenders to the kripAnidhi("ocean of compassion"). A wonderful " S n S G R" start and when DKP sings this in her baritone, it is just pure bliss. Moving on to the anupallavi(which happens to be yet another of my favorites :))

**Anupallavi:**

*nIla nIrada sharIra dhIratara nIrajakara nirUpamAnandakara  
lIlaya gOpa vEshadhara muraLI dhara shrIdhara dAmOdara vara*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar starts of the anupallavi by describing the Lord and hence bringing Him right in front of your eyes. He sings "Your body("sharIra") is in dark blue colour("nIla") just like the rain-bearing clouds("nIrada") and you are the wisest("dhIraThara"). Your lotus-like("nIraja") hands("kara") bestow("kara") infinite, supreme and incomparable("nirUpama"-formless) bliss("Ananda"). The one who incarnated for the folklore("IliAya") disguised as("vEsha dhara") as the cowherd("gOpa"). You are the one holding the flute("muralIdhara") and the one adorned by Goddess Lakshmi("shrIdhara"). You are dAmOdara, the precious one("vara")."

The beauty of the anupallavi according to me is the tight rhythm maintained by the exquisite rhyme scheme of the sAhityams which just fuse into the rAga and the rendu kalai Adi tAlam gets its own beauty in these lines :). dIkshithar once again displays his grammatical acumen and authority with metaphors while describing the Lord's body and rhythmic patterns by repeatedly employing kara and dhara. The phrase "muralIdhara shrIdhara dAmOdara vara" becomes a sort of unintended madhyamakAla sAhityam and the word "dAmOdara" is sung in such a beautiful way which signifies the meaning of the name. dAmOdara(367th name of the Lord in viShNu sahasranAma) has different explanations regarding the origin. Many believe it is a reference to mother yashOdA tying the Lord with a cord("dAma") around his waist("udara"). Spiritualists define the name's origin as "one who can be recognized only through a mind purified("udara") by means of self control("dAma"). The way the rAga bhava is brought out when dAmOdara is sung is as if someone is tying with a rope, completely signifying the action and the name. What can we say..life has to go on and hence I move on to the charanam :)

**Charanam:**

*chAnUra mallahara nipuNathara charana nihata shakaTAsura murahara  
mAnikya makuTa hAravalayadhara mathebha kumba bhEdana patutara  
vANiSha architha pIthAmbaradhara vajayanthi vanamAladhara  
ANavAdi vijaya mAnasakara apahata kamsAsura nathabUsura  
drONakarna duryOdhanAdhihara draupadi mAna samrakshanakara  
vainika gAyaka guruguha nutha pura vairivihita gOpika manOhara*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar portrays the ugra face of the Lord in the first lines of the charanam by describing him as "the one who skillfully("nipuNathara") destroyed("hara") chAnUra and malla, the one who destroyed shakaTAsura with his foot("charana nihata") and the one who killed mura." dIkshithar then describes the Lord's beauty as "the one who is adorned by("dhara") by a crown("makuTa") studded with ruby("mAnikya"), necklace("hAra") and bracelet("valaya)". Then dIkshithar beautifully brings in the divine aspect of the Lord which every devotee seeks..the Lord as the end and means to the search of the ultimate truth, by singing "He is adept in breaking open("bhEdana") the pot-like head("patutara") and liberating the mind of the intoxicated("mattebha") elephant("kumbha")." Here dIkshithar is referring to the omni-pervading mAya in this world and the Lord reveals the truth to the mind and unveils a human's delusion. dIkshithar continues "He is worshipped("architha") by Goddess Saraswathi("vANI") and he is adorned by the yellow,silky veil("pIthAmbara") and the victorious garland of forest flowers("vajayanthi vana mAla"). He is the embodiment("AkAra") of the divine mind("mAnasa") that conquers("vijaya") arrogance("ANava") and other bad thoughts("Adi"). He is the one who destroyed("apahara") demons like kamsa and he is the one who is worshipped("nuta") by all the kings and celestials("bhUsura")."

The madhyamakAla sAhityam is a real gem which of taut sAhityams fused in a mellifluous bhairavi. It goes like "He is one who killed("hara") drona, karna and duryOdhana. He is the one who saved("samrakshana") the honour("mAna") of draupadi. He is praised and worshipped("nuta") by all the veena players("vainika"), singers("gAyaka") and Lord guruguha. He is equally disposed("vihita") with friends and foes("vairi") alike and he is the heartthrob("manOhara") of all the gOpikAs."

The charanam, filled with prAsam, bhakthi and vEdAnta, according to me could have very well been a small krithi with a samAshTi charanam on its own. I have even heard that there is a version in which there are 2 more lines in this krithi which was found by Ambi dIkshithar in the later years and added to the krithi's charanam but by then the version which is sung now had become popular. The TNS and DKP versions of this krithi once again present some interestingly different facets of the krithi and both are beautiful in their own ways.

Due to my current obsession with hEmavathi and chakravAhAm, I will take up two cute, kutti krithis of the nAdhajyothi in my next blog- "shrI kAnthimatIm" and "gajAnanayutham"( an enchanting vegavAhini). In less than 2 weeks I will be meeting some of my most wonderful and cherished friends in LA- aishu, vijay and SK and ofcourse we will have some nice live sessions :) :). I also will get to go to the self-realization fellowship temple :).

My boss had gone there for the past 2 weeks and he has bought me this wonderful gift- A 2 volume epic called "God Talks with Arjuna" in which shrI paramahansa yOgAnandA beautifully explains the bhagavad gIta :). The next few weeks are going to be filled with bliss for body, mind and soul :) and I cant wait. Wishing you all a very happy, fun-filled week ahead too. Take care, God bless and always remember "shrI kamalAmbA jayathi"!! :)

Thursday, September 13, 2007

**gajAnanayutham and shrI kAnthimathIm**

I am going to take up gajAnanayutham first..that beautiful vEgavAhini which has become to be known as an extremely auspicious invocation song. With today being Vinayaka chaturthi, it is extremely apt that I am starting off with this krithi. It is a small samAshTi charanam with just 10 words :). I am taking up this kutti krithi just to show that dIkshithar doesnt spare any rAgA..he exploits vEgavAhini's beauty to the core in this krithi. Infact, the smaller the dIkshithar krithi, more the power of the punch packed in that small dynamo..It sounds sweet and refreshing. The pallavi goes like:

**Pallavi:**

*gajAnanayutham ganEshwaram bhajAmi sathatham surEshwaram*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar starts off with a small salutation-" I constantly ("*sathatham*") sing the praise of ("*bhajAmi*") of Lord Ganesha, the elephant-faced one ("*gajAnanayutham*") and the Lord ("*Eshwaram*") of all dEvAs ("*sura*")."

This krithi was composed by Dikshithar when he visited the Uchchi Pillayar temple in trichy. I have heard many versions of the krithi but perhaps the best ever would be that of SSI. I vividly remember the rAgA chAya he brings into the krithi and sings amazing sangathis in these few lines of the pallavi. This krithi is perhaps most beautiful because of its

simplicity. These lines provide ample scope for improvisation and the rAgA's beauty is completely brought out in these few lines. The samAshTi charanam which follows makes the krithi symmetric with both the pallavi and charanam containing the same number of words.

**Charanam:**

*ajEndrapUjitavignEshwaram gaNadisannutapadapadmakaram kunjara**banjanachaturatarakaram** guruguhA**grajam** praNavAkAram* **Meaning:**

DIkshithar describes Lord Ganapathi as "the one who is worshipped ("*pUjita*") by Brahma and Indra ("*ajEndra*")" and "the remover of all obstacles ("*vignEshwaram*")" and "the one whose lotus-like ("*padma*") hands ("*karam*") and feet ("*padam*") are worshipped ("*sannuta*") by Ganas ("hence the name, ganapathi-Lord of the Ganas"). dIkshithar continues to describe the Lord as "the one who destroyed ("*banjana*") kunjara and showed his skill and cleverness ("*chaturataram*"). He is the elder brother ("*agrajam*") of guruguha and is in the form ("*AkAram*") of the Pranava mantra".

The madhyamakAla sAHityam is beautiful as usual and he brings in the rAgA mudhra without any trouble as usual. :). He finishes of the charanam by saying that Lord Ganapathi is in the form of the pranava. For depictions and detailed explanations about this reference, please read the post on vAthApi ganapathim by me(one of my earliest posts). Other than that, there is nothing much to talk about. A fairly simple krithi which is usually taught to beginners as it will lay a solid ground for their fundamentals.

Now I will move on to "shrI kAnthimathim", an amazing piece in hEmAvathi, the 58th mELA, which has offlate become one of my most favourite rAgAs. dIkshithar composed this krithi when he visited tirunelveli which is shown in the sAHityam "shuddha tAmraparni thata sthithAm". The krithi has a soul in it which creates a sort of very intoxicating and sullen mood and it leaves you wanting for more. And once again, the SSI version of the krithi is beautiful and something to be experienced. Goddess kAnthimathi(Parvathi) is saluted and depicted with great care by dIkshithar. Every word has its beauty and infinite possibilities to showcase the beauty and scope of this rAgA.

**Pallavi:**

*shrI kAnthimathIm shankara yuvathIm  
shrI guruguha janani vandEham*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "Goddess kAnthimathi, the young wife ("*yuvathIm*") of Lord Shiva ("*shankara*") , I prostrate before you and worship ("*vandEham*") you, the mother ("*janani*") of guruguha."

Simple sAHityams as usual provide the flexibility required to sing beautiful sangathis. The "R; G M P D P" start is amazing and the "R; G R R S" take-off for "shrI guruguha" is just mind-blowing. It sets the tone of the krithi and



establishes it as a masterpiece. I also love the "N D P M G R S" which people sing for "vandEham". The pallavi in itself completes hEmavathi according to me. The first time I heard the pallavi, I thought "what could be more beautiful and comprehensive than this?" and dIkshithar answered me immediately with the charanam of the krithi..he makes a statement basically. No one ever will handle hEmavathi like this and no one needs to :).

**Charanam:**

*hrImkAra bIjakAra vadanAm hiranya maNimaya shobhA sadanAm  
pAkashAsanAdi dEva vinuthAm parashurAma natha himashaila suthAm  
shukha shounakAdi sadArAdithAm shudhatAmpraparnI thata sthithAm  
shankAdhyashTOthara sahasra kalashAbhishEka modhAm surahithAm*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar gives the ultimate salute to the Goddess by saying "she has the form("AkAra") of the hrIm bIja mantra." Just like Om(the father), hrIm is yet another powerful mantra and is considered the mother of all sounds on earth. hrIm is also the bIja mantra of the supreme sahasrAra chakra( the thousand petalled lotus) at the top of the brain in the astral body. By reciting the hrIm mantra and proper meditation, souls attain kaivalyam. And dIkshithar seems to be referring to the sahasrAra chakra when he refers to the dEvi as "She resides in the lustrous("shobhA") golden("hiranya") palace("sadanAm") filled("maya") with gems("maNi")". dIkshithar sings "She is praised and worshipped("vinuthAm") by Indra("pAkashAsana") and other("aadi") Gods("dEvAs"). She is worshipped("nutha") by ParashurAma and is the daughter("suthAm") of the God of the mountains("hima shaila")."

The madhyamakAla sAHityam is the climax of this great piece. He takes it to a new level with the "P S N D P M" phrase at "shukha shounakAdi", the jIva phrase of hEmavathi..amazing only!!! dIkshithar continues to praise the Goddess "She is worshipped("ArAdhithAm") by shukha, shounaka and all the other saints and yOGIs. She resides("sthithAm") on the banks of("thata") of the pure("shudha") tAmpraranI river. She is bathed and her feet washed("abhishEka") with divine water from the pitchers("kalasa") containing the waters from all the 108 divine sthalams and conches("shankAdhyashTOthara"). She is benevolent("mOdhAm") to the celestial Gods("surahithAm")."

And the sAHityams just beautifully fit with the mood he creates. He once again uses the "PSND" phrase at "sahasra" and goes up to the "S M G R" in the thAra sthAyi at "kalashAbishEka" and then peacefully comes down for "mOdhAm surahithAm" as if to emphasize the merciful, benevolent side of the dEvi. And it beautifully blends in with the start of the pallavi to complete the epic :). Sometimes, this hEmavathi is so intoxicating and compelling that it keeps me drowned and helpless for weeks together. On the whole, the best ever krithi in hEmavathi and who else can do such justice to the rAga and beautifully using "hEmavathi"(another name for the dEvi) itself to describe shrI kAnthimathi..amazing stuff yet again from the God of music :).

As SK continues his beautiful portayal of the navagraha krithis, I will take up some more dEvi krithis as per the request of my friend and well-wisher, Priyanka. So, I will discuss one of her favourite krithis, "HiranmayIm lakshIm" in lalitha. The mood the rAga and the krithi evoke are too much to handle for me and I eventually end up breaking down most of the time. Lalitha holds a special place in my heart because of the araajagam SK did with "AgasthIshwaram" in our epic Fools' day session. The sangathis he puts at "jagajIvE" in the first line of the anupallavi are too much to take. Anyway, All of you have a great week and I will be back very soon with the next gem of dIkshithar..the greatest creation of God ever..shrI kamalAmbA jayathi!!!

Sunday, October 7, 2007

**hiraNmayIm lakshmi - Lalitha**

God answers all my doubts, prayers, everything. For example, unable to listen to my own incompetent vocal chords singing the gems of dIkshitar, I decided that I will henceforth stop singing. And so I did not sing in the last 2 weeks of September. However, music was always running in my mind and my soul. It became too much to take... my heart and soul wanted to sing but my mind told me otherwise. And so I meditated and asked God what I should do. And he answered the very next Sunday at the SRF meditation center. In the lecture that day, the reader quoted the beautiful words of Paramahansa Yogananda-"God does not listen to the tonal quality of your voice. He listens to the divine vibrations of love emanating from your soul". A few drops of tears rolled down my cheeks..the feelings were overpowering. My Guru had answered and cleared all my doubts in just one simple sentence. shrI gurubhyO nama:.That is the power of meditation. Anyway..I will now take up the beautiful krithi "hiraNmayIm Lakshmi" in rAgA lalithA.



Ever since the april fools' day session of the dIkshitar brigade, the session that well and truly brought us closer together, lalithA has become one of those rAgAs which are extremely close to my heart, for, in that session, I cried for the first time listening to SK's rendition of "agasthIshwaram", yet another masterpiece of Lord dIkshitar. I have always thought of lalithA as a rAgA very close to vasantA and all the sangathis that used to run in my mind were entirely based on this perception. However, my discussion with SK the other day proved to be a revelation when he showed me how the rAgA is beautifully associated with its mother, mAyAmALavagowLa. Though vasantA and lalithA are janya rAgAs of MMG, somehow when SK sang lalithA after MMG and explained to me, it struck a new bell and revealed some beautiful phrases to me..thanks pa SK. The mandira stAyI madhyamam of lalithA never fails to stir my soul and make my tear buds wet. Ok ok..enough rambling..moving on to the krithi now. As I had mentioned in my blog on "bAlagOpAla", this krithi was composed at the rAjagOpAlaswamy temple in mannArdguDi. The pallavi goes like:

**Pallavi:**

*hiraNmayIm lakshmi sadA bhajAmi  
hInamAnavAshrayam tyajAmi*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar sings "I forever("sadA") worship("bhajAmi") the golden("hiraNmayIm") Goddess, Goddess Lakshmi and renounced("tyajAmi") the association of("Ashrayam") of mean, materialistic persons("hIna"+"mAnava")."

At first glance, the pallavi looks so simple. However, a slightly deeper look reveals the beautiful message dIkshitar wants to convey in these opening lines. He says that he worships Goddess Lakshmi, the giver of wealth but he stays away from rich people who are materialistic. It is a suggestion of how the mind of a righteous man should be..to worship and long for the grace of God..to bask in the sunlight of the permanent, true and ever-new bliss which God gives and not be merely satisfied with the earthly things and sensual pleasures of this mAya we are all living. From a musical point of view, the grandeur characteristic of all dIkshitar krithis is once again very evident in these few lines itself. The scope for sangathis and improvisations are immense. I love the "D M G R" start at "hiraNmayIm"..it makes you stop whatever you are doing and totally grabs your attention and thoughts. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*chiratara sampatpradAm kshIrAmbudi tanayAm  
harivaksha sthalAlayAm hariNIIm charana kisalayAm  
karakamaladhruva kuvalayAm marakatha maNivaLayAm*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar describes the compassionate, merciful Goddess as "She bestows("pradAm") her devotees with uncountable and imperishable("chiratara") wealth and treasure("sampath")". Now dIkshitar starts to describe the physical beauty of the Goddess. He sings "She is the daughter("tanaya") of the ocean("ambudi") of milk("kshIra")". She resides("AlayAm") in the heart("vakshasthala") of Lord Hari. She is the pure one("hariNI") and her feet("charanam") are like tender leaves("kisalayAm"). She possesses("dhruva") in her Lotus-like hands("karakamala"), a blue lotus("kuvalayAm"). She is adorned by bangles("vaLayAm") studded with emeralds("marakatha maNi").

dIkshithar starts the anupallavi with the beautiful "G M M D" phrase at "chiratara" and beautifully builds up to the "D S N D" phrase at "kshIrAmbudhi". Even before you notice it, the tempo smoothly shifts to madhyamakAla dIkshithar beautifully incorporates 4 shadjamams at "harivakshasthala". The madhyamakAla sAhityam is an absolute treat. I love the "M G R S, R G R S, R G M" ending at "marakatha maNi vaLayAm". It beautifully fuses into "hiraNmayIm". It is at instances like these that one wants to give up this mundane life and surrender. Notice how dIkshithar employs two different words for lotus-kamala and kuvalaya in the same word and brings in the alliteration. Also notice the amazing prAsam in the entire anupallavi with each word ending with "yAm". Yet another display of genius. And he is not done yet..infact, he does so much arAjagam with the charanam that it consumes you and leaves you yearning for more.

**Charanam:**

*shwEta dwIpa vAsinIm shrI kamalAmbikAm parAm  
bhUtha bhavya vilAsinIm bhUsura pUjitAm varAm  
mAtaramAbja mAlinIm mAnikya Abharana dharAm  
gItavAdhya vinOdinIm girijAntAm indirAm..(san-)  
shItha kiraNa nibha vadanAm shrIta chintAmaNi sadanAm  
pIthavasanaAm guruguha mAdhula kAnthAm **lalithAm***

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Goddess as "the one who lives("vAsinIm") in the white lotus("shwEta dwIpa"). She is the supreme, eternal spirit("parAm"), Goddess kamalAmbA. She makes both the past("bhUtha") and future("bhavya") resplendent("vilAsinIm"). She is worshipped("pUjita") by celestials("bhUsura") and blesses the righteous people("varAm"). The divine mother("mAtaram") is ornamented("Abarana dharAm") with garlands of lotus("Abja") and other precious stones("mAnikya"). She is mAlinI, the creator of all garlands. She rejoices("vinOdinIm") in the music from the vocal chords("san-gIta") and from instruments("vAdhya"). She is Goddess Indira who enjoys the company of girijA(pArvathi), the daughter of the mountain God himavAn. Her delicate face("vadanAm") resembles("nibha") the soft rays of moonlight("kshIta kiraNa"). She is chintAmaNi(meaning of this word explained(rather attempt to be explained) a few lines below) for the her devotees("shrIta-Ashrita jana"). She is adorned with yellow("pItha") silk robe("vasanaAm"). She is the consort("kAnthAm") of Lord VishNu, the maternal uncle("mAdhula") of Lord guruguha. And She is the elegant one("lalithAm").

As I mentioned earlier, the charanam totally usurps the listener and leaves the rasika in a state of sublimity and serenity. dIkshithar describes the Goddess as chintAmaNi. chintAmaNi is a special gem which is supposed to be decorating the floor of vaikunTa. It is also a very powerful stone which is supposed to have the ability to grant anything one desires. And so, dIkshithar aptly uses the word to describe the Goddess as the wish-yielding gem for all Her devotees. The last line of the charanam is just too amazing. He beautifully brings in both the composer's mudra as well as the rAga mudhra. dIkshithar cleverly uses the fact that Lord vishNu is the uncle of kArthikEya and brings in the mudra effortlessly. But definitely, dIkshithar finishes the charanam with a bang when he describes the Goddess as lalithA and hence fusing the rAga mudhra.

Musically, the "S R S S S" start to the charanam is absolutely sedate and the "N S R S, R G G M" phrase at "shrI kamalAmbikAm parAm" is soul-stirring. The "S N D M D N" phrase at vinOdinIm is beauty personified and so is the "n s R G M; D M D N S" phrase at "shrIta chintAmaNi sadanAm".

As usual, I am just lost and helpless and I am not able to point out a single aspect of beauty in this krithi. It is a gem studded with beautiful, precious stones in the form of amazing sAhityams and laced together with bhakthi and prAsam. The one thing evident throughout the krithi is the scholarly working of the mind of a genius. We have all heard of hitting 2 birds with one stone. dIkshithar seems to always extend this theory and he hits atleast 5 or 6 birds with just a small pebble. He once again proves that he is a phenomenon. If the question "Was dIkshithar a genius?", a math problem, using any method(proof by theory, proof by contradiction, etc..), anyone will come to the only conclusion, the universal truth that this was the avatAram of music itself which descended in flesh to this world. Whatever little God has given me, even that I totally surrender..sarva samarpaNam to dIkshithar. I will stop my ramblings here as I have to go and cook dinner now.

I am listening to an amazing kAmbOji AlApana sung by SK now..beautiful. God bless you SK on your star birthday. I love october :) yippeee!! After listening to Hari playing the last 2 lines of "amba nIAyatAkshi" last week, I totally gave up. To continue on the dEvi krithis theme, I will hence take up this beautiful krithi in nIAmbari in my next post. And hopefully I will find time to post it this weekend. Happy navarAtri everyone. Have a wonderful time..I am missing home :( Give me strength Oh divine mother, shrI kamalAmbA jayathi!!!

Saturday, November 3, 2007

agastIshwaram - lalita

I was going to blog about ambA nIAYatAkshi but SK told me that while we are at lalita, why not finish off agastIshwaram. This beautiful krithi in lalita is extremely close to SK's and my heart. The emotions evoked by this krithi are soul-stirring and the first time I heard SK's second sangathi at jagajIvEshAkAram in the anupallavi, tears just rolled down my cheeks and I started crying like a kid. The words, the sangathi, the emotions..just too much to take. This krithi was composed by dIkshithar at tiruvArUr praising agastIshwara(Lord Shiva), appropriately named so because He was worshipped ardently by sage agasthya. The pallavi is a simple salutation to the Lord which goes like:

**Pallavi:**

*agastIshwaram ArAdhayEham haram saccidAnanda vallIsham*

**Meaning:**

*dIkshithar sings "I salute and worship("ArAdhaya:+aham") Lord agastIshwara. He is Hara, the destroyer and He is the husband of sundaravalli("vallIsham)".*



This can also be interpreted as "the greatest epitome("vallIsham") of truth-consciousness and bliss("sat+chit+Ananda") in this world." The word vallIsham has many interpretations. vallI in general means creeper. Hence, the Lord can also be visualized as the divine creeper of satchitAnanda. vallI in the general can also be used to refer to the earth. So vallIsha could also be interpreted as "Lord of the earth".

The simple opening lines of the pallavi as usual can be filled with exquisite beauty and dumbfounding sangathis and there have been times when have found SK's rendition of the pallavi alone to be a comprehensive lalita. As I mentioned before, the feelings evoked are extremely solemn and hair-raising. It sets up a nice platform on which the anupallavi and the charanam are built by dIkshithar with pristine quality which takes a rasika to that pinnacle of ecstasy.

**Anupallavi:**

*jagajIvEshAkaram janana vilayakaram nagajAhlAdakaram nandIsham shaHNkaram*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar starts off by describing the Lord as "The embodiment("AkAram") and ruler of all the life on this earth("jagajIvEsha")." Now this is where the brilliance of dIkshithar's grammar comes into play. He does a complete volteface when he describes the Lord as "the one who is responsible for the dissolution("vilayakaram") of life("janana")" in the very same line. dIkshithar keeps reiterating the fact that Lord Shiva holds an important key to the gateway of life and death and by worshipping Him, we can choose to end this cycle of birth and death. He describes the Lord as "the one who delights and pleases("hlAdakara") the one born of the mountain("nagajA"-referring to Goddess pArvathi as the daughter of himavAn, the mountain God)."

dIkshithar then uses two beautiful and carefully chosen words to describe the Lord. He describes Him as "nandIsha". We all know that nandI, the bull is the primary attendant of shivA and hence Lord shivA is addressed as the ruler of nandI. nandI also literally translates to joy, happiness and welfare and hence Lord Shiva is beautifully described as the Lord of all these beautiful things which a human soul wants to experience. dIkshithar then uses the word *shankara* to directly address the Lord. Lord Shiva is the dispeller("hara") of all our doubts("shanka") and hence the name. He is also sankata haran, the destroyer of all our miseries and difficulties.

dIkshithar uses the word shankaram as a beautiful bridge between the anupallavi and the pallavi of the krithi. This reminds me of a similar set-up in the beautiful dEvagAndAri krithi, vadAnyEshwaram when he uses shankaram at the end of charanam to beautifully loop back to the pallavi. dIkshithar is God..thats all. As I mentioned earlier, the sangathis SK sings at "jagajIvEshAkAram" is just amazing and absolutely soul-stirring. The emotions are too powerful and overwhelming. As if the araajagam is not enough, dIkshithar continues to take the krithi to a whole new level in the charanam.

**Charanam:**

*jalanidhipAnArttham kalashajEnArchitham*

*jalajanAbhAdinutham jAhnnavIdaram satatam  
kalikalmashApaham kamanIyavigraham  
sulalitaguruguhajanakam rakshitadhanikam  
jalaruhAptachandrAgnidR.sham jaTAjUTamIshAdrIsham  
valaripuvanditajagadIsham vAnchithArthadAyakamanisham*

**Meaning:**

Let me take a breath before the charanam..too much to take this is. I am literally taking a 5 minute break now because it is getting too much to bear. I will be back :).

Ok..I am back. dIkshithar starts off with an old imagery typical of the tamil poets of 18th century once again showing his versatility. He uses a double reference in the first line of the charanam alluding to sage agasthya even without mentioning his name. All that dIkshithar wants to convey in this line is that "Lord shivA was worshipped by sage agasthya". dIkshithar chooses events relating to sage agasthya's birth(sage agasthya was born out of a sacred vase as the son of mitra-varuNa and hence is called by various names like kalashaja, kumbhaja, kumbhamuni, kalashOdbhava etc) and sings kalashaja+EnA+architham(worshipped). There is also a story in which sage agasthya drank the ocean at the bidding of the dEvAs when the asurAs were hiding beneath it. dIkshithar hence refers to sage agasthya as the one who drank("pAna") the ocean("jalanidhi").

dIkshithar then describes the Lord as the one who is worshipped("nutham") by Lord viShNu("jalajanAbha") and others and as one who is eternal("satatam"). The next word is perhaps the best display of thalaivar's greatness in this krithi(perhaps one of the best ever). He describes Lord Shiva as "jAhnnavIdaram". However you split it, this word is beautiful. If you split the word as jAhna vidaram(I dont know if this split is correct), it once again conveys the meaning that Lord Shiva is the dissolver("vidara") of life("jAhna") on this earth. If you split the word as jAhnnavI daram, Lord Shiva is addressed as the one who bears("dara") of the river ganges("jAhnnavI"). The story behind this is that when Lord Shiva wanted to bring down the river ganges from heavens to the earth, the river was forced to follow an ancient king jAhnu because he was the ruler of the northern plains and the king safely guided the river's course in return for a promise of the perennial inundation of his plains. Hence river ganges is also known as jAhnavi, the daughter of king jAhnu. dIkshithar is God!!!

dIkshithar then portrays the Lord as "the destroyer of all the sins of the degenerate kali yuga("kalikalmashApaham")" and continues to describe the Lord's beauty as the one who has a beautiful, desirable("kamanIya") appearance("vigraham") and as the very pleasing("sulalita") father("janaka") of guruguha. " Lord shiva is also described here as the bestower and protector("rakshita") of all the riches("dhanika").

The beautiful madhyamakAla sAhityam gallops like a horse adding beauty to mishra chApu. dIkshithar continues to describe the physical beauty of the Lord as "the one with lotus-like("jalaruha") eyes("dR.sham") of chandra(signifying shAntam) and agni("signifying the ugra rasa and the third eye of the Lord)." dIkshithar describes Lord Shiva as "the one with the curly locks of hair("jaTAjUTam") and as the Lord("Isha") of the mountains("adrIsha)". SK beautifully explained this word to me the other day indicating the possibility of multiple explanations. Lord Shiva is called the Lord of the mountains either because of Him being the king of kailAsha or by the virtue of being the husband of Goddess pArvathi, the princess of the mountains.

dIkshithar once again refers to him as "the Lord("Isha") of the world("jagath") and as the one worshipped("vandita") by the enemy("ripu") of the demon vala, Lord Indra." Lord Indra is the ruler of dEvAs and the 5 elements are his attendants. The majestic Lord Indra himself worships Lord Shiva and hence he becomes the Lord of the 5 elements and hence the universe. dIkshithar concludes the krithi aptly by praising the Lord as "the one who always("anisham") grants("dAyaka")the boons and wishes of all the things his devotees desire("vAnchitArta)". dIkshithar signs off as if instructing us to worship Lord Shiva and get all our desires fulfilled.

Regardless of whatever aspect you are looking at; be it musical richness, grammatical perfection, bhakthi, etc ; this is an extremely wholesome and comprehensive krithi in which dIkshithar beautifully portrays the Lord in all his greatness. And what a beautiful choice of rAga for the krithi..Just like Goddess shakthi adds beauty and splendour to Lord Shiva, lalitA adds a solemn beauty and fuses wonderfully well with the sAhityams describing the Lord of the universe. As I wrap up, I am still left with that incomplete feeling as I always get at the end of trying to explain a dIkshithar krithi. I am happy that I try my best to explain everything that this kutti brain can understand. I will continue with dEvi krithis now and in my next post, I will try to explain ambA nIIAyatAkshi..that beautiful, rAga-defining krithi in nIIAmbari. Forever, shrI guruguhasya dAsOham!!! :)

Saturday, December 15, 2007

**ambA nIIAyatAkshi - nIIAmbari**

Speaking of laziness and sleep brings me to the krithi I am going to discuss about today, the slow, serene and beautiful ambA nIIAyatAkshi in nIIAmbari. A masterpiece that is one of the best krithis in nIIAmbari showcasing some amazing and unbelievable prayOgams of this beautiful rAgA. The richness and the divinity pervading the krithi is indescribable. It is to be sung/played and experienced. I highly recommend listening to the TNS and DKJ versions of this krithi to get an idea of how beautiful dIkshithar has composed it. This krithi was composed by dIkshithar at the famous kAyArOhanEsha- nIIAyatAkshi amman kovil when he visited nAgapattinam as he clearly mentions in the krithi at "shivarAjadhAni" in the starting of the charanam. Lord Shiva is called kAyArOhanEsha at this temple because of a story according to which, pleased by a sage's penance, Lord Shiva embraces him and liberates him of worldly bondages-kAya(body)+arohana(embracing)+Esha(Lord). A must visit temple filled with pure vibrations which cannot be explained.



Coming to the krithi, the already beautiful nIIAmbari (the one covered in resplendent blue) is embellished beyond words in this krithi by dIkshithar. To describe the shAnthaswarUpam of nIIAyatAkshi ambAI, dIkshithar aptly chooses the slow-flowing, peaceful nIIAmbari rAgA and portrays the shAntha and bhaktha rakshaka characteristics of the Goddess. The pallavi goes like:

**Pallavi:**

*ambA nIIAyatAkShI karuNAkaTAKShi  
akhilalOkasAkShi kaTAKshi*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar addresses the Goddess as Mother ("ambA"). He describes her eyes ("akshi") as filled with mercy and compassion ("karuNA"). Making full justice to the "ambA" he used in the first line, referring to the Goddess as the mother of all creations, he describes her as "the one who bears witness ("sAkshi") to all the happenings in the worlds ("akhilalOka")." dIkshithar seeks the blessings and the refuge of such a Goddess and asks her to shower her blessings ("kaTAKsha") on everyone.

Musically speaking, he starts off with this beautiful "s r M p m g m" phrase which sounds like falling at the feet of the Goddess and induces a feeling of complete surrender. Some of the prayOgams are extremely intricate and I unfortunately dont have the technical expertise to write them down. It is a krithi to be experience and a rAgam to be imbibed. The prAsam dIkshithar brings in at the pallavi continues and grows in strength through the anupallavi and the charanam.

