

Information Technology meets Music Tradition: the English translation of Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini

One hundred years ago, it was the dream of A.M. Chinnaswami Mudaliar, an employee at the Chief Secretariat of the then-Madras government to bring out the treasures of Indian classical music in the English language. Though he did not live to see that dream fulfilled, his pioneering efforts bore fruit with the publication of the Telugu volume Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini in 1904 by Subbarama Dikshitar. Subbarama Dikshitar was the adopted son of Balaswami Dikshitar who was the brother of Muthuswami Dikshitar, one of the Trimurtis of south Indian Classical music. Convinced by Mudaliar to share the closely guarded musical heritage of his family with the world, Subburama Dikshitar was able to bring out this book thanks to the patronage of the kings of Ettayapuram, a small village belonging to the Vijayanagara empire, in present day Tuticorin district of Tamil Nadu.

The Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini contains over two hundred compositions of Muthuswami Dikshitar and other composers, and a sophisticated system of notating the different gamakas, which are the defining feature of ragas in south Indian classical music. It has served as a rich source of learning for musicians and music researchers for more than hundred years.

The Andhra Pradesh Sangita Nataka Akademi brought out a reprint of this great work in four volumes, edited by Sri. Rallapalli Ananthakrishna Sharma in 1979, but this reprint did not include the two appendices. The Music Academy subsequently released four volumes of the notations given in this work in Tamil along with the two appendices between the years 1961 and 1983.

In 2004, as part of the centenary year of the Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini, two music enthusiasts Vidya Jayaraman, an IT Consultant from Coimbatore, now living in USA; and Dr. P.P. Narayanaswami, a mathematics professor from Kozhikode, now living in Canada; began collaborating through e-mail on an English version of this work. The Vaggeyakara Caritram Section was translated and edited by Ms. Sandhya Vinjamuri from USA. Renowned musicologist Dr. N. Ramanathan and Vina Vidushi Dr. R.S. Jayalakshmi, both from Chennai, provided technical inputs for the work through e-mail. Several volunteers from across the world, connected by e-mail and internet chat, enthusiastically helped with the proofreading the English notation of the Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini.

This electronic version of this English translation was released at <http://ibiblio.org/guruguha/ssp.htm>, a digital library of free information on music, art, history, and science maintained by the University of North Carolina, USA.

More recently, a Kannada version was brought out by Dr. S. K. Ramachandra Rao and Sri. Anandarama Udupa, and published by the cultural organization, Ananya, in Bangalore in 2008.

Even though the translations of this book exist in Kannada, Tamil and English, the musicological sections ‘Sangita Lakshana Pracina Paddhati’, which deals with the ancient traditions of music and ‘Lakshana Sangraha’, a compendium of various topics on musicology that preceded the notations in the book had not been translated from the original Telugu until this year.

In 2010, veteran Chennai-based musicologist and musician Professor S.R. Janakiraman was approached by Dr. P.P. Narayanaswami and Vidya Jayaraman to help translate these sections along with critical commentary and formally complete the book in its entirety. There is yet another bit of history behind this choice, for it was Prof. S.R. Janakiraman and his teacher Brahmasri P.K. Rajagopala Iyer who had started working on translating this content for the Journal of the Music Academy, Madras, around 1989 under the leadership of Shri.T.S. Parthasarathy. That project was subsequently discontinued and it was indeed fitting that Prof. Janakiraman could resume this work after two decades. The original text from these sections was read out over the phone and over the internet, with Prof. Janakiraman providing the translation, critical commentary and a brief introduction to the work.

The work took final shape under the able editorial guidance of musicologist Prof. N. Ramanathan and Vina Vidushi Dr. R.S. Jayalakshmi. The first volume is now being released as a hard copy in order to meet the demands of students and scholars alike. It contains the Vaggeyakara Caritramu, Sangita Lakshana Pracina Paddhati, and Lakshana Sangraha and also includes the notations for the first six melas with the corrections from the errata section in the original Telugu text incorporated as in-place footnotes. The book is dedicated to the memory of A.M. Chinnaswami Mudaliar and is published by Dr.P.P. Narayanaswami and Vidya Jayaraman. It will be released at a formal function in Chennai on September 26, 2010.

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