Karnatic music has been a subject of much study and research all over the world. Researchers have looked at it through different lenses and evolved their own notions of breaking down various components and facets which form this great art, to aid them in their understanding of it and develop their thought processes around interpretations of facts and phenomena. One of the most widely accepted views of Karnatic music is the classification of history into the pre-Trinity and the post-Trinity periods. While different musicologists have unearthed new and varied facets of the creative outpourings during different centuries, almost all of them have accepted this classification of periods into pre- and post-Trinity to nearly the same extent that the division of historical periods into the period before and after the death of Christ, i.e. BC and AD is accepted by historians around the world. Music in the 18th and 19th centuries enjoyed a lot of royal patronage and was also very spiritual in content. The Trinity composed music which was meant to show the path in the bhakti and gyana marga and was not intended to be used to obtain monetary benefit for the composer or musician.

For centuries now we have hailed Tyagaraja, Muthuswamy Dikshitar and Syama Sastry as the “Trinity” of Karnatic music. This thesis aims to make a detailed examination of the basis and justification for such a designation being conferred on the trio. Hence, all references to the ‘Trinity’ in this thesis refer only to these three composers and none other. As music is an oceanic subject and the topic of the Trinity itself has limitless possibilities and opportunities for study, it becomes desirable to define the framework within which this research is undertaken. While many thoughts expressed here may merit further exploration, they are dealt with here only to the extent of their immediate relevance to the point at hand.
The dictionary meaning of the word **appropriateness** is ‘the quality of being specially suitable’ or ‘appropriate conduct’, where ‘appropriate’ in this context is defined as ‘meant or adapted for an occasion or use’, ‘suitable and fitting’ and ‘suitable for a particular person or place or condition etc.’ The Oxford English dictionary defines the adjective appropriate as ‘being suitable or proper in the circumstances’ and the Merriam-Webster dictionary defines it as ‘especially suitable or compatible’. The term ‘appropriate’ when used as a verb can also mean to take (something) for one’s own use, typically without the owner’s permission (e.g. ‘he appropriated the plaintiff’s property’) or to devote (money or assets) to a special purpose. However, that is not the sense in which it has been used in this thesis and here the noun appropriateness is derived from the word adjective appropriate i.e. being suitable for a particular purpose or condition. For instance, ‘this is neither the appropriate time nor place’ or ‘a measure appropriate to an economic emergency’.

The term **grouping** refers to the ‘act or process of combining in groups’ where a group is a number of people or things that are located, gathered or classed together. Grouping, according to Wikipedia, is also defined as a form of hierarchical representation. The latter also defines groups as persons or things being in some relation to one another and even the briefest perusal of an encyclopaedia immediately throws up specific definitions of groups in different fields. For instance, groups in Mathematics are sets taken together with a binary operation satisfying certain algebraic conditions, in Chemistry they can be Functional groups (a functional entity consisting of certain atoms whose presence provides a certain property to a molecule) or Periodic table

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1 http://oxforddictionaries.com/
groups (a column in the periodic table of chemical elements e.g. a group of inert gases like helium, neon, argon etc). Similarly, there are groups in many other fields such as Biology, Cosmology, Sociology, Computing and Business, to name but a few.

In fact, the concept of grouping humans has been in existence since ancient times – the fourth chapter of the Bhagavat Gita cites the grouping of people into four classes based on their characteristics and purpose in life.

\[
\text{चातुर्वर्ण्य मया सृष्टं गुणकर्मविभागः} \\
\text{तस्य कर्तारस्मृति मो विद्विषकर्तारमल्यम्} \text{॥ ४-१३ ॥}
\]

**Meaning:** *The four divisions of human order were created by me according to differences in quality, activities and aptitude; although the creator of this, know me as the non-doer, being immutable*\(^2\)

While in India we largely followed this grouping of persons, the basis of grouping as well as the actual groups themselves may differ in other cultures. Thus the fact of grouping often while being indicative, need not be equally applicable across all values in a category. In this paper we will consider groups and the term grouping to be closest to the sociological definition of a peer group which is an informal primary group of people who share a similar or equal status and who are usually of roughly the same age, and have similar interests and backgrounds, bonded by the premise of sameness. In music itself, you can group the people who have contributed to music based on the nature of contributions e.g. singers, vaggeyakaras, composers (who have

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composed both the lyrics and set it to music), or based on different criteria like the period in which they lived, gender, geographic region, type of compositions etc. In the case of this research, we will specifically look at Tyagaraja, Muthuswamy Dikshitar and Syama Sastry in the group of composers, why they are held to be peers or rather, 'peerless' and whether any other composers should be included in this peer group.

To set the context for this study, it is first necessary to understand the significance of the term Trinity and what makes it a term conferring extraordinary distinction and merit. This is done by looking at various numbers and their significance in culture, mythology and history worldwide and used as the context for examining the uniqueness of the number three and especially the term Trinity i.e. a group of three people or things or the state of being three. This also lays the foundation for a later examination of the question, when examining the work of many other renowned composers, whether the grouping of our most celebrated composers should be restricted to only a Trinity or could this possibly be expanded to include more composers, making the group a Quartet or Quintet or something more or perhaps even less.

