

Interviews



Leading musicians and musicologists refer Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini for anything they want to know about the ragas and their evolution over the years.

And now, vocalist T.M. Krishna and violinist R.K. Sriramkumar are working on bringing out what is written in the Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini, the huge collection of compositions with notations, in audio format. They have released their first audio cassette containing 10 kritis of Muthuswamy Dikshitar, 'as written' in the Pradarshini, in February 2006. While Sriramkumar is currently touring the US, T. M. Krishna spoke passionately on this tough but interesting project and how they worked and learnt the kritis together in a chat with **Revathi R of *KutcheriBuzz***.

How did you get the idea of bringing Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini in audio format?

It has been in our minds for a couple of years - from 2004, when the Music Academy celebrated Subbarama Dikshitar centenary. It was a vague idea then and we were not sure of what we were getting into. And when I took a composition in the raga Mangalakaishiki - Sri Bhargavi for a thematic album for Rajalakshmi Audios, I had to seek the Pradarshini as no recording of this kriti was available, though B. Rajam Iyer had sung it on many occasions. I wished if there were any audio recording of these well-notated kritis. But we were travelling and the task worked out to be a costly affair and was kept in abeyance.

What motivated you to go ahead with this project?

After the album of thematic compositions on Lord Ranganatha of Srirangam, in which I sang the Mangalakaishiki kriti, was released, my cousin Shyam Krishnamoorthy in the US heard it and enquired about how I learnt that particular version of the kriti. This kriti has another version also. It was just a conversation then that Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini was the guide for the song and that we were wanting to archive the compositions written in Pradarshini. We were thinking of applying for a grant from the Govt. sponsored institutions. But when we received the initial money from my cousin and a few friends within a couple of days, we jumped into the project!

Why do you think it is important to archive the Pradarshini in audio format?

Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini is a definite reference manual for Carnatic music. Apart from compilation of kritis of various composers, Pradarshini gives in a capsule of everything about how Carnatic music was sung about 150 years ago. The notations are written as simply as that of western music. It has explained every movement of the swaras. As Subbarama Dikshitar was a Vainika (veena player), he has explained the swaras as they are played through strings and the possible pitfalls while playing them on instruments. Diskhitar school of music follows the Venkatamakhin sampradaya of raga classification. Venkatamakhin has explained about this system in his work Chaturdandi Prakashika written in 17th century. But there is a gap between Venkatamakhin and Dikshitar's time. And Pradarshini bridges this gap and has a compilation of kritis of different schools of music. It has everything about a raga, the way to sing, time to sing, the important and rare prayogas of the raga and more. "We owe a lot to Subbarama Dikshitar for this magnificent work. It is important to preserve such very specific and scientific work for the future generation. The best way to preserve the work on music is 'audio archiving' it"

Is it easy to read the book? Who helps you in this project?

This is a mega project. It is not easy to 'read' the notations, because we tend to sing a kriti in a particular raga in the way we learnt the raga. To archive the Pradarshini, we need to 'read' and not 'interpret' the gamakas. It is a challenge to sing a kirtana, as per the notations of Pradarshini, which I already knew in a totally different form. Sriramkumar remembered Dr. R. S. Jayalakshmi who had done her thesis for Ph.D on the gamaka science of Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini. She has helped us. Also musicologist Dr. N. Ramanathan, who used to be Head of the Dept. of Music at Madras University who is a lover of Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini, for its enormous contents, helps us. Without both of them, we would not have kicked off this project.

Do you intend to archive the entire Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini?

Though my ambition is to record the full work, I realize that it will take years and years to complete it. Presently, we intend to archive 229 kritis of Muthuswamy Dikshitar in the first phase. This itself is a lot of work and will stretch up to even 5 years. We are doing it the mela order and have completed till Todi. Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini lists only a few of Dikshitar kritis, whereas many more kritis are attributed to Dikshitar. . Many say that Dikshitar has composed over 400 kritis and Pradarshini has only 229 of them. But this project is about recording Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini. It is just an audio image of the book. My musical knowledge or scholarship and any such issue of compositions by Dikshitar do not interfere in archiving the Pradarshini. I follow just what the book says!

Do you find any difference between the way the ragas are explained in the Pradarshini and are sung today?

The way of singing many ragas have changed. Rather evolved, I would say. Any change is bound by time. You cannot think of the form of raga Todi according to Pradarshini, today. It is difficult to accept the kriti 'Kamalambike' sung as per the notations given in Pradarshini. You would ask me, if it was Sindhu Bhairavi. According to me 'change' is a celebration of the human mind. Todi has developed a fabulous colour today!

What are the other ragas, you feel, have changed over the time?

Many ragas have changed. We are at the initial stage of 'learning' the Pradarshini. We find that ragas like Saurashtram, Saveri, Begada, Sahana and Bhairavi have changed. Can you imagine Bhairavi without Chatusruti daivatam today? According to Pradarshini, Bhairavi has only Shuddha daivatam.

The original version of Pradarshini is in Telugu. Do you know to read the language?

Sriramkumar can read Telegu. I use the Tamil translation published by the Music Academy. If there is difference between these two editions, we follow the original version. Language is not all that important here, because we read and use only the notations.

Do other musicians show interest in your work?

Many have enquired me about this project for it is important to know that music has changed. We have discussed about the changes during our conversations. When we talk about changes, we will definitely be comparing the quality of music of those days with the present day form. But it is important to understand that tradition is constantly changing, evolving, re-inventing itself.

Do you sing the compositions the way you learnt from Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini?

Yes, I do. But not all the kritis! The kriti in a rare raga like Phenadhyuti does not sound any different to the ears of a rasika. But definitely not popular kritis like 'kamalambike' in Todi. This project has helped me in gathering

knowledge about the changes in music. I leave it there!

How is the audio archival of Pradarshini useful for the rasikas of Carnatic music?

I am not sure of this. The audio recordings are not commercial releases. We are giving away the cassette to music colleges, department of music at various institutions and archival centers free of cost. We want our work to reach to those interested in the history of music. It is not meant for learning the kritis through the recording. Those who wish to buy the cassette for their knowledge will have to order through us.

Those who wish to buy the cassette can contact T. M. Krishna at 2A, 115, Sivaswamy Salai, Mylapore, Chennai. Email: tmkrishna@hotmail.com, jnanarava@gmail.com

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