

An analysis of the Rāga-s seen in the Rāgamālīka-s of Subbarāma Dīkṣitar

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Abstract

Karnāṭaka Music has various musical genres and the most interesting among them is rāgamālīka-s. The contribution of prominent composers like Muddusvāmy Dīkṣitar, Svāti Tirunāl, Tiruvorriyūr Tyāgayyar, and Harikēśanallūr Muttiah Bhāgavatar in the realm of rāgamālīka is well known. What is lesser known is the contribution made by the members of the family of Muddusvāmy Dīkṣitar, namely Rāmasvāmi and Subbarāma Dīkṣitar.

Subbarāma Dīkṣitar, well known for his text Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśini has composed ten rāgamālīka-s, including a rāgāṅga rāgamālīka. The rāga-s featured in his rāgamālīka-s range from a common ones like Kalyāṇī, Śaṅkarābharāṇa to rarer ones like Rudrapriyā and Balahaṁsa. Since three members of this family have handled this musical form, this article attempts to know whether any similarities exist between the compositions of Subbarāma Dīkṣitar with his predecessors. Also, we will be engaging ourselves to know the system followed by in handling the rāga-s which got its svarūpa changed, predominantly in the last century.

Introduction

Karnāṭaka Music has various musical forms and the one that never fails to enthuse us is a rāgamālīka. Literally meaning ‘a garland of rāga-s’ is a genre in which multiple rāga-s are used sequentially in the same composition. A peep into the musical forms prevalent during the medieval period reveals a form by the name ‘rāga kadambaka’, which could be considered as a predecessor for rāgamālīka-s. We do have prabandha-s composed using multiple rāga-s, and many of them were also composed using more than a tāla (Jānakīraman S.R 1980:27). Some of the sūlādi-s were also constructed using various rāga-s.

When we consider the rāgamālīka-s sung in concerts, a composer who comes to our mind instantly is Muddusvāmy Dīkṣitar. His rāgamālīka ‘śrī viṣvanātham bhajēham’ is still popular and serves as an example to understand this musical genre. But, what is not known is the contribution made by his family members in the field of rāgamālīka. His father, Rāmasvāmy Dīkṣitar, perhaps inspired by his preceptor Vīrabhadrayya, has composed several rāgamālīka-s. Though we are not certain about the exact number of rāgamālīka-s composed by him, his grandson Subbarāma Dīkṣitar in his treatise ‘Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśini, published in the

year 1904 has preserved four of them for the posterity.¹ His family members, namely Muddusvāmy and Subbarāma Dīkṣitar, carefully preserved and propagated this practice. Going by this, we can speculate the siblings of Muddusvāmy Dīkṣitar, Cinnasvāmy, and Bālasvāmy could have tried this form; yet we do not have any evidence of their existence in the text Pradarśini.

Subbarāma Dīkṣitar, in the mentioned treatise, has conscientiously documented these rāgamālīka-s. We can find two rāgamālīka-s of Muddusvāmy Dīkṣitar² and ten rāgamālīka-s of Subbarāma Dīkṣitar along with the four of Rāmasvāmy Dīkṣitar in notation. Hence, this document serves as an authentic source to study and analyze the compositions of Dīkṣita-s.

The Rāgamālīka-s of Subbarāma Dīkṣitar

Subbarāma Dīkṣitar not only has given the notations for the rāgamālīka-s, but also has mentioned its ideal features. The rāga-s used must suit the meaning of the text, they should have pallavi, anupallavi and caraṇa composed using nine, fourteen or sixteen rāga-s, have a muktāyī svara, to mention a few. In the majority of the cases, his rāgamālīka-s abide by the rules prescribed.

Of the ten rāgamālīka-s available to us, this article considers only nine and excludes the rāgāṅga rāgamālīka 'ī kanakāmbārī'. Since the rāgāṅga rāga-s require a separate discussion, this was not included in this study.³ When the remaining nine were considered, all were composed in Telugu, except 'manatōḍiṇaṅkiṇa', which is a Tamiz composition. Interestingly, all these rāgamālīka-s were set to either tisra ēka or rūpaka tāla, excluding the Tamiz one 'manatōḍiṇaṅkiṇa', which was set to ādhi tāla.⁴ The majority of them were in praise of royal patrons like 'Pusapāti' Ānanda Gajapati, Muddusāmi Ettēndra, etc., and a few were on deities like Rājagōpāla Svāmy.

