

Carnatic music has a rich variety of compositions. It starts with the easier geethams. We have then the lakshana geethams, the lyrics of which explain the ragam in which they are set in. We have a progression of forms one more complex than the previous. Jathiswaras, Swarajathis, Tana varnams were set by Mudduswami dikshitar.

Mudduswami Dikshitar has composed several beautiful ragamalikas. Several of them are thematic. Notable among them are the dasavathara, kamalambika and chaturdasa ragamalikas. Dasavathara ragamalika, Rupakam - Madhavo mamavathu is set in ten ragas with chittai swaras. The ragas are Nata, Gaula, Sri, Arabhi, Varali, Kedaram, Vasantha, Surati, Saurashtram, Madhyamavati. Shath ragamalika, Rupakam - Kamalambika is set in Purnachandrika, Narayani, Saraswathi Manohari, Suddhavasantham, Hamsadhwani, Nagadhwani.

The grand Chaturdasa ragamalika - Sri Viswanatham bhajeham is set in fourteen ragas. It is interestingly split in two parts symbolising the chaturdasa bhuvanas or fourteen worlds as mentioned in the puranas. Structured wonderfully, the first six ragas from Sriragam to Mohanam continue in reverse order for half avarthanam each linking back to the pallavi in Sriragam. The second part starts with raga sama and continues with seven other ragas ending with bhoopalam. These also tie back to the pallavi proceeding in reverse order in half avarthanams. A piece of great majesty Dikshitar employs raga mudras beautifully. Some examples are Sri Viswanatham (Sri), Samasarabeethyabhaam (arabhi), Mohanakaralingam (Mohanam), Sama gana (Sama), Lalitha Hrudaya (Lalitha), chidakasa bhairavam (bhairavam), Sarangadaram (Saranga), Sankarabharanam, sath gathi daya kamboja charanam, vadaanya devakriya kelanam, Bhoopala palanam. Dikshitar also composed a mangala ragamalika Simhasanasthithi in rupaka tala in four auspicious ragas Sourashtram, Vasantha, Surati and Madhyamavathi.

The 72 Mela ragamalika of Mahavaidyanatha Sivan is a monumental composition, Pranatharthihara Prabho. This ragamalika starts in Sriragam with the pallavi, anupallavi, chittaswaram and a sublime solkattu jathi. The first ragam kanakangi is set into the lyric Kanakangya Ramaya Pooja for two lines, followed by one line of chittaswaram in kanakangi. Then there is a half avarthanam chittaswaram in kanakangi linked to a half avarthanam swaram in the next ragam Ratnangi. All 72 mela ragas follow this structure. The song features Kanakangi, Ratnangi, Ganamurthi, Vanaspathi, Manavathi, Tanarupi, Senavathi, Hanuma Todi, Dhenuka, Natakapiya, Kokilapiya, Rupavathi all with two lines of Sahityam and Chittaswaram. The later part of the chittaswaram leads to the next ragam. At the end of Rupavathi the 12th ragam, half avarthanam swaram is set in Sri and then the song merges into the pallavi in Sriragam.

In the same grammatical order all 72 mela ragas are sung as a ragamalika. After two chakras or 12 mela ragams half an avarthanam of Sriragam swaram followed by singing the pallavi is in common practice. This ragamalika is a comprehensive introduction to all the 72 mela ragas of the carnatic style rendered as Mahavaidyanatha Sivan's masterpiece.

Swathi Tirunal's ragamalika composition Pannakendra sayana in samskrit was made in praise of lord Padmanabha of Thiruvananthapuram. This song is also translated into telugu as Pannakaadreesa. The song is set with beautiful raga mudras. The other popular ragamalika by swathi tirunal Bhavayami Raghuramam was originally set in Saveri ragam. It was later converted to a ragamalika by Sri Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer and gained huge popularity.

In the post-trinity era we meet composer Mysore Vasudevachar who has to his credit the elegant tala-ragamalika featuring 35 talas. He also composed ragamalikas on the trinity of carnatic compositions, Shri Ramachandra on Thyagaraja swami and two other ragamalikas in praise of Muthuswamy Dikshitar and Shyama Sastri.