Coming to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*bimbAdhari citpratibimbAdhari bindunAdavashaHNkari shaHNkari  
ambujAramaNasOdari Adhari ambari kAdambari nIIAmbari*

**Meaning:**

As I mentioned in the beginning itself, this krithi is completely describing the beauty and the compassionate nature of the ambA. dIkshithar beautifully describes the Goddess as "one with sweet lips ("Adhari") which are red like the bimbA fruit". bimbA also means moon. So, it could also be interpreted as "the one wearing ("dhari") the moon". Looking at the esoteric aspect of this line, if we can imagine the human souls to be images ("bimba") of God, then we can interpret this word as "the one who is responsible for these bimbAs". dIkshithar further describes the Goddess as "the consciousness ("chit") and its reflection ("pratibimba")". I think dIkshithar is referring to the knowledge that accompanies consciousness when he says "pratibimba".

This is where dIkshithar brings in the deep, yogic text references when he says that the Goddess is "captivated ("vashankari") by the sound ("nAda") and the blue dot ("bindu")". The first sound to have ever resonated



on this earth is the mantra "Om". Thus, we associate this sound with God, the blessed supreme spirit Himself. The third eye between your eyebrows is the doorway thru which the yogi looks within himself and finds him "self". This third eye is represented as a 5 pointed star in a blue dot called the bindu. The Om mantra is the bIja mantra of the bindu which activates this third eye. Thus, when dIkshithar says that the Goddess is captivated by the nAda and the bindu, he is telling us that the only way to reach and captivate the heart of the Goddess is by using the nAda to activate the bindu. Now this is the beauty of dIkshithar's compositions.. It has taken me nearly ten lines to "try" to explain what dIkshithar is saying in one word and even after these ten lines, I am pretty sure I have not even scratched the surface..just amazing.

Ofcourse, since the Goddess is the consort of shankara, dIkshithar addresses Her as shaHNkari. The small madhyamakAlam employed in the anupallavi adds more beauty. dIkshitar describes Her as "the sister("sOdhari") of Lord viSHNu("ambujA("Goddess Lakshmi")+ramaNa("husband"))" and the cause and reason("Adhari") for this world."

dIkshithar continues to describe Her beautifully as "ambari- the one who covers(pervades) all universe", "kAdambari-the one who loves the fragrance of the kAdambara flower and is garlanded with it" and "nIIAmbari- the one who is adorned with blue silk("nilAmbara")." dIkshithar thus effortlessly brings in the rAga mudhra here while describing the Goddess's beauty. It is just mind-boggling when you wonder how he chose his rAgas to sing on a particular deity..a topic which in itself deserves a few doctoral researches. The "G, m P sn P M - M P M, R G" phrase at "kAdambari nIIAmbari" is just too much to take.

As I mentioned in the pallavi, the prAsam keeps flowing throughout the krithi. The pallavi is filled with all "KShi"s, the anupallavi is embellished with "ari" rhyme scheme and now comes a monster of a charanam adorned with "ini" patterns.

**Charanam:**

*shivarAjadhAnIkSEtravAsini shritajanavishvAsini  
shivakAyArOhaNEshOIIAsini cidrUpavilAsini  
navayOginicakravikAsini navarasadarahAsini  
suvarNamayavigrahaprakAshini suvarNamayahAsini  
bhuvanOdaya sthithilaya vinOdini bhuvanEshvari kSipra prasAdini  
navamANikya vallakI vAdini bhavaguruguha vEdini sammOdini*

**Meaning:**

In the first line of the charanam, dIkshithar names the place where he composed this krithi, nAgapattinam as "shivarAjadhAnIkSEtra-the place under Lord Shiva's rule" and describes the Goddess as the one who lives("vAsini") here. To portray the trust of Her devotees which She always upholds, dIkshithar sings "the one who protects those devotees("Ashritajana") who take refuge in her("viSvAsini)". dIkshithar once again employs a beautiful portrayal of the Goddess as "shivakAyArOhaNEshOIIAsini". This can be interpreted in two ways. One is the physical, gross meaning as " the consort of kAyArOhaNesha". The other( in my mind a better) interpretation would be to see this description as "the one who shares her body("kAyA") with Lord Shiva(the supreme spirit) and shines in resplendence("rohanE") as his consort and power(the shiva-shakthi concept which is the quintessence of all creation)". What perception and devotion dIkshithar should have had to write this word..aahaa.

dIkshithar continues to praise the Goddess as the "form("rUpa") in which consciousness("chit") dwells("vilAsini)". Further yogic references (characteristics of most charanams of dIkshithar krithis) ensues when he describes the ambA as "the one who is seated("vikAsini") in the shrI chakra along with the nine yOginis". For detailed explanations on the yOginis, the shrI chakram and how the divine mother is the embodiment of all this, please refer to my posts explaining the navAvarNams in general and on the 11 navAvarNams themselves in particular. dIkshithar, in my opinion gives the highest compliment to the Goddess by describing the beautiful smile ("hAsini") She wears("dhara") on her face as one that reveals all the 9 rasAs(aesthetics) of shrngAram(love), hAsyam(pleasantness), karuNam(compassion), raudram(anger), vIram(valour), bhayAnakam("terrifying/fear inducing"), bIbatsam(odious/hate), adbutam(wonder/marvel) and shAntam(peace/tranquility). dIkshithar further describes this smile("hAsini") as resplendent as gold("suvarnamaya") and he describes the Goddess's beauty by saying that her form("vighraha") scintillates and shines("prakAshini") like gold.

Till now, the guruguha mudra has not come in the krithi. The madhyamakAla sAhityam delivers that final punch to this krithi which leaves you in tears and on your knees yearning for more. dIkshithar continues to describe Her as

"the unique one(*vinOdhini*)" who is responsible for the creation(*udaya*) and sustenance(*sthithilaya*) of this world(*bhuvana*) and thus the Queen/ruler(*Ishwari*) of this world". dIkshithar portrays the sweet, motherly love which She gives to all her children by saying that "she is very easily(*kshipra*) pleased and delighted(*prasAdini*)" and thus shows how compassionate and merciful She is.

dIkshithar possibly recalls a divine vision when he describes the Goddess as "the one who is playing(*vAdini*) the vallakavINA which is adorned with nine gems(*navamAnikya*).". dIkshithar incorporates the composer's mudra in the last word of the charanam by singing " She is understood completely(*vEdini*"-possible to interpret as the one from whom the vEdAs originated??) by the supreme spirit(*bhava*) and guruguha and she is always happy and at peace(*sammadini*)".

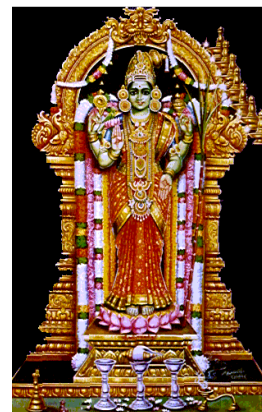
The phrases employed in the charanam are just beyond words, especially phrases like "G M P N D N" at bhava guruguha is just too much to take as a rasika. You practically give up on whatever you have imagined as beauty till that instant..just amazing. Yet another masterpiece and somehow, this blog post seems to leave me with that incomplete feeling as usual. I hope dIkshithar, looking down from the heavens is pleased with whatever small explanations this mere mortal is trying to give to his gems such as this. If not, I beg for his forgiveness.

After listening to and researching on the abhayAmbA krithis, I feel that I am now equipped with decently enough knowledge to take up the abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis which are marvellous creations of the genius. I will start off with the dhyAna krithi in my next post and with God's will and Gawd's blessings, I will be able to go through the entire set pretty soon. Since I have been very lazy in posting only 2 krithis(now 3) in the last 3 months, I am going to start off with the abhayAmba krithis tomorrow itself. Till then, keep singing/playing/listening and learning the divine art. shrI gurubhyO nama:

Sunday, December 16, 2007

**akhilANDEshwari - jujAvanti**

First of all, there are many controversies surrounding this krithi and the rAgA. The rAgA as mentioned in most of the texts including the SSP is pronounced as jujAvanti. Since the rAgA mudrA in this composition goes as jujAvanti, I will hence refer to it by that name. Most purists say that this krithi was not composed by dIkshithar simply because of the way he has handled jujAvanti in his masterpiece, cEtah shri-bAlakrishNam. A lot of other musicologists claim that there are some grammatical imperfections in this krithi and such errors could not have been committed by the nAdajyOthi. I tend to believe otherwise. Though I am in no way qualified to make such a statement, I firmly believe that akhilANDEshwari is a dIkshithar krithi simply from some of the observations I have made.



**Proof by theory:** I am using some stuff quoted by V.V. Srivatsa in one of his lec-dems. If you notice, dIkshithar has effectively used many hindusthani rAgAs such as lalithA, hindOLam(mAlkauns), karnATaka dEvagAndAri(bhImplAs), kAsirAmakriyA(pUrya dhanashrI) etc. In all these rAgAs he has composed two krithis, one showing the adapted carnatic version and the other showing touches of its hindusthani counterpart and Dr. Srivatsa calls these as the maDi and ammaDi versions respectively.

He sights examples like gOvardana girIsham and nIrajAkshi kAmAkshi in hindOLam (mAL kauns), pancAshaTpITa rUpiNi and kAyArOhanEsham in karnATaka dEvagAndhAri (bhImplAs), rAmanAtam bhajEham and srI sundara rAjam in kAsirAmakriyA (pUryaA dhanashrI) and 'hiraNmayIm lakshmiM' and 'agastIsavaram' in lalitA as the 'maDi' and 'ammaDi' pieces respectively. From this point of view I tend to believe that jujAvanti which is again a hindusthani rAgA, has been handled in the same way and 'cEtahshri bAlakrishnam' and 'akhilANDEshwari' are the maDi and ammaDi pieces respectively.

**Proof by Contradiction:** Let us assume that cEtahshri is the only krithi in jujAvanti composed by dIkshithar. Again, if you notice, dIkshithar has incorporated rAgA mudrAs in all of his compositions except those in tODi, asAvEri and erukulakAmbOji. Further, if dIkshithar has composed only one krithi in a rAgA, he most certainly puts the rAgA mudhra in that krithi.(this, I think, applies all his one rAgA krithis) Hence, if cEtahshri is the only jujAvanti krithi composed by dIkshithar, then it should have the rAgA mudra; but it doesnt. This leads us to believe that either akhilANDEshwari(which has the rAgA mudra) is a dIkshithar composition or dIkshithar composed some other krithi in jujAvanti which was lost over time. I have to give the benefit of the doubt to the former case and accept it.

Anyway..irrespective of whether it is a dIkshithar composition or not, whether it is dwijAvanti or jujAvanti, it is an amazing krithi filled with some beautiful prayOgams. That intimate feeling and devotion it evokes is beyond words. So, I shall stop with the argument here and move on to the krithi itself. This krithi has been composed in praise of the Goddess at tiruvAnaikkAval near trichy. A beautiful temple where jambukEshwara(varuNa lingam) is the presiding deity and akhilAndEshwari is the Goddess. I have had the pleasure and have been fortunate enough to visit this temple a couple of times when I was studying at REC,trichy. An absolutely mesmerizing experience which everyone must experience. The pallavi goes like:

**Pallavi:**

*akhilANDEshwari rakSamAm Agama sampradAya nipuNE shrI*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "Oh auspicious("shrI") Goddess akhilANDEshwari(*akhila(every)+aNDa(world)+Ishwari(ruler/queen)*), the scholarly expert("nipuNE") in all traditions("sampradAya") and vEdAs and scriptures("Agama"), please protect me("rakSamAm")."

I love the start to this krithi and I adore the N N D D P phrase at rakSamAm. Over the years, the sangathis that I have listened to have increased by many folds and after mahAgANapathim in nATa and vAthApi in hamsadwani, perhaps this is the third most popular dIkshithar krithi. The smooth transition from "s s s" at Agama to "S S S"(mel sthAyi) at sampradAya is awesome and the kick I get when i play it on the guitar is indescribable. A very simple

pallavi which when subjected to improvisation yields some amazing prayOgams of the rAgA.

Characteristic of most dIkshithar krithis, the anupallavi contains some beautiful descriptions of the dEvi.

**Anupallavi:**

*nikhila IOka nityAtmikE vimalE  
nirmalE shyAmaLE sakala kalE*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Goddess as " the one whose form completely pervades("nityAtmikE") all("nikhila") the worlds("IOka")." He further embellishes her physical form by describing her as "pure("vimalE"), sublime and blemishless("nirmalE"), dark complexioned("shyAmaLE") and adept in all("sakala") arts("kalE")". Feel the prAsam that runs through these few lines of the anupallavi. dIkshithar has used really simple words to describe the Goddess and this might be one more reason for the purists to believe that this is not a dIkshithar krithi. I love the "N D, D P, P M, M G" start to the anupallavi and look at how beautiful it blends with the sAhityams as "ni, khi, la, IO". The "R G R S" at shyAmaLE is very cute and soothing :). Moving on to the charaNam,

**Charanam:**

*lambOudara guruguha pUjitE lambAlakOdbhAsitEhasitE  
vAgdEvatArAdhitE varadE varashailarAjanutE shAradE  
jambhAri sambhAvitE janArddananutE jujAvanti rAganutE  
jallI maddaLa jhar jhara vAdya nAdamuditE jHnAnapradE*

**Meaning:**

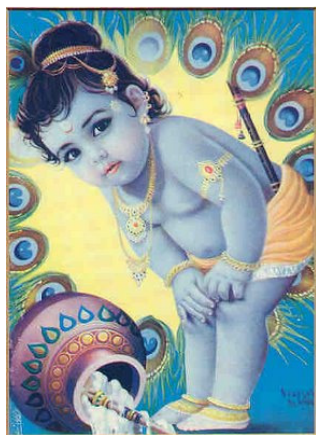
The charaNam incorporates both the composer mudra and the rAgA mudra. dIkshithar refers to Lord Ganesha as lambOudara here, ("lamba+udara=big+belly") and sings about the dEvi as "She is the one who is worshipped("pUjitE") by Lord Ganesha and guruguha". dIkshithar then describes the beauty of the Goddess as "the one with lustrous("bhAsitE") long plaits of hair("lambAlaka") and a beautiful smile("hasitE")". dIkshithar continues as " She is the one worshipped by vAgdEvi("Saraswathi-the Goddess of speech"), the bestower of all boons("varadE") and the daughter of the mighty("vara") God of the mountains("shaila rAja"-HimavAn"). She is shArada and the one worshipped by Lord Indra("jambhAri"-enemy of JambAsura) and Lord janArhdhana. She is praised through rAgA jujAvanti and she delights("muditE") in the music("nAda") produced by instruments like jallI, mardara and jharjhara. She is the bestower of all knowledge("jHnAnapradE")."

The "M D P M M G M G G R G S" phrase for the start of the charaNam is fabulous. One of my most favourite phrases is the plain "R G M P M G M R G S" at "shAradE". Extremely beautiful..what else can i say. And the madhyamakAla sAhityam just overflows with exquisite beauty and takes the rasika to a totally different plane. The "R M R G R, S N D P R" pattern at jambhAri sambhAvi, the "P S P R R" at jallI madhala and flat " R G M P M G M" notes at jharjhara are just overwhelming and pure ecstasy. On the whole, the krithi exhudes soukhyam and is rich with bhakthi and beauty. akhilANDEshwari forever will remain one of the sweetest krithis and I can perhaps say that this krithi was one of the very first dIkshithar krithis I heard..hence it is special :).

Now, since I talked about the maDi and ammaDi versions of rAgAs and since I knowingly or unknowingly already handled one such pair("hiraNmayIm" and "agastIshwaram"), I am going to push the abhayAmba vibhakthi krithis a little more and instead take up The most brilliant and beautiful composition in jujAvanti ever, cEtah-shrI bAlakrishNam. in my next post. I cried 3 times today listening to cEtah-shrI..some prayOgams are just mind-blowing and the beauty and bhakthi is too too much to take. Before you read my post, if you have not heard the krithi, I request you to go to our dIkshithar website and listen to the SSI and the TMK versions I have uploaded there... a must listen. Till then, keep drowning yourselves in the ocean of bliss. shrI gurubhyO nama:

Sunday, December 23, 2007

cEtah shrI bAlakRSNam - jujAvanti



Coming back to jujAvanti and dIkshithar's treatment of this rAga, cEtah shrI bAlakRSNam is perhaps the best ever krithi composed in this rAga. The way dIkshithar employs the scale of the rAga and fuses it with the sAhityams is so unbelievably carnatic that a rasika would not even know it is an hindusthani rAga. The slow, chouka kAla composition just exudes with soukhya rasam and the bhakthi and beauty are indescribable. Lord Krishna, the shyAma sundaran he already is, his beauty is further embellished by this wonderful krithi. I dont know at which kshEtra dIkshithar composed this krithi. If anyone who reads this does, please share the information with me. I personally recommend the extremely slow and sweet version of the krithi sung by TMK to feel the beauty of the krithi. Also, simply because of the amazing swarams, I recommend rasikas to listen to the version by SSI. Both these krithis are available at our dIkshithar website. The pallavi goes like:

**Pallavi:**

*cEtah shrI-bAlakRSNam bhaja rE rE  
cintitArtha-prada-caraNAravindam mukundam*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar instructs every human soul- "Oh mind("cEtah"), worship and sing the praises("bhaja") of Lord bAlakRSNa. He is Mukunda("the bestower of freedom") and by worshipping his lotus-like("aravindam") feet("caraNa"), his bhaktAs will be bestowed with("prada") all the boons they can think of("cintita-arttha")."

The "R, R ,R" start for the krithi in itself tells you what a masterpiece you are looking at. The "m p d S" prayOgam at "prada-cara" exposes the beautiful link existing between jujAvanti and yadhukulakAmbOji. Look at the words dIkshithar uses to command..the sAhityams obviously demand an esoteric interpretation. Here, he is addressing Lord Krishna as Mukunda, the one who gives his devotees freedom from this cycle of birth and re-birth. The slEsham here is that mukunda is the name of a precious gem. The third eye located between the eyebrows is sometimes referred to as Mukunda maNi, the blue bindu encompassing the penta-pointed star which the yOgi sees when he meditates. This is why dIkshithar addresses the citta(consciousness) and the cEtah(mind) here and in these few lines of the pallavi, stresses the importance of bhakthi and yOga and how discipline and devotion are keys to the path of kaivalyam. The pallavi sets it up nicely for the vocalist/instrumentalist to buckle up and be ready for the amazing rides in the form of the anupallavi and the charaNam.

**Anupallavi:**

nUtana-nIrada-sadRsha-sharIram nanda-kishOram  
pIta-vasana-dharam kambu-kandharam giri-dharam  
pUtanAdi-samhAram puruSOttamAvatAram  
shItaLa-hRdaya-vihAram shrI-rukmiNI-dAram

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the physical beauty of the Lord by using metaphors. He says that the Lord's body("sharIram") is as dark("sadRsha") as a new("nUtana"), rain-bearing cloud("nIrada"). He sings "The young boy("kishOra") of the nanda clan is adorned("dharam") with yellow("pIta") silk robe("vasana"). He has a conch-shaped("kambu") neck("kandharam") and He lifted the govardhana mountains("giri"). Time and time again, I have always wondered what kind of a pure soul dIkshithar must have been to be able to visualize the Gods and Goddesses and describe them with such pristine depictions and to do that in their own language("dEvanAgari-Language of the Gods"). He definitely was a puNya Atma. The smooth transition from keezh Shadjamam to mEl shadjamam at nUtana nIrada is pure bliss to sing/play and the slow " n s d" at sharI"ram" is amazingly beautiful.

In the madhyamakAla sAhityam, dIkshithar sings "He destroyed("samhAram") the demon pUthana and others. He is an incarnation("avatAram") of the supreme soul, the most supreme among men("purushOttama"). He resides("vihAram") in the tender and soothing("shItaLa") hearts("hRdaya") of his devotees and He is the spouse("dAram") of the auspicious Goddess Rukmini".

Even in the madhyamakAla sAhityam, dIkshithar beautifully preserves the traditional gait he introduced at the

starting of the krithi. The similarity in structure between "nUtana" and "pUtana" with respect to prAsam as well as the swarasthAnas is a classic example of dIkshithar's mastery. He once again brings in the yadhukulakAmbOji effect by using the "p d s" phrase at "shrI" rukmini and perfectly blends the end of the anupallavi "r m g s" at "dAram" and the rUpaka tALam thattu to take-off at Rishabham for the pallavi. Just amazing. The Rishabham at "cEtah" is as if dIkshithar is cajoling the soul. These effects must be heard, felt and experienced and cannot be described in limited language. The "am" prAsam continues to flow through the charaNam and it acts like a beautiful thread embroidering the already well-printed silk cloth.

**CharaNam:**

*navanIta-gandha-vAha-vadanam mRdu-gadanam  
naLina-patra-nayanam vaTa-patra-shayanam  
nava-campaka-nAsikam atasI-sumabhAsakam  
natEndrAdi-Ioka-pAlakam mRga-mada-tilakam  
navatulasI-vana-mAlam nAradAdi-muni-jAlam  
kuvalayAdi-paripAlam guru-guha-nuta-gOpAlam*

**Meaning:**

Actually, whenever you think of Lord Krishna as a kutti kid, what instantly comes to your mind is a physical form which is young, beautiful, energetic, mischievous and all that sorts. Hence, very appropriately, dIkshithar continues to talk about the physical beauty of the Lord and describes Him as "the one whose face ("vadanam") smells ("gandha") like ("vAha") fresh butter ("navanIta") and one whose speech ("gadanam") is soft and tender ("mRdu")". The physical descriptions becoming extremely descriptive as dIkshithar sings "His eyes ("nayanam") are like petals ("patra") of the graceful lotus ("naLina") and he rests ("shayanam") on a banyan ("vaTa") leaf ("patra"). His nose ("nAsikam") is like a fresh champaka flower ("nava-champaka") and a wonderful fragrance ("suma bhAsakam") of tuLasi ("athasI") emanates from his body. He is worshipped ("nata") by Indra and other IOkapAlakAs. He wears the kastUri ("mRgamada") tilakam."

The madhyamakAla sAhityam goes like "He is adorned with garlands ("vana-mAlam") of fresh ("nava") tuLasi leaves and he is served ("jAlam") by nArada and other sages ("muni"). He is the protector ("paripAlam") of all the worlds ("kuvalayAdi") and He is worshipped ("nuta") by guruguha and He is gOpala."

The charaNam is, for the lack of better words, beautiful and very soothing. If you observe, he describes the tender features of the Lord so beautifully with all the tender and soft phrases of jujAvanti. The "s n d p" at "mRdu" is in itself so mRdu and touching. The "r g m p" phrase at "naLina" is just too much to take and your heart melts there and the dIrga "g r s" complementary phrase at "vaTa" shows how smooth the rAga flows while going up as well as going down the scale, just like how soft and smooth the Lord's body is. The "p p G R" take off at "nava-champaka" is perhaps the best transition to the tAra sthAyi ever..aahaa..what beauty. And ofcourse, the "nd,dp,pm,gmr" at "mR-ga-ma-da" is the epitome of beauty. The madhyamakAla sAhityam begins with the incorrigibly goosebumping "r g m p d" phrase and ends with yet another beautiful pattern of "rs, nd, dp" at "guru-guha-nuta".

On the whole, it is a krithi to be submerged in and the exquisite beauty is beyond description. The krithi leaves you haunted and wanting for more. As a rasika, I am just spellbound each time I listen to this krithi. I am not able to comprehend how it is humanly possible to compose such masterpieces and as ever, I console my mind with the "dIkshithar is God" funda. I am going to end this post abruptly because I find myself at an absolute paucity of words. If you have not heard this krithi, you are missing something wonderful in life and hence I request you to please listen to it at the earliest. I will now peacefully take up the abhayAmbA vibhakti krithis and over the next month, I will try and complete the entire set.



Sunday, January 20, 2008

**sadAshrayE abhayAmbikE - chAmaram**



Coming to the abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis, I would like to start off with the story behind the kshEtra at which these krithis were composed by dIkshithar. After the guruguha vibhakthi krithis, the abhayAmbA series was the next set composed by dIkshithar. Goddess abhayapradAmbA and Lord mAyUranAtha reside at the famous temple at mayilAdudurai or mAyavaram. According to the legend, king dAksha did not invite his daughter(dAkshAyaNi-Goddess pArvathi) and her husband, Lord Shiva to yagnam he was performing. In spite of Lord Shiva's strict instructions, Goddess pArvathi went to the event uninvited and She was ignored and insulted. Meanwhile, an injured peahen that came that way ran to Goddess parvathi and took shelter. Unable to bear these insults, Goddess pArvathi took the peahen and entered the sacred fire. In her next birth, She came incarnated as the peahen and came to the same place and did severe penance. Pleased by this Lord Shiva, came down from the heavens, assumed the shape of a peacock and did the gowri tAndavam dance and accepted the peahen as his wife. Hence the name of the sthalam(mayil-Adu-thurai). Since the Goddess gave shelter to the peahen, she is known as the Mother(ambA) who gives shelter(abhayam) and hence abhayAmbA.

The abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis is a set of 10 krithis; 1 dhyAna krithi, 8 main krithis for each vibhakthi and 1 maNgaLa krithi. Unlike the kamalAmbA navAvarNams which glorify the Avaranams, this set does not deal with shrI chakra. One more significant difference is that unlike the navAvarNams where dIkshithar uses simple sentences with profound meanings, the abhayAmbA krithis consist of long-winding sentences which convey high thoughts; some words running for 5 or 6 lines (like the charaNam of the krithi in kEdAram). Some similarities between the two sets would be the usage of main rAgAs like shankharAbharaNam, tODi, kalyANi, kAmbhOji, Bhairavi etc.

Some musicologists believe that "sadAshrayE abhayAmbikE", the krithi in chAmaram (56th mELa in the asampUrNa scale) does not meet all the requirements of a dhyAna krithi and hence substitute "dAkshAyaNi abhayAmbikE" in tODi instead and treat the chAmaram krithi as the eighth vibhakthi krithi. Also, this substitution would bring the set in line with the navAvarNams which also has its dhyAna krithi in tODi. However, I am going to stick with the more popular belief and treat the chAmaram krithi as the dhyana krithi. One more interesting fact is that, apart from "AryAm abhayAmbAm" in bhairavi, none of the other abhayAmbA krithis are showcased in SubburAma dIkshithar's "sangItha sampradAya pradarshini(SSP)".

Since these krithis are once again filled with deep, esoteric meanings and kundalini yOGic references, I will try my best to explain them. Please pardon me if something is wrong and please correct me if you find something you know better about. The chAmaram krithi is set completely in the sambhOdhana vibhakthi (eighth/vocative case) where dIkshithar addresses the Goddess directly as "hE abhayAmbikE". The pallavi goes as:

**pallavi**

*sadAshraye abhayAmbike sannidhehi  
sadAshraye tvAmambike bhadraM dehi*

**Meaning**

dIkshithar starts off as "Oh Goddess abhayAmbA!! I always ("sada") bow to you and seek your shelter ("AshrayE"). You, who ("tvAm") are the Mother ("ambikE") of all goodness ("sadAshrayE"), please appear before me ("sannidEhi") and bestow ("dEhi") all auspiciousness ("bhadram") upon me."

dIkshithar as usual, starts off by showing his brilliance and mastery over music and grammar. He starts off with beautiful swarAksharams of sa, dA at "sadAshrayE". To see his precision in grammar, look at how he uses the various meanings of the same word (sadAshrayE) in the pallavi. The symmetry is also clearly visible in the pallavi. Both lines start off with sadAshrayE, have "ambikE" in the middle and end with "dEhi"..simple yet powerful constructs. The alliterations, multiple meanings for the same word and the prAsam continue through to the anupallavi.

### **anupallavi**

*cidAshraye cidambaracandrike ehi  
cidAshraye shivama~ncake natavArAhi  
mudAshraye bhuktimuktipradamArgaM brUhi  
mudAshraye mAyAdhInaM dInaM mAAM pAhi*

### **Meaning**

dIkshithar addresses the Goddess as "the dwelling place of consciousness ("cidAshrayE")" and continues to describe her as "the moon ("candrike") in the sky ("ambara") of consciousness ("cid"). Please come near ("ehi"). You are the one who dwells in chit and the one who rests on the seat ("ma~nchakE") which is shiva. You are worshipped ("nata") by vArAhi. You are the abode of bliss ("mudAshrayE"). Teach ("brUhi") me the path ("mArgaM") of liberation ("mukthi") and enjoyment ("bhukthi"). I approach you with happiness ("mudAshrayE"). Please save me ("mAAM pAhi"), the one who is helpless ("dInam") and caught up in this delusion ("mAyAdhInam")."

The anupallavi sets the tone. Once again, dIkshithar employs multiple meaning for cidAshrayE and mudAshrayE by playing with the samAsa's once again displaying his grammatical prowess. The AdyAkshara prAsam (commencing alliterations such as sadAshrayE, cidAshrayE) and antyAkshara prAsam (terminating alliterations such as ehi, vArAhi, brUhi etc) bring that rhyme scheme which makes the sAhityams flow with poetic gait.

Just like most dIkshithar krithis, the charaNam of this krithi is big, prAsam inundated and provides the climax. The rAga mudra and the composer mudra are also featured in the charaNam. In the anupallavi, dIkshithar asks the Goddess to show him the path to liberation and accordingly, he sings about the nAdabindu in the charaNam.

### **charaNam**

*gaurI mAyUranAtha mohanakara shakte  
shaurIsha-vidhIndrAdi-sannuta parAshakte  
nArImaNyAdyarcita nAdabindu yukte  
shArIrakAdi vidyAsiddhAnta yukte  
bherI-maddaLa-vINAvAdanAnurakte  
sUrijanopAsita caraNanalina yukte  
vANImA-karadh.rta cAmara sevAsakte  
dUrIk.rta durita vedashAstrAdi prasakte  
vArIshAdi lokapAla nuta guruguhabhakte  
dAridrya duHkha bha~njanakara shaN^karA vibhakte  
shukasanakAdi devatA sevite paradevate  
vArijamukhi varadAbhayahaste namo namaste*

### **Meaning**

dIkshithar sings " Oh gowri!! You are shakthi, the one capable of delighting and pleasing ("mohana kara") Lord mAyUranAtha. You are the supreme power ("parAshakthi") worshipped by Vishnu ("shaurIsha"), Brahma ("vidhi") and Indra. You are worshipped ("arcita") by women and others ("nArImaNyAdi") and you are in the primordial OM form ("nAdabindu"). You are the embodiment of divine knowledge ("vidya") and shArIraka specified in the scriptures, the end result of all siddhis.

You delight in the sounds from instruments like bhEri, maddaLa and vINa. Your lotus-like ("naLina") feet ("charaNam") are worshipped ("upAsita") by all the dEvAs ("sUrijana:"). Goddess Saraswathi and Goddess Lakshmi are holding ("dhruta") the fan ("chAmara") in their hands ("kara") and are giving you the royal service ("sEva"). You are famous for being the reason ("prashaktE") for the establishment of the vEdAs and other shAstrAs and you drive away ("dUrIkrita") the troubles and sufferings ("durita") of your devotees. You are attached to guruguha and worshipped by Lord Varuna ("vArIsha") and other dikpAlakAs (the protectors of all the directions). You are the companion ("vibhaktE") of shankara and you are destroyer ("bhanjanakara") of poverty ("dAridhram") and sufferings ("dukha"). You are worshipped ("sevite") by shukha, sanaka and other celestials. You are the supreme Goddess ("paradEvate"). You have a lotus-like ("vArija") face ("mukhi") and your hands ("haste") are in the posture of granting boons ("varada") and providing shelter ("abhaya"). I prostrate before you again and again ("namO namaste")."

dIkshithar brings in the rAga mudhrA beautifully employing the literal meaning of the word chAmara. One can very well see the similarities in lalitha sahasranAmam in which we can see "*sachAmara ramA vANI savyadakshiNa sEvita*". dIkshithar employs the same concept in a few of his other krithis too, for eg., "shrI ramAsarasvatI sEvitAm shrI lalitAmbAm" in nAsAmaNi. dIkshithar addresses the dEvi as the primordial OM bIja mantra, the nAdabindu ("the dot or point from which all sounds originated"). Compared to other dIkshithar krithis, I would say that though the charaNam is long, it is not very profound and can be relatively easily interpreted. I would highly recommend listening to the kalpagam swaminathan maami's rendition of this krithi for the rasikas. Other than that, nothing much to be said.

I will next take up the prathama vibhakthi krithi, "abhayAmbA jagadamba", a beautiful krithi in kalyANi. Just like the kalyANi navAvarNam, this krithi is also embellished with some amazing phrases and is an absolute treat.