Rāgamālīka-s of Subbarāma Dīkṣitar

Rāgamālīka	Number of rāga-s	Tāla
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¹ śiva mōhana, manasāvēri, sāmaja gamana and nāṭakādi vidyāla.

² śrī viṣvanātham bhajēham' and 'pūrṇacandra bimba vadanē'.

³ Rāgāṅga rāga-s used by the Dīkṣita-s correspond to our mēlakarta-s and are 72 in number.

⁴ Tisra ēka and rūpakam seems to be the favorite tāla for Subbarāma Dīkṣitar, as majority of his compositions were set to one of these tāla. It is interesting to note, the akṣara-s of both these tāla-s come to six.

Endhuku rā rā	9	Rūpakam
Kāmiñcina kalāvatira	9	Tisra Ēkam
Nī sarilērani	9	Tisra Ēkam
Garavamuganna	32	Rūpakam
Valapumīri	4	Rūpakam
Manatōḍiṇaṅkiṇa	6	Ādhi
Vanidarōyē	4	Rūpakam
Vēḍukatō	5	Rūpakam
Priyamuna	10	Tisra Ēkam

Though we have a textual record on the availability of these rāgamālika-s, elaborate analyses of these compositions are much scanty. We have an article by Rāmakṛṣṇan (1970:204-205) wherein he had made an attempt to enlist these rāgamālika-s. Unfortunately, no attempt was taken to explore its musical aspects. Kamaliah (1977:188-191) expounded on the literary aspects of the navarāgamālika ‘garavamu’, and here again, the musical aspects were untouched. Vijayalakṣmi (1986) has studied the compositions of Subbarāma Dīkṣitar in detail. The melodic aspects of many kṛti-s were explained; but, the rāgamālika-s, especially its musical aspects were not covered.⁵

Subbarāma Dīkṣitar is actually a link between the celebrated composers of our music, namely, Śyāmā Śāstri, Tyāgarāja Svāmigaḷ and Muddusvāmy Dīkṣitar and the composers who lived posterior to them. It is pertinent to note that the period of Subbarāma Dīkṣitar is much important, as that was the time when the composers (of his period) predominantly followed the text Saṅgraha Cūdāmaṇi and its ilk and tried to infuse various new scales into our music. In this event, the major rāga-s like Hindōla, Balahaṁsa, and Takka were also tampered with and made to fit into a restricted scale (Aravindhan T.R 2020:16-24). Hence, Subbarāma Dīkṣitar could be considered, as a rare class who lived much closer to the period of the celebrated composers and at the same time, was also contemporary to the later composers. This raises an interesting query, ‘does the rāga lakṣaṇa seen in the rāgamālika-s of Subbarāma Dīkṣitar resembles the style of his predecessors or follows the lakṣaṇa prevalent during his period?’ and this forms our first research question.

Since this musical form was handled for three generations by the members of this family, they give us a wide scope for understanding and dissecting the structure, rāga-s, and tāla-s of rāgamālika-s among other aspects. When we skim through the rāgamālika-s composed by Dīkṣita-s, an unseen link strikes us straight over the face, which makes us ask ‘are there any

⁵ We do have few recent studies done on the family of Dīkṣita-s. Since they are not accessible, they are not included.

similarities between the rāgamālīka-s composed by Subbarāma Dīkṣitar with other Dīkṣita-s belonging to his family? Needless to say, this forms our second research question.

Since we have a text published by an author who belongs to the family of Dīkṣita-s, thereby revealing their family treasure unalloyed, Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśini will be followed as a solitary source to get an answer to these questions.

Rāga-s seen in the Rāgamālīka-s

Subbarāma Dīkṣitar has used all the three categories of rāga-s, namely, rāgāṅga, upāṅga and bhāṣāṅga in his rāgamālīka-s. Among them, bhāṣāṅga-s were much preferred.⁶ The use of rāga-s ranges from the common ones like Kalyāṇī, Śaṅkarābharaṇa to rarer ones like Rudrapriyā and Balahaṁsa. Tōḍi was the most commonly used rāga, as evidenced from its presence in eight of the rāgamālīka-s, closely followed by Kamāsu, used in five of these compositions. The rāga-s like Vasanta, Bhairavi, and Śrīrāgam were used more than once.

