PREFACE

“Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything.”

- Plato

Music is something that must be experienced – no amount of writing can ever do justice to the range of feelings we undergo when singing, performing or listening to music. And this is true across the world. As the poet Henry W. Longfellow said, “Music is the universal language of mankind”. That being said, music is still composed, codified and set to words differently in different parts of the world. In fact, each language has expressions which are peculiar to it and are often not adequately captured in other languages. For instance, the word ‘Guru’ is one such unique word. A Guru is not merely a teacher, or a preacher, but something far greater. This is conveyed by the following Sanskrit shloka from the Guru Stuti:

“Gurūr BrahmA gurūr Vishnu gurūr dēvō Maheswarā
Gurūr sākshāt parabrahmā tasmai śrī guravē namaha”

**Meaning**:  
The Guru is Brahma (The God of Creation)  
The Guru is Vishnu (The God of Sustenance)  
The Guru is Shiva (The God of Annihilation)  
My Salutation to such a Guru, who is verily the Supreme God

Another example is the word ‘Madi’ used in traditional Tamil Brahmin households which is very difficult to explain to a westerner, or

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even someone from another part of India, since it is so inextricably linked with the culture and life style of this community.

Some aspects of Indian music are so steeped in the ethos and environment of creation and practice that it is impossible to adequately or concisely convey the meaning using words from foreign languages such as English. So it is with Karnatic music – some concepts are best expressed in Tamil or other South Indian languages. A prime example of this is the word ‘vaggeyakara’ which is the synthesis of ‘vak’ + ‘geya’ + ‘kara’ i.e. literally meaning one who creates both words and music. There is no equivalent word for this in English where the lyricist or songwriter is different from the composer who sets the music. Another example is the Tamil term ‘Idam’ (also known as ‘Eduppu’) which denotes a variety of opening or starting places of a song or a particular phrase with reference to tala. There is no corresponding term available in English and even the correct technical term in Karnatic music ‘Graha’ is so rarely used by musicians that using any term other than ‘Idam’ or ‘Eduppu’ for this would detract from the readability of this document. Similar colloquial phrases that have been used in this thesis are the terms Oru kalai (or single kalai), Rendu Kalai (or double/two kalai), Arudi, Samam etc. for which there is no literal translation available in English. Another example is that of ‘Sundu viral ½ Idam’ which when translated to English as ‘half of the little finger’ sounds unmusical both to Indian and non Indian readers. This eduppu has been mentioned many times especially in relation to Tyagaraja kritis. In this thesis, the relevant phrases in Tamil and Sanskrit have been written within brackets and the various eduppus are depicted numerically as ¼, ½, ¾, 2/7, 3/7, 5/7 etc. Some other similar terms which have no English equivalent are kondukooti and odukkal chedukkal.
As this thesis examines the appropriateness of grouping Tyagaraja, Muthuswamy Dikshitar and Syama Sastri as the Karnatic music Trinity, these 3 composers together have been referred to as the Trinity (with a capital T) in keeping with the starting hypothesis. At the outset, it is important to mention that the salutation of Sri, Smt, Vidwan, Swami etc. has not been affixed before the names of all the composers in the interest of brevity and improving readability. In addition, the spelling of Karnatic music used throughout has been ‘Karnatic’ rather than Carnatic or Karnatak music which is also generally accepted spellings for the genre of South Indian Classical music.

**Diacritical Marks:** The transliteration of non-English words is unavoidable when writing about a subject as steeped in Indian languages as Karnatic music and hence, diacritical marks have been used to clarify the pronunciation wherever fragments or entire compositions have been reproduced in the text. However it would be counter-productive to transliterate each and every word into English due to the large number of vernacular terms, names and compositions specified in the text – the popular spellings would be more instantly recognizable than the ones with diacritical marks. The following words recur frequently in the text, so the diacritical marks are not indicated every time: raga, bhava, tala, sruti, sahitya, kala, varnam, sastra, alapana, Karnatic.

Because of the reference to the Tamil as well as the Sanskrit traditions popular spellings have been used in the following cases.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanskrit</th>
<th>English</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rāga</td>
<td>raga;</td>
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<td>Tāla</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pāṭāntara</td>
<td>patantaram;</td>
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<td>Śiva</td>
<td>Shiva;</td>
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<tr>
<td>Krūṣna</td>
<td>Krishna etc.</td>
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Hence in the thesis, there has been no attempt to be completely consistent with transliteration and both diacritical marks and popular spellings have been interchangeably used with the hope that ultimately the meaning and essence of the text is conveyed to most Indian readers. For instance, Dikshitar’s name has been written as Muthuswamy since that is a popular spelling for the name and easily understood by all. For the same reason also, consistency has not necessarily been maintained with regard to capitalising or italicising terms which are technical or are proper nouns like Kriti, Raga etc. Capital letters have only been used in instances where these words need to be highlighted or emphasised.

An additional point to note here is the various aspects of Kritis studied are so inter-related that the same topics or points may recur across several chapters – especially considering the chapters on General Comparison, Musical Forms, Decorative Angas and Individual Approach. For instance the same kriti may be touched upon when doing a general comparison, cited for its structure/sahitya in musical forms and decorative angas and then examined in-depth in the chapter analysing contributions in individual ragas.

And lastly, in the words of the writer Victor Hugo, “Music expresses that which cannot be put into words and that which cannot remain silent”. Given that, one can say that it is not possible to express music fully in words when writing or trying to describe it. Given this limitation, this thesis nevertheless dwells on some of the great treasures hidden in the compositions of Karnatic Vaggeyakaras while analyzing the Trinity’s claim to their designated nomenclature.

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