Wednesday, January 30, 2008

**abhayAmbA jagadambA rakSatu - kalyANi**

Continuing with the abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis, I will now take up the beautiful krithi in kalyANi in which dIkshithar mesmerizes everyone including the Goddess. "abhayAmbA jagadambA rakSatu" is completely set in the prathamA vibhakthi (Nominative case/First case) and hence all places at which dIkshithar says "She", he refers to the Goddess. Set to Adi tALam, the krithi just gallops along beautifully. With every word in the anupallavi and charaNam ending in "nI or NI", the prAsam is the invisible thread that keeps the rasikA spell bound. The rAga bhAva just effuses in this krithi. Mother kalyANi herself will be extremely proud of this krithi and as dIkshithar very appropriately sings in the charaNam "*bhAvarAgatALaviSwAsini*", the Goddess will indeed be delighted in the music filled with bhAva, rAga and tALa. Now moving on to the krithi, the pallavi starts off as:

**Pallavi:**

*abhayAmbA jagadambA rakSatu AtmarUpapratibimbA madambA*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "May Goddess abhayAmbA, my mother ("*madambA*") and the Mother of the entire universe ("*jagadambA*") protect me ("*rakSatu*"). She is the reflection ("*pratibimbA*") of the supreme self ("*AtmarUpa*")."

Look at the devotion which he cries out to his mother. He calls the Goddess as his own mother. Imagine what puNyam dIkshithar's soul must have done to be able to portray Her as his mother. The "SNDP" start to the krithi is beautiful. The pallavi sets up the kalyANi mood very nicely so that the rasika can get ready to experience the beautiful anupallavi which in my opinion is perhaps one of the best anupallavis a krithi in kalyANi could have. The anupallavi goes as

**Anupallavi:**

*ibhavadana shrIguruguhajananI IshamAyUranAtharanjanI  
abhayavaradapANI alivENI Ashrita mAvANI kalyANI*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Goddess beautifully in the anupallavi with very simple, yet meaningful descriptions. He starts by saying "She is the mother ("*janani*") of the elephant-faced ("*ibhavadana*") Lord Ganesha and guruguha". Beautifully portraying the sthala of mayilAduthurai, he describes abhayAmbA as "the one who delights and is loved ("*ranjani*") by the Lord mAyUranAtha". The anupallavi ends in one of the most prAsam laden lines ever composed by dIkshithar. In the mini madhyamakAla sAhityam, he embellishes the Goddess by describing her as "the one whose hands ("*pANI*") offer ("*varada*") shelter and protection ("*abhaya*") to Her devotees". dIkshithar continues to sing "She has braids of hair ("*vENI*") as dark as bees ("*ali*"). She is attended ("*Ashrita*") by Goddesses Lakshmi and Saraswathi ("*mAvANI*"). She is kalyANI, the ever auspicious one."

The presence of both the composer mudra as well as the rAga mudra in the anupallavi clearly shows the significance of it in this krithi. I personally recommend rasikas to listen to the anupallavi sung by Prof. S.R.J mama. Some of the sangathis he sings at "abhayavaradapANI alivENI" are just amazing and the bliss is something that should not be missed. dIkshithar once again emphasizes that Goddess abhayAmbA is worshipped and served by Lakshmi and Saraswathi, which inturn means that by praying to Goddess abhayAmbA, you will get the wealths of prosperity as well as fine arts. The "N M D" phrase at kalyANI followed by the subsequent take-off gives me goosebumps all the time. The anupallavi creates a longing in the rasika..a longing which is more than satisfied by the exquisite charaNam.

**charaNam:**

*bhakta nAgaliNga paripAlinI bhAsamAna navaratna mAlinI  
vyakta samastha jagadhvishAlinI vyadhi karaNa haraNa nipuNa shUlinI  
rakta-shukla-mishra prakAshinI ravikOTikOTi saNkAshinI  
bhukti-mukti-mAnasa nivAsinI bhAvarAgatALa viSwAsinI*

*bhukti phalaprada dakSa mrDAnI bhakti prada nipuNatara bhavAnI  
shaktisampradAyaka sharvANI bhukti mukti vitaraNa rudrANI*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "She was the protector ("*paripAlinI*") of her devotee ("*bhakta*") nAgaliNga. She is adorned by sparkling ("*bhAsamAna-bhA(stars)+samAna(equivalent)*") necklace studded with nine gems ("*navaratna*"). She is the one responsible for illuminating ("*vishAlinI*") the entire ("*samastha*") manifested ("*vyakta*") universe ("*jagadh*"). She holds the trident ("*shUlinI*") and is adept ("*nipuNa*") in destroying ("*haraNa*") the dualities and their corresponding disturbances ("*vyadhi*"). She scintillates ("*prakAshinI*") with a blend ("*mishra*") of red ("*rakta*") and bright white ("*shukla*") colours. She shines ("*saNkAshinI*") like crores and crores ("*kOTikOTi*") of suryA dEvAs. She resides ("*nivAsini*") in the hearts and minds ("*mAnasa*") of devotees seeking liberation ("*mukti*"). She rejoices ("*vishwAsinI*") in the music filled with bhAva, rAgA and tALa. She is mrDAnI (consort of mrDA), the one who is adept ("*dakSa*") in bestowing ("*phalaprada*") different types of enjoyments ("*bhukti*"). She is bhavAnI ("consort of bhava"), the one adept ("*nipuNa*") in granting ("*prada*") devotion ("*bhakti*"). She is sharvANI ("consort of sharva"), the one who shows the traditional path ("*sampradAya*") of shakti worship. She is rudrANI ("consort of rudra"), the bestower ("*vitaraNa*") of worldly pleasures ("*bhukti*") and the one who helps transcend ("another meaning for vitaraNa) these pleasures to attain mukthi".

The reference to the devotee nAgaliNga has been a topic which has intrigued many musicologists. There are no stories or folklores showing the Goddess to have protected a devotee called nAgaliNga. The same devotee has been referred to in the Anandabhairavi krithi "abhayAmba nAyaka harisAyaka" composed in praise of Lord mAyuranAtha at the same kSetra. There could be some absolutely different interpretation to the phrase too. I dont know :( . Experience the current of prAsam beginning at the anupallavi and flowing beautifully through the charaNam. Also look at the adhyAkshAra prAsam in the charaNam as the two words in the same line start with the same consonant ("bha, vya, ra" etc).

dIkshithar uses the words mrDAnI, bhavAnI, shUlinI and rudrANI to address the Goddess. All these names are found in lalitA sahasranAmam. As I always say, dIkshithar's krithis are like beautiful sugar-coated toffees of all the scriptures rolled into one. Though not strictly classified as a upAsana krithi (unlike the navAvarNams for shrIchakra), the abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis are no doubt, masterpieces of bhakthi and being inundated with direct references to the lalitA sahasranAmam, these krithis are ideal for dEvi upAsana. How can dEvi refuse to come to you if you call Her with all the devotion and address Her as your own mother like dIkshithar does. For a complete absorption of the rich gait in this krithi, please listen to kalpagam swAminAthan maami's rendition. Incidentally, I am listening to SK's rendition of kamalAmbAm bhajarE as I am finishing this blog. :) Looks like today is going to be a kalyANI day :).

Continuing with the abhayAmbA series, I will next take up the graceful "AryAm abhayAmbAm" set in dwitIyA vibhakthi ("accusative case"). The krithi, in my opinion adds an entirely new dimension to bhairavi. Hopefully I will be able to resolve the serpentine charaNam in time so that I can post this krithi this weekend :). Till then, keep listening and keep drowning in the ocean of musical bliss.

shrI kamalAmbA jayathi!!

Saturday, February 9, 2008

**AryAM abhayAmbAM - Bhairavi**

I hate to accept this sometimes, but yes..I have become an emotional idiot and a sentimental fool these days. Today I was listening to this amazing krithi "sarasa souvIra rasavAdakaraNa" in souvIram (47th mEla) sung by SK and I was just blown away. Tears have rolled down my cheeks the entire evening as I sit and continue to loop and drown myself in this ocean of ecstasy. My colleague took me out for a nice drive today evening. I drove a car after a gap of around 20 months. I have not been able to play my guitar as much as I would like to because I suffered a fracture on my left hand a few weeks back. Now, I am truly experiencing the statement "kai odanja maadhri irukku".

For the past month and a half, I have been some nice music sessions with bala sir (a great professor and a wonderful friend from REC,Trichy). Last week, I got introduced to another friend, Vasumathi Sridharan through bala sir. She has adopted SK and myself as her kutti thambis :). Over the last month, I also observed that I am getting increasingly detached from this world. For the good or the bad, nothing except dIkshithar seems to run in my mind. Music has consumed me and has pervaded my soul completely. Hopefully this urge, passion and bhakthi will drive me towards improving myself and becoming a better devotee of this art. shrI gurubhyO namah:

I will continue my discussion on the abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis by taking up "AryAm abhayAmbAm"; yet another masterpiece from dIkshithar composed in bhairavi rAga set to tripuTa tALam. This krithi has been composed exclusively in the dvitIyA vibhakthi (second/accusative case). The basic construct of every sentence is of the form "She, Who..". The first thing you will notice about the sAhityam of this krithi is the antyAkshara prAsam throughout the pallavi, anupallavi and charaNam with every word ending in either "IM" or "AM". Also observable in this krithi, are the long-winding word constructs of the charaNam, a pattern which reaches its climax in the kEdAram krithi "ambikAyAH abhayAmbikAyAH". The pallavi starts off with the famous "bhajarE, tyaja rE" rhyme scheme.

**Pallavi:**

*AryAM abhayAmbAM bhajarE rE citta santatam  
avidyAkAryAkalanAM tyaja rE  
AdimadhyAntarahitAM shivasahitAM*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar starts off by addressing the mind ("*citta*") and commands it as "Oh mind!! Always ("*santatam*") worship ("*bhajarE*") Goddess abhayAmbA, the revered and honourable one ("*AryAM*"). Abandon ("*tyaja*") everything attached to and resulting from ("*kalanAM*") deeds ("*kAryA*") of ignorance ("*avidyA*"). She, Who is the one without ("*rahitAm*") any beginning, middle or end ("*AdimadhyAnta*") and the companion ("*sahitAm*") of Lord Shiva."

The "N; N D P" start at AryAm makes your bones tingle and serves as a clear indication of what is to come. dIkshithar sings of the Goddess's praise as the one who has no beginning or end once again reiterating the fact that the supreme soul is the origin of everything in this universe and hence becomes the final destination too. Hence, dIkshithar addresses the mind to shed all attachments to this material world and effectively use the bhakthi mArgA to worship and realize God. The small madhyamakAla sAhityam in the pallavi serves as a perfect knock-out punch :). Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*sUryAgnicandramanDala vAsinIM  
sukhatara pravartinIM svEtaranivAsinIM  
AcArya sishyAnugraha karaNa shakthi pradApAra karuNAM  
caryAdi catushTaya vitaraNa samartatara caraNAM aruNAM*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Goddess as "the one who dwells ("*vAsinIM*") in the orbital planes ("*manDala*") of Sun, fire and moon. The one who bestows ("*pravartinIM*") bliss ("*sukha*") and the one who resides ("*nivAsinIM*") in herself and all others ("*svEtara*"). She is the one, who, with unlimited ("*pAra*") mercy ("*karuNAM*") is granting ("*prada*") the power ("*shakthi*") that manifests in the form of guru's ("*AcArya*") grace ("*anugraha*") for a student ("*sishya*"). The one, whose lotus feet ("*caraNAM*") is adept in bestowing ("*vitaraNa*") the four-fold ("*catushTaya*") path for



religious austerities beginning with carya ("virtuous conduct") and She is red hued one ("*aruNAM*")."

What an amazing anupallavi. Writing about this krithi made me listen to the anupallavi once again and I was completely bowled over as usual. To start off, dIkshithar brings in advaita fundas addressing the Goddess as the one who resides in herself ("*paramAtma*") and all others ("*jIvAtma*"). The point at which dIkshithar describes the Goddess as the sublime power behind the guru-sishya relationship, the goosebumps start to run up your skin and the rasika reaches heights of bliss when the AchArya-charya rhyme scheme hits him..just beyond words. In this beautiful few lines, dIkshithar beautifully shows the bhaktha that the Goddess is the supreme soul ("*svEthara*"), the medium ("*AcArya*") and the path itself, consisting of virtuous conduct ("*charya*"), acts of worship ("*kriyA*"), yOGA and the culminating knowledge ("*gnAna*"). This is perhaps the greatest reason for rasikAs like me who are not professionally trained musicians to surrender to these masterpieces and sing these krithis as a definite path towards salvation.

**caraNam:**

*nandanavanotpAdana puSpamAlikAM  
vandanAlayAdi prasthApana divya-  
candanAkarSaNa sthalashuddhikaraNa-  
vandana stotrAdi paThana bhaktasevAnAm  
mandadhIharaNa caryAyuta mAnavAnAM dharmamaya-  
svacchandashivasAlokya dAyaka caturatahara naTabhairavIM  
mandasmita vilasita mukhAravindAM guruguhAmbikAM  
mukundasodarIM mahAtripurasundarIm AnandalaharIm*

**Meaning:**

Let me take a deep breath before starting off with the caraNam. My friend was asking me about tongue twisters in carnatic music and I ended up telling him about dIkshithar's brilliance quoting the sAhityam of krithis like this. I will try my best to explain these long words using the limited english language but I have to accept that the interpretation and explanations will definitely fall short of conveying the complete meaning. The caraNam is basically a description of the various austerities a bhaktha must perform to obtain the complete blessing of the Goddess like gathering flowers from the garden, making garlands for Her, grinding sandal paste, cleaning the place of worship, prostrating before her, chant sacred hymns and sing devotional songs in praise of Her. dIkshithar captures these details completely in the caraNam.

dIkshithar continues to describe the Goddess as "the one, who wears the garland of flowers ("*puSpa mAlikAM*") from the heavenly garden ("*vana*") of nandana. The one, who is served ("*sEvAnAm*") by devotees ("*bhaktha*") who are engaged in austere practices like building ("*prasthApana*") temples ("*vandanAlaya*"), grinding sandal paste ("*candanAkarSaNa*"), cleaning ("*shuddhikaraNa*") the place of worship ("*sthalA*"), prostrating ("*vandana*") and chanting ("*paThana*") divine hymns ("*sthOtrAdi*"). The one, who is the dancing ("*nata*") Goddess bhairavi and the one who is adept in destroying ("*haraNa*") ignorance ("*mandHI*") bestowing ("*dAyaka*") upon the ones who perform the virtuous acts ("*caryAyuta mAnavAnAm*") , the righteous ("*dharmamaya*") path of becoming one ("*sAIOkya*") with Shiva ("*Shivasayujya*") according to one's own will ("*svachanda*"). The one with a lotus-like face ("*mukhAravindAM*") and a gleaming ("*vilasita*") smile ("*mandasmita*"), the mother of guruguha ("*guruguhAmbikAM*"), the sister ("*sOdarIM*") of mukunda. She is mahAtripurasundari, the deluge ("*laharIM*") of bliss ("*Ananda*")."

In the caraNam too, dIkshithar seems to reinforce thoughts of bhakthi, surrender and finally becoming one with God. Through these lines, he says that the first step towards self-realization is bhakthi. Bhakthi eventually leads to complete surrender, total detachment from material possessions, practice of good conduct. By serving God, the bhaktha finally sees him"self" as the jyOthi and becomes one with it, never to return to this birth-death cycle. Look at how carefully dIkshithar chooses his words to keep the rhyme scheme intact and the tripuTa tALam gallops along majestically. He beautifully incorporates the rAga mudra by describing the Goddess as the dancing Bhairavi. The madhyamakAla sAhityam flows beautifully and brings the same "mandasmita" on the face of the rasika. :). On the whole, an absolute treat and a quality gem. It is extremely sad that even though professional artists seem to have beaten bhairavi to death by singing it in almost every concert, no one takes up krithis like AryAm abhayAmbAM or cintaya mAkaanda or dEvi jagadIshwari. Everyone is happy singing the same old bAlagOpAla or upachAramu or tanayuni brOva. I really hope that artistes take it upon themselves to look outside the rigmarole and start singing krithis like this.

I will next take up girijaya ajAya, the tritIya vibhakthi krithi composed in shankarAbharaNaM. This krithi too has an

amazingly long construct with the charaNam consisting of just two words running for 5 lines. The first word is 86 syllables long :O :O. I am going to be pretty free tomorrow and day after and I will hopefully post 2 or possibly 3 krithis over the next few days :). Till then, keep listening and keep drowning!!

Monday, February 11, 2008

**girijayA ajayA - shankarAbharaNam**

Continuing with the legendary abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis, I will now take up the majestic shankarAbharaNam krithi "girijayA ajayA" composed exclusively in the tritIyA vibhakthi (third/instrumental case) set to Adi tALa. dIkshithar very aptly chooses the rAga to describe Lord Shiva's AbharaNa, His consort, Goddess abhayAmbA. Once again in this krithi, the caraNam comprises of extremely lengthy words thereby making it a challenging task to explain in English. I will as usual try my best but the 86 syllable first word of the caraNam which runs for 4 lines is going to be really tough. dIkshithar starts the krithi off with a bang as he plays with the words straight away. The pallavi goes like:

**Pallavi:**

*girijayA ajayA abhayAmbikayA  
girIshajAyayA rakSito.aham*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar shows his grammatical expertise in the opening lines of the pallavi by describing the Goddess as "The one who is the daughter of the mountain God ("*girijayA*")", himavAn. The one who is birthless ("*ajayA*") and the one who is the consort ("*jAyayA*") of the Lord of the kailAsa mountains, Lord Shiva ("*girIsha*")"; and he sings "I am protected ("*rakSito.aham*") by Her".

The "yA" prAsam runs throughout the krithi. The adhyAkshara prAsam witnessed in these two lines starting with "giri" is also preserved throughout the krithi. The simple yet beautiful "SRGM" start for the krithi followed by the typical shankarAbharaNam phrase of "SRG; GMdP; GmRS" at "rakSito.aham" completes the exquisite pallavi. I highly recommend kalpagam maami's rendition of this krithi to listen to and learn from. Apart from that, there is nothing much to explain in the pallavi. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*harihayAdidEvatArAditayA AtmaswarUpa prabOditayA  
hariharaguruguha sammoditayA AdiSantavarNa vEditayA*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar continues to describe the dEvi as "The one who is worshipped ("*ArAditayA*") by Indra's horse ("*harihaya*") and other dEvAs. The one who displays and brings forth ("*prabOditayA*") the form ("*swarUpa*") of the supreme self ("*Atma*"). The one who is delighted ("*sammoditayA*") by Lord viSNu, Lord Shiva and Lord guruguha. The one who is the origin and embodiment ("*vEditayA*") of all the alphabets ("*varNa*") from "A" to "kSA".

I am a little confused about the first line whether harihaya is to be taken as a reference to Indra's horse or if it is to be split as hari and haya referring to Lord viSNu and Lord Indra respectively. dIkshithar once again employs the "SRGM" start for the anupallavi. The madhyamAkAla sAHityam beautifully caps off the anupallavi, ending with "GPGRS" phrase thereby beautifully fusing into the pallavi once again. :). dIkshithar once again stresses on how the Goddess can be worshipped to attain mOksha by describing Her as the form of supreme self and the embodiment of everything. I am taking a small break here before going on to the caraNam because, simply put, it is going to be tiring for me to explain :). I am going to split up the words and write for better readability and better understanding.

**caraNam:**

*samaya visESa niryANa mukhabIja nirbIja dIkSA viSaya karaNa  
samayAcaraNOpayOga pUjAsAmagrI sangrahAnta karaNa-  
samayamata pratipAdyAnusaraNa sAmAnyA visESa prajAcaraNa-  
mamatva nirAkaraNa kriyAyuta sadbhaktAnAm dharmArtarUpa-  
samatvavritI vitaraNa nipuNatara sAmrAgyapradAruNacharaNayA*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "She is the one, who bestows upon Her devotees, the special power ("*visESa*") to depart from this life ("*niryANa*") when desired ("*samaya*"). She is the one who initiates them in the techniques ("*viSaya*") of

mukhabIja (uttering the bIja mantras by verbally) and nirbIja ("without the bIja but contemplating about it") dIkSA. She, who shows the samaya path ("*caraNa*") equipped with yOga in which, the entire pUjA vessels ("*sAmAgrI*") are considered to be within ("*sangrahAnta*") the spiritual aspirants themselves." dIkshithar once again describes the devotees who will attain mOkshA in these lines as "those who follow ("*anusaraNa*") the path ("*pratipAdaya*") of the samaya doctrine, those who exhibit both the normal ("*sAmAnyA*") and special ("*visESa*") codes of virtues. These citizens ("*praja*") , these noble devotees ("*sadbhaktAnAm*") who are thus engaged ("*kriyAyuta*") in removing ("*nirAkaraNa*") their ego ("*mamatva*") and possess the righteousness ("*dharmArtarUpa*") to choose ("*vRti*") equally ("*samatva*"-between virtues and material pleasures alike); the red-hued ("*aruNa*") feet ("*caraNayA*") of the Goddess, which is adept ("*nipuNatara*") in bestowing ("*vitaraNa*") the kingdom of kaivalyam ("*sAmrAjya*") are always ready for these bhaktAs."

What an amazing caraNam..I have no words. How beautifully dIkshithar has constructed these words. He very clearly elucidates the virtuous things a true devotee should possess in order to attain mOksha. dIkshithar once again strikes parallelisms from advaita when he describes the samaya doctrines according to which, the kingdom of God ("*paramAtma*") is believed to be within oneself ("*jIvAtma*") and hence consider the body of these devotees to contain the instruments of pUja. What dIkshithar does in these lines is give hope to the ones who want to tread this path to salvation. He asks each one of us to follow these ideals and finally reach the goal, the source and the destination. Musically, the "sa ma" swarAksharams which dIkshithar employs repeatedly in the first 3 lines of the caraNam first in the madhya sthAyI and then in the tAra sthAyI are yet another display of dIkshithar's brilliance and competence.

As I conclude this krithi, I am listening to Sanjay sir's rendition of "sAmbasadAshivAya namastE", an amazing kAmbhOji that has completely consumed me over the last few weeks. The India- Sri Lanka one day game at Canberra is about to begin and hence I am in a rush to watch it :). Continuing with the series, I will next take up "abhayAmbikAyai", one of my most favourite yadhukulakAmbhOji compositions. The caraNam of this krithi is going to take us back to normalcy in terms of word lengths :). Ofcourse, the bliss experienced is pretty much the same..indescribable!!

Tuesday, February 12, 2008

**abhayAmbikAyai - yadukulakAmbhOji**

Continuing with the abhayAmbA series, I am going to discuss the beautiful yadukulakAmbhOji krithi, "abhayAmbikAyai ashwArUDhAyai" composed exclusively in the chaturthi vibhakthi (fourth/dative case). dIkshithar shows his mastery over the 28th and the 29th mElakarthas by taking up rAgAs like shankarAbharaNam, yadukulakAmbhOji (referred to as YK from now on), kEdAragOwLa and kEdAram one after the other for these consecutive vibhakthis. According to me, this is the highlight of these compositions. If you have any doubts, whatsoever distinguishing these rAgAs, then these krithis are your answer. There are a few common phrases between these rAgAs and dIkshithar has handled them so beautifully that you will never feel uncomfortable singing/playing them. This krithi is comparable to divAkara tanujam, that amazing YK masterpiece in the navagraha set and it probes the beauty of the rAga in a very similar fashion. The pallavi starts off as:

**Pallavi:**

*abhayAmbikAyai ashwArUDhAyai  
abhayavarapradAyai namastE namastE*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar begins with a cute salutation to the Goddess "I prostrate before you again and again ("*namastE namastE*")", Oh Goddess abhayAmbikA, the one who is seated on a horse as the form of ashwarUDhA and the one who displays the abhaya (protection/fearlessness) and varada (boons granting) mudrAs."

dIkshithar starts off with the beautiful YK phrase "M P D". The "P D S D " phrase at "ashwArUDhAyai is a complete knock out punch. The swarAksharam combining the mandra sthAyI "dha" at pra"da"yai is a stroke of genius. The two namastEs cover the typical "P D S" and "M P D P MGRS" phrases. So, basically, YK is murdered and brought back to life in the pallavi itself..just amazing. The pallavi sets the tone for the krithi. None of the words are complex to understand or interpret and thats how the entire krithi is structured. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*subhagAkArAyai suruciranaTanabhEdAyai  
shobhitaradanAyai SuddhamAnasAyai  
hiraNyamaNikundalAyai himAcalasadanAyai*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the beautiful appearance of the dEvi in these lines. He sings "You are the one who has a pleasant ("*subhaga*") form ("*AkArA*") and the one who exhibits beautiful ("*su+ruchira*") variations ("*bhEdAyai*") in your dance ("*naTana*"). You are the one with glittering ("*shobhita*") teeth ("*radanAyai*") and the one with a pure ("*Suddha*") mind ("*mAnasAyai*"). You are the one who wears a gem studded ("*maNi*") golden ("*hiraNya*") ear ring ("*kundalAyai*") and the one who has her abode ("*sadanAyai*") in the himAlayAs ("*himAcala*")."

To fully appreciate these beautiful lines, we must go back to the main theme behind the story of abhayAmbA and how she danced as a peahen with Lord Shiva who came down as a peacock. dIkshithar preserves this theme by describing the Goddess's beauty and Her dancing skills. dIkshithar talks about the physical beauty as well as the pure mind of the Goddess. I once again cannot comprehend the greatness of dIkshithar's soul to have been able to visualize the Goddess so beautifully and comprehensively.

Musically, the "S R Pmgm" phrase to kick off the anupallavi is amazing followed by the "D N D P" phrase at "suruchira". The swarAkshara usage of deivatham for words like pa"da"yai, bhE"da"yai etc is to be taken for granted in this entire krithi..just mind-blowing. The krithi for the first time goes to the tAra sthAyI with the "S R Pmgm" phrase at "shObita" thereby establishing similarity with the first line of anupallavi. The typical phrases of "M P D P" at "Suddha" adds to the beauty of the krithi and "S R MM GM PP" at "hiraNyamaNi" totally knocks you off the floor. The madhyamakAla sAhityam does not change the sowkhyam in the krithi whatsoever. The first time I heard the anupallavi, my head was spinning and there were goosebumps as usual. Outstanding brilliance. In this krithi, dIkshithar for a change keeps the caraNam pretty simple without much in-depth yOgic stuff.

**caraNam:**

*sakala-mantra-yantra-rUpAyai sakalAyai  
candraSEkara-priyAyai pancamakarAyai  
gUDhagulphAyai guruguhaswarUpAyai  
garvabhaNDakhaNDAYai gamapadAdinutapadAyai  
kAvEritIrAyai kamalESasEvitAyai*

**Meaning:**

The caraNam is pretty easy to interpret. dIkshithar describes the Goddess as "The one who exists in all ("*sakala*") the forms ("*rUpAyai*") of mantra and yantra. The all knowledgable one ("*sakalAyai*") and the beloved ("*priyAyai*") of Lord Shiva ("*candraSEkara*"-the one who wears the moon). The one whose path of worship consists of the pancamakara-matya etc. The one who has well-turned, beautiful ("*gUDha*") ankles ("*gulphAyai*") and the one who is the real form ("*swarUpAyai*") of the teacher ("*guru*") who removes the ignorance from the caves ("*guha*") of the heart of the devotees. The one who destroyed ("*khaNDAYai*") the pride ("*garva*") of the demon bhaNDAsura and the one, who's feet ("*padAyai*") are worshipped by the gama padAs etc. of the agama shAstrAs. The one who resides on the banks ("*tIrAyai*") of kAvEri and the one who is attended ("*sEvitAyai*") by Lord viSnu, the Lord of Goddess Lakshmi ("*kamalESa*")."

dIkshithar has adopted the KISS strategy-Keep It Straight and Simple. The caraNam has no exorbitant or explosive words but at the same time, it is beautiful and exclusively exquisite. The plain "S G R M" nalinakAnti-ish phrase at "sakala" and the "P S N D P" Anandabhairavi-ish phrase at "pancama"karAyai are what one would call as the complete exploitation of a rAga. At this point, a rasika just closes his/her eyes and totally surrenders.

But, if you think this is the pinnacle of dIkshithar's brilliance in this krithi, you have to wait till the madhyamakAla sAhityam. Perhaps the best ever showcase of swarAkshara usage ever is found in this krithi at "*ga ma pa dA*" di nu ta "*pa dA*" yai in the madhyamakAla sAhityam. This is where I completely gave up while listening to this krithi. Tears just rolled down my cheeks..what kind of an insanely human brain can ever compose such a thing..This is perhaps a place where dIkshithar scores one over God Himself..perhaps a classic example of the creation overshadowing the creator. Just amazing. I still roll on the floor helplessly when I listen to this phrase. My brain has now stopped working as I listen to the krithi once again while typing these lines..this is just too much to take for a mere mortal like me. I have nothing more to say about this masterpiece. I kindly request everyone to please listen to the krithi at <http://www.sangeethapriya.org/~dikshithar> (kalpagam maami's version) and experience the bliss I am unable to put in words here. Enjoy the goosebumps :) :).

I apologize for finishing this post abruptly like this..I have nothing more to say as I enter a pensive mood of surrender. I will take up the spectacular kEdAragOwLa krithi "abhayAmbikAyAH" in my next post. This krithi is perhaps my most favourite in the abhayAmbA series simply because of a single phrase which kills me every time I think about it. shrI gurubhyO namah:!!



Wednesday, March 5, 2008

**abhayAmbikAyAH - kEdAragOwLa**

Continuing with the abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis, I will take up the mellifluous "abhayAmbikAyAH" in rAgA kEdAragOwLa composed exclusively in the panchami vibhakthi (fifth/ablative case). This krithi, in my humble opinion is perhaps the best ever kEdAragOwLa composed. The beauty, scope and depth of the rAgA is beautifully brought out and completely exploited by dIkshithar. The entire krithi (especially the charaNam) is rich in tAntrik references and vedantic allusions. The pallavi itself is a comprehensive display of the rAgam.

**Pallavi:**

*abhayAmbikAyAH anyam na jAnE  
ajHnAnadhmanE aparOksha jHnAnE*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "I know ("jAnE") of none other ("anyam na") than Goddess abhayAmbika, the one who removes ("dhmanE") all ignorance ("ajHnAna") and the personification of limitless ("aparOksha") knowledge ("jHnAnE")."

The pallavi brings out the majestic as well as the gentle natures of this beautiful rAgam. The "S S rsndp" start at "abhayAmbi" kAyAH straight away takes you to seventh heaven and promises no return :). And the highlight of this krithi is the mind-blowing "S ndp" phrase at "anyam". The chill it sends down my spine each time I listen to it or sing it is just indescribable. "S ndp-mgr" phrase at "ajHnAnadhmanE" and "nd, dp, mg, rmpnsr" at "aparOksha jHnAnE" are the final nails in the coffin. There is absolutely nothing more to do in kEdAragOwLa..dIkshithar takes the entire juice out of the rAgam in the pallavi, in one stroke..just amazing. If you are reading this blog without having listened to the krithi, please immediately rush to the website and listen to this masterpiece..thats all I can say.

The anupallavi ofcourse has to live up to the billing after such an explosive start, which it more than does :).

**Anupallavi:**

*ibharAjagatyAh IshvaryAh jagatyAh  
nabhOmaNi gatyAh nAdalayagatyAh*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Goddess as "the one who has the majestic ("rAja") gait ("gatyAh") of an elephant ("ibha") and the supreme Goddess ("IshvaryAh") of the universe ("jagatyAh)". In the madhyamakAla sAhityam, dIkshithar sings "She is the one who makes the sun ("nabhOmaNi"-star/gem of the sky) shine ("gatyAh") and the one who is embodiment ("gatyAh") of sound ("nAda") and beats ("laya")."

Look at the prAsam in these few lines of the anupallavi. dIkshithar plays around with different meanings for the same word "gatyAh". True to the sAhityams, the krithi itself just gallops along with that majestic gait. The "r R mgr, rsndp" phrase at "nabhOmaNi gatyAh" and "P mgr, rmpns" phrase at "nAdalaya gatyAh" to finish the anupallavi and beautifully take off at the pallavi once again shows how well dIkshithar has handled this rAgam. He literally toys around with all the different sangathis and creates that magical effect as usual. How carefully he has woven the thread..look at that "rmpns" ending for the anupallavi (a proper ArOhaNam) culminating in the pallavi. One is reminded of John keats' words- "Beauty is truth, truth beauty"..what else can I say. I shut up and move on to the charaNam

**charaNam:**

*bAlAdi nAmadhEya prakAshinyAh  
kAlAdi tatvAnta prakAshinyAh  
mUlAdi dvAdashAnta prakAshinyAh*

*sthUIAdi maunAnta prakAshinyAh*  
*trailOkya mUIA prakRtyAh svashaktyAh*  
*sAlOkA sAmIpya sArUpya muktyAh*  
*mAlinImantra mAlAdi tantrOktyAh*  
*shUlinI guruguha svAnubhava gatyAh*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings of the Goddess as "The one who shines ("*prakAshinyAh*") in various manifestations like ("*nAmadEya*") bAla, etc. The one who shines forth ("*prakAshinyAh*") as the philosophy ("*tatva*"), beginning with time ("*kAla*"). The one who radiates ("*prakAshinyAh*") from the twelve ("*dvAdasha*") nerve centers ("*anta-inner parts*") starting with mUIA ("*mUIAdi*"). The one who manifests as ("*prakAshinyAh*") various forms starting from the gross ("*sthUIAdi*") and ending with the esoteric/subtle ("*maunAnta*")."