In general, when we compare the rāga-s used by Subbarāma Dīkṣitar with the other two Dīkṣita-s, a great amount of similarity is seen between Subbarāma Dīkṣitar and Rāmasvāmy Dīkṣitar. The raga selection seems to be completely influenced by Rāmasvāmy Dīkṣitar. Every raga handled by Subbarāma Dīkṣitar in the rāgamālīka-s were used by Rāmasvāmy Dīkṣitar, except for four. Rudrapriyā, Kalāvati, Parajū, and Kamāsu are the four rāga-s and the above statement can be confirmed only if we get the complete corpus of the compositions of Rāmasvāmy Dīkṣitar.

The rāga-s seen in the rāgamālīka 'priyamuna' is almost a replica of the rāga-s used by Rāmasvāmy Dīkṣitar in his rāgamālīka 'sāmaja gamana', a rāgamālīka on Amarasimha Bhūpāla, one of the last kings of Tanjāvūr.⁷ The former uses ten rāga-s and the latter twenty rāga-s. Of the ten rāga-s used in 'priyamuna', seven can be located in 'sāmaja gamana', namely, Śrī rāga, Haṁvīru, Darubāru, Pāḍi, Sahānā, Mōhanam, and Bhūpālam.⁸

Additionally, serial placement of the janya rāga-s belonging to the same rāgāṅga rāga is a feature employed by all the three Dīkṣita-s. If Rāmasvāmy Dīkṣitar has employed Maṇiraṅgu, Kāpi, Śrī rāga and Darubāru⁹ in his rāgamālīka 'sāmaja gamana', Muddusvāmy Dīkṣitar has

⁶ Ten rāgāṅga-s, ten upāṅga-s and thirty bhāṣāṅga-s were used in total.

⁷ The rāgamālīka 'sāmaja gamana' rendered by the author can be heard here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CuEO33mMs-Y>

⁸ The rāgamālīka 'priyamuna' rendered by the author can be heard here:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HPws00A0SX0>

⁹ All are considered to be the janya-s of the 22nd rāgāṅga rāga Śrī rāga.

used Sarasvathi manōharī, Śuddha vasantha, Hamsadvani, and Nāgadvani¹⁰ in his rāgamālīka ‘pūrṇa candra bimba’. This style was later adopted by Subbarāma Dīkṣitar. His rāgamālīka ‘kāmincina kalāvatira’¹¹ has many such groups – Kāpi and Sahāna,¹² Lalita, Paraju, and Gauri,¹³ to cite a few. These Dīkṣita-s also had a liking for the janya-s belonging to the rāgāṅga rāga-s Māyāmālavagaula and Śrī rāga, as evident from their works.

Rāga-s used more than once

We have seen earlier, many rāga-s were used more than once by Subbarāma Dīkṣitar in his rāgamālīka-s. In such an instance, he has tried to portray a different svarūpa of the raga at each instance. The rāga Tōḍi is taken as an example to illustrate this statement.¹⁴ This rāga was used in eight of his rāgamālīka-s and each time it was used differently. Whereas in the rāgamālīka ‘vēḍukato’, it is shown as a sampūrṇa rāga, in the rāgamālīka ‘priyamuna’ it is shown as a pañcama varjya rāga. Also, the graha svara used to start the rāgamālīka segment in ‘vēḍukato’ and ‘priyamuna’ are niṣādha and madhyama respectively.

Handling of Bhāṣāṅga Rāga-s

Bhāṣāṅga rāga-s, by themselves, form a separate and interesting group, as they require the use of a svara not available in its parent scale. This use of anya svara, even in the same phrase occurring in the same rāga was not uniform in the past. This difference can be authoritatively identified in the compositions of Dīkṣita-s available in the same rāga.¹⁵ The bhāṣāṅga rāga-s available in the rāgamālīka-s of Subbarāma Dīkṣitar, having outnumbered rāgāṅga-s and upāṅga-s, demands an individual examination. Considering the brevity, this paper restricts in analyzing the anya svara usage in a single bhāṣāṅga rāga, namely Bhairavi.

¹⁰ All are considered to be the janya-s of the 29th rāgāṅga rāga Śaṅkarābharaṇa.

¹¹ The 32 rāgamālīka ‘kāmincina kalāvatira’ rendered by the author can be heard here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ih_fEqQYRY8&t=636s

¹² The rāga Sahāna was considered as a janya of Śrī rāga in the past, and handled in the same manner by Dīkṣita-s and their contemporaries.

¹³ All are considered to be the janya-s of the 15th rāgāṅga rāga Māyāmālavagaula.