Ramaswamy Dikshitar will always be remembered for many of his magnificent lengthy ragamalikas. One such ragamalika is on Lord Venkateshwara in 48 ragams, beginning with the words manasa verutarula. Shivamohanashakti on Goddess Meenakshi of Madurai was set in 44 ragams another one Samajagamana ninnu was in 20 ragams. His masterpiece is perhaps the longest composition in the carnatic style, the leviathan Ashtottarashata ragatalamalika. The composition commences with the phrase Naatakaadi in 108 ragams and 108 talams. Amba ninnu neranammiti starting in Anandha bhairavi was composed by Chinnikrishna dasa. Seetarama Iyer has made a popular ragamalika Nithyakalyani. Arunachala kavi's ramanataka keerthanai Enakkun irupatham ninaikka is a lilting ragamalika with vast popularity on the concert platform. Krishna leela tarangini ragamalika Jaya Jaya gokula bala beginning in bhairavi was popular in yersteryear drama stages, well rendered by the famous S.G. Kittappa. Several dasar padams are sung as ragamalikas. Baaro Krishnaiyya and other dasar kritis were made famous by Smt. M.L. Vasanthakumari. Many were set to tune by Shri T.K. Govindarao.

Arabhimanam in tamil is also well known and was made by Thiruvalluvar Ramaswamy pillai. Many lighter ragamalikas exist in tamil. Ragamalika as a compositional form has gained many authors in the recent past by newer composers. Subramania Bharathiyar's verses set as ragamalikas abound. Some are Theerada vilaiyattu pillai popular in D.K. Pattammala's voice, chinnanchiru

kiliye by M.L. Vasanthakumari , Mannum imaiyamalai by M.S.Subbulakshmi and solla vallayo by Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer etc. Kannanidam eduthu solladi by ambujam krishna as well as several by periyasaamy thooran. Thanjavur Sankara Iyer has made a ranjani ragamalika featuring all ragas with ranjani in their name which is very well known.

Music lovers cannot forget the unique varnam set in ragamalika, the navaragamalika valachi vacchi. It consists of nine ragas which are kedaram, sankarabharanam, kalyani, begada, kambodi, yadukula kambodi, bilahari, mohanam and Sri. It is interesting to note that the composer has chosen to place allied ragas next to each other rather than contrasting ragas. For eg. Sankarabharanam and Kalyani have only one swara difference. Again Kambodi and Yadukula kambodi are a challenge to sing one after another. Bilahari and Mohanam generally not sung together have also been juxtaposed. It seems that the composer has made a deliberate attempt to make the varnam difficult to master. He has offered the student a useful exercise in bringing out miniscule differences between the allied ragas in succession.

We also find interesting varnams in gana ragas and the dwitiya gana ragas. The gana panchakam is Nata, Gowlai, Arabhi, Varali, Sri. The next four are Reeti gowlai, Narayan gowlai, Kedaram and Bowli. I have composed a varnam as a navaragamalika with the above ragas.

I have also composed ragamalikas in the priya ragams viz. karaharapriya, kokilapriya, ramapriya, shanmukhapriya, pasupathipriya, rishabhapriya, gayakapriya and rasikapriya. I have also explored ragamalikas themed with allied raga sets. Panchakalyani , Bhairavi thayai or the bhairavi mala set in bhairavi, natabhairavi, vasanthabhairavi, salakabhairavi, anadabhairavi, sindhubhairavi and ahirbhairav are examples. There is a manohari mala with devamanoohari, jayamanohari, saraswathimanohari and ramamanohari. Another special ragamalika is one on the panchabhootha sthalams of Lord Shiva. It is set as a ragatalamalika featuring two talas, misra chapu for the pallavi and Adi for the charanams. There is also a ragamalika thillana set in Vaasanthi, Hamsanandi and Madhuvanti.

Often times sankrit slokams or tamil viruttams, suitable verses in other languages are sung as ragamalikas without talam. In this type of rendering ragas should be chosen appropriate to the emotion and meaning of the words. In ragam tanam pallavis also it is now standard practice to sing suitable ragamalika kalpana swaras.

The ragamalika as a compositional form today may be presented anywhere in the concert

Ragamalikas

Written by Vidushi Suguna Purushottaman

schedule, as the starting song, the masterful main piece or as end pieces. It has continued as a vehicle of creative expression for the vaggeyakara from the days of the trinity and as a delight for listeners alike over generations.