The galloping madhyamAkAla sAhityam unfolds where in he describes the Goddess as "The one who is the primordial force ("*mUIaprakrutyah*") responsible for the creation of the three worlds ("*trilOkya*") and the self-propelling force ("*svashaktyAh*"). The one who gives all the four types of liberations ("*muktyAh*"), namely, sAlOkya, sAmIpya, sArUpya and sAyujya. The one who is the essence of ("*uktyAh*") of tantric works like mAlini and mantamAlA. The one who bears the trident ("*shUlini*") and the one who is the self experience ("*svAnubhava*") of guruguha."

What an amazing charaNam..look at the prAsam ;(. dIkshithar's references to tAntric philosophy and vEdAntAs are perfectly showcased in the charaNam. He refers to the dEvi as the one who transcends everything from the gross physical plane to the subtle astral and the esoteric causal planes. For the yogi, She is the one who resides in the 12 nerve centers of the body, starting with mUIAdhAra chakra at the base of the spine and extending upto the sahasrAra, the thousand petaled lotus at the top of the head. Thus, by pleasing the Goddess and praying to Her, one can meditate on Her and make the kundalini move up the spine thereby reopening the nerve passages from these chakras and hence attaining supreme consciousness.

dIkshithar gives the Goddess the ultimate compliment by saying that She is the one who gives the four types of liberation, sAlOkya mukthi (Being in the same plane of God consciousness-Co-located with the Lord), sAmipya mukthi (Being close to or near God consciousness-Being in the vicinity of God), sArUpya mukthi (Attaining the same form as the parabrahman) and sAyujya mukthi (union with the Lord, this is the final stage of liberation). It has taken me five lines to (in)completely sketch one word of dIkshithar..such is the depth, profoundness and brilliance of this genius.

Musically, the charaNam starts off with the "r R" phrase which is overflowing with beauty. The "S ndp" phrase at "kAlAdi" and the "r M m g R" phrase at "tatvAnta" brings the rasikA to life and kills him/her once again..such is the beauty. The "p m pN S r r" at "mUIAdidvAdasha" is perhaps one of the best ever take-offs composed by dIkshithar. By this stage of the krithi, the rasikA is sure to have given up on life and closed his/her eyes, peacefully floating in the ocean of bliss. The madhyamakAla sAhityam literally flows to give that crescendo effect. The "gr rmp" ending to the charaNam leading to the "R S rsndp" take-off at the start of the pallavi completes the masterpiece, making this krithi, perhaps my most favourite krithi of the abhayAmba series. Such beauty and bliss is impossible to describe and it must be experienced by every human being with an ear for carnatic music.

I am now listening to the recording of varadarAja avAva in gangAtaraNgini (33rd mELa) in which SK and I completely gave up and went gA gA. I suddenly become extremely senti as I close this post listening to this recording. If it was not for the satsangam of friends like SK, hari and many more, my life would have continued along less meaningful paths. Anyway, I will next take up "ambikAyAh abhayAmbikAyAh" in kedAram, perhaps the studdiest gem among this set of krithis. Till then, keep listening and as usual drown in the ocean of nectar :). shrI gurubhyO namah:

Saturday, March 15, 2008

**ambikAyAH abhayAmbikAyAH - kEdAram**

I will now take up "ambikAyAH abhayAmbikAyAH", perhaps the most grandest composition among the abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis in kEdAram set to Adi tALam. This krithi is composed extensively in the shashTi vibhakthi (sixth/genitive/possessive case). In this krithi, dIkshithar completely exploits the beauty of this rAgam. In the pallavi itself, dIkshithar brings the essence of this rAga to the forefront. But more than the musical aspect, I would say that it is the grammatical brilliance displayed in this krithi which overshadows musical beauty. The adhyakshara and antyakshara prAsams in the anupallavi build-up to the 86 syllable word in the charaNam which runs for 5 lines. And the esoteric yogic and tAntric references in the charaNam are way beyond description. A careful rasika will be able to completely imagine the highly meditative state of surrender and devotion dIkshithar must have been in when he composed this amazing krithi. As always, I will make yet another humble attempt and try to explain this great work of a genius. If there are any mistakes, please pardon me and correct me. If the explanation is incomplete, please post your comments and help me learn. Moving on to the krithi now,

**Pallavi:**

*ambikAyAH abhayAmbikAyAH tava dAso.ahaM AdijagadambikAyAH*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings " I am the servant ("dAso.ahaM") of you ("tava"), Goddess ambikA, the one who provides shelter ("abhayAmbikayAH") and the one who is the primordial mother of the universe ("AdijagadambikAyAH")."

The "PMGP" start for the krithi wakes the rasika up and issues a clear command to get ready for a treat. The typical "PSNP, MGR; SSMG;R" kEdAram phrase at "tava dAso.ahaM" brings out the beauty of this rAgam in its entirety. The pallavi ends with a small madhyamakAla sAHityam. Other than that, there is nothing much to explain here..yet another simple pallavi which provides infinite scope for improvisation.

**Anupallavi:**

*shambarAriharishashikuberapramukhopAsitanavayoginyAH sAMkhyatArakamanaskarAjayoginyAH shivabhoginyAH bimpratibimbarUpiNyAH bindumaNDalavAsinyAH svarUpiNyAH*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Goddess as "the one who is an embodiment of the nine yoginIs ("navayoginyAH") who are worshipped ("upAsita") by great/significant Gods ("pramukha:") like cupid ("enemy of Lord Shiva-shambarAri"), Lord Vishnu ("hari"), the moon ("shashi") and kubera. The one who is beyond the 3 stages of enquiry ("sAMkhyA") of the mind ("manaska") leading to liberation ("tAraka") and the one who is established in rAja yOGa. The one who delights ("bhoginyAH") Lord Shiva. The one who is of the form ("rUpiNyAH") of the light, image ("bimba") and reflection ("pratibimba"). The one who dwells ("vAsinyAH") in the bindu maNDala and the one who manifests as her"self" ("svarUpiNyAH")."

What an amazing anupallavi. The anupallavi of this krithi itself shows what a masterpiece this is. dIkshithar directly jumps into the yogic and tAntric stuff. For a yogi, dIkshithar depicts the Goddess as the ideal source of light who is beyond all doubts and questions a human mind could ask. dIkshithar follows this up by describing Her as the one who delights shivA. Apart from taking the direct meaning of the dEvi being the consort of Lord shivA, one can also interpret this description of the Goddess as "the one who delights the still mind of the yOgi, the still soul, shivA. To consolidate this, dIkshithar brings in direct advaita vedanta by describing Her as the source ("paramAtmA") as well as the reflection ("jIvAtmA"). dIkshithar finishes the anupallavi by describing Her as the one who resides in the bindu maNDala. The bindu maNDala or third eye is a five pointed star at the seat of the eyebrows. It is supposed to be a blue dot (hence the name bindu) and dIkshithar once again emphasizes that surrender to Goddess abhayAmbikA is a sure step towards jIvana mukthi.

The greatness of this anupallavi, in addition to all the esoteric meanings as explained above, is that it sets a wonderful platform on which dIkshithar builds perhaps the magnum opus of all charaNams ever composed by dIkshithar in terms of grammatical mastery. The charaNam is a monstrous display of dIkshithar's skill in handling meter, grammar, musical succinctness, esoteric vedAntic references and what not. I once again salute him and pray to him to give me the strength to try to interpret this complex charanam.

**Charanam:**

yamaniyamAdyaSTAN^gayogaviSayAdinirahakaraNa- mUIAdhAramaNipUraKAdyabjbedanasphurakuNDalinI-  
sahasradaLabrahmarandhrasthakamalAntargatashivasammeLana- gaLitaparamAm.rtabindusecanasamujj.rmbhita-  
nADImukhavikAsakaraNanijAnubhUtiyoginyAH amoghavarashivasArUpyAnandAnubhavapradAyinyAH  
aprameyaguruguhAdijananyAH brahmAdipa~ncakakAriNyAH

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar beautifully describes the ways in which one can truly realize and experience the existence of ("nijAnubhUti") the Goddess as the yogini ("yoginyAH"). dIkshitar sings "by contemplating and practicing ("nirahakaraNa") the essence of ("vishaya") eight fold path of yoga ("aSTAN^gayoga") beginning with yama, niyama (self-restraint and penance); by awakening the kundaliNi ("coiled snake") and making it pierce through ("bhedana") the quivering ("sphura") chakras/lotuses ("abja") starting with mUIAdhAra and maNipura and going all the way upto the brahmarandra seated at the sahasraAra, the thousand petalled lotus ("sahasra dala kamala) and thereby bringing about a great harmony, causing union ("sammeLaNa") with shiva which causes the oozing flow ("galita") of eternal ambrosia ("paramAmr.ta") which makes the third eye ("bindu") to become resplendent ("secana") and make the energy engulf ("samujrambita") the nerve centers ("nADimukha") and enervating ("vikAsa karaNa") them, thereby making the yOgi experience the truth ("nija") and realizing the divine existence of ("anubhUti") the Goddess as the yogini."; thus ending the 86 syllabled word..perhaps the biggest ever word written in sanskrit.

dIkshithar ends the charaNam by continuing to describe the dEvi as "the one who bestows ("pradAyiniyAH") the rare and immeasurable boon ("amOghavara") of experience of bliss ("Ananda anubhava") by merging and identifying the soul with Lord Shiva ("shivasArUpya"). The mother of ("jananyAH") the immeasurable ("apramEya") guruguha and the cause of the 5-fold acts ("panchaka-kArinyAH") beginning with brahma."

What an amazing charaNam :O :O. I completely surrender to dIkshithar. One can very clearly see the deep meditative state he must have reached and must have been marinating in to express in such great detail, the purpose of a human being and the spiritual progress he should make. dIkshithar explains the essence of the propagation of the kundaliNi through the chakras in the astral body and how one can achieve this by meditating on the Goddess. And how beautifully he explains the dynamics of this practice, enunciating the way and the end result..opening of the 2 million nerves of the body and experiencing the bliss of merging with "the one", the supreme light. And to put such vEdanta in a musical form with unimaginable meter shows the greatness and the genius of the musical yogi, the great nAdhajiOthi. I salute and lie prostrate at the feet of him, shrI guruguhasya dAso.aham.

There is nothing more to write about this krithi. My mind has gone blank because of the exhaustive charaNam and I am vibrating with pure bliss listening to shrI vijay shivA's rendition of this krithi. I have not discussed the musical aspects of this krithi owing to the sheer volume of explanations which would add more complexity to the already convoluted composition. I leave it to the rasika who (I hope) should have been able to understand the krithi better after reading this blog, to listen and appreciate this masterpiece..trust me, it will add more beauty and value to your life..just listen to it.

I will next take up the beautiful "abhayAmbAyAm" composed in sahAna. I am hoping to find time today and tomorrow and finish this krithi and probably the next one, thereby leaving me with only the maNgaLa krithi to write about in order to complete the set. Signing off with a deep sense of surrender to dIkshithar, shrI gurubhyO namah:

Monday, March 24, 2008

**abhayAmbAyAm - sahAnA**

In this post, I will continue to explore the majestic abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis by taking up "abhayAmbAyAm" in sahAnA set to tripuTa tALam composed entirely in the saphthami vibhakthi (seventh/locative case) by the great nAdhAjyOthi. With the masterpiece kEdAram krithi I discussed in the previous post, I guess dIkshithar reached the pinnacle of his meditative trance and decided that he will keep the last three of the abhyAmbA krithis relatively simple. This beautiful krithi in sahAnA (perhaps my most favourite rAga ever) is a short samASTi charaNam (the only one in this vibhakthi series) in which dIkshithar still manages to grasp the rAga by the throat and bring it to life :) . dIkshithar addresses the Goddess in various forms in this krithi thereby giving all of us a chance to sing the name of the Goddess and thereby gain some puNyam. The antyAkshara prAsam adds to the grace and completely mesmerizes the rasika. Moving on to the krithi,

**Pallavi:**

*abhayAmbAyAM bhaktiM karomi  
saccidAnandarUpAyAM svasvarUpAyAM shrI*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "I offer my devotion ("*bhaktiM karomi*") to Goddess abhayAmbA, the one who is an embodiment ("*rUpAyAm*") of truth/existence-consciousness/knowledge-happiness/bliss ("*sat-chit-Ananda*"). She is the auspicious one ("*shrI*") with the form of the unified, supreme self ("*svasvarUpAyAM*")."

The "PMG" start to the krithi straight away brings sahAnA's core essence of shringAra rasa to the forefront. He follows this up with the "PMD; N;S" phrase at "bhaktiM karomi" and hence more or less covers the entire scale of the rAga in one line :). dIkshithar brings in vEdAnta in the pallavi itself by referring to the Goddess as the unified, supreme self. Moving on to the samASTi charaNam,

**charaNam:**

*vibhavAdivitaraNanipuNamantriNyAM  
vijayakAraNanipuNataradaNDinyAm  
viyadAdibhUtakiraNamAlinyAM  
vikalpaharaNanipuNashUlinyAm  
abhedapratipAditAyAM AdiguruguhaveditAyAM  
sabheshamoditanaTanAyAM sAyujyapradacaraNAyAm*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar praises the Goddess in many names in the charaNam. He addresses her as "mantriNi, the one who is an expert ("*nipuNa*") in bestowing ("*vitaraNa*") many riches and powers ("*vibhava*")"; as "daNDini, the one who is adept ("*nipuNatarA*") in granting the causes/skills required ("*kAraNa*") for victory ("*vijaya*")"; as "mAlini, the one who is an embodiment of the five elements ("*bhutakiraNa*") beginning with the sky ("*viyat*")" and as "shUlini, the one who is an expert ("*nipuNa*") in destroying ("*haraNa*") confusions and difficulties ("*vikalpa*")."

dIkshithar beautifully slips into the madhyamakAla sAhityam here. He describes the Goddess as "the one who is completely understood ("*pratipAditAyAm*") by a clear mind without any distinctions ("*abheda*") and the one realized ("*vEditAyAm*") by guruguha." He finishes the krithi sweetly by describing the Goddess as "the one whose dance ("*naTanAyAm*") delights ("*modita*") Lord Shiva, the Lord of the dance court ("*sabEsha*") and she is the one whose feet ("*charaNAYAm*") bestow ("*prada*") sAyujya mukthi on her devotees."

The subtle sahAnA is handled very delicately in this krithi by dIkshithar. The " SPM; NDPM DNS" at "abhEdapratipAditAyAm" is one of my most favourite lines in sahAna ever :). dIkshithar once again clearly emphasizes in this krithi that by surrendering to the dEvi, one will be bestowed with all siddhis and happiness and finally given salvation, thereby bringing a purpose in living. I am planning to visit the mAyuRanAtha temple in this november. When I go there, this will perhaps be the first krithi I sing there :). Somehow I am not finding any flow to write today. :( I think this is by far the worst post till date on this blog. My mind is a little troubled I guess..I will surely make it up in my next post, in which I will handle "dAkshAyaNi abhayAmbikE", the amazing krithi in tODi. All of you have a wonderful weekend :). shrI gurubhyO namah:

Monday, April 7, 2008

**dAkSayaNi - tODi**

Anyway, I will now take up "dAkshAyaNi abhayAmbikE", a majestic krithi in tODi composed exclusively in the sambOdhana vibhakthi where dIkshithar directly addresses the Goddess as "hE abhayAmbikE". The highlight of this krithi is the soul-stirring mandira sthAyi deivatham start for the pallavi, thereby making "dA"kshAyaNi a swarAkshara beginning. dIkshithar presents an absolutely different shade of tODi in this krithi. By comparing with the nishAda start of kamalAmbikE, this mandira sthAyi deivatham beginning shows the versatility of this genius. The krithi on the whole is an extremely simple set up but it still oozes with rAga bhAva and amrita rasa.

**Pallavi:**

*dAkSayaNi abhayAmbikE  
varadAbhayahastE namastE shrI*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar addresses the Goddess in the pallavi- "Oh abhayAmbA, the daughter of King dAkshA, the one who bears the mudrAs of abhaya ("protection") and varada ("boon-granting"). Prostrations unto you ("*namastE*") Oh auspicious one ("*shrI*")."

As I mentioned earlier, the mandira sthAyi deivatham with which the krithi begins is mesmerizing to say the least. The rishabam at dAkshAya"Ni" followed by "GDP" phrase at "abha"yAmbikE completely makes the rasika to surrender. dIkshithar employs a madhyamakAlam in the pallavi itself at "namastE" which descends as "DNS,SNDPMGRS" thereby looping back to first line with the beautiful "S D" prayOgam. This is one of those krithis in which dIkshithar clearly portrays the meditative essence of this entire set of abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis. Because of the grandeur of this tODi, many musicologists still argue that this krithi should be the dhyAna krithi of this series (similar to the tODi dhyAna krithi of the kamalAmbA navAvarNams). Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*dIkSAsantuSTamAnase dInAvanahastasArase  
kAMkSitArthapradAyini kAmatantravidhAyini  
sAkSirUpaparakAshini samastajagadvilAsini*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Goddess as "the one who's mind ("*mAnase*") is pleased ("*santuSTa*") by initiation ("*dIkSa*") and the one whose lotus-like ("*sArase*") hands ("*hastA*") protects the destitute and the needy ("*dInavana*")." In the madhyamakAla sAhitya, dIkshithar continues to describe the Goddess as "the one who grants ("*pradAyini*") all the wishes of devotees ("*kAmkshitArtha*") and the one who displays ("*vidhAyini*") the primary essence of all creation, the tantra of desire ("*kAma*"). She is the one who shines forth ("*prakAshini*") as a witness ("*sAkSirUpa*") to this game of birth and death in this playpen called the world and she is the one who pervades ("*vilAsini*") the entire universe ("*samastajagad*")."

dIkshithar clearly shows that he is a shrI vidyA upAsaka by bringing in the topic of initiation ("*dIkSa*") and in the words "*kAmatantravidhAyini*". In shrI vidyA, kAmatantra or kAmakAlA represents the inner heart of the bindu (the third eye) and symbolizes that for creation, the sperm and the egg must unite. Musically, the "SNDp; GM PGRS" phrase at "*samastajagadvilAsini*" is absolutely divine and it once again loops back with the "S D" prayOgam while merging with the pallavi. Vedavalli maami's rendition of this part of the anupallavi is a must hear. Moving on to the charaNam now,

**CharaNam:**

*sakalaniSkaLasvarUpatejase sakalalokas.rSTikaraNabhrAjase  
sakalabhaktasaMrakSaNayashase sakalayogimanorUpatatvatapase  
prabalaguruguhodaye pa~ncAnanah.rdAlaye  
bharatamataN^gAdinute bhAratIshapUjite*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the dEvi as "the one who displays the true powerful form ("*svarUpatejase*") established as the undivided absolute state of brahman ("*sakalaniSkaLa*"). The one who glitters and shines ("*bhrAjase*") through all

Her creations ("*s.rSTikaraNa*") in all the worlds ("*sakalaloka*"). The one is famous ("*yashase*") for protecting ("*saMrakSaNa*") all ("*sakala*") Her devotees ("*bhakta*"). The one who is the embodiment ("*rUpa*") of penance ("*tatvatapase*") in every ("*sakala*") yogi's mind ("*mano*")."

In the madhyamakAla sAhitya, dIkshithar continues to describe the Goddess as "the one who is the source ("*udaye*") of the mighty ("*prabala*") guruguha. The one who resides ("*Alaye*") in the heart ("*h.rda*") of Lord Shiva, the five-faced one ("*panchAnana*"). The one who was praised ("*nute*") by great sages like Bharata and matanga and the one who was worshipped ("*pUjite*") by Lord Brahma, the husband of Goddess Saraswathi ("*bhAratIsha*")."

Vedavalli maami and kalpagam maami seem to present extremely different facets of this krithi. While the former's rendition is pretty fast paced suggesting a madhyamakAla krithi, kalpagam maami's version seems to establish the grandeur a lot more stronger. Her slow, chouka kAla rendition of the krithi adds a grand flavour to this masterpiece. dIkshithar once again establishes advaita fundas in the first line of the charaNam.

One more thing to note in this krithi is that the tAra sthAyi prayOgams are very sparingly used. dIkshithar seems to emphasize that the beauty of the rAgam and the meditative phase he is trying to portray is based out of the madhya and the mandira sthAyis. As I complete this post, I sincerely hope that I will get some time in the next few days to take up "shrI abhayAmba" and complete this set. I am suddenly in the grasp of dwijAvanti now, listening to SSI's beautiful swarams for cEtaH shrI. I guess I will loop the krithi and go to sleep listening to it. All of you have a wonderful week ahead and I will surely meet you all once again before this week is over :). Till then, Godspeed!!



Saturday, April 26, 2008

**shrI abhayAmbA - shrI rAgam**

I will now take up the tenth and the final krithi of the abhayAmbA vibhakthi series. The maNgaLa krithi in shrI rAgam, shrI abhayAmbA set to Adi tALam is a beautiful maNipravALa (multi-lingual) masterpiece in which dIkshithar shows his command over 3 of the most beautiful languages ever; sanskrit, telugu and tamil. The way he fuses the 3 languages while still highlighting the rhyme scheme and the prAsam is just mind-blowing. Since I do not know telugu, please pardon me if I interpret anything incorrectly.

**Pallavi:**

*shrI abhayAmbA ninnu cintincina vAriki  
cintai kavalai eLLAM tIrum amma*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings- "Oh auspicious ("shrI") mother ("amma") abhayAmbA, for the people ("vAriki") who think ("cintincina") of you ("ninnu"), all ("eLLAM") their mental ("cintai") worries ("kavalai") will be eliminated ("tIrum")."

To completely appreciate this krithi, one must definitely listen to DKJ's version. The different sangathis and the clarity with which he sings this krithi is something to be experienced. dIkshithar starts this krithi off with the tAra sthAyi rishabham. All the krithis that start off in the tAra sthAyi are simply shtudly; "karikaLabamukham" in sAvEri for example :). The "R;SNPNS" phrase at "shrI abhayAmbA" and the "pRsR" phrase at "eLLAM" are special phrases which embellish the pallavi. dIkshithar beautifully brings out the rAga mudra with the first word of the krithi itself. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*hE abhayakarE varE Ishwari kR.patOnu-  
endannai rakshikka idhu nalla samayam amma*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar addresses the Goddess as "the one who bears the abhaya ("protection") and the vara ("boon bestowing") mudras in her hands ("karE"), the Goddess ("Ishwari"). This ("idhu") is the right time ("nalla samayam") for you, my mother ("amma") to come and protect ("rakshikka") me ("endannai") showing your compassion ("kR.patOnu")."

Just like the shrI maNgaLa krithi in the kamalAmbA series, dIkshithar keeps it very simple in this krithi also. He does not bring in any vedantic or purAnic references. He simply prays to the Goddess, praises her compassion and seeks her blessings. The "SRNS; PNMP; PDNPM; RMRS; RMPNS" at "endhanai; rakshikka; idhu nalla; samayam; amma" acts as a perfect ending for the anupallavi leading to the rishabam take-off for the pallavi. Apart from that, there is nothing much to explain and so I move on to the charaNam

**CharaNam:**

*nI atyadbhuta Subha guNamulu vini-  
nIvE dikkani nEra nammiti  
nIrajAkshi nijarUpasAkshi  
nityAnanda guruguha kaTAKshi rakshi*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "Hearing of your ("nI") miraculous ("atyadbhuta") and good qualities ("Subha guNamulu"), I trusted ("nEra nammiti") that you ("nIvE") are my refuge ("dikkani"). You are the lotus-eyed ("nIrajAkshi") one and the witness to the true form ("nijarUpasAkshi"). You are the one who graces ("kaTAKshi") the eternally blissful ("nityAnanda") guruguha. Please protect me ("rakshi")."

In the charaNam, dIkshithar shows the bhaktha inside him. He goes into a mode of surrender and requests the Goddess to be his saviour. He brings in a few advaita fundas here by referring to Her as "the witness to the true form" implying that the Goddess bears witness to the true supreme soul which the jIvAtma realizes at the supreme level of consciousness. The madhyamakAla sAhityam just gallops along beautifully and gives that vaibhava and

maNgaLa mood to end the krithi and hence the majestic abhayAmbA series.

As I complete this krithi, I feel extremely blessed and fortunate to have been able to cover the kamalAmbA navAvarNams and the abhayAmbA vibhakthi krithis, two grand series' of masterpieces composed by the great nAdhajyOthi. This ardent devotee will now resign with a sense of satisfaction :).

In my next post, I am going to take up a krithi which I have been waiting a long time to write about, one of my favourite krithis which never fails to bring a tear to my eye, the magnum opus, "rangapuravihAra" in brindAvana sAranga. Probably I should not be taking up Brindu right after shrI rAgam, but I guess the similarities make it all the more reason for me to take it up right away :). Hopefully I will find time to post this krithi tomorrow. Till then, keep rocking..I must admit that even though Work sucks, Life is still beautiful :D :D.

Thursday, May 1, 2008

rangapuravihAra - bRNdAvana sAranga



I will now take up the beautiful masterpiece in bRNdAvana sAranga, "rangapuravihAra" composed by the nAdhajaOthi at the enchanting shrIrangam kSEtra. As I had mentioned in one of my earlier posts, in almost all of the rAgAs which dIkshithar adopted to carnatic music, he has composed one krithi keeping the hindustAni style intact (ammaDi) and one krithi sketching out the adapted carnatic version (maDi). In the case of bRNdAvana sAranga, dIkshithar's soundarAjam (refer to earlier blogs for explanation on this gem) is the maDi version while rangapuravihAra seems to be the ammaDi, hindustAni variant. The rUpaka tALam flows brilliantly in this krithi, pretty much in sync with the lapping waters of the kAveri. As is the case with most rasikAs, I always attribute this krithi to MS amma. Her mellifluous voice and the melodious gamakAs she employs are truly mind blowing. Moving on to the krithi now.

**Pallavi:**

*ranga pura vihAra jaya kOdanDa-rAmAvatAra raghuUvIra shrI*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar directly addresses the Lord "Lord RanganAtha!!The one who resides ("vihAra") at rangapura, victory ("jaya") unto thee. The one who incarnated ("avatAra") as bow ("kodaDa") wielding Lord Rama. The warrior ("vIra") of the raghu dynasty."

What a beautiful start to the krithi. One of those starts which definitely has a bang attached to it. The "R S" beginning for the krithi is haunting to say the least. And look at how beautifully dIkshithar loops the shrI at the end of the pallavi to the ranga beginning thereby giving the kSEtram. The incomprehensible beauty this line of the pallavi exudes will reverberate forever. The "psnrns; mnpms" phrase at "rAma;avatara" oozes with rAga chAya. It is because of krithis like this that I tend to become too biased and make statements like dIkshithar is the one who defined classical music best. Anyway, moving on,

**Anupallavi:**

*angaja janaka dEva bRNdAvana sArangEndra varada ramAntaranga shyAmALanga vihanga turanga sadayApAnga satsanga*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar continues to describe the Lord with references to mythology as "The father ("janaka") of Cupid ("angaja"). The one who protected the celestials ("dEva") and Gajendra, the Lord of Elephants ("sArangEndra") in the forest ("bRNdAvana"). The one who grants boons ("varada") and the beloved one ("antaranga"-intimate) of Goddess Lakshmi ("rama")."

The beautiful madhyamakAla sAhityam continues "The one with the bluish-black ("shyamaLa") body ("anga"). The one who has the divine Garuda ("vihanga") as his vehicle ("turanga"). The one who is full of mercy and compassion ("sadayApAnga") and the one who is always in the company of noble-minded men ("satsanga")."

The hindustAni face of the rAga is clearly brought in the first line of the anupallavi with the "rPnmp" phrase at "angaja" followed by the "SsnpsNS" phrase at "janaka dEva". The "P R" take off at bR"ndA"vana makes one's hair stand up and this is where the goosebumps really start getting too much to handle. Similar to "soundarAjam", dIkshithar once again uses the reference to Lord gajendra to bring in the rAga mudra. The madhyamakAlam in the anupallavi is one of my all time favourites. dIkshithar explores the complementary phrases in this rAga which goes as "PSnRs;NP;MnpsR;SRnS" at "shyAmala;anga;vihanga;turanga".

Throughout this krithi, one can see the simplicity in the structure and usage of sanskrit grammar which is very simple to understand. Further, the absence of any yogic or vedantic references makes this krithi a demonstration of beauty and bhakthi straight from the heart of the bhakta in dIkshithar. He does not intend on bringing in any

science here. It is a plain description of the Lord and the rasika can easily relate to a heart pouring out with pure bhakthi and surrender, captured completely by dIkshithar. The charanam continues in that same tone set by the pallavi and anupallavi,

**Charanam:**

*pankajApta kula jala nidhi sOma  
vara pankaja mukha paTTAbirAma  
pada pankaja jita kAma raghurAma  
vAmAnka gata sItA varavEsha  
SEshAnka Sayana bhakta santOsha  
EnAnka ravi nayana mRdu-tara bhAsha  
akaLanka-darpaNa kapOla viSEsha muni-  
sankata haraNa gOvinda vEnkata ramana mukunda  
sankarSana mUla kanda shankara guruguhAnanda*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar beautifully describes the Lord as "the one who rose as the moon ("sOma") in the ocean ("jalanidhi") dynasty ("kula") of the sun ("pankajApta"-friend of the lotus). The revered one ("vara") with a lotus-like ("pankaja") face ("mukha") and the one who was coronated as king ("paTTAbhirAma"). The one with the lotus-like ("pankaja") feet ("pada") who surpasses ("jita") the beauty of the cupid ("kAma") as Lord Rama of the raghu clan; the one who beautifully appears ("vEsha") with the revered ("vara") sItA seated gracefully on His left lap ("vAmAnka gata"). The one who reclines on ("shayana") AdiSEsha, the serpent and the one who delights and pleases ("santOsha") His devotees ("bhakta"). The one who has the sun and the moon ("EnAnka ravi") as His eyes ("nayana") and the soft-spoken one ("mRdu-tara bhAsha"). The one who has cheeks ("kapOla") that shine like a blemishless ("a-kaLanka") mirror ("darpaNa"). He is Govinda, the one who destroyed ("haraNa") all the troubles ("sankata") for the munIs. The one known by many names like vEnkataramaNa and mukunda. The one who bestows auspiciousness ("sankarshana") in His primordial form ("mUla kanda"). The one who delights ("Ananda") Lord Shiva ("shankara") and Lord guruguha".

What an amazing charaNam ;(. Just beautiful. dIkshithar plays with the word "pankaja" in the first few lines of the charaNam. And see how he maintains the prAsam throughout the krithi right from the first word (r"anga") to the last word (sh"anka"ra). That is why I keep saying that he is He!! Genius ;(. I actually am deeply emotional now thinking about this charaNam and have nothing more to say. I am just at a complete loss of words sitting here with tears in my eyes and goosebumps on my skin. I am not even equipped or qualified enough to talk about the charaNam and hence I stop right here. Musically, there are too many beautiful phrases in the charaNam for me to point out and it would end up as more like "notations for the entire charaNam" kind. Hence I feel it is better for the rasika to listen and experience personally. Just amazing how big a genius he should have been. ;( Anyway..life has to go on. If you have not already, I would highly advise watching Ranjani and Gayathri render this beautiful krithi on youtube; one of the purest renditions of this krithi I have heard.

I will take up yet another of my favorite krithi about which I have been wanting to write for a long time now, "sArasa daLa nayanA" in khamAs which happens to be one of the very first dIkshithar krithis I listened to :). As I sign off, I am listening to SSI taking mukhAri to a whole new level in the famous airport concert . I would rate this concert as one of the very best I have heard in my whole life. Please listen to it if have not already. shrI gurubhyO namah:

Saturday, May 10, 2008

sArasa daLa nayanA - khamAs



From what I have noticed, when dIkshithar really falls in love with a kshEtram, he composes two krithis at the same temple in the same rAga. That seems to be the case here... dIkshithar has composed both sArasa daLa nayanA and santAna gOpalakrishNam upAsmahE in khamAs at the same mannArguDi kshEtram. This rAjagOpAlaswAmi temple seems to have been showered with some amazing dIkshithar krithis with shrI rAjagOpAla in sAvEri capping it all off as the numero uno. Now, starting with the pallavi,

**Pallavi:**

sArasa daLa nayanA sankTa haraNa harE gOvinda mAm pAhi

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar seeks the refuge of the Lord in the opening lines of this krithi and starts off by addressing the Lord as "Oh gOvinda!! The one with eyes ("nAyana") like lotus petals ("sArasa daLa") and the remover ("haraNa") of all obstacles ("sankTa"). Please protect me ("mAm pAhi")."

dIkshithar starts the krithi off with a swarAksharam. The opening phrase of "S; dndsdP; P nd M Gm; dnp DNS" at "sArasa daLa nayanA" followed by the MGM phrase at "sankTa" completely captures the beauty of khamAs and pretty much sums up the entire scale of the rAga. This krithi is more of a nAmasmaraNam according to me.