¹⁴ Though Tōḍi features several times in his rāgamālīka-s, it is surprising to note that he has not composed a single composition in this rāga. There is a composition ‘paradēvatē’ in this rāga, composed by Kṛṣṇasvāmy Ayya and tuned by Subbarāma Dīkṣitar.

¹⁵ Readers can refer to this article for more information: <https://tlmthelostmelodies.wordpress.com/2020/11/07/colorful-bhashanga-s/>

The rāga Bhairavi, despite in use for many centuries, has transformed in the last century.¹⁶ The Bhairavi available/used by the celebrated composers had a sparse usage of pancaśruti (chatuśruti) dhaivata.¹⁷ Subbarāma Dikṣitar mentions NDNS and NSDNS are the only prayōga-s that can take this svara.¹⁸ The compositions notated under this rāga in Pradarśini, irrespective of the composer follow this prescription. Subbarāma Dikṣitar has used Bhairavi in three of his rāgamālīka-s,¹⁹ of which he has followed this norm in two of them. The rāgamālīka ‘vēḍukatō’ is an exception. In this composition, the rāga Bhairavi was used without the anya svara!

Though this might surprise us, there existed a practice of handling this rāga without this anya svara. Rāmasvāmy Dikṣitar gave a similar structure to this rāga in his rāgamālīka ‘śivamōhana’. This practice was even extant in the last century among the composers not belonging to the family of Dikṣita-s.²⁰ The rāga Bhairavi, devoid of its anya svara can be seen in the book published by Stephen and Popley (1914:43).²¹

Phrases unique to the family of Dikṣita-s

A rāga could have been popular during the period of Subbarāma Dikṣitar or his predecessors. It does not negate the fact that all the composers were aware of/used all the phrases available in a rāga. To support this statement, we do find some interesting phrases seen only in the compositions of Dikṣita-s. This will be illustrated by taking the rāga Manōharī.

Manōharī or Kamalāmanōharī, as it is commonly called now, is placed as a janya of the 33rd rāgāṅga rāga Gaṅgātaraṅgiṇī by Subbarāma Dikṣitar. It is a upāṅga rāga with the mūrccana SGMPNS SNDPMGS. Subbarāma Dikṣitar has notated a varṇam of Rāmasvāmy Dikṣitar and two compositions of Muddusvāmy Dikṣitar in this rāga. Subbarāma Dikṣitar has used this rāga

¹⁶ The usage of of Bhairavi pancaśruti (chatuśruti) dhaivata differs considerably among the various lakṣaṇa grantha-s. Since this paper deals only with the compositions of Subbarāma Dikṣitar, only the rāga transformation that happened in the last century is considered.

¹⁷ This information was recorded by A.M.Cinnasāmy Mudaliyār and T.M. Vēṅkaṭeśa Śāstri in the year 1893 and 1892 respectively, in their books, which was later mentioned by Subbarāma Dikṣitar in the year 1904.

¹⁸ A similar lakṣaṇa was prescribed by A.M.Cinnasāmy Mudaliyār and T.M. Vēṅkaṭeśa Śāstri.

¹⁹ ‘valapumīri’, ‘manatōḍiṇaṅkiṇa’ and ‘vēḍukatō’.

²⁰ After seeing in this example, we even get a doubt on the usage of anya svara in a bhāṣāṅga raga - is it compulsory or optional?

²¹ This was a book to evangelize the Indian natives who listen to our music. They have tuned short poems from Bible to Karnāṭaka rāga-s wherein we see many interesting practices, with respect to the rāga-s, prevalent during the last century.

in the rāgamālika ‘kāmiñcina kalāvātira’. This rāga runs for four āvarta-s in this composition, including a svara-sāhitya segment. In this segment, we find SDP, a phrase outside the given mūrccana. Another composition that features this phrase is ‘sañkaram abhirāmi’ of Muddusvāmy Dikṣitar. This phrase is not even seen in the Vālājāpēttai transcripts available with us.²² It is possible to identify such phrases in other rāga-s, yet not discussed here.

Rāga-s in their old form

As mentioned earlier, many rāga-s transformed even at the beginning of the last century, particularly after the popularity of the texts which consider rāga-s in the form of a scale. Only, a few composers were impervious to these changes and Subbarāma Dikṣitar is notable among them. We can enjoy the rāga-s in their old glory in his compositions. In this section, his prowess in handling the rāga-s in their original form will be illustrated with a single example.