He brings in all those beautiful names of God like hari, gOvinda, mukunda, mAdhava etc. The pallavi is extremely simple and easy to understand. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

nIrajAsanAdi pUjitAnga shrI ramAntaranga shubAnga  
muraHara abhayaprada mukunda yAdavakulabhUshaNa mAdhava

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes rAjagOpAlaswAmi as "the one worshipped ("pUjitAnga") by Lord Brahma ("nirajAsana"-seated on the lotus) and others. The one who resides in the heart ("antaranga") of Goddess Lakshmi ("ramA") and the one whose form is auspicious ("shubAnga"). The one who vanquished ("hara") the demon named mura and the one who provides ("prada") protection and refuge ("abhaya"). The one who liberates ("mukunda"), the pride jewel ("bhUshaNa") of the yAdhava clan and he is mAdhava, the Lord of knowledge."

The anupallavi is where the rAgam blossoms completely. The beauty of tripuTa tALam comes to the forefront. dIkshithar shows his brilliance once again with swarAksharams at nIrajA"sanAdi" employing the "SND" phrase. Look at the antyAkshara prAsam in the first line of the anupallavi. I love the "DPmp Dnd; PNDP" phrase at "pUjitAnga". To finish the anupallavi on a high note, dIkshithar uses some kutti yet amazing prayOgams like "SSGR" at "muraHara" and "DNSR-N" at "prada mukunda". Grammatically and spiritually speaking, as you can clearly see, this krithi is pretty simple. dIkshithar is not trying to play with words or show his yogic brilliance here. Moving on to the charaNam,

**CharaNam:**

mAghamAsotsava prabhAva mAnita guruguha vandita bhava  
gOkula janapAla gOpikAmanOhara gOvardanadhara

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "The one who is honoured ("prabhAva") during the festivities ("utsava") held in the month ("mAsa") of MAgha (March-April). The one who is worshipped ("vandita") by the esteemed and respected ("maanita") Lord guruguha. The one who protects ("pAla") the cowherd clan ("gOkula jana"). The beloved ("manOhara") of the gOpika damsels and the one who held ("dhara") the gOvardhana mountains in His hand."

What an amazing charaNam. dIkshithar kills 3 birds with one stone in the first word of the charaNam. First, he incorporates one of the most beautiful rAga mudrAs ever at mA"ghamAs"otsava. Second, he brings in one of the most beautiful swarAksharams ever at "maghamA"sotsava. And finally by talking about the utsavam held during

the magha mAsa, dIkshithar has pretty much given a good identity of the kSEtram. The tiruvizha held at the rAjagOpalaswAmi temple is a grand event for which huge number of people gather from all the villages around mannArguDi. Symbolizing Lord krishna's liking for the butter, the "vennai-thAzhi" and the "thiruthEr" festivals are extremely famous. What a genius..look at that rAgamudra..cha ;(.

dIkshithar continues with his swarAkshara arAjagams in the charaNam by using the "MND" phrase at "mAnita". If the anupallavi was filled with antyAkshara prAsam, in the charaNam, dIkshithar shows that he is equally adept with adyAkshara prAsam with all the words of the first line of charaNam starting with "mA" and all the words in the second line starting with "ga". The madhyama kAla sAhityam gives the krithi its completeness and brings to end, one of the most soothing khamAs's ever.

In my next post, I will take up the beautiful sAma masterpiece, annapUrnE. As I end this post, I am listening to a majestic lathAngi sung by Sanjay sir. Check out these two videos on youtube- lathAngis sung by Sanjay sir and SRJ maama. Absolute treats :). I will surely post the next krithi tomorrow itself in my attempt to make up for this 1 month gap :( . Till then, signing off..shrI guruguhasya dAsOham.

Monday, June 9, 2008

annapUrNE - sAmA



sAmA is one of those serene rAgams which paint these pictures of beautiful landscapes whenever I think about it. This rAgam is supposed to give mental equipoise and is known to be soothing to the nerves. Goddess AnnapUrNi is the form of the divine mother at kASi and She seems to have had a divine overseeing of dIkshithar's life. It is believed that the great chidambara nAtha yOgi, his guru, told him to think of this dEvi in his heart and meditate. And dIkshithar is said to have got a darshan of the Goddess before his soul left this world. dIkshithar has composed this krithi at the ancient annapUrNi temple in kuzhikkarai. On the deity at kASi, dIkshithar has composed another masterpiece, the brilliant Ehi annapUrNE in punnAgavarALi. And because of these similarities, the temple at kuzhikkarai is also called as madhyakASi. Goddess annapUrNi is not only the provider of food to the body, but also the divine bestower of chidAnanda. It is perfectly appropriate that dIkshithar chose this soothing, meditative rAgA to compose a krithi on the Goddess.

**Pallavi:**

annapUrNE viSAIAkSi akhila bhuvana sAKSi kaTAKSi

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar addresses the Goddess directly- "Oh Goddess annapUrNi, the one with wide eyes ("visAIkSi"). You bear witness ("sAKSi") to all that is happening in all the worlds ("akhila bhuvana"). Please bless me with your divine glance ("kaTAKSi")."

dIkshithar starts the krithi off with a beautiful "DSRM" prayOgam. The subsequent sangathis like "rsdprm" that vidwAns sing for the pallavi's opening lines are extremely appealing too. But, somehow that DSRM opening at "annapUrNe" has a special tone attached to it. One can clearly visualize how a devotee of the devi would join his hands in prayer and sing the Goddess's praise here. dIkshithar aptly calls Her the witness to the universe. She is the divine mother responsible for the creation and sustenance of this universe. The "dsrpmgr" phrase at "sAKSi" in the tAra sthAyi is beautiful and brings out the essence of the rAgA in full. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

unnata gartAtIra vihAriNi OmkAriNi duritAdi nivAriNi  
pannagAbharaNarAjni purANI paramESwara viSwEswara bhAsvari

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "You reside ("vihAriNi") in the hallowed ("unnata") gartatIra (explained below). You are of the form of omkAra ("OmkAriNi"). You are the remover ("nivAriNi") of all difficulties ("duritAdi"). She is the consort ("rAjni") of the one who is adorned ("AbharaNa") by serpents ("pannagA")-Lord Shiva. You are the primordial one ("purANI") and the one who makes Lord ParamEshwara, the Lord of all worlds ("viSwEswara") shine with his luminosity ("bhAsvari")."

dIkshithar refers to the kSEtram by addressing kuzhikkarai as gartatIra. garta means pit and tIra means bank and so kuzhik-karai literally translates to garta-tIra. By referring to Her as OmkAriNi, dIkshithar alludes to sAmavEda where Goddess UMA is said to be the embodiment of the praNava mantra AUM. Representing the praNava mantra, She automatically becomes the primordial power responsible for the creation and the sustenance of this universe and dIkshithar aptly follows this by calling Her "purANI".

To whom does a kid run to when he/she has a problem- his/her mother. In the same way, human beings (the kids) run to our divine mother who will solve all the problems ("duritAdi nivAriNi"). I love the "SDPM" phrase at "unnata" and I also love the "dsRPMGRR" at "tIraVihAriNi". The beautiful "pdsdpm" phrase at "pannagAbharaNa" and "dRdS" phrase at "purANI" are the most beautiful phrases in the anupallavi bringing the rAgA chAya to the fore. Moving on to the charaNam,

**CharaNam:**



*pAyasAnna pUrIta mAnIkya pAtra hEmadarvI vidrutakarE  
kAyajAdi rakSaNa nipuNatarE kAnCanamaya bhUshaNAmbaradarE  
tOyajAsanAdi sEvitaparE tumburu nAradAdi nuta varE  
trayAtIta mOkSaprada CaturE tripada kshObita guruguha sAdarE*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Goddess (please see the picture above to see how exactly he describes the devi) as " the one who holds a gem studded ("*mAnIkya*") vessel ("*pAtra*") filled with ("*pUrIta*") rice cooked in milk ("*pAyasAnna*") in her left hand and a golden ("*hEma*") ladle ("*darvI*") in the other hand ("*vidruta karE*"). dIkshithar continues to describe Her as- "the one who is adept ("*nipuNatarE*") in protecting ("*rakSaNa*") manmata ("*kAyaja*") and others. The one who is adorned completely with ("*darE*") golden ("*kAnCanamaya*") ornaments ("*bhUshaNa*") and golden silk ("*ambara*"). The one who is served by ("*sEvitaparE*") Lord Brahma ("*tOyajAsana*") and worshipped ("*nuta*") by great sages like tumburu and nArada".

dIkshithar as usual brings in his vEdanta in the last two words of the madhyamakAla sAhityam. He describes the Goddess as "the one who bestows ("*prada*") salvation ("*mOksha*")", the fourth purushArta ("*caturE*") beyond ("*atIta*") dharmA, artha and kAma ("*traya*"). The one who is dearest to Lord guruguha ("*guruguha sAdarE*")", the one who shines as the three words ("*tripada*")-tat tvam asi".

In the charaNam, dIkshithar uses some amazingly beautiful words to describe some Gods and to keep the prAsam flowing. He addresses Cupid as kAyaja. kAya refers to the body and all the six afflictions associated with it-kAma, krOda, lObha, mOha, mada and mAtsarya. Manmatha is supposed to be born in every human being only because of these 6 attachments of the body and hence he is referred to as kAyaja ("the one born from the body"). dIkshithar refers to Lord Brahma as toyajAsana, the one who is seated ("Asana") in the lotus ("toyaja"). dIkshithar could have used a lot of other words to refer to lotus-kamala, padma etc. But in order to keep that prAsam and that invisible thread going, dIkshithar carefully selects the word tOyajaja. He is just a smart, extremely skilled, brilliant artist beautifully sculpting this krithi. :).

In the last two words, dIkshithar crisply summarizes that the dEvi is a yOgini who will guide your soul to mukthi. Musically, dIkshithar begins the charaNam with a " P p p p" phrase :). I love the entire madhyamakAlam beginning with "ddpp, pmmgrsrmmmp" at "tOyajAsanAdisEvitaparE". On the whole a masterpiece in one of the most serene rAgams known to mankind :) and one of my all time favorites :).

I will next take up another krithi which I have been wanting to blog about for a long time, the surutti beauty, "shrI vEnkata girIsham AIOkayE". It is one of those krithis which is very close to my heart because of a few of my friends who love it :). Till then, wish you all a wonderful, musical week ahead :). See you all very soon. shrI gurubhyO namah:

Monday, June 16, 2008

shrI vEnkaTa girISam AIOkayE - suruTTi



Looking back on the past 1.5 years, ever since I started blogging, I am wondering how come I never blogged about one of my most favourite rAgams, suruTTi (affectionately called as "folder" by our session gumbal due to obvious reasons). A few weeks back, Hari, SK and I chanced to listen to this beautiful chouka kAla suruTTi varNam from SSP sung by Prof. SRJ maama. As usual I was in tears and Hari started calling me an azhu moonji :). Irrespective of the size of the gumbal, the members present or the number of krithis/ragams discussed about, no session closes without atleast a brief suruTTi :). An amazingly beautiful rAgam which soothes one's mind. "shrI vEnkaTa girISam AlokayE" is perhaps the first dIkshithar krithi I learnt to sing (thanks to hari). This krithi is on the fav list of many of my fav people (Hari, Aishu etc) and hence is very close to my heart :).

Regarding the kSEtram at which this krithi was composed, there are a few controversies because both the tirupathi temple and the pulivalam/gOkarNa temple get mentioned. Many people believe that this krithi was composed at the tirupathi temple praising Lord vEnkatAchalapati. There is another group of people who believe that this krithi was composed in pulivanam/ gOkarNa temple. In the maNipravAla krithi, vEnkatAchalapatE in karnATaka kApi, dIkshithar seems to be alluding to the legend linking Lord vEnkatAchalapati to the deity at pulivalam in the last lines of the anupallavi reading "mangaLam porundiya pulivalathil viLaNgum" in sundara tamil :).

Since dIkshithar seems to have visited both temples and has composed on both deities, we can only guess where this was composed. Moving on to the krithi now,

**Pallavi:**

*shrI vEnkaTa girISam AIOkayE vinAyaka turagArUdam*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar demands the attention of the Lord in the pallavi- "Behold ("AIOkayE"), auspicious ("shrI") Lord of the vEnkaTa hills!! The one seated on the powerful Garuda ("turagArUdam"), the king ("nAyaka") of all birds ("vi")."

These first lines of the krithi always strike me as a beautiful display of the divine romance between the bhakta and the Lord. Look at how dIkshithar, the bhakta, is demanding the attention of Lord vEnkaTeshwara, the protector of all the worlds. Musically, the "rmgr" prayOgam at "shrI" to open the krithi bowls the rasikA over straight away. dIkshithar employs the beautiful "psndp" phrase at "girISam" followed by the "ndpmmg;mgpmr" phrase at "A;IOkayE". dIkshithar caps off the pallavi with "rmpndp; pmgm;rmgs" at "turagArUdam" thereby bringing out the entire beauty of this rAgam in just one line. The beauty of the pallavi is its simplicity. Notice that, dIkshithar does not even use the mandira or the tAra sthAyis in these opening lines. The entire pallavi is structured simply in the madhya sthAyI extracting the rAgA's essence to the fullest. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*dEvESa pUjita bhagavantam dinakara kOTI prakASavantaM  
gOvindam natabhUsura brindam guruguhAnandam mukundam*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Lord with devotion as "the one who is worshipped ("pUjita") by Lord Indra ("dEvESa"-Lord of the dEvAs) and the one who is as resplendent ("prakASavantaM") as crores ("kOTI") of suns ("dinakara"). He is gOvinda, the one who is saluted ("nata") by groups ("brindam") of virtuous people ("bhUsura"). He is Mukunda,

the one who delights ("Anandam") Lord guruguha."

dIkshithar uses hyperboles in order to give an idea of the magnitude of greatness he is talking about while describing the Lord. The last line of "guruguhAnandam mukundam" can be literally translated as explained above. If we dive a little deeper, we will find dIkshithar, the yOGi coming out. Mukunda, the name of the Lord means "the one who releases". As I have explained before, guruguha could be a yogic reference to a teacher ("guru") residing in the heart caves ("guha") of the disciple. So, this line can also be translated as " He is mukunda (the one who releases (the soul from this world)), the one who brings bliss ("Anandam) to the disciple's heart by being the divine teacher".

Musically, the anupallavi is rich in phrases that define suruTTi. I love the "SnSR" phrase at "dinakara" and the "pRSnn" phrase "prakASa". The "mpnsr; grsnrnpd" at "gOvindam; natabhUsura brindam" gives the madhyamakAla sAhityam its beauty and grandeur :). The charaNam has perhaps the most beautiful starts ever, one for which, I might give up my life :).

**Charanam:**

*alamElumangA samEtam ananta padmanAbham atItam  
kaliyuga pratyakSa vibhAtam kanjajAdi dEvOpEtam  
jaladhara sannibha sundara gAtram jalaruha-mitrAbja-Satru nEtram  
kaluSApaha gOkarNakSEtram karunArasapAtram chinmAtram*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar continues to describe the Lord as "the one who is in the company ("samEtam") of Goddess alamElumangA and the one who is the supreme ("atItam") ananta padmanAbha swAmi, the lotus navel. The one who shines forth ("vibhAtam") as the omniscient one ("pratyakSa") in this yuga of kali and the one who is surrounded by ("upEtam") by Lord Brahma ("kanjaja") and other dEvAs. The one whose body ("gAtram") is beautiful ("sundara") like the black rain-bearing ("jaladhara") clouds ("sannibha") and the one whose eyes ("netram") are the sun ("jalaruha-mitra"-friend of the lotus) and the moon ("abja-Satru"). He is the one who removes ("apaha") all the sins ("kalusha") and resides in the kshetram of gOkarNa. He is the one who is the repository ("pAtram") of mercy and compassion ("karunArasa") and the embodiment of pure consciousness ("chinmAtram")."

There is nothing much to explain in the charaNam. dIkshithar keeps the sAhityams simple. But the beauty of the charanam is something that is to be experienced. Also, look at how he brings in the sun and the moon. He refers to the sun and the moon with reference to the lotus and uses mitra and shatru in the same word :). One must listen to Balaji Shankar's or SSI's rendition to get a good feel of this beautiful krithi :). The reference to alamelumanga thAyAr makes one's heart melt with devotion and is heavily inundated with bhakti rasA. Musically, the "rmpp" start for the charaNam followed by "M N" swarAksharam at "man"ga are truly mind-blowing. And finally to add spice, dIkshithar uses explicitly flat notes in the madhyamakAlam to expose the fast, racy aspects of the rAgam. The madhyamakAlam starts as "rmpmpnd; Pmg pmR" and ends up with the "pmgrmgs" phrase at "chinmAtram" setting it up smoothly for the pallavi to take off :).

As I end this post, I am listening to an amazingly well rendered osOsI padam by Aishwarya Vidya Raghunath who seems to be a name to look out for in the future. In my next post, I will take up the krithi "bAlasubrahmaNyam bhajEham" once again in suruTTi making it a double punch :). Hopefully I can squeeze in time in the next two days or so and post the next krithi :). I hope you guys enjoyed reading this :). Catch you all in the next post..shrI gurubhyO namah:

Sunday, June 22, 2008

**bAlasubrahmaNyam bhajEham - suruTTi**



I have been totally swooning over suruTTi for the past 2 or 3 days after listening to SRJ maama's lecdem on gamakAs. The suruTTi that he sings for a brief 7 minutes in that recording is sheer bliss. Please check out the lecdem page on sangeethapriya and look out for the gamakAs lecdem. The sedate chouka kAla varNam of subbarAma dIkshithar provided with notation in SSP is intoxicating to say the least..azhagu\_max. I have also been listening to thalaivar's masterpiece "shrI vAnchanAtham bhajEham" and have been completely engulfed by the beauty of this rAgam. So it is only appropriate that I blog about this beautiful krithi on the cute, kutti Lord bAlasubrahmaNya in this post :).

This krithi is sung as a dhyAna krithi before the kamalAmbA navAvarNams. It has a meditative aspect associated with it. The krithi has some divine power associated with it and is known to grant the wishes of the devotees who sing it with their soul, a facet captured by dIkshithar in the pallavi of this krithi. It is said that dIkshithar even instructed his disciples to meditate on the lyrics of this krithi and they obtained all that they wished for.

Shri A. Sundaram iyer in his dIkshithar kIrtana mAla says " Those bereft of the bliss of having a child will do well to recite the appropriate mAla or mantra with this song". These are some of the specialities of this beautiful composition. Moving on to the krithi itself,

**Pallavi:**

*bAlasubrahmaNyam bhajEham bhaktakalpabhUruham shrI*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "I ("aham") chant ("bhajE") the name of the auspicious ("shrI") bAlasubrahmaNya, the divine wish yielding tree ("kalpa bhUruham") for all the devotees ("bhakta")".

Lord bAlasubrahmaNya's name itself has a deep meaning. bAla means young, su is a prefix for indicating something is good/pure and brahmaNya is something that is associated with brahmaN, the undivided supreme self. So the name itself represents something pure and filled with consciousness and auspiciousness. As I mentioned, in these few lines in the pallavi, dIkshithar clearly captures the fact that by singing this krithi and meditating on the Lord, a devotee can obtain all that he wishes for. From the musical standpoint, I love the "S ndp" and the "S nSRndp" sangathis sung at "bAlasu" and the "npmrr" at "bhajEham". Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*nIlakaNTa hr.dAnandakaram nitya-shuddha-buddha-muktAmbaram*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Lord as "the one who brings happiness ("Anandakaram") to the heart ("hr.d") of blue-black necked ("nIlakaNTa") Lord Shiva and the one who has permanence ("nitya"), purity ("shuddha"), knowledge ("buddha") and liberation/freedom ("mukta:") as his clothes ("ambaram")".

Look at how beautifully dIkshithar captures Lord bAlasubrahmaNya's essence in the word "nitya shuddha buddha muktAmbaram". As I mentioned earlier, Subrahmanya is associated with brahman, the infinite self. Thus, He is the origin of everything and is hence permanent, pure ("su+brahmanya"), a repository of knowledge and is the liberated one. Now the word ambara has two meanings. Depending on the context it could be interpreted as "clothes" or "sky". We all know that the Lord wears no physical dress as kutti bAlasubrahmaNya. And hence, these 4 things become the Lord's ambara. Actually, in this sense, the Lord actually wears ambara (the sky) as his ambara (clothes). Brilliance from dIkshithar as always. The "nS; nd; pn; mmpn" phrase at "nitya; shudha; buddha; muktAmbaram" flows melliflously and brings in that beautiful invisible thread to tie in the 4 qualities as

explained above. :)

**CharaNam:**

*vElAyudadaram sundaram vEdAntArta bOdachaturam  
phAlAksha guruguAvatAram parAshakti sukumAram dIram  
pAlita gIrvANAdi samUham panCabhUtamaya mAyAmOham  
nIlakaNTavAham sudEham niratishayAnanda pravAham*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Lord as "the one who carries ("*daram*") the spear weapon ("*vElAyuda*"). The one who has a beautiful form ("*sundaram*") and the one who is intelligent and skillful ("*chaturam*") in explaining ("*bOda*") the inner meaning ("*arta*") of vedAnta. The one who incarnated ("*avatAram*") as the teacher ("*guruguha*") to Lord Shiva, the one with an eye ("*aksha*") on his forehead ("*phAla*"). The one who is the valiant ("*dIram*") noble son ("*sukumAram*") of the supreme ("*para*") Goddess Shakti. The one who protects ("*pAlita*") the community ("*samUham*") of Gods led by Brahma ("*gIrvANa*"). The one who created this illusory world ("*mAyAmOham*") pervaded by ("*maya*") the five elements ("*panCabhUta*"). The one who has the blue-necked peacock ("*nIlakaNTa*") as his vehicle ("*vAham*") and the one who has a beautiful body ("*sudEham*"). The one who is a never-ending ("*niratishaya*") stream ("*pravAham*") of bliss ("*Ananda*")."

What a beautiful charaNam :). Very easy to understand. One might wonder why Lord SubrahmaNya, even as a kid carries a spear. The story goes that when He went to fight tArakAsura, Goddess Shakti (His Mother and ours too :)) made a weapon out of her amsha and this is the divine vElAyudam that the Lord carries. We know how Mothers carry their sons/daughters and Lord Subrahmanya has divine honour of carrying his Mother :).

dIkshithar describes the Lord as "vEdAntArta bOdachaturam", the one who is adept in explaining the vEdAntAs. Here is where dIkshithar the yOgi surfaces. To those ardent devotees who are on the path of self-realization, He becomes guruguha and explains the purpose and the inner meanings of the scriptures. The term "pancabhUtamaya mAyAmOham" has an interesting philosophical interpretation. mAyA is the counterpart of brahman who creates the physical universe composed of the five elements (*panCabhUta*); traditionally conceived as a female. She is also the mother of shUrapadma the asura. Lord SubrahmaNya was unable to defeat him in battle since mAyA was helping her son by recreating him everytime he was destroyed. Finally He uses his spear (*vEl*) and aims it at mAyA who swoons (*mOham*) and shUrapadma gains the ultimate knowledge to be relieved of the mortal coils. Hence it is traditionally claimed that Lord SubrahmaNya is the ultimate to be prayed to get over the illusions of prapancha.

As I mentioned before, this beautiful krithi richly deserves its prime position as one of the dhyAna krithis sung before the grand kamalAmbA navAvaranams. In my next post, I will follow up with one more krithi on Lord SubrahmaNya, the melodious "swAminAtha paripAlayAsumAm" in calanATTai (sung popularly in nATTai). I will try to post it in the next few days. See you all in the next post. shrI gurubhyO nama:

Sunday, June 29, 2008

swAminAtha paripAlayAsumAm - nATa



SwAminAtha paripAlayAsumAm is a cute, kutti krithi in nATa. It was sung pretty frequently by the great GNB and I have heard some mind-boggling swarams sung by him for this krithi. There is a chitta swaram popularly sung by musicians at the end of the samaSTi charaNam even though there is no chitta swaram given in the SSP for this krithi. dIkshitar composed this masterpiece at the beautiful swAmimalai, about 5 kms from kumbakonam. The temple's significance is pretty much expressed in the picture above. Being one of the Arupadai veedus, I thought I will give some information about the temple and the legend associated with it.

**Pallavi:**

*svAminAtha paripAlayAshu mAma svaprakAsha vallIsha guruguha dEva sEnEsha*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar addresses the Lord- "Oh Lord Swaminatha, the self-resplendent ("*svaprakAsha*") guruguha and the Lord of Valli and dEvasEna, please protect ("*paripAlaya*") me ("*mAma*")."

The speciality of the Lord at swAmimalai is the legend associated with His name. It is at this location that Lord Subrahmanya is believed to have taught his father, Lord Shiva, the meaning of the praNava mantra Om. As symbolized by the picture I have posted above, the small kid taught his own father, the great Lord Shiva and hence is addressed as swAminAtha. Thus, the Lord here is a gnAna-rUpam and Lord Shiva becomes Lord Subrahmanya's disciple and accepts Him as the guruguha, the teacher ("guru") who dispels the darkness of ignorance from the heart caves ("guha") of the disciple. Since the Lord is glowing with all that knowledge at this kSEtra, dIkshithar precisely captures this amsha by using the words "svaprakAsha".

Lord Subrahmanya's two wives, Valli and dEvasEna have been included in the pallavi thereby giving us a complete darshan of the main sannidhi. I would like to mention a few things about Lord Subrahmanya at this point. Everything associated with Him has its own significance. Goddess Valli, the famous girl from the hunter's clan signifies Icha shakti or the power of desire. Goddess dEvasEna is the daughter of Indra and She signifies kriyA shakti, the power of action. In addition, Lord Subrahmanya's spear, shaktivEl signifies gnAna shakti, the power of knowledge that removes ignorance. Lord Subrahmanya uses the peacock as his vAhanam. The peacock, whose behaviour is unpredictable and has mood swings depending on external factors such as weather conditions, signifies the ego, the unpredictable behaviour occupying the mind of human beings. Hence Lord Subrahmanya is the Lord of all these powers, desire, action, knowledge and control of ego.

Also, since one of the Lord's amsha is portrayed as Lord Muruga, the one who waged wars to kill demons, He is also the commander-in-chief of the army of Gods and hence the unavoidable reference to the other meaning of the word "dEva sEnEsha (Lord of the divine army)". In spiritual terms, this could also be interpreted as the Lord of the divine army of the soul consisting of the Lords of good senses and thoughts. An army which is ready to trounce the evil ego and its army which have taken over the senses of a spiritually un-enlightened human being. From the musical stand point, dIkshithar starts the pallavi off with the ArOhaNam "S r g m p n" at "swAminAtha pari". The pallavi ends with a beautiful madhyama kAla sAhityam at "vallIsha guruguha dEvasEnEsha". Moving on to the samaSTi caraNam,

**samaSTi caraNam:**

*kAmajanaka bhAratIsha sEvita kArttikEya nAradAdi bhAvita  
vAmadEva pArvatI sukumAra vArijAstra sammOhitAkAra  
kAmiarttha vitaraNa nipuNacaraNa kAvyanATakAlaHNkAra bharaNa  
bhUmi jalagni vAyu gagana kiraNa bOdharUpaAnandakaraNa*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Lord as "He is kArthikEya, the one who is worshipped by Lord Brahma ("*bhAratIsha*"-husband of Goddess *Saraswati*) and Vishnu ("*kAmajanaka*"-father of the cupid) and the one held in high esteem ("*bhAvita*") by sage nArada and others. He is the distinguished son ("*sukumAra*") of vAmadEva (Lord Shiva-explained below) and Goddess pArvatI. The beauty of his form ("*AkAra*") is captivates ("*sammohita*") even the cupid ("*vArijAstra*"-explained below). His feet ("*caraNa*") is adept ("*nipuNa*") in granting ("*vitaraNa*") boons as desired ("*kAmitarttha*") by devotees. He embellishes ("*bharaNa*") epics ("*kAvya*"), dramas ("*nATaka*") and the shastra of alankAra. He illumines ("*kiraNa*") the 5 elements, earth ("*bhUmi*"), water ("*jala*"), fire ("*agni*"), wind ("*vAyu*") and ether ("*gagana*"). He is the embodiment of knowledge ("*bOdharUpa*") and bestows ("*karaNa*") eternal bliss ("*nityAnanda*") on his devotees."

dIkshithar portrays the delicate side of Lord SubrahmaNya in the caraNam. He directly associates this by describing the Lord as the son of vAmadEva, one of the 5 aspects of Lord Shiva. It is supposed to represent the female manifestation of the Lord and vAmadEva literally translates to beautiful God. Thus, being born out of the female manifestation of Lord Shiva and his consort pArvathi, Lord swAminAtha inherits those qualities. He describes His physical beauty as captivating and surpassing that of the Cupid. dIkshitar has some unique ways of referring to Gods. Apart from general stuff we have seen before like "kAmajanaka" to refer to Lord Vishnu and "bhAratIsha" to refer to Lord Brahma, dIkshithar uses "vArijAstra" to refer to the Cupid. "vArija" means flower in general and lotus in particular. Astra means arrow. kAmadEva is known to strike with his arrow of flowers and dIkshithar uses this to describe cupid. The madhyamakAla sAhityam in this krithi is one of my favourites. The way it gallops and flows is amazing. dIkshithar maintains the prAsam throughout the krithi and especially in the madhyamakAla sAhityam, he uses both adyAkshara as well as antyAkshara prAsam. And thats how the krithi ends, leaving the rasikA yearning for more as always.

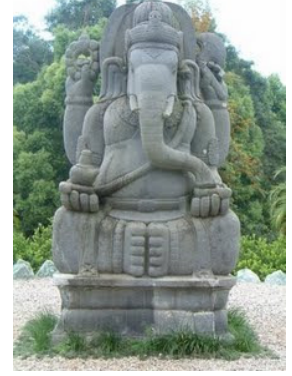
In my next post, I will take up a krithi composed by dIkshithar in praise of Lord guruguha's brother, the beautiful sAvEri masterpiece, "karikaLabha mukham". I have been wanting to blog about this krithi for a long time too :). I will make sure that I post the krithi within a day or two :). See you all in a while!!



Monday, August 11, 2008

**karikaLabhamukham - sAvEri**

Having completely exploited 30 janya rAgas of mA LavagOwLa, we can very safely conclude that dIkshitar is/was and forever will be the king of MMG and its daughters. His two compositions in sAvEri, karikaLabhamukham and shrI rAjagOpAla are classics. While in karikaLabhamukham, dIkshitar makes use of almost all nuances of this beautiful rAga, shrI rAjagOpAla with its rich gait and grandeur stands out as perhaps one of the top 5 compositions of dIkshithars (IMHO). As SK often says, shrI rAjagOpAla is the toughest and the most demanding of all dIkshitar krithis. Anyway, coming back to karikaLabhamukham, the first thing that strikes me about this krithi is the brilliant usage of that enchanting gAndhAram by dIkshitar at some of the most beautiful places. It is sad to note that this krithi is not included in the SSP though :( . The pallavi of the krithi goes like:



**Pallavi:**

karikaLabhamukham DhuNDhi gaNEsham bhajarE rE citta  
kAvEri taTasthitam sAvEri rAganutam

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar instructs the mind - "Oh mind! (*"rE citta"*), worship (*"bhajarE"*) the one who has the face (*"mukham"*) of a young elephant calf (*"karikaLabha"*), DhuNDhi gaNEsha, the one who resides (*"sthitam"*) on the banks (*"taTa"*) of river kAvEri and the one who is praised (*"nutam"*) by the rAga sAvEri."

dIkshitar starts off beautifully with a swarAksharam with the tAra sthAyi "G R" at "kari", arguably, one of the best starts to a krithi ever. I have heard a few people sing a "MGR" or even a "DGR" at "kari"..simply beautiful. He brings in the rAga mudra in the pallavi itself. Though it is a direct usage of the rAgam's name and not one of his brilliant, sIEsha based rAga mudras, the prAsam effect it creates because of the rhyme scheme employed (*"kAvEri, sAvEri"*) is awesome. Some stalwarts like GNB have sung some exceptionally improvised sangathis in the pallavi. Other than that, there is nothing much to explain or elucidate on. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

harihayAdi sakaladEvatArAdhita padAmbujam  
giriJA tanujam vijita manasijam guruguhAgrajam

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar describes the Lord as " the one with the lotus feet (*"padAmbujam"*) worshipped by (*"ArAdhita"*) Lord Indra (*"harihaya"*) and all the other (*"sakala"*) devas. The son (*"tanujam"*) of pArvati (*"giriJA"-daughter of the mountains*), the elder brother (*"agraja"*) of Lord guruguha and the one whose beauty surpasses (*"vijita"*) that of the cupid (*"manasija"-born out of love/emboiment of love/God of Love*)."

The anupallavi starts off with a very serene "S R M P" at "harihaya" but the highlight of the anupallavi is the amazing madhyamakAla sAhitya. dIkshitar once again employs the "G R" swarAksharam at "giri"JA. How did dIkshitar follow the GRS phrase at "giriJA" with NPD at "tanujam"? What beauty and brilliance..it just makes my hair stand. dIkshitar completes the murder with "D S DM; P D S" phrase and the wickedly tantalizing "R G R M Pdpd" phrase at "vijita manasijam" and "guruguhAgrajam" respectively.

Look at how beautifully dIkshitar uses 3 indirect allusions consecutively to the Lord in the madhyamakAla sAhityam. He describes Lord Ganesha by referring to Goddess pArvati, Lord SubrahmaNya and kAmadEva. In my extremely humble opinion, the krithi's start and the anupallavi's madhyamakAla sAhityam pretty much make this a masterpiece. dIkshitar establishes his Godliness once again (which was never in doubt in the first place :)). Moving on to the caraNam,

**caraNam:**

*mUIAdhAra caturddaLa paHNkaja madhyastham  
mOdakahastam munijana hRt kamalastham  
phAlacandram sumukham karuNAsAndram  
pAshAHNkushadharam padmakaram sundaram  
nIagrIvakumAram nIrada shObhAharam  
pAlita bhaktam dhIramapAram vAram vAram*

**Meaning:**

In the caraNam, dIkshithar starts off with his yogic references by describing Lord Ganesha as "the one seated at the center ("*madhyastham*") of the four petalled ("*caturdaLa*") lotus ("*paHNkaja*") of the mUIAdhAra chakra." dIkshithar continues to describe Him as "the one who has modakas in His hands ("*hasta*") and the one who dwells ("*astham*") in the lotus-like ("*kamala*") hearts ("*hRt*") of sages ("*munijana*")."

dIkshithar describes the physical beauty of the Lord as "the one who wears the moon ("*candra*") on His forehead ("*phAla*") and the one with a pleasant face ("*sumukham*") filled with ("*sAndram*") grace and compassion ("*karuNA*"). The one who bears ("*dharam*") the noose ("*pAsha*") and the goad ("*aHNkusha*") and the one who is beautiful ("*sundaram*") with lotus-like hands ("*padmakaram*")."

In the madhyamakAla sAhityam, dIkshithar portrays the Lord as "the son ("*kumAram*") of the blue-necked ("*nIagrIva*") Lord Shiva and the one who is like the rain-bearing clouds ("*nIrada*") in radiating mercy ("*shObhAharam*"). The one who protects ("*pAlita*") His devotees ("*bhaktam*") and the one who has immeasurable ("*apAram*") courage and intelligence ("*dhIram*"), unto Him I pray again and again ("*vAram vAram*")."

Look at the serenity with which the caraNam starts.. "M M P mpdP" at "mUIAdhAra". I love the "D N D M G R GRS" at "kamalastham" and the "P mpdP; MPdpmG" phrase at "phAlacandram" followed by "d r; dpmG" phrase at "sumukham". The prayOgam that always blows my mind away while listening to this krithi is "G R S N dMDS" at nIA"grIvakumAram" which GNB brings out so beautifully in his rendition (followed by that amazing neraval and swaram at harihayAdi).

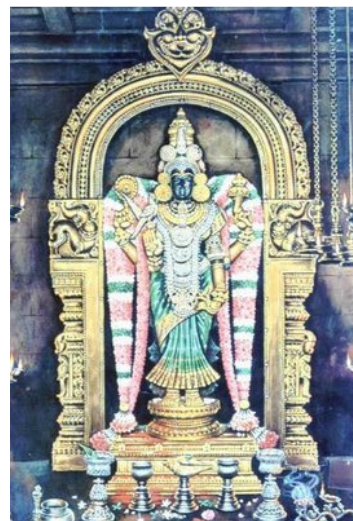
The sublime caraNam is pretty simple in terms of the word-by-word meaning involved and there is nothing much for me to elucidate upon. In a lec-dem by Vedavalli maami, I heard her say that this krithi employs almost all of the beautiful phrases that give sAvEri its grandeur. I hope this post helped in bringing out some facets of the same standpoint expressed by Vedavalli maami.

I have been listening exclusively to TMK's "paradEvatA brhatkuchAmba" in dhanyASi for the past 2 days. A beautiful krithi sung majestically by TMK. Hence, I will take up this krithi in my next post and attempt to bring to light the brilliance of this composition. Until then, tata :) :D

Friday, August 22, 2008

**paradEvatA bRhatkucAmbA - dhanyASi**

Today, I will take up the majestic dhanyASi masterpiece, paradEvatA bRhatkucAmbA composed by the nAdajyOti in praise of Goddess bRhat sundara kucAmbika, the consort of shrI mahAlingaswAmi at tiruvidaimarudur/madhyArjunam. This temple is believed to be around 1200 years old and is one of the famous pAdal Petra sthalams because it is one of the 275 shrines of Lord Shiva mentioned in thEvAram hymns. MadhyArjunam literally translates to "middle maruda". There are 3 Shiva temples which have the maruda tree as the sthala vr.kshAs- shrIsailam in Andhra, tiruvidaimarudur and tiruppudaimarudur in tirunelveli. Geographically, since this temple is located in-between the other two, it is called madhyArjunam. The lingam here is a swayambu and because of its rich history, there are some amazing stories associated with this temple.



In addition to this krithi, dIkshithar has composed a few other krithis at this magnificent temple, mahAlingESwarAya namastE in aTHAna, mahAlingESwaram in paraju and ofcourse the other paraju gem "cintayE mahAlingamUrthim" popularly sung by GNB. I will now move on to the krithi. In my humble opinion, the best thing about singing this krithi is that it provides you with a wonderful opportunity for dEvi nAmasmaraNam. The krithi is filled with different names of the Goddess, uttering which will purify your soul. The goddess in this kshEtra is dressed up in a dancer's attire (you can see the pleats near the legs if you observe in the picture above) and dIkshithar has composed this krithi similar to a dancer's main characteristics, a beautiful mixture of grace and gallop (madhyamakAla). Moving on to the krithi now.

**Pallavi:**

*para dEvatA bRhatkucAmbA saMrakshatu mAM SrI jagadambA*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar directly seeks refuge in his divine mother's lap. He sings "May the supreme Goddess ("paradEvatA"), the auspicious mother of the universe ("jagadambA") bRhatkucAmbA protect me ("saMrakshatu mAM")."

What an amazing start to the krithi!! dIkshithar's brilliance once again just shines in the first words of the pallavi itself. He pretty much sums up the grandeur of dhanyASi with the "P G M P N S D P" phrase at "paradEvatA". How can one start a krithi with such a bold statement directly taking to the heart of the rAga in the opening phrase!! Simply amazing..it shows the authority and the command of this highly knowledgable being..I prostrate in front of him just for that one phrase >--<-o. And to cap off this beautiful pallavi, he ends with "Srns; S G M; PdpMP" at "shrI; jagad;ambA". I dont know if this is a valid observation but if one literally translates the word bRhatkucAmbA, bRhat means "big/massive", kuca means "breast" and "ambA" means "mother". Since She is universal mother, all of us, Her Children are fed by Her and hence the name. I am sure there is some folklore associated with the name of the Goddess here..If anyone knows anything about it, please shed some light. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*SAradA ramA sannuta sakaLA SaraccAmpEya pushpa pada yugaLA  
(madhyama kAla sAhityam)  
vara guru guha janani cinmAlinI sthira-tara sampatpradAna dhaninI*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Goddess as "The complete One ("sakaLa") served ("sannuta") by Goddess Saraswathi ("SAradA") and Goddess Lakshmi ("ramA")". He continues to describe Her physical beauty as "The one whose two feet ("pada yugaLa") are like the campA ("cAmpEya") flowers ("pushpa") that blossom in the autumn season ("Sara")".

In the madhyamakAla sAhityam, he describes Her as "The mother ("janani") of the revered ("vara") Lord

guruguha. The one who wears consciousness as a garland ("*cinmAlinI*") and the one who is capable of bestowing ("*pradAna*") the everlasting ("*sthira-tara*") wealth (of liberation)."

dIkshithar describes the Goddess in just one word- sakaLa meaning "the all encompassing/ complete One". What a wonderful way to encompass the all encompassing one in one word :). He further shows his grammatical prowess by employing a beautiful simile/metaphor comparing Her feet to the campA flowers. Look at the care he takes to describe these flowers..It is not any campA flower but those which are in full bloom during Autumn. The madhyamakAla sAhityam just flows, the syllables fusing with the tALa. Here, dIkshithar uses the word "cinmAlini", the one who wears consciousness ("*cid*") as a garland ("*mAla*"). Such precise usage of words and reference forms..what a genius ;(.

Musically, the "GMPNN" phrase at "sakaLa" is intoxicating. The whole of the madhyamakAla is pure bliss. Some of my favourites are the amazing drop from Sadja to gAndhAra at the transition from guruguha to janani followed by "mgmgDPM;gmRS" at "cinmAlini". The cinmAlini prayOgam pretty much gives me goosebumps every time I listen to it. And the way dIkshithar beautifully ascends the dhanyASi scale as "MGPMDPN;" at "sthira-tara sampat" is a thing of beauty that is to be observed with the eyes of an artist working on a sculpture.. ahhh..If you have not listened to this krithi yet, please do so immediately..what more can I say.

**caraNam:**

*carAcarAtmaka prapanca janani cAru candra hAsini suvAsini*  
*cidAnanda mahAlinga mOhini cidrUpini bhakta viSvAsini*  
*(madhyama kAla sAhityam)*  
*karuNA rasa pravAhini kauLinI kali kalmasha nASini haMsini*  
*kAla mAlini kAtyAyanI kanja IOcanI bhava pASa mOcanI*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar once again emphasizes the universal mother concept by describing Her as "The mother ("*janani*") of the universe ("*prapanca*") and the embodiment ("*Atmaka*") of mobile ("*cara*") and immobile ("*acara*") objects". He continues to describe Her as "the one whose smiling face ("*hAsini*") resembles the beautiful ("*cAru*") moon ("*candra*"). The one who is the dwelling place of consciousness ("*suvAsini*"). The one who captivates ("*mOhini*") Lord mahAlinga, the embodiment of bliss of consciousness ("*cidAnanda*"). The one whose form is pure consciousness ("*cidrUpini*") and the one who has the faith ("*viSvAsini*") of her devotees ("*bhakta*")."

In the madhyamakAla sAhityam, dikshithar describes the dEvi as "the continuous stream ("*pravAhini*") of compassion ("*karuNArasa*"). The one who signifies the kauLa path of worship and the destroyer ("*nASini*") of the trials and tribulations ("*kalmasa*") of the kali yuga. The one who is the divine swan ("*hamsini*") and the one who wears the arts ("*kala*") as a garland ("*mAlini*"). The one who is known as kAtyAyanI, the red-hued one. The one with eyes ("*locanI*") like lotus ("*kanca*") and the one who liberates us ("*mOcanI*") from the attachments ("*pASa*") of this samsAra ("*bhava*")."

What a caraNam. ;(. As I had mentioned in the beginning of this post, there are so many names of the Goddess that dIkshithar brings in. And look at the details once again..he compares Her face to not just a moon but a beautiful moon ("cAru candra"). In addition to the "cinmAlini" in the anupallavi, dIkshithar further addresses Her as "cidrUpini" and "hamsini" to stress on the yogic significance of the Goddess. For devotees who want to attain a higher level of consciousness, surrender to dEvi is all that is required.

From a musical standpoint, some prayOgams like "GNP" at "carAcarA" and "SDSGMGRS" at "cidAnanda mAha"linga are just mind-blowing and these are phrases that embellish the beauty of this rAga even more. The madhyamakAla is once again a pure gem. dIkshithar once again climbs the winding ArOhaNam with the "MGPMDPNRS; pGRS" at "kalikalmaSanASini;hamsini". To cap the krithi off, he comes full circle and uses the same "PGMPNSDP" phrase at "kalamAlini" similar to the opening pallavi line. That's how the krithi ends. MLV amma's rendition is one of my favourites and ofcourse TMK's 1 hour rendition of this krithi is soulful. Please listen to these if you have not.

Staying with the same dEvi theme, in my next post, I will attempt to explain "mAmava mInAkSi" in varALi. A very happy krishna jayanti to everyone :). Happy cheedai eating and as always-"cEtah shrI bAlakriSNam bhajarE"!!

Wednesday, September 3, 2008

### Panchabhoota kshEtra krithis - An email excerpt

*Being the highly inert character I am, it takes a lot for me to get down to writing something in one shot. However, one fine day, I felt spirited to discuss my understanding of 3 of the 5 panchabhoota kshEtra krithis with a very close uncle (read - nearly father figure) of mine, and sent him a rather verbose email. An excerpt of the same is reproduced here. I, by virtue of being human, may have erred in many a place; I'd only be glad to rectify all such, if any.*

I want to share some certain facts about the 3 panchabhoota-kshEtrams - chidambaram, tiruvaNNAmalai and SrIkALahastI with you in this mail. Most of these might be superfluous, and already known, but the context in which they are put forth in the krithis of Dikshitar that I will talk about in chunks and how merely singing/these songs is sufficient to appease/woo the deities in these places, is what I want to discuss in this mail. There will be also be instances of Dikshitar's literary genius that I will rave about to no end (where I might begin to get painful to people!) Owing to that, this mail WILL test your endurance, with its length.

### Introduction

Most of these kshEtrams fall in a belt rich with puranic tales and mythological events associated with them. Unfortunately, whenever I have visited these places, my lack of knowledge of the local language deterred me from reading and understanding more about the kshEtrams. Also, I have always wondered how to pray to these different forms of the same God at different kshEtrams. It is the same God, and one stOtram should do, but there are differences in the "swarooma" and "kArya" (groping for an English translation here - in a loose sense, form and purpose of appearance at that kshEtram - Shiva as the Atmalingam in gOkarNam for eg., and as kirAta (hunter) in SrIshailam - difference in form and purpose) from one kshEtram to another, which makes each kshEtram unique. Thanks to widely traveling saints and saintly figures, we have with us, almost always, stOtrams or shIOkams composed and recited in praise of that unique deity at every kshEtram. But then again, due to our limited means to get to them (Such knowledge is far from being digitised 100% still) and inescapable involvement in mundane life, we rarely attempt to get access to such resources.

Luckily for me, and for many of us students of music, the widely traveling, highly knowledgeable and polyglot vaggEyakAras of the yesteryears, have almost always visited all these brilliant kshEtrams, and documented their prayers to the Almighty there, in the form of exceptional and brilliant krithis, which have been passed down generations for our benefit. So, thanks to their scholarship, the average level of understanding and knowledge about various kshEtrams becomes accessible to those associated with Carnatic music. With some effort towards understanding their picturesque sketching of Sanskrit grammar, a whole new level of elevation can be reached, merely by enjoying the lyrical and grammatical beauty of these krithis. Amongst these, Muthuswami Dikshitar stands out, with a notorious reputation of having composed songs even on vaTukanAtha, found in a roadside temple at Thiruvaiyyaru!!

Being a devout student of Sanskrit, my love towards and minuscule understanding about Dikshitar krithis is not very coincidental. So, I will be citing from Dikshitar krithis alone, in a bid to try erase the thin line demarcating carnatic music and bhakti (from a personal perspective).

### Chidambaram

As you may already know, shiva at chidambaram is formless, or more aptly, adorns the form of "ether" - AkAsha, the all pervading formless panchabhootam. Muthuswami Dikshitar, in his krithi called "chidambaram naTarAjamoortim", mentions this in the very first paragraph, pallavi, of the krithi as "**chidambaram-naTarAjamUrtim chintayAmi atanukeertim**". The term atanukeertim, meaning "The one who is famous for being formless". ('tanu' means 'body or form', 'atanu' means 'bodiless or formless') qualifies the ethereal form of shiva. He talks about the consort of shiva at chidambaram, shivakAmI (often mispronounced in tamil as sivagami), in the 2nd paragraph - madamba shivakAmIpatim. He refers to dEvi as 'madambaA', meaning my mother, with a passionate emphasis on "my", seen quite often in his dEvi krithis.

He goes on to describe the naTarAja there as "shining with the ethereal joy derived from the cosmic dance" in his krithi **Ananda-naTana-prakAsham** (which is a panchabhoota krithi) in the pallavi - "*Ananda-naTana-prakAsham*

*chitsabhEsham AshrAyami, shivakAmavalleesham*". The consort of shiva is referred to as shivakAmavalli! What a beautiful phrase to refer to pArvati! Further, he goes on to attribute the form of AkAsha to shiva in the phrase "bhuktimuktiprada dhar**AkAsham**" in the anupallavi. The unintentional, yet intentional attribution to the kShEtram as such, comes in the phrase "shArddUlacharmAmbaram **chidambaram**", in the charanam, which talks of the formlessness of naTarAja and the kShEtram in one word. The beauty of the word **chidambaram** itself is evident in its grammatical split **chidambaram = chit + ambaram**. I confess not to have a good understanding of the depth of the meaning of this word, but my interpretation is that of "ambaram iva chit" = "a level of consciousness as pure as that of Ether". chit here refers to the 2nd of the 3 - sat-chit-Anandam. I may be totally wrong with this here. Moving on, Shiva's pose of tAnDava is brought out in the term vinOdatANDava - the cosmic dance which is vinOda, fun and frolic, to him.

The richness of description of Shiva, his concert and a complete qualification of his form at chidambaram are so succinctly put forth in these two compositions. Of course, there are a few more compositions on naTarAja at chidambaram (shivakAmeepatim chintayAmyaham is one that comes to me right away).

The lyrics of these songs are available at the links hyperlinked to the krithi name - AnandanaTanaprakAsham, chidambaranaTarAjamUrtim, ShivakAmpatim chintayAmyaham, chidambaranaTarAjam AshrayE&ham. Also, do listen to shivakAmIshwarIm chintayAmyam, a krithi of dEvi shivakAmI at chidambaram.

Talking about chidambaram, there is a gOvindarAja temple there, which has also been sung in praise of in gOvindarAjEna rakShitO&ham.

### SrIkAlahastI

I will be referring to primarily two krithis here. One of them is a panchabhoota-kShEtrakrithi, SrIkAlahastIsha, and another is jnAnaprasUnAmbikE on shiva's consort at SrIkAlahastI.

Shiva at **SrIkAlahasti** is said to be in the form of Air (anila, vAyu, sameera etc.). This point is driven home right away by Dikshitar in the pallavi of the krithi on shiva at SrIkAlahasti, "**SrIkAlahastIsha**" as "*SrIkAlahastIsha shritajanAvana-sameerAkAra mAm pAhi rAjamouLE Ehi*". The term *sameerAkAra* describes the *AkAra*, form, of shiva to be that of *sameera*, air. [I will not go into describing the legend of SrIkAlahasti here (the story of the spider, snake and elephant). I refer you to the temple website for the same.]

The anupallavi of the same song beautifully ascribes the five fundamental elements, panchabhootas, to shiva. It also has one of the most brilliant uses of Sanskrit grammar in - "pAkArividhihariprANamayakOSha-**anilAkAsha-bhoomi-salilAgni** prakAsha shiva". There are numerous ways of understanding and interpreting this line. One direct understanding is that shiva manifests his jyoti/tejas in the form of anila (air), AkAsha (ether), bhoomi (earth), salila (water), agni (fire) - the panchabhootams. Of course, the panchabhoota-kShEtrams represent this fact. He is also described as 'pAkArividhi' - another lovely usage - which means "fate to the enemies of indra (pAka) - destroyer of all evil". (The link to the lyrics that I shall provide you with at the end of this section puts forth another interesting interpretation of the anupallavi. The difference in meanings could be because, either I am completely ignorant, or Sanskrit is beautiful, or both!).

The charaNam is wonderful again. His consort is brought into picture directly with - "**jnAnaprasUnAmbikApatE** bhaktAbhimAna-dakShiNa-kailAsa-vAsa". It also talks about shakti in the form of jnAnaprasUnAmbika. Moreover, the krithi incorporates a reference to SrIkAlahastI as **dakShiNa-kailAsa**. In fact, in another kShEtram - shiva is proclaimed as the "resident" of dakShiNakAshi - kuzhikkarai in Central TN. Of course, the fact that kuzhikkarai is dakShiNakAshi is well corroborated with the use of the exact sanskrit translation, gartateera, in 2 of Dikshitar's magnum opuses - kASi vishwEshwara Ehi and SrI vishwanAtham (a krithi composed in 14 ragams), (as well as annapoorNE vishAIkShI in sAma). While the former actually explicitly uses 'dakShiNa-kAshi vishwEshwara' for the anupallavi-pallavi joiner, the latter uses "SrIpura-niRRutti-bhAga-gartatIra-sthiratara bhooAla-pAlanam".

A note on this now. Here, my interpretation, is that SrIpura refers to ThiruvArur, for Kuzhikkarai comes south of NH-67 connecting Tanjavur (which is west of tiruvArur) and tiruvArur. So, kuzhikkarai is indeed southwest of ThiruvArur. I support my claim as follows. The corroboration for SrIpura being thiruvArur comes in Dikshitar's SrI

kamalAmbA jayati - in the line "SrIpura-bindu-madhyastha chintAmani-mandirastha shivAkAra-manchastitha shivakAmEshAngastha". Here, Dikshitar seems to be defining the "coordinates" of kamalAmbA, from the city, to the temple, to the position, to shiva himself! (Talk about shiva-shakti union!). Sure enough, the tiruvarur temple is right in the middle of the town - SrIpura-bindu-madhyastha (bindu-madhyastha = center point ?), and there on, the localization of the coordinates of kamalAmbA. Dikshitar never ceases to amaze me with his brilliance! Interestingly, mannArguDi, referred to as dakShiNa dwAraka (Thanks Sai!) in SrI rAjagOpAla, is also southwest of Thiruvavur and south of the NH-67, on SH-66 off nidamangalam! Now, back to kALahastI.

Another term that describes shiva ever-so-wonderfully here is "*heenajAtikirAtakEna poojita-keertE*" - One who is famous to be worshipped even by the low-caste hunter (kaNNappa, in folklore). I understand this line very differently, which gives a different, perhaps unreasonably ridiculous, interpretation too (Again, I might be stupid here). The term "*heenajAtikirAtakEna-poojita-keertE*" could be split as above, in which case, the "grammatical case" that flows through the krithi faces a small alteration - with the 3rd case (tRutIyA vibhakti) coming in (with kirAtakEna) and then restoring to the 'reference' case (with poojitakeertE) (called sambOdhana vibhakti in Sanskrit). However, the case can be maintained in the sambOdhana itself, if understood as "*heenajAtikirAtaka*" + "*ina-poojita-keertE*". Shiva is himself a hunter, who thrives in the graveyards, so the first term could refer to him. Shiva also has the distinction to be worshipped by Sun (*ina* = sun). In fact, though I could be taking it a little too far, Lord Rama is referred to as *inakAnta* in lore. tyAgarAja refers to rAma as *inakula mandu* in the song *kanugONtini*. So, it could also be referring to the event in rAmAyaNa where rAma worships shiva during his search for seeta. (I don't know if there's a story of rAma getting to SrIkALahastI and such. The locals might know.) Multiple interpretations, the latter, possibly erroneous, but the beauty remains unquestionable.

Moving on, Dikshitar sings in praise of Shiva's consort here, *jnAnaprasUnAmbika*, exclusively, in his krithi - *jnAnaprasUnAmbike*. He refers to her husband in the song as kALahastIsha-manOllAsini.

To the extent that I know, these are the two songs sung in praise of kALahastIsha and kALahastI.

### Tiruvannamalai

The panchabhoota-kShEtra krithi **aruNACHalanAtham smarAmi** talks about shiva here, in the form of fire. The beauty is that there is no explicit mention of the word fire or its synonyms in this krithi. More on that later.

The pallavi goes as "aruNACHalanAtham smarAmi anisham, apItakuchAmbA-samEtam SrI". Clearly, the reference to his consort at TiruvaNNamalai, apItakuchAmbA has been brought in straight away! The anupallavi is something that makes aruNACHalEshwara unique, because this is a reference that is not come across in the other four. It goes "smaraNAt-kaivalyaprada-charaNAravindam"!!!! By mere 'thought' of shiva here (charaNAravinda = the lotus feet of shiva (aravinda = lotus)), one is granted kaivalyam - mukti! Interestingly shiva is referred to as 'smaraNAt-kaivalyaprada-charaNAravinda' here. So, shiva here is the shiva who grants kaivalyam to one who merely thinks of his lotus feet. (Reiteration for grammatical clarity.).

The reference to the 'fire' form comes in 3 places, metaphorically though. The reference 'taruNAdityakOTI-sankAsha-chidAnandam' is the first ; Shiva is compared to be as bright as crores of 'rising suns' - taruNa+Aditya (taruNa = young, Aditya = sun). Clearly, the energy of the rising sun is more abundant and rejuvenating than that of the setting sun. I admire Dikshitar for his tactful choice for a simile here - taruNAditya, not merely Aditya. Also, crore here doesn't mean a crore, but actually means infinite! So, the interpretive meaning here is aruNACHalEshwara is crores of times brighter than the sun, a reference to his 'fiery' form! The next reference comes immediately after the charaNam starts - "aprAkRuta-tEjOmaya-lingam". Notice the use of the term aprAkRuta - meaning, something not natural, something extraordinary/supernatural. Shiva in the linga form emanates a rather supernaturally extraordinary amount of mystic brilliance/tEjas, a second reference to the fiery form. The third reference is described later.

The rest of the charaNam just makes me cry in awe, with bhakti towards shiva-parvati, with bhakti towards Dikshitar and his brilliance. The lyrical majesty is inexplicable thru an email. Snippets follow however. Shiva is described as - "*apramEyam*" (unqualifiable, unlimited), "*aparNAbja-bhRungam*" - the most majestic description of a couple! - aparNA refers to pArvatI (she was on an unbroken fast to woo shiva. aparNA means a lady of unbroken fast), abja = lotus (ap-water, ja-born in), bhRungam = bee. How do we make sense out of this? Shiva is that to the lotus-like pArvati, what a bee is to a flower - the reason for being. Without bees, there are no flowers. Bees and flowers are amongst the first examples of interdependence and complementing that I can think of. Shiva is



described later as *viprOttama-vishEShAntaragam* - the one who dwells in the hearts of austere people (vipra = brahmin, actually), and further as *swapradIpa* - self illuminating (one who is naturally brilliant), *mouLividhRutagangam* - the one who is crowned by gangA, *swapraKAsa-jita-somAgnipatangam* - the one, who, with his innate brilliance, has won over moon, fire and the sun, meaning to say, the one who leaves sun, moon, and fire far behind with his brilliance - another reference to the 'fiery' nature of shiva at tiruvaNNAmalai.

Thus, Dikshitar closes an exceptional, heavy, description of shiva at aruNAchala. I've only been very superficial in interpreting it. Almost 50% of the words herein have multiple interpretation, each more brilliant than the other! It's just a joy to even contemplate on it.

#### **Final comments**

I have excluded the 2 other krithis - jambUpatE mAm pahI on jambukEshwara, shiva in the form of water, at the kShEtram - jambukEshwaram and chintaya mAkandamoolakandam on shiva at kAnchIpuram, in the form of earth. Note however, that the pallavi of either song, at once ascribes the respective panchabhoota forms to shiva at those kShEtrams. The philosophical implications that these krithis have from the advaitic viewpoint is a discussion that's very very interesting, and owing to its depth and verbosity, excuse itself from this mail.

Thanks for your patience, for reading all the way through till here!

There are so many such lovely instances of describing the almighty - be it Vishnu, shiva, dEvi, subrahmaNya, whosoever! There is just not enough time in life to live each moment thinking about all these. I also want to tell you about the tiruvArUr panchalingams and krithis associated with them, but that will have to wait a while. Perhaps when we meet next, we will have some time to discuss and deliberate and contemplate on such things.

Thursday, September 4, 2008

**mAmava mInAkSi - varALi**

Today, I will take up the beautiful dIkshithar krithi, mAmava mInAkSi in varALi composed by the nAdajyOthi at Madurai. Before I dive into the krithi, I would like to give a brief introduction about this kSEtram and its folklore. According to mythology, Indra once killed an innocent demon by mistake and in order to escape the effects of this sin, Indra built a small lingam in the forest he was roaming and propitiated Lord Shiva. After severe penance, Lord Shiva forgave him and Indra built a small temple at that site. King Malayadhwaaja Pandyan was ruling this part of the country called kadambavanam and he came to know of this small temple. He decided to expand this temple into a big complex and build the city of Madurai around it. The king was childless and did severe penance to please Lord Shiva and beget a child. Lord Shiva answered his prayers and gave the king a 3 year old ayonija (not born out of a womb) daughter. This child was a manifestation of Lord Shiva and Goddess Shakti. Due to her beautiful fish-like eyes, the king named her as mInAkSi. She grew up to be a great warrior and after the king's demise, ruled the kingdom ably.



I must mention the yogic interpretation of Goddess mInAkSi. Sage Mathanga was from the lower chandal caste but did not believe in the caste system and wanted to attain brahmin hood through penance. Through the kripa of Lord Indra and Goddess Saraswati, sage matanga was given a beautiful daughter, Matangi. In tantric tradition, there are ten wisdom Goddesses, Mahavidyas and Matangi is one of them and is believed to be the yogic counterpart of Goddess Saraswathi. On another note, these ten Vidyas are believed to be the source of then ten avatars of Vishnu.

Goddess Matangi is believed to have a dark complexion and she resides in the vishuddhi chakra at the throat. Through upAsana, She can be invoked for command over speech and knowledge. Goddess mInAkSi at Madurai is believed to be this amsha of Goddess Shakti. dIkshithar very beautifully brings this aspect out in the very first lines of the pallavi by addressing the Goddess as "rAja mAtangi-princess mAtangi", thereby consolidating both the physical as well as the yogic beliefs as I have described above. Since mAtangi is the yogic counterpart of Goddess Saraswathi, she holds a veena studded with emeralds and this is once again brought out by dIkshithar in the pallavi itself. With this introduction, I will now delve into the krithi,

**Pallavi:**

*mAmava mInAkSI rAjamAtaHNgi  
mANikyavallakIpANi madhuravANI varALivENI*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "Oh Goddess mInAkSI, the fish-eyed one, the princess mAtangi, please protect me (*"mAmava"*). He describes the Goddess as "The one possessing an emerald studded vINa (*"mANikyavallakI"*) in Her hands. The one with a mellifluous voice (*"madhuravANI"*) and the one with dark hued hair (*"vENi"*) that resembles a swarm of bees (*"varALi"*)."

dIkshithar directly addresses the Goddess and seeks refuge. Being a vainika himself, he promptly salutes Her and refers to Her vINa. Musically, the key "PMGRS" phrase occurs at "mInAkSI" followed by the defining "S n gr G M" phrase at "varALi vENi". dIkshithar once again shows his command over the language by brilliantly incorporating the rAga mudhra as a figure of speech describing the beauty of the Goddess' hair :). Other than that, it is a pretty simple and peaceful pallavi. Moving on to the samaSTi caraNam,

**samASTi caraNam:**

*sOmasundarEshvara sukhasphUrti rUpiNi  
shyAmE shaHNkari digvijaya praTApini  
hEmaratnAbharaNabhUSaNI Isha guruguha hRdAgAriNi  
kAmitArttha vitaraNadhOraNi kArunyAmRtaparipUraNi  
kAmakrOdhadi nivAriNi kadambakAnanavihAriNi*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Goddess as "The embodiment ("*rUpiNi*") of the vibrating force ("*sphUrti*") that delights ("*sukha*") Lord SomasundarEshvara. The dark-hued ("*shyAmE*") one who does good deeds ("*shaHNkari*") and the one who has the glory of conquering all directions ("*digvijaya*") and is the ruler of the world ("*pratApini*"). The one adorned ("*bhUSaNI*") by gem studded ("*ratna*") golden ("*hEma*") ornaments ("*AbharaNa*") and the one who resides in the heart ("*hRdAgAriNi*") of Lord Guruguha, the preceptor of Lord Shiva ("*Isha*"). The one who bestows ("*vitaraNadhOraNi*") all the desired boons ("*kAmitArttha*") of devotees. The one filled with ("*paripUraNi*") the nectar of compassion ("*kArunyAmRta*"). The one who removes ("*nivAriNi*") lust ("*kAma*"), anger ("*krOda*") and all other vices. The one who resides ("*vihAriNi*") in the kadamba forests ("*kAnana*")."