The rāga Balahaṃsa, a janya of 28th rāgāṅga rāga Harikēdāragaula, is now a rarer rāga and is very difficult to hear it in a concert. The rāga sañcāra is now restricted to the scale SRMPDS SNDPMRMGS and the phrase ‘rmgs’ is almost synonymous with this rāga. Almost every other major composer belonging to the 18th century has a composition in this rāga. The composers of the last century like Tiruvottriyūr Tyāgayyar, Paṭnam Subrahmaṇya Ayyar and Harikēśanallūr Muttiah Bhāgavatar too utilized this rāga.

However, the rāga Balahaṃsa of the period of Muddusvāmy Dikṣitar (and prior) was much different from that of mentioned composers. This rāga, as a janya of Harikēdāragaula,²³ can be traced from the text ‘rāga lakṣaṇamu’ authored by King Śahāji (1684-1712). The old Balahaṃsa was never restricted to the mentioned scale. It has many phrases outside the ārōhaṇa-avarōhaṇa and hence treated as a major rāga. Few phrases which might be of interest include ‘rgr’, ‘srgm’, ‘pmr’, and ‘mpdps’ (Hēma Rāmanāthan 2004:176). It is interesting to note that the phrase ‘rmgs’ is not seen in the old Balahaṃsa.²⁴

²² Vālājāpēttai transcripts form an important source to know the old versions of the kṛti-s of Tyāgarāja Svāmigaḷ.

These were copied from the manuscripts written by Vālājāpēttai Vēṅkaṭaramaṇa Bhāgavatar and his son Kṛṣṇasvāmy Bhāgavatar, disciples of Svāmigaḷ. The transcripts can be accessed here:

<http://musicresearchlibrary.net/omeka/files/original/bdae739ecfdd8774f1c0bb23c74c6a9b.pdf>

²³ Several rāga-s with the different lakṣaṇa, but with the name Balahaṃsa exists in the literature. Those were not considered here.

²⁴ None of the compositions of Tyāgarāja Svāmigaḷ (seen in the older sources including Vālājāpēttai transcripts), Muddusvāmy and Subbarāma Dikṣitar show this phrase. Rāmasvāmy Dikṣitar has used it in a single place.

Subbarāma Dīkṣitar could be the only composer of the last century who has handled this rāga in its old form. He has composed an aṭa tāla varṇam in this rāga and included it in his rāgamālīka ‘nī sarilēni’. Both stand as an example to understand its real svarūpa. It is important to note and appreciate the fact that a composer belonging to a period, which saw the drastic changes in the rāga svarūpa, has taken adequate efforts to preserve its old form. His rāga portrayal is much in line with the Balahaṃsa handled by Dīkṣita-s and Tyāgarāja Svāmigaḷ.²⁵

Conclusion

The rāgamālīka-s of Dīkṣita-s offers a lot of scope to understand the music of the past. Ideally, the rāga-s used in these rāgamālīka-s are to be taken individually and a comparative study is to be done, with respect to the rāga svarūpa painted by the Dīkṣita-s.

It is to be emphasized that Subbarāma Dīkṣitar has meticulously followed the tradition pioneered by Rāmasvāmy Dīkṣitar. Though we restrict ourselves to the rāga prayōga-s when saying this statement, this can be applied to other aspects too. The rāga selection, using them serially were all influences taken from Rāmasvāmy and Muddusvāmy Dīkṣitar and many rāga phrases were known/used only by the Dīkṣita-s. Collectively taken together, it can be said Subbarāma Dīkṣitar was much interested in not only preserving the tradition bequeathed to him but also in preserving them and make them open to all by publishing them in a book form.

Subbarāma Dīkṣitar is a vital link between the composers who lived in the last century with those who lived prior to his period. He was impervious, not benighted, to the changes happening to a rāga during his time period and his compositions actually look like an extension of the musical thought of his ancestors. Needless to say, his compositions help us to understand the music of the past. Further studies will be taken to understand more about the music of Dīkṣita-s.

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²⁵ The kṛti-s of Tyāgarāja Svāmigaḷ in this rāga also has been changed. But, the older versions, as seen in Vālājāpēṭṭai transcripts are much in accordance with the lakṣaṇa of old Balahaṃsa. Readers can refer to this article for further details:

<https://tlmthelostmelodies.wordpress.com/2021/01/14/intriguing-raga-s-balahamsa/>

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