Look at how beautifully dIkshithar depicts the entire shrine. He brings the sannidhi right in front of your eyes in all his descriptions in the caraNam. There is once again no yogic or puranic references here that need detail explanations. He employs a vicious "S r s s n G" at "sukhasphUrti" and the word itself vibrates to bring joy to one's hearts just like the word suggests :). This is followed by a rich "n S G M; D D N" at "shyAmE shankari" that brings out the essence of the pUrvAngam clearly. I also love "S N G R" at "hRdAgArini" and the way the caraNam ends as "nDpmgr-rsGM" at "kadambakAnanavihAriNi" and beautifully merges into the pallavi :). I don't think there is much more to beat upon here and I will promptly wind up.

Since I have given a decent explanation about the kSEtra and since one of the readers had requested, I think I will take up "mInAkSi mE mudam dEhi" in my next post. Though I wanted to reserve this krithi as the very last krithi for this blog (for obvious reasons), I guess I will take it up at this juncture and will provide some insight. I will hopefully post a few more krithis before leaving the US. See you all very soon :). shrI gurubhyO namah:!!

Monday, October 27, 2008

mInAkSi mE mudaM dEhi - gamakakriyA



Moving on to the krithi for the day, I will take up mInAkSi mE mudaM dEhi in gamakakriyA. Today being naraka chaturdashi (dIkshithar's samadi day), it is most appropriate that I will be blogging about this krithi. As most of you would have heard, it is said that dIkshithar shed his mortal coils on narakachaturdashi while his disciples sang the lines "mInalOcani pASamOcani" in the anupallavi of this krithi. Saluting the great guru,

**Pallavi:**

*mInAkSi mE mudaM dEhi mEcakAngi rAja mAtangi*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar directly addresses the Goddess " O Goddess mInAkSi, give ("dEhi") me ("mE") bliss ("mudaM)". He describes Her as "The one who wears golden ornaments ("mEcakAngi") and the one who exists in the form of rAja mAtangi."

As I mentioned in my previous blog, there is a lot of folklore associated with this temple. Please refer to my prior post on the significance behind the term "rAja mAtangi" used by dIkshithar to describe the Goddess at Madurai. The antyAkshara prAsam set in motion in the pallavi pervades all through the krithi. The krithi starts off with "S, rssd" and dIkshithar immediately starts weaving the ArOhanam with the "Srgrgm" phrase at mI"nAkSi mE". The "Snd" phrase at "kA"ngi melts the rasikas' heart. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*mAnamAtRmEyE mAyE marakataccAyE shivajAyE  
mInalOcani pASamOcani mAnini kadambavanavAsini*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar gives Her the ultimate description in the anupallavi. He describes the Goddess as "the concept/knowledge ("mAna")(of the ultimate truth), the one who knows ("mAtR") (the ultimate truth) and the measurable/known part ("mEyE")(of the ultimate truth)". He continues to describe Her as "the one who creates delusion ("mAYE"), the one who has the color of emerald ("marakataccAyE") and the one who knows ("jAyE") Shiva." dIkshithar continues to describe Her as "The fish-eyed Goddess ("mInalOcani"), the one who destroys the bond of worldly attachment ("pASamOcani"), the venerated one ("mAnini") and the one who resides ("vAsini") in the kadamba forest ("kadambavana)".

What a beautiful anupallavi. dIkshithar pays huge respect to the Goddess in these few lines. He clearly states that She is the embodiment of ultimate truth, and that by worshipping her, one can be liberated from all the worldly attachments. dIkshithar, being the yogi he was, shook off his mortal coils and attained Sripuram while making his disciples sing these very lines. When rendered properly with bhakti, these lines combined with the beautiful retta kalai Adi tALam makes one's hair stand and the rasika in me always has that tear rolling down his cheeks while saluting this great soul ;(.

Grammatically, the alliterations in the first line of the anupallavi and the antyAkshara prAsam makes the rhyme scheme gallop at a steady pace. Musically, dikshithar uses swarAksharams for the "ma" shabda in the first line of the anupallavi. Personally, I love the "m, dmrg" phrase at "mAnamAtR". The entire last line is beyond description. "Ss, srsn" at mInalOcani followed by "dd, sndp" at pASamOcani promptly melts the rasika's heart. And he caps it all off with a brilliant "ga da" swarAksharam at "kada"mba. What a genius ;(. Since life must move on, I will continue with the charaNam,

**Charanam:**

*madurApurinilayE maNivalayE malayadwaja pANDyarAja tanayE  
viduviDambanavadanE vijayE vINAgAna daSagamakakriyE  
madumadamOdita hRdayE sadayE mahAdEva sundarESapriyE  
madumuraripu sOdari SATOdari vidiguruuha vaSankari Sankari*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar sings "She is the one who dwells ("*nilayE*") in madurApuri. The one who wears gem-studded ("*maNi*") bangles ("*valayE*") and the one who was born as the daughter of ("*tanayE*") of King Malayadwaja Pandya. The one whose beautiful face ("*vadanE*") outshines ("*viDambana*") the moon ("*vidu*") and the one who is victorious ("*vijayE*"). The one who created ("*kriyE*") the ten gamakas associated with vINa music. The one who brings delight ("*mOdita*") to one's heart ("*hRdayE*") which is as sweet as honey ("*madumada*") and the one who is compassionate ("*sadayE*"). The one who is dear ("*priyE*") to Lord SundareSa. The sister ("*sOdari*") of Lord Vishnu, who is the enemy ("*ripu*") of the asuras Madu and mura and the one with a slender waist ("*SATOdari*"). The one who captivates ("*vaSankari*") Lord Brahma ("*vidi*") and Lord guruguha. She is Shankari, the ever auspicious one".

dIkshithar packs one big punch in the charaNam as he brings in the name of the kSEtra ("madhurapuri), describes the lineage of the Goddess ("malayadhwaja pANDyarAja"), incorporates the rAga mudra and the composer mudra. As you would recollect from my previous post, I had mentioned that Goddess rAja mAtangi is the yogic counterpart of Goddess Saraswati and is often described as holding a vINa. dIkshithar brilliantly brings in this amsha of the dEvi while at the same time incorporates the rAga mudra at "vINAgAna dasagamakakriyE"..what a genius. >--<-o. Grammatically, If you notice, throughout the krithi (pallavi, anupallavi and charaNam), dIkshithar uses the "yE" and the "I" prAsams. He employs similiar words to describe different things in the charaNam, for eg, he uses madu for both "honey" as well as the demon and uses vaSankari and Sankari one after the other..yet another display of his brilliance. Overall, a great masterpiece that has had a huge impact on me and I am sure many rasikas would share the same belief. As I conclude this post, I once again wish everyone a very happy deepavali. The best way to celebrate, as always, would be to listen to dIkshithar krithis and eat amma's food :). Continuing with dEvi krithis, as one of the readers had requested, I will take up kanCadalAyatAkSi in kamalAmanOhari in my next post. Until then, shrI gurubhyO namah:

Thursday, November 13, 2008

kanjadaLAYatAkSi - kamalA manOhari



Moving on to the dikshithar krithi for today, I will be taking up "kanjadaLAYatAkSi" in rAga manOhari, a beautiful composition embellishing Goddess kAmAkSi of kAnchi. Goddess kAmAkSi is considered as a representation of shrI vidya. The idol and the meru at this temple are carved out of Salagrama and is believed to have been consecrated by sage Durvasa. Legend has it that the Goddess performed severe penance under a mango tree at kAnchi and worshipped a shivalingam made out of sand, intun gaining Lord Shiva's hand in marriage. The dEvi here sits in a majestic padmAsana posture signifying complete control over the universe. The original kAmakSi amman temple, where Adi Shankaracharya is believed to have worshipped the Goddess and established the shri chakra. Initially, the Goddess here was a ugra form (an amsha of anger). After Adi Shankara's worship, the Goddess is said to have become peaceful and attained Her present day Shanta swarUpa. The new kAmAkSi amman temple was built in the 12th Century.

With this small introduction, I will move on to the krithi now. According to the SSP, manOhari is classified as an upAnga janya of the 33rd mELa gangataraNgini with the scale "Sgmpns; sndpmgs". dIkshithar straightaway employs the avarOhaNam in the opening line of the krithi,

**Pallavi:**

*kanja daLAYatAkshi kAmAkshi  
kamalA manOhari tripura sundari*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar directly addresses the Goddess "kAmAkSi!! The one who has large eyes ("akSi") like lotus ("kanja") leaf ("daLa"). The one who is dear ("manOhari") to Goddess Lakshmi ("kamalA")-Goddess tripurasundari!!"

dIkshithar beautifully brings in the raga mudra in the pallavi itself. This rAga has become so famous exclusively because of this krithi that people refer to the rAga itself as kamalamanOhari. As I mentioned above, the krithi starts off with the avarohaNam-"sndpmgpmg" at "kanjadaLAYatAkSi". The final oscillating gAndAram here gives the krithi a wonderful flavour. He immediately follows this with the ArOhanam-"sgmpn" at "kAmAkSi". The gAndAram seems to carry a really nice tone that gives this raga the identity and dIkshithar has repeatedly emphasized the usage of this gAndAram in this krithi. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*kunjara gamanE maNi maNDita manjuLa caraNE  
mAmava Siva panjara Suki pankaja mukhi  
guru guha ranjani durita bhanjani niranjani*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar describes the Goddess in detail- "The one who has a majestic gait ("gamanE") like an elephant ("kunjara"). The one who has beautiful ("manjuLa") feet ("caraNE") adorned with ("maNDita") gems ("maNi"). Please protect me ("mAmava")!! The one who is the parrot ("Suki") encaged in the cage ("panjara") of Siva. The one who is lotus ("pankaja") faced ("mukhi"). The one who captivates ("ranjani") guruguha. The one who destroys ("bhanjani") all afflictions ("durita") and the one who is blemishless ("niranjani")."

dIkshithar employs a majestic madhyamakAla gait to describe the Goddess's gait in the anupallavi. The pallavi begins with a "nsgsgGM" phrase. The entire anupallavi gallops in madhyamakAla. The "nsgsg" phrase seems to be a pretty significant sangathi as dIkshithar repeatedly uses it to bring out the rAga bhAva. He once again employs the "nsgsg" phrase at "mAmavasiva".

dIkshithar alludes to the Goddess as the parrot in the cage of Siva. One can easily derive a much deeper meaning for this reference. The body will become a lifeless lump if there was no soul to move to physically, mentally and

spiritually. Similarly, there is no point in any form ("Siva") to exist if there is no life force ("Shakti"). Thus, dIkshithar beautifully refers to the dEvi as the soul/driving force engaged within the body. dIkshithar closes the anupallavi with an amazing "psnd,pdpm,mgmpn" phrase at "durita bhanjani,niranjani". In my humble opinion, the anupallavi of this krithi serves as a websters dictionary for this rAga.

**caraNam:**

*rAka SaSi vadanE su-radanE  
rakshita madanE ratna sadanE  
SrI kAncana vasanE su-rasanE  
SRngArASraya manda hasanE  
EkAnEkAkshari bhuvanESvari  
EkAnandAmRta jhari bhAsvari  
EkAgra manO-layakari SrIkari  
EkAmrESa gRhESvari Sankari*

**Meaning:**

dIkshithar continues to describe the dEvi's beauty as he addresses Her as "the one whose face ("vadanE") is like the full ("rAka") moon ("SaSi") and the one with beautiful teeth ("su-radanE"). The one who rescued ("rakSita") cupid ("madanE"). The one who is in a bejeweled ("ratna") peeta ("sadanE") and the one who is adorned with ("vasanE") auspicious ("Sri") gold ("kAnCana"). The one who has a beautiful tongue ("su-rasanE"). The one whose beautiful smile ("manda hasanE") is filled with shringAra rasa."

In the madhyamakala sAhitya, dIkshithar continues to describe the Goddess as "the one who is embodiment of single and multiple syllabled ("Eka-anEka-akshari") mantras. The one who rules the universe ("bhuvanESwari"). The one who is like a waterfall ("jhari") of blissful ambrosia ("EkAnandAmrta") and the one is resplendent ("bhAsvari"). The one who brings auspiciousness ("Srikari") to those who worship her with steadfast devotion ("EkAgra manOlaya"). The Goddess who rules the house ("grhESwari") of Lord EkAmrESwara and the one who symbolizes auspiciousness ("Sankari")."

dIkshithar emphasizes the fruits of staunch devotion in these few lines. Look at the details he has observed in his meditative state of mind including the beautiful teeth and the graceful smile of the dEvi. The Goddess's smile once again reinforces the fact that She is no longer a "ugra" amsha of Shakti. There is a chitta swaram in this krithi which I love :). If you havent heard the swarams, I strongly urge you to look at the SSP for this krithi.

I am already excited about my train journey to Kumbakonam and my visit to all the other temples in the region :). Hence I conclude this post here. In my next post, I will post pictures of all the temples I was privileged to go to and write a few lines about my trip in brief. Watch out for some exclusive pictures of dIkshithar's house (now converted into a small temple for the trinity). Hoping to see you all on the other side of this pilgrimage as a much better human being :) !! Shri gurubhyO namah.



Tuesday, March 24, 2009

**akSayaliHNga vibhO - SankarAbharaNam**

The krithi akSayalinga vibhO was composed at this beautiful temple town on a hillock called kIvalUr located between tiruvArUr and nAgapattinam. Since one of the readers here, Padma says that this is her hometown, I am very sure that she knows much much more about this town and the temple. One of the specialities of this temple is the straight line in which the navagrahams are situated (instead of the circular version). I remember that this is how the navagrahas are situated in the tiruvArUr temple too. The locals call akSayalingEswarar as kediliyappar and SundarakuchAmbika thAyAr as Vanamullai amman. The sthala vriksha is ilandha maram (badari tree), which is captured in the first line of the caraNam in this krithi. There are quite a few stories based on this temple too. Lord SubrahmaNya Himself is believed to have constructed this temple with the help of Indra.



One need not elaborate on the grandeur of the raga ShankarAbharaNam. It has been handled with utmost care by the trinity and pretty much all composers after the trinity. dIkshithar, especially seems to have had a great liking for this raga and he has proved his might in handling the 29th melakartha by composing big masterpieces such as the navAvarNam, akSayalinga vibhO, dakSinAmurthE and innumerable many more brilliant krithis in addition to the nottuswara sAhitya.

Coming to the krithi itself, right from the beginning, dIkshithar seems to have composed this song with a mindset of trying to make it something special and make it stand out amidst his other magnum opuses in this rAgA. Ofcourse, a pretty famous story attached with this krithi is that when dIkshitar visited kIvalUr to sing this composition in front of the Lord, the day's worship was over and the archakar had closed the sannidhi. Even after dIkshitar requested him to keep the sannidhi for a few more minutes so that he can present this krithi in front of the Lord, the archakar refused to cede to his requests and is known to have mentioned sarcastically to dIkshitar to "come back the next day" and that "the Lord will not run away anywhere". Undaunted by this insult, dIkshitar is said to have started singing the krithi and a huge crowd gathered there. As he finished the krithi, the doors of the sannidhi are said to have burst open and the archakar fell on dIkshitar's feet, pleading mercy. He begins the krithi as:

**Pallavi:**

*akSayaliHNga vibhO svayambhO  
akhilANDa kOTi prabhO pAhi SambhO*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar sings " Lord Akshayalinga, the undiminishing, resplendent one ("vibhO"), please protect me ("pAhi)". dIkshitar describes the Lord as "The self-manifested one ("svayambhO") and Lord ("prabhO") of the innumerable universes ("akhilANDa kOTi)".

As the name of the Lord suggests, He is indeed undiminishing in His form, His compassion and His consciousness, and so is this krithi, replete in details and complete in every aspect. dIkshitar begins with a bang as always, employing a defining phrase like "pmgmp" at "akSayalin" followed by "mpdns" at "gavibhO" (sorry for the bad split of words). IMHO, SankarabharaNam is completely captured in just one word by him in the opening line of this krithi. That oscillation in the madhyamam at akSa"ya" is pure bliss. The killer blow perhaps comes in the form of the "d p" phrase he employs at "svayambhO". And rhythmically, miSra cApu (SSP quotes the tALa as miSra Eka) gets a royal treatment and after listening to this pallavi, one tends to believe that the tALa perhaps gets its salvation because of how it is treated in masterpieces such as this..the gallop and the gait is unbelievable and its best left to the listener's experience. And ofcourse, I need not talk about the antyAkshara prAsam dIkshitar uses in the pallavi; that pretty much summarizes the completeness with which he has composed (this krithi, in particular and most of his krithis in general). Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*akSara svarUpa amita pratApa  
AruDhA vrSa vAha jaganmOha  
daksha SikshaNa daksha-tara sura lakshaNa  
vidhi vilakshaNa lakshya lakshaNa  
bahuvicakshaNa sudhAbhakshaNa  
gurukaTAkshavIkshaNa*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar describes the Lord in the anupallavi as "The one who is the embodiment of words ("akSara svarUpa"), the one who is filled with unlimited ("amita") splendour and glory ("pratApa"). The one who mounts ("AruDhA") the bull as His vehicle ("vrSa vAha") and the one who captivates the universe ("jaganmOha"). The one who punished daksha ("daksha SikshaNa") and the one who very adeptly ("daksha-tara") defines and protects ("lakshaNa") the dEvas ("sura"). The one who defied ("vilakshaNa") definition ("vidhi") and the one who is extremely well-versed ("bahuvicakshaNa") in grammar and literature ("lakshya lakshaNa"). The one who consumed ("bhakshaNa") nectar ("sudhA") and the one who bestows ("vIkshaNa") the grace of a guru ("gurukaTAksha")."

As the krithi takes shape in the anupallavi, it is very clear that dIkshitar is establishing the identity of the Lord by describing Him in His physical resplendence. This is a trend which dIkshitar continues to employ throughout the krithi. Since everything is believed to have originated from the omkAra, the vibrations of words are believed to be responsible for the creation and sustenance of the universe and dIkshitar pays tribute to the Lord by describing Him as akSara svarUpa. He continues to say that the Lord defies even vidhi itself. Finally, dIkshitar finishes the anupallavi by describing the Lord's erudition by referring to His lakshya and lakshaNa skills and as the one who takes form as guru and guides His children through to the origin, the Self manifested as the Supreme Consciousness, hence highlighting the importance of a guru in every soul's journey.

Musically, I dont even know where to start describing the grandeur of the anupallavi. I love the "P Ddpm" start at "akSara" and the "Pdns Nsdnsns" phrase at "pratApa". The "Prs" with the slight gAndAra touch at jagan"mOha" is a killer and it builds up very nicely for the madhyama kAla sAhitya. dIkshitar gets stuck into the "ksha-kshaNa" prAsa scheme in the madhyamakAlam and it is pure bliss from there on to the pallavi. ShankarAbharaNam being a very graceful and phrase-oriented rAga, I guess I am not achieving anything by just mentioning the swarams here. I think it would make more sense for the ears of a rasika to interpret these brilliant passages and for the heart to feel, experience and enjoy :). Hence, I move on to the CaraNam,

**CaraNam:**

*badarIvana mUlanAyika sahita  
bhadrakALISa bhaktavihita  
madanajanakAdi dEva mahita  
mAyA kArya kalanA rahita  
sadaya guruguhatAta guNAtIta  
sAdhu janOpEta Sankara navanIta-  
hRdayavibhAta tumburusangIta  
hRImkArasambUta hEmagirinAta  
sadASrita kalpaka mahI ruha  
padAmbuja bhava rathagajaturaga-  
padAti samyuta caitrOtsava  
sAdASiva saccidAnandamaya*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar continues to describe the Lord as "The one who accompanies ("sahita") the main Goddess ("mUla nAyika") of Badari vana and is the Lord of Bhadrakali ("BhadrakALISa"). The one who is devoted to devotees ("bhaktavihita"). The one respected and worshipped ("mahita") by the father of manmatha, Lord Vishnu ("madanajanaka") and other devas. The one on who is devoid of and beyond ("rahita") the effects ("kalanA") of activities of delusion ("mAyA kArya"). The one who is the father ("tAta") of the benevolent ("sadaya") guruguha. The one who is beyond good qualities ("guNAtIta") and the one who is approached by ("upEta") by ascetics ("sadhujana"). The one who is an embodiment of good deeds ("Sankara") and the one whose heart ("hRdaya") is

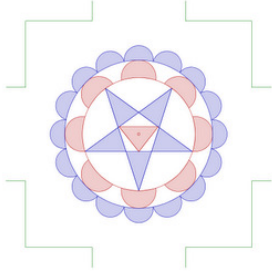
like fresh butter ("navanIta"). The one whose praise shines forth ("vibhAta") in tumburu's music ("sangItha"), Lord hEmagirinAtha, the one born out of ("sambhUta") hRImkAra. The one who is always ("sadASrita") like the divine wish-yielding tree ("kalpaka mahI ruha") to His devotees. The one with lotus feet ("padAmbuja") and the one who is also known as Bhava, the one who aids in crossing the delusionary ocean of samsara. The one who has the chariot ("ratha"), the elephant ("gaja"), the cavalry ("turaga") and the infantry/foot-soldiers ("padAti") all combined ("samyuta") under his command. The one whose temple festival ("utsava") is in the month of chitra and the one who is always ("sadA") in unison with the divine consciousness ("Siva"). The one who is an embodiment of truth,consciousness and bliss ("saccidAnanda-maya")."

dIkshitar starts the Caranam with a sedate and stable "gmPMPMDPM" phrase. There is a famous BhadrakAli sannidhi in this temple and folklore says that the Goddess protected Her son Lord SubrahmaNya when he was doing His penance. dIkshitar captures this temple in its entirety in the caraNam. Starting with the description of the sthala vriksha, Badari tree and the BhadrakAli sannidhi, dIkshitar finishes the krithi with reference to the famous temple festival in the month of chitra. dIkshitar employs a -ihita rhyme scheme in the first two lines of the CaraNam and comfortably shifts to Ata (guruguhAta), Ita(guNAtIta), Eta(janOpEta) and Uta(sambUta) schemes as the Caranam progresses and culminates in the madhyamakAla sAhityam. He employs quite a few "S D" swarAksharams in the CaraNam at places like "sada"ya and "sadA"shrita. dIkshitar brilliantly rounds off the krithi with a galloping madhyamakAlam, the highlight being the usage of the complete avarOhaNam "sndpmgrs" at "sadASivasa"ccidAnandamaya. The "smgm" ending of the CaraNam beautifully fuses in to the panchamam take-off for the pallavi thus making this perhaps one of the best ShankarAbharaNams known to mankind. Its because of krithis such as this that I firmly believe that dIkshitar's name will resonate as long as this universe exists.

I still have not decided what krithi to take up in my next post. It will most probably be a samaSTi caraNam or I might jump into one of the vibhakti series of krithis (thyAgarAja or nIIOtpalAmba). Till then, keep the music flowing. Shri gurubhyO namah:

Monday, May 11, 2009

**gIticakra ratha stithAyai - kannaDa**



Over the past few days, I have been smitten by kannaDa (note: not kAnaDA). I have been listening to SSI's shrI mAtrubhUtam over and over again and have been looping Sanjay's "gIticakra ratha" too. Hence, I thought I will take up these two krithis one after the other and try to do some justice. First, about the rAga itself, I have for a long time wondered why kannaDa is classified as a janyam of harikEdAragowLa (28th mELa) instead of shankarAbharaNam in the SSP. I still have not found the answer and I hope someone reading this blog will be able to help me out. Also, the SSP says that the "srg" prayogam is allowed, which baffles me once again.

Anyway, moving on to the krithi, I believe that dIkshitar composed this krithi at madurai, in praise of Goddess mInAkSi.

As I mentioned in my post on the krithi "mInAkSi mE mudam", Goddess mInAkSi is referred to as shyAmala, the dark-hued one, rAja mAtangI etc. Goddess mAtangi is the yogic equivalent/tantric form of Goddess Saraswati and as I have once again mentioned in the "mInAkSi mE mudam" blog, She is picturized as one holding a gem-studded vINa. Of the 10 mahAvidyAs, mAtangi occupies a very significant place and She is known to bless Her devotees with proficiency in music, poetry and other fine arts. Hence, dIkshitar straight away starts off by referring to Her as the one who resides in the chariot called gItichakra, the chakra of music/singing. Goddess Shyamala is believed to have been created by Goddess Lalita and She is believed to have emerged from Goddess Lalita's sugarcane bow during Her battle with bandAsura. In Lalita Sahasranamam, there is a clear reference to Shyamala which reads "gEya cakra rathArUDha mantriNi pari-sEvitA" and since gEya and gIti have similar meanings ("song/the act of singing"), dIkshitar improvises straight away and replaces gEya with gIti to begin this krithi.

Sorry to continue with this big introduction for the krithi, but, I feel that once I create a good idea about the yogic import of the krithi and the Goddess Herself, no further detailed explanations would be needed. And, the krithi as such is short anyway. So, continuing with the tantric references in the krithi and talking about the gEya cakra in particular, please look at the image above that I have embedded in this post as I describe. There are quite a few versions (some of them, wrong) of this cakra, though the above one is perhaps the most pristine forms. The symmetries and geometric concepts are clearly visible. The gEya cakra, just like the shrI chakra employs the famous "golden ratio" quite extensively, beginning with the inner most triangle enclosed in a pentagon which is further circumscribed by the pentacle (more golden ratio). Finally the 8-petalled and the 16-petalled lotuses form the circumference around this figure and is enclosed within the square bhUpUra. The yantra of saNgIta yOGini is known to correspond with the gEya cakra which signifies Shyamala/mAtangi, further evidence connecting gEya cakra to saNgIta. With that introduction, I will now move on to the krithi itself.

**Pallavi:**

*gIti cakra ratha sthitAyai guru guha nuta SyAmALAyai  
namastE namastE*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar sings "I prostrate before you again and again ("namastE namastE"), Oh Goddess SyAmALA, the one who is present in ("sthitAyai") the chariot ("ratha") called gIti cakra and the one worshipped by ("nuta") Lord Guruguha".

As I have mentioned before, I love these double namastE, samASTi caraNam krithis. Just like the 20-20 cricket, these short krithis pack quite a punch :). dIkshitar seems to stress the importance of music as a marga to mOkSa in these lines. That's why, I presume that in addition to the straight-forward meaning of Goddess SyAmALA riding the chariot corroborated by Lalita Sahasranamam, dIkshitar seems to refer to music, signified by the gIti cakra and devotion to Goddess mAtangi enables the bhakta to elevate himself to ride the chariot to salvation.

Musically, miSra cApu once again proves a perfect foible for the galloping that he seems to create in this composition. He starts off with a plain, divine gAndAra just like shrI mAtrubhUtam and straight away catches the

ranjana that this rAga exudes. The "gmp gmr" at "ratha" followed by "ss mgm dd" at "guruguha nuta" pretty much seals the deal as he incorporates the rAga mudra with such elegance. Finally, the killer blow comes in the form of the double namastEs as "gmr(tAra sthAyi) rnsndpm" and "gdp gmdpgmrs" to loop back to the gAndAra. Sanjay's version seems to capture some unique nuances very beautifully. Please do listen to it if you haven't already. Moving on to the caraNam,

**samashTi caraNam:**

*gItAmRtAnanditAyai gIrvANa vanditAyai  
hata vishanga samUhAyai kRta IOkOpakArAyai  
nata bhairavAdi sEnAyai nava nava vidha bANa karAyai*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar continues to directly address the Goddess and describes Her as "Your heart rejoices ("AnanditAyai") in the blissful nectar of music ("gItAmRta"). You are worshipped by ("vanditAyai") the best of Gods ("gIrvANa"). You killed ("hata") a community ("samUhAyai") of demons led by vishanga and hence did ("kRta") a great help ("upakArAyai") to the world ("IOka)". In the short madhyamakAla sAhityam, dIkshitar sings "Bhairava and other warriors ("sEnAyai") salute ("nata") you. You create ("karAyai") many new ("nava nava") arrows and weapons ("bANa)".

In the caraNam, dIkshitar once again refers to the Goddess being attached to music. He also portrays Her capabilities to destroy demons and pretty much creates an image of Her as suzerian-in-chief of the armed forces :). Also, he refers to vishanga. When manmatha was incinerated by Lord Shiva's third eye, two demons namely vishukra and vishanga were born out of the ashes. For a yOgi who is trying to achieve oneness, the two demons, vishanga in particular causes problems by disturbing the mind and thereby makes it not seek oneness. This demon was killed by SyAmaLa and dIkshitar brings in this yOgic aspect in this krithi, thereby indirectly advising bhaktas to worship Goddess SyAmaLa to overcome delusion and achieve that stillness.

Musically, dIkshitar stresses on the gAndAra once again to bring in that bhAva. Instead of phrasing out each sangati here, I think it would be best to leave it to the rasikas to enjoy themselves listening to it. The chitta swaram in the end begins with a peaceful "gmdp" which kind of gives it that ShankarAbharaNam/western classical tilt. If there were any doubts regarding allowed phrases in this rAga, the chitta swarams completely dispel them and serves as a nice appendix to the krithi itself. On the whole, it is yet another masterpiece composed by dIkshitar and serves as a wonderful starter for those who want to learn this rAga.

Continuing with my love for kannaDa, I will take up "shrI mAtrubhUtam" in my next post. Till then, ciao!!

Sunday, May 31, 2009

**shrI mAtR bhUtam - kannada**

Coming to the krithi I am taking up today, shrI mAtR bhUtam holds a special place in my heart, probably because I did my B.Tech at Trichy where this krithi was composed by dIkshitar at the famous rock fort temple. Trichy has some wonderful temples nearby like tiruvAnaikkAval, Srirangam etc. The rockfort is perhaps the flagbearer of this city. In the olden days, Trichy was called Trisirapuram because an asura by the name trisiran worshipped Lord Shiva here. Ofcourse, the other version is that there are 3 peaks on the rockfort hill occupied by Lord Shiva, Goddess Parvathi and the famous Uchchi pillayar. Because of this, rockfort is also called tri-shira-giri. dIkshitar beautifully incorporates many facts and stories about this temple. In the pallavi itself he brings out the location by addressing the Lord as tri-shira-giri-nAtha.



The Lord Himself gets His name as mAtR bhUtESwarar because he is known to have appeared as a mother. A devotee of Lord Shiva belonged to the Chettiar caste and she used to cross the Kaveri river everyday and come to worship Lord Shiva at this temple. She continued to do so even when she became pregnant and on one such visit, the kaveri was flooded and she was not able to cross back over to her village after darshan. She suddenly developed labour pain and Lord Shiva Himself came in the disguise of that devotee's mother and helped her in delivery. Since Lord Shiva took this motherly form,

He is known as mAtR bhUtESwarar here and in tamizh, He is referred to as thAyum-Anavar (translates as "One who is also a mother"). dIkshitar summarizes this whole episode in just one word in the caraNam when he describes the Lord as "vaiSya jAti strI vESa dharaNam" (the one who came in the disguise of a vaiSya woman). Anyway, moving on to the krithi now,

**Pallavi:**

*SrI mAtR bhUtAm tri-Sira giri nAthaM hRdi cintayE  
sugandhi kuntaLamba samEtam*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar straight away advices "to meditate in one's heart ("hRdi cintayE") on Lord mAtRbhUtESwara, the Lord of tri-Sira giri and the one who is in the company of ("samEtam") Goddess kuntaLamba, the one who has a naturally fragrant ("sugandhi") hair ("kuntaLa")."

In the pallavi itself, dIkshitar effectively brings the whole sannidhi and the temple in front of your eyes by describing Him as the Lord of Trisiragiri, the three peaked hill and bringing His consort, KuntaLamba into the picture. The amsha of pArvati here is always described as one whose hair has a natural fragrance. The locals call Her as "maTTuvAr kuzhali" which compares Her locks of hair to the drops of honey which bring fragrance to flowers. Yet another interesting observation I have made is the similarity in structure between the pallavi of this krithi and the pallavi of the beautiful krithi in raga kuntaLam composed aptly on Goddess kuntaLamba which starts as "shrI sugandhi kuntaLambike" and proceeds along similar lines as "hRdi cintayE". But the similarity ends there :).

Musically, the serene gAndAram is once again used by dIkshitar to mark the beginning of the krithi. With phrases such as "GMDp" and "gmrs" at "shrI mAtRbhutam" and "dnsdsp" at "kuntaLamba", he spreads the canvas for a beautiful picture to unfold upon, not to mention the thatu and take-off of miSra cApu which he has employed so well throughout the entire song. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**anupallavi**

*sOma sakhaM nata Suka sanakaM  
naLa kAmAdi vijaya kamanIyAngaM*

*sOmaM SirO-dhRta sUrya gangaM kOmaLa kara dhRta kurangaM  
guru guhAntaranga lingam*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar describes the physical form of the Lord in the anupallavi as "The friend of ("sakham") the moon ("sOma") and the one worshipped by ("nata") sages Suka and sanaka. The one whose beautiful appearance ("kamanIyAngaM") conquers ("vijaya") Nala and Manmatha. The one who is with Goddess Parvathi ("sa+umam") and the one who wears on His head ("SirO-dhRta"), the calotropis flower ("sUryagangaM"-arka flower or erukkam poo as they call it in tamizh). The one who holds a deer ("kurangaM") in His tender hands ("kOmaLa kara"), the linga form that resides in the innermost caves ("guhAntaranga") of the meditative mind of a guru (the realized one)."

Wow..what a brilliant anupallavi. IMHO, this anupallavi takes the krithi to a whole new level and sets it up to be turned up yet another notch in the caraNam that ensues. dIkshitar captures the entire beauty of this raga by using the deivatham at the very beginning of the anupallavi. It is hard to believe that for the entire part of "sOmasa"kham, dIkshitar has just used the deivatham. As if to show the symmetry in the rAga, he uses symmetry in his words too..sOma sakham nata suka sanakam naLa and in the process incorporates the rAga mudra at sana"kam naLa"(La and Da can be used interchangeably). What a genius!!

Again at "sOmam" he uses his understanding of the raga to the fullest by employing the deivatham yet again. The ranchana that brings in is immeasurable. He then flaunts his grammatical repertoire by using something as contrary as "sOmam" and "sUrya" to describe the Lord and in the process he uses the two words to convey two entirely different meanings, i.e, sOmam here stands for "the one with Uma" instead of the typical meaning of the "moon" and sUrya as a part of sUrya gaNgam referring to the flower. What can one describe this act except as an audacious display of brilliance :). He finishes the anupallavi off with a word to the yOgis to meditate on Him, this form of the linga which is an embodiment of a guru who shines to drive away the ignorance. The "gmdp gmrs" end to the anupallavi facilitates an easy looping back to the gAndAram start for the pallavi. As I always say, I guess the beauty is a bit too much to explain by mere words :). Helplessly moving on to the caraNam,

**caraNam:**

*vAsavAdi dEva vandita caraNaM  
vaiSyA jAti strI vEsha dharaNaM  
vAsu dEva mahitaM bhava taraNaM  
vAsanAdi rahitAntaHkaraNaM  
dara hAsa tri-purAdi haraNaM  
vAsuki pramukhAbharaNaM  
bhAsamAna navAvaraNaM  
dAsa jana santOsha karaNam  
suvAsita nava javanti pushpa -  
vikAsa priya hRdayaM sadayaM  
mAsa varsha pakshOtsava vibhavaM  
sadASivaM parama Sivam*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar continues to describe the Lord as "The one whose feet ("caraNam") are worshipped by ("vandita") Lord Indra ("vAsava") and other dEvas. The one who took the form/disguise ("vEsha dharaNam") of a woman ("strI") belonging to the vaishya community. The one revered by ("mahitam") by Vasudeva and the one who assists in crossing ("taraNam") the ocean of life ("bhava"). The one (on whom by meditating) who puts an end ("anta karaNam") to all the karmic remnants ("vAsanAdi") (in the yOgi's mind). The one who has a smile ("hAsa") as bright as a white conch ("dara") and the one who destroyed ("haraNam") the three floating cities ("tripurAdi") of the asuras. The one who wears the snake ("vAsuki") as His primary ornament ("pramukhAbharaNam") and the one who is covered in new ("nava") robes ("AvaraNaM") that are as bright as the stars ("bhA-samAna"). The one who delights ("santOsha") his followers/devotees ("dAsajana")."

In the madhyamakAla sAhitya, dIkshitar continues to describe the Lord as "the one whose heart ("hRdayam") is fond of ("priya") the freshly ("nava") blossomed ("vikAsa") fragrant ("suvAsita") chrysanthemum flowers ("javanti pushpa"). The ever-compassionate one ("sadayam"). The omni-present one ("vibhavam") whose festivals ("utsava") are celebrated on a fortnightly ("pakSa"), monthly ("mAsa") and yearly ("varsha") basis. The one who is the ever-present and supreme consciousness ("sadASivam and paramaSivam")."

As I mentioned before, he pretty much sums up the story behind this sthalam in one word, "vaiSyA jAti strI vEsha dharaNam". dIkshitar once again uses the gAndAra to establish a strong base in the first few lines of the caraNam



and this enables him to bring in that killer deivatham once again on which he repeatedly stresses at "vAsu"dEva and "vAsu"ki to perhaps make this krithi a great dedication to this wonderful rAga. He employs similies at "dara hAsa" and "bhAsamAna" to highlight the Lord's beauty.

And as always, he never forgets to emphasize on the astral planes for the yOgi. dIkshitar describes the Lord as the one who destroys the vAsanAs. These vAsanAs are impressions which a soul accumulates over its countless cycles of rebirths as it gets entwined in the materialistic pleasures and pains that this world has to offer. For eg, when you lust for something/someone or when you judge a person, these form strong impressions or vAsanAs which get stored in the mUIAdhAra chakra as a signature. These vAsanAs accumulate in each of your births, thereby disabling the soul to progress. The only way to escape this cycle is by meditating and following specific techniques to help the soul regain its purity and destroy these impressions. Hence, for spiritual progress, dIkshitar yet again insists praying and meditating on Lord mAtRbhUtESwara.

And for all you wonderful devotees, the next time you pay a visit to this temple, buy some fresh sevanthi flowers and offer to the Lord as dIkshitar states that it pleases Him :). Finally, dIkshitar completes this masterpiece with reference to the festivals celebrating the Lord's greatness. The madhyamakala sAhityam is yet another treat with the words just dancing along with the tALa and thus ending the krithi on a happy, festive note :).

Please listen to MMI's and SSI's versions of the krithi to enjoy some prayOgams to the maximum. In my next post, I will take up one of the vibhakti series of krithis and hopefully will complete the entire series over a month or so. Salutations to the great gurus.

Thursday, June 25, 2009

### Guruguha vibhakti kritis



Since I am beginning to blog about the guruguha vibhakti set of kritis, I thought I will start with a small post giving an introduction to this series and the story behind the beginning of perhaps one of the greatest composers this world has ever witnessed. This is the first set of krithis that the great nAdajyOti composed and there are so many things that this series reveals about the man behind the compositions. Since dIkshitar pays rich tributes to his guru in all the 8 krithis of this series, I will give small introduction to his spiritual guru, Shri Chidambaranatha yogi of Benaras. Muthuswami dIkshitar's family was invited to Manali (near Madras) when a family friend, Muthukrishna Mudaliar visited tiruvArUr.

Upon repeated requests, the family shifted to Manali and Muthuswami was about 15 years old at this time. Ramaswami dIkshitar (Muthuswami's father) was given shrI vidyA dIksha at tiruvArur by Chidambaranatha yogi. On the yogi's way to Kashi from tiruvArUr, he stopped at Manali and spent a few days with the dIkshitar's.

Muthuswami took a liking to the yogi and used to sing and play the vINa during the yogi's pUja. The yogi also developed a liking to the young boy and requested the boy's father to send Muthuswami with him to kAshi. Sensing this as a rare opportunity and considering the immense benefits that his boy would gain from the association with the yogi, Ramaswami reluctantly agreed. After reaching kAshi, the yogi initiated Muthuswami in Sri vidya, taught him the shodashAkshari mantra and taught him yoga and vEdanta. This disciplined and austere life must have been the main reason for dIkshitar acquiring a perceptive intellect capable of delving into spiritual matters and turned him into a great bhakta and an aspiring yogi. He spent around 4 years at kAshi and probably had an opportunity to listen to hindustani music which helped him evolve musically, the influences of which can be clearly seen in quite a few of his compositions in hindustani ragas.

And it is during this stay with the yogi that he went for a bath in the ganges and a vINa came floating into his hands with "rAma" inscribed on it and with an upturned yAli. The great chidambaranatha yogi then instructed dIkshitar to return to Manali, follow Lord SubrahmaNya as his natural guru and told him that he will soon realize the purpose of his birth. So saying, the yogi bid farewell to his disciple and attained jala samadhi in the ganges. His body was later recovered and is now buried at Hanuman Ghat which this humble devotee plans to visit very soon.

After coming back to Manali and spending time with his parents, dIkshitar found a great urge to go to tiruttani, one of the 6 Arupadai veedus of Lord SubrahmaNya. The shrine is beautifully located on a hill top on the way from Madras to tirupathi. This is believed to be the place where Lord SubrahmaNya defeated the asura sUrapadma and married Valli and deivAnai. Lord SubrahmaNya's idol bears a circular hollow in the center of His chest which legends believe is because of a disc thrown at Him by one of the asuras. It is an extremely ancient temple with references in some of the literary works of the sangam era. Just like swAmimalai which has 60 steps (each step denoting 1 year of the tamizh calendar), tiruttani has 365 steps (each step denoting 1 day of the english calendar year). After reaching tiruttani, dIkshitar decided to do penance and meditate on Lord SubrahmaNya for a mandala (40 days).

On the 40th day, while was dIkshitar was meditating, an old man came to him and asked him to open his eyes. He then put a sugar candy in dikshitar's mouth and disappeared. This was Lord SubrahmaNya himself in the guise of an old man and overwhelmed with joy and devotion, dIkshitar immediately burst into his first krithi, the first of the 8 krithis in this set, shrI nAthAdi guruguho in mAyAmALavagowLa. To get this blog going, since this was dIkshitar's first legitimate composition (humbly side-stepping the nOttu swara sAhityams), my first post was about this krithi. Notwithstanding the fact that this was his first composition, it was technically flawless, artistically mature, refined and aesthetic, grammatically perfect and philosophically profound. Ofcourse, he expressed his brilliance straight away adopting the guruguha mudra, incorporating the rAga mudra and began his composition in a traditionally way by composing in MMG, the raga in which music lessons are begun to this day. And the fact that he begins this composition with the ArOhaNa and avarOhaNa of the rAga, set in all the 3 speeds of kAla

pramANams shows that he was a genius. He was around 25 years old, putting most of other 25 year olds like me to shame :).

Each of the 8 krithis in this set is unique and brilliant in its own sense. The common theme of all these 8 krithis, each kriti composed exclusively in the 8 declensions of Sanskrit language, is to glorify the guru, exalt the importance of a guru and showcase the supreme truths and show the way for a yOgi in his spiritual progress. As I mentioned before, these krithis perhaps reveal the making of a great phenomenon called Muthuswami dIkshitar whose name and krithis will ring in this universe as long as it exists.

This set of krithis is used by dIkshitar as a sort of a training ground. Filled with references to vEdAnta, yOga, adopting the guruguha mudra, employing the rAga mudra, playing with grammar, etc, dIkshitar pretty much sets this mould which became the trademark of his compositions and his greatness. The ease with which he handles rare ragas such as pADi, pUrvi, balahamsa and bhAnumati is astounding. He has employed the rAga mudra in each of the 8 kritis in this set and the genius clearly is on display the way he beautifully weaves the rAga mudra into each kriti. ;(. Just amazing. Each kriti has its own rare speciality, for eg, guruguhAya bhaktAnugrahAya in sAma (4th kriti in the series) is the only dIkshitar kriti that employs two guruguha mudras to my knowledge.

Over the next month or so, I will have the pleasure and privilege of taking up each of these gems and will try my best to uncover the brilliance of dIkshitar and his compositions. Since I have already blogged about the first kriti in this set in my first post, I will take up "mAnasa guru guha" in Anandabhairavi in my next post. There is so much to be written and explained and I cant wait to begin :). I will be back :). Shri gurubhyO namah:

Sunday, June 28, 2009

**mAnasa guru guha - Anandabhairavi**

Coming to today's krithi, I will take up the second composition of the guruguha vibhakti series, mAnasa guru guha rUpam in Anandabhairavi set to rUpaka tAla and composed exclusively in dvitiyA vibhakti (accusative case). After starting off his composing career on a high by aptly composing the first krithi of this series, shrI nAthAdi guruguhO in MMG, dIkshitar perfectly chooses the rAga Anandabhairavi to set the mood of this series. As the name of the rAga suggests, it creates a divinely blissful mood and eliminates all the agitations and disturbances in the rasika's mind. dIkshitar continues on "the salutations to the guru" theme as below,

**Pallavi:**

*mAnasa guru guha rUpam bhajarE rE  
mAya-maya hRttApam tyajarE rE*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar straight away instructs the mind to strive for higher goals- " Oh mind!!("rE mAnasa") meditate on ("bhajarE") guha, the form of guru and abandon ("tyajarE") the delusionary ("mAya-maya") sorrows and afflictions of the heart/mind ("hRttApam")."

dIkshitar adopts a commanding/instructive tone throughout this krithi and seems to emphasize the importance of a guru by directly addressing the mind. He repeatedly commands the mind to abandon all illusions in this world (which in itself is an illusion) and strive for greater spiritual progress. One can actually see that by stressing the significance of a guru, dIkshitar himself assumes the post of a guru and commands the mind just like how a guru commands, strictly adhering to obedience and austerity. What a genius he must have been to choose such a profound word (guruguha) as his signature at such a young age, a mudra with which he continued to compose till he shed his mortal coils.

In the opening lines of the pallavi itself dikshitar makes the idea/theme behind this set of krithis crystal clear. He straightaway equates a guru as a form of the Lord Himself and commands the mind to worship him and meditate on him. Musically, dIkshitar has inundated this krithi with nokkus and he starts the krithi off with a nokku on madhyamam and then heading to the panchamam at "mAna"sa following it up with the characteristic "mgrgm" phrase at "guruguha". The "Nnsnmgr" at "mAya-maya" and the final "grgrgm" at "rE rE" loops back beautifully to the beginning of the pallavi. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*mAnava janmani saMprAptE sati  
paramAtmani niratiSaya sukham vrajarE rE*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar sings "Having obtained ("saMprAptE") the human ("mAnava") birth form ("janmani"), go,take the path ("vrajarE") and try to attain the unsurpassed bliss ("niratiSaya sukham") associated with the supreme consciousness ("paramAtmani")."

dIkshitar once again emphasises the purpose of this birth and the gift of attaining a human form which enables to soul to discern, choose the right path and unite with the supreme consciousness, the source. This krithi in particular and dIkshitar's life in general, in my humble opinion, serves as a lesson on how to lead one's life, stop running this rat race and strive for the real purpose of coming to this play pen. I really admire the silky smooth way in which dIkshitar climbs the madhya stAyai by using "S p p S" at "mAnava" and hits the tAra stAyai madhyama employing the "smgrs" phrase at "janmani samprA"ptE. The beautiful oscillatory phrases around the pdn area at para"mAtmani niratiSaya sukham" using the beautiful Shuddha deivatham is something which you cannot find in any other Anandabhairavi krithi. The beauty and brilliance clearly shines through and this can be clearly observed and experienced in DKP's rendition of the krithi.

**caraNam:**

*satva guNOpAdhi sahita sadASivaM  
svAvidyA samEta jivOdbhavam  
tatvam tAmasa yuta viSva vaibhavaM  
tArakESwaram Anandabhairavam  
natvA shrI guru caraNaM kRtvA nAmasmaraNaM  
jitvA mOhAvaraNaM matvA tvadEka SaraNam*

**Meaning:**

In the caraNam, dIkshitar describes the Lord as " The form of everlasting consciousness ("sadASivaM"), the one endowed with ("sahita") with qualities of ("guNOpAdhi") satva. The one from whom all the living beings ("jIva") are born ("udbhavam") as a result of their own ignorance ("sva avidya"). His greatness ("vaibhavaM") symbolises the truth ("tatvam") that lies beyond this world ("viSva") filled with tamasic qualities ("tAmasa yuta"). He is tArakEswara, the Lord who helps cross this ocean of samsara. He is the form of Anandabhairava, radiating everlasting bliss".

The madhyamakAla sAhityam will probably resonate till this world ends in which he says "Worship ("natvA") the feet ("caraNam") of the auspicious preceptor ("shrI guru"). Chant and meditate on his name ("nAmasmaraNaM"). Conquer ("jitvA") the sheath/veil ("AvaraNam") of delusion/desire ("mOhA"). Surrender to him as the sole ("tvadEka") refuge ("SaraNam")."

Wow..what a caraNam!! I still cannot believe that someone can be so complete in just his second composition ever. He repeatedly hits the same note, ridiculing the ignorance of the human mind and how it succumbs to these alpa,tamasic pleasures when there exists a royal,sAtvic path to eternal happiness. dIkshitar also seems to have used this set as proving grounds for his rAga mudra usage skills. The prAsam in the krithi and especially the madhyamakala sAhitya brings a rich gait to the composition.

The caraNam is a musical masterpiece in the sense that even if there was no sAhityam, the mellifluous flow of the notes rich with sphurita and kampita gamakAs itself would grant the caraNam, a superstar status. Some of the highlights would be the "sGmP" phrase at "sadASivaM" followed by perhaps the best ever shuddha deivata usage in Anandabhairavi that dIkshitar brings about by employing the "SndPdp" phrase at "svAvidya". The beauty of these phrases once again comes to light clearly in DKP amma's version of this krithi. Oscillations at the niSAda at jI"vOdbhavam" and the "PSsmgrgrs" phrase at "tatvamtAmasayuta" serve as lessons for "how to extract maximum beauty out of this rAga". These are real eye-openers for anyone who wants to get a good grip of this rAga.

dIkshitar then builds up a nice crescendo using smooth, curvaceous and captivating phrases like "Sndnp; sPdnp" at "tArakEsvaramAnanda"bhairavaM. Once again DKP amma brings out the best here. The beauty of these delicate usages cannot be expressed in mere words..they are definitely to be cherished and enjoyed. It definitely leaves the rasika with that "AhA" feel. Finally, to top it all, what a madhyamakAla sAhityam. The arAjagam he does reaches the pinnacle at "natva shrI guru caraNam". It is extremely hard to believe that he has used just a single swara (Sadja) for these 4 words. What a genius. The slight tinge of the niSAda is implicit while the Sadja dominates. No one else can even imagine employing such audacious phrases. I get goosebumps when I listen to these last two lines everytime. The grammar, the prAsam, the musical content..it just gets a little too much to take. To end the krithi, dIkshitar rounds it off nicely with "GM dpm grgm" at "matvA tvadEka SaraNaM" to loop back to the pallavi.

On the whole, a complete krithi which pretty much establishes dIkshitar's status as a phenomenon that seems to have reached its peak in just his second composition. If you still haven't listened to this masterpiece, I can assure you that you are missing something beautiful in your life and urge you to listen to it right away :). I will next take up the wonderful krithi "shrI gurunA pAlitOsmi" in rAga pAdi composed exclusively in tritiya vibhakti. After trips to Chennai for a couple of interviews followed by a trip to yercaud with some of my best, old school friends :), I shall be back with my next post very soon. Till then, keep listening and keep enjoying. shrI gurubhyO nama: !!

Thursday, July 23, 2009

shrI gurunA pAlitOsmi - pADi



ShrI gurunA pAlitOsmi in rAga pADi set to rUpaka tAla and composed exclusively in tritIyA vibhakti (Instrumental case), one can clearly see the genius of dIkshitar unfold as he handles a pretty uncommon rAga such as pADi. Characteristic phrases such as "dpmrs" and "pdpns" are quite frequently used throughout the krithi and dIkshitar manages to capture the identity of the rAga in its entirety. Also, the spiritual progress and experiences of dIkshitar comes to the forefront. The kriti goes like,

**Pallavi:**

*shrI gurunA pAlitOsmi  
saccidAnanda nAthEna*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar sings "I am protected by ("pAlitOsmi") the auspicious ("shrI") guru, the one who is the ruler/embodiment ("nAthEna") of truth-consciousness-bliss ("sat-cit-Ananda")."

In the pallavi itself, dIkshitar firmly establishes the fact that Lord SubrahmaNya is perhaps the most ideal guru for He is known to have taught His father, Lord Shiva, meaning of praNava mantra. Once again, dIkshitar is completely justified here in taking such a Lord who dwells in knowledge and consciousness as his own guru. He starts off with the deivatham and incorporates the characteristic phrases of "dpmrs" followed by "pdpns" at "shrI gurunA" and "pAlitOsmi" respectively. The highlight of the pallavi is the rAga mudra at "pAli"tOsmi (la and Da and interchangeable). As I mentioned before, this set of krithi is something special for any dIkshitar bhakta simply because of the fact that one can clearly see how dIkshitar progresses as a composer, as a yogi and as a bhakta :). Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*AgamAdi sannutEna akhila viSva vanditEna  
tyAgarAja vibhAtEna tApatrayAtitEna*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar describes the Lord/guru as "the one praised by ("sannutEna") the Agamas and worshipped by ("vanditEna") all the worlds ("akhila viSva"). The one who shines ("vibhAtEna") because of Lord tyAgarAja. The one who is beyond ("atItEna") the three mental afflictions ("tApatraya")."

The greatest beauty of this set of krithis is perhaps the intricate way in which dIkshitar salutes both his guru as well as the Lord, a perfect example of "One stone, two birds". Ofcourse there are times when he hits even 4 or 5 birds with 1 stone :). For eg, here in the anupallavi, he refers to the Lord as one who is praised by the Agamas. Agamas are aspects described in the vedas which deal with rituals and their importance. These rituals in the vedas were originally conceived by the great sages(gurus themselves) in the first place and hence the Lord/guru by the virtue of being praised by other gurus attains a "super guru" kind of status. He further establishes this fact by bringing in the "swAminatha" amSa of Lord guruguha when he defines the Lord as "the one who shines because of Lord tyAgarAja". Also, if one assumes the other meaning of vibhAta which is "to respect", Lord Shiva will obviously have a lot of respect for both Lord SubrahmaNya as well as any enlightened guru and here dIkshitar scores yet again.

And he finishes the anupallavi by highlighting once again that by ardently following the guru, a yogi can become one with the supreme consciousness who is beyond the three afflictions of tApa namely AdyAtmika (physical and mental pains), Adibautika (pains caused by other animate and inanimate objects in this world) and Adideivika (supernatural interruptions by spirits existing beyond this plane). Musically, the plain panchama start for the anupallavi creates a serene platform on which dIkshitar builds a beautiful edifice with phrases like "Rssnp" and "RmPp" at "sannutEna" and "vanditEna" respectively. The beautiful "dpmrmp" phrase at the end of the anupallavi

serves as a nice loop back to the pallavi. Moving on to the caraNam,

**caraNam:**

*vEdAntArtha vEdyEna vikalpa rOga vaidyEna  
nAdAmrta supAdyEna nava nAthEnAdyEna  
sAdAkhyA kala karENa sadASivAvatArENa  
nAdAnta vihArENa nava cakrAdhArENa  
pAdAmbujEna parENa bhEdAdi vidArENa  
Adiguruguha varENa kAdi matAnusArENa*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar continues to describe the significance of the Lord/guru as "the one who has completely understood ("vEdyEna") the inner meaning of the vEdas ("vEdAnta artha"). The one who cures ("vaidyEna") the disease ("rOga") of confusion in the mind ("vikalpa"). The one who rejoices drinking ("supAdyEna") the sweet nectar of nAda ("nAdAmrta"). The one who is an embodiment of the nine ("nava") nAthas since "The beginning" ("adhyEna"). The complete one who represents the sAdAkhyA kala. The incarnation of ("avatArENa") SadaSiva, the eternal supreme consciousness. The one who resides ("vihArENa") in the very essence ("anta") of nAda. The one who forms the basis of the 9 cakras of the shrIcakra. The supreme one ("parENa") with lotus-like feet ("padAmbujEna") and the one who removes/destroys ("vidArENa") all discriminations ("bhEdAdi"). The distinguished guha who is the first ("Adi") guru and the one who followed ("anusArENa") the path of kAdi mata."

In the caraNam, one can clearly see the prAsam revolving around the "Ena" and "ENa" scheme. Also, what stands out in the caraNam are places where dIkshitar clearly differentiates between descriptions attributed to the Lord and those attributed to the guru. There are descriptions such as "the one who is an incarnation of SadaSiva, the one who is an embodiment of the nine nAthas" etc which clearly are descriptions of the Lord. There are other descriptions like "the one who cures the disease of mental delusions" etc which are more appropriate if associated with the guru. Ofcourse, the very essence of this set of krithis is to see the Lord as the supreme consciousness (the goal/final destination itself) as well as the guru (the path/the guide) and to illustrate the fact that dIkshitar has achieved this harmony perfectly, I am trying to separate the two attributes to make things clear. In order to preserve that harmony in my explanation too, I guess I will refrain from further dissociation of the meaning implied. Finally, to perhaps imply what I just meant, dIkshitar himself describes the Lord "as the guha who is the first guru" @ "Adi guru guha varENa". This one line, IMHO, summarizes the theme of this set of krithis brilliantly.

The navanAthas referred to here could either be the 9 elements based on which this universe was created. It could also be a reference to the sect of 9 saints who are believed to have come in a lineage starting from dattAtrEya. I am not very sure of which one of these interpretations to take. The Shakti path of worship is also beautifully interwoven in this krithi as dIkshitar refers to the Lord/guru as the embodiment of sAdAkhyA kala and the one who follows the kAdi mata path. The practice ("mata") of kAdi is quite symbolic throughout this series of krithis and this path is considered one of the highest matas in principle. The yogic import of sAdAkhyA kala is something which I dont want to delve in as it could get too complicated and boring and eventually this post will become too long hence losing its punch. In a nutshell, the sahasrAra cakra is the principal center of worship for samayins and the bindu at the center of the sahasrAra is the sAdAkhyA kala and it symbolizes the union of Shiva and Shakti. This samaya worship is brought to the forefront in this krithi by dIkshitar.

As I conclude this post, I have a sort of incomplete feeling simply because there are still so many aspects that I have left untouched. I could discuss in detail about the nAda and more in detail about the sAdAkhyA kala but,unfortunately, these aspects could get a little too scientific and might not appeal to the general mass. I hope I have done enough justice to atleast make a scratch on the surface of this beautiful composition. The greatness of this krithi is that, even if one doesnt delve too deep, the musical content and lyrical rhythm carry the rasika to a paradise land which in itself is an unique experience. If there are any performing musicians who are reading this blog, I sincerely request you to learn this krithi and perform..such precious gems shouldnt be lost to the ravages of time.

In my next post, I will take up "guruguhAya bhaktAnugrahAya" in sAma, a beautiful piece that sort of has joyous tilt to it and takes away the seriousness that would have set in after this composition in pADi. If there are no further disruptions in my internet connection, I will try my best to post the next krithi in a few days. Till then, keep listening and enjoying :).



Wednesday, August 5, 2009

**guruguhAya bhaktAnugrahAya - sAma**



Coming to the krithi that I will be taking up today, guruguhAya bhaktAnugrahAya in sAma set to Adi tALam is composed exclusively in the caturthi vibhakti (fourth/dative case). The manner in which dIkshitar addresses the Lord as "kumArAya" in the pallavi melts ones heart. The pallavi goes like,

**Pallavi:**

*guru guhAya bhaktAnugrahAya kumArAya namO namastE*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar sings "I offer sincere prostrations ("namO namastE") to guruguha, the one who bestows grace ("anugrahAya") upon His devotees ("bhakta"), the ever youthful one ("kumArAya")."

dIkshitar starts off with that hanging devivata note that straight away rings bells in your brain to qualify the status of this composition as a masterpiece in this raga.

He neatly captures the entire essence of the raga by employing the "s R r" phrase at "anugrahAya" followed by the "dsrmgr" phrase at "kumAraya". Other than that, there is nothing much to explain about the pallavi. The simplicity of the pallavi encourages musicians to embellish and improvise with their own sangathis and over a period of time, the pallavi of this krithi has undergone some transformation with additional sangathis. Moving on to the anupallavi,

**Anupallavi:**

*guru guhAya bhaktAnugrahAya guNAtItAya rUparahitAya  
hariharavirinci rUpAya saccidAnanda svarUpAya SivAya*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar describes the Lord as "the one who has transcended ("atItAya") all the qualities ("guNa"), i.e, satva, rajas and tamas. The formless one ("rUparahitAya") and the one who is an embodiment of viSNu-Siva-Brahma ("hariharavirinci") all rolled into one. The one whose natural self ("svarUpAya") is truth-consciousness-bliss ("saccidAnanda") and the one who is the ever auspicious consciousness ("SivAya")."

As far as I know, this is the only dIkshitar krithi in which he uses the guruguha mudra twice. Though, lyrically I cant quite figure out why he uses it in the same context, conveying the same meaning in both the pallavi and anupallavi, musically, dIkshitar clearly justifies the usage. Just like how he uses the sAhityam "guruguhAya bhaktAnugrahAya" in the pallavi to capture the beauty of the avarOhaNa prayOga of "dpmgrsRr", he uses the same sAhityam to exhibit the majestic ArOhaNa prayOga of "srmPpDPM". One might argue that dIkshitar could have used a different set of words all together but I feel that the very fact that he uses the same sAhityam to incorporate two different kramAs not only shows his genius but also the flexibility of this rAga sAma which surprisingly is an extremely classical and traditional rAga believed to have originated from the songs and hymns sung in villages.

dIkshitar once again emphasizes the advaita doctrine by describing the Lord as the embodiment of hari,hara and virinci all combined. It is extremely clear that dIkshitar was a strict advaitin in the fact that irrespective of whether it was his beloved Lord guruguha or Goddess Shakti, the principal deity of shrI vidya upAsana, there are many instances in which he sees the divine supreme consciousness. There are quite a few instances such as the reference in this krithi and the bhairavi navAvarNam in which he describes Goddess kamalAmba as "shrIkAnTa-viSNu-virincAdi-jananyitrAyAH" for instance to reinforce this belief. To further establish the supreme state of bliss in which dIkshitar was meditating, he describes the Lord as a unified consciousness whose natural self shines forth as saccidAnanda. Wow..now, thats what I call a brilliant anupallavi in which dIkshitar explains a massive concept such as advaita in very few words. And to do something like this in just his fourth ever composition clearly shows

that dIkshitar was a phenomenol genius. The final master stroke perhaps comes at "SivAya" where he uses "srmm" to further embellish the anupallavi and grant it what I call "superstar status" :).

**caraNam:**

*sakaAgama mantra sAragnyAya satsampradAya sarvagnyAya  
sakaLaniSkaLa prakASakAya sAmarasya sampradAyakAya  
vikaLEbhara kaivalya dAnAya vikalpahInAya vignyAnAya  
SukavAmadEva vandita padAya SukavAmadEva mukti pradAya*

**Meaning:**

dIkshitar continues to pay rich tributes to the Lord by describing Him as "the essence ("sAragnyAya") of all Agamas and mantras. The one who is omniscient ("sarvagnyAya") and who is well-versed in the path of noble traditions ("satsampradAya"). The one whose resplendence ("prakASakAya") is the cause of existence of all sentient and insentient matter ("sakaLa niSkaLa") in this universe. The one who is knowledgeable in the doctrine ("sampradAyakAya") of sAmarasa (the unity of Shakti and Siva). The one who is the embodiment of knowledge ("vignyAnAya") and the one who bestows ("dAnAya") vidEha mukti, i.e, liberation from the body ("vikaLEbhara kaivalya"). The one whose feet ("padAya") were worshipped by ("vandita") sages Sukha and vAmadEva and the one who granted liberation ("mukti pradAya") to them."

In the caraNam, dIkshitar pretty much describes Lord guruguha as the supreme soul residing in all creations, living and non-living. Here, he once agains uses adjectives and descriptions that could be in reference to his guru as well as the Lord himself. There are some descriptions such as "satsampradAya" and "sAmarasya sampradAyakAya" which would more aptly suit the guru. Ofcourse, the same words can indeed be used to describe the Lord Himself since the guru himself is a subset of the Lord :). Perhaps the highlight of the caraNam is the way in which dIkshitar uses the rAga mudra by referring to the yogic path of sAmarasa. In his own inimitable style, he embeds the rAga mudra not only without disturbing the flow of the krithi but by conveying a doctrine which clearly expresses the emotions he was going through. Those unique blissful experiences a yogi visualizes when the kundalini shakti moves through the cakras and reaches the sahasrAra- these experiences are granted and governed rightly by guruguha (the Lord as well as the guru).

As we move into the madhyamakAla sAhityam, dIkshitar portrays the Lord/guru as the path and ultimate destination that grant mukti. I also fail to understand why dIkshitar uses the names of the sages Shuka and vAmadEva twice in the last lines of the caraNam. There seem to be quite a few repetitions in this krithi from the beginning to the end, the reason to which eludes me. Musically, there are many beautiful phrases in the caraNam that delights the rasika. The "sdSr" opening for the caraNam followed by prayOgams such as "dpdMdD" at "sakaLaniSkaLa" and "sdpmMggrR" at "sAmarasya sampradAyakAya" are not only pleasing to the ear but also helpful for learners to grasp the subtleties of the rAga. The madhyamakAla sAhityam is pure bliss to listen to. Especially, the 4-2-2 akshara split of Adi tALam in the madhyamakAla creates a rich, majestic gait. And as a final measure to establish the clear usages, dIkshitar has appended a beautiful citta swaram to this krithi which unfortunately has got lost over time and has disappeared pretty much. He embellishes the swarams with jArus and janta prayOgams in sync with the pattern he follows in the madhyamakAla sAhityam. All-in-all, this krithi is yet another masterpiece that adds more beauty to this already mind-blowing set of krithis.

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