Following this is an exploration of various groupings in history, especially in music as well as other famous groupings involving the number three or the appellation of the Trinity.

Before embarking on the question of ‘appropriateness’, a study of the life and work of Tyagaraja, Muthuswamy Dikshitar and Syama Sastry is carried out taking into consideration a gamut of factors like musical contribution in terms of raga, decorative angas, sangatis, lyrics, language, content, grammar, gyana, tala, concert worthiness, student
following, comparison with predecessors and successors, impact on the future generations etc. The background is first set by providing an overview of the historical and political factors that led to the earmarking of the Trinity. This is followed by a general comparison of the three composers, with a brief biographical sketch followed by an overview of the number and type of compositions, raga exploration, tala and laya usage, style and spontaneity. In addition, a detailed analysis of their usage of various musical forms and decorative angas in their compositions is carried out in subsequent separate chapters.

In order to examine the question of appropriateness of earmarking these composers, it does not simply suffice to just study the characteristics of these three composers, but also look at other composers who were their predecessors, contemporaries and successors to see how the contributions of the Trinity to Karnatic music measure up in relation to the entire pantheon of composers in this field. Thus other noteworthy Karnatic music composers and their body of work have also been studied. It is relevant to note here that the late 18th century and early 19th century was a period of great creativity in music worldwide and saw the flowering of many composers—Mozart, Beethoven, Chopin, Haydn and Schubert, who were the stalwarts of the classical period of music in Europe and Tyagaraja, Dikshitar and Syama Sastry in South India. The fact that these great souls lived and worked in the same span of time in the same geographic area (Tanjore district of Tamil Nadu) might in itself have been the driving force for their designation as the Trinity of Karnatic music.

This thesis looks at the body of work of the Trinity and other composers at a general level and then goes on to analyse the individualistic approaches taken by each of these composers by
examining their work across several major ragas and carrying out critical appreciations of their compositions in different ragas. The ragas included in the detailed study are Todi, Shankarabharanam, Kalyani, Bhairavi, Kambhoji, Anandabhairavi, Dhanyasi and Saveri. The research finally concludes with a look at the present day situation and the impact of the various composers on music as it is taught and performed today. At this point it is pertinent to note that while the kriti form has remained unchanged in essence, from the times of the Trinity, there have been significant developments in other forms like varnams and thillanas in the 20\textsuperscript{th} and 21\textsuperscript{st} centuries. Composers like Sri Lalgudi Jayaraman, Dr.M.Balamuralikrishna and Prof. T.R.Subramanyam have experimented and brought great variety to these forms.

Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna has composed over 400 compositions in Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit which cover a variety of musical forms like Varnams, Javalis, Tillanas, Kritis and devotional songs. Apart from his innovation of new ragas like Ganapathi, Sarvashri, Mahati, Lavangi, Siddhi, Sumukham, Omkaari, etc. and innovation in talas like gatibhedam in the Sasabdhaakiya, he has also had great concepts in his kritis in already popular ragas like Todi, Gambhiranattai etc. For instance his varnam ‘Saraguna’ in Adi talam in Todi is replete with swaraksharas. In fact, the entire varnam itself does not use the panchama.

Sri Lalgudi Jayaraman is another contemporary composer who has left an indelible mark on Karnatic music through his musicianship. He has composed Tillanas in relatively less handled Desi ragas like Dvijavanti, Desh, Brindavani, Pahadi etc. His skillful interweaving of raga bhava with intricate rhythmical patterns and abundant use of Kanakku swaras, Srotovaha and Gopuchha yati patterns, Ragabhava sangatis and many complex and melodious rythmic patterns has captured the minds of musicians and rasikas for many decades now.
His contribution to these forms has really added on to what had been traditionally available with us.

Another contemporary composer who has scaled similar heights is Prof. T.R. Subramanyam. Apart from his distinct style and approach to Manodharma music and pallavi singing that he has inculcated in many performers of today, his contributions in terms of Kritis, Varnams and Tillanas is also revolutionary. Like Dr.Jayaraman, he has composed in unconventional rakti ragas like Behag, Misra Sivaranjani, Kapi, Brindavana Saranga, Dvijawanti, Hamir Kalyani and Varamu. Even his varnams in traditional ragas like Devagandhari or Atana are distinctly different from traditional compositions, with great care having gone into the choice of words, raga bhava and prayogas and rhythmical patterns.

However, it is interesting to note that despite many developments having been made in different musical forms after the Trinity, there has been no significant addition made to the Kriti form that was popularized by the Trinity in an almost missionary manner.

The intention of this study is not to arrive at a definitive judgment of whether the Trinity as it is, is the only possible grouping of composers. Music is an ocean with many islands, continents and archipelagos of composers – some may be greater in some aspects while being not as accomplished in some other aspects; some may have a vast body of work but others fewer but more choice compositions. Our endeavour will be to identify the greatest common denominator amongst renowned Karnatic composers, based on different factors like number and type of compositions, the sahitya and languages used, impact on succeeding generations etc to enable us to examine the appropriateness of the current grouping. For a dedicated student of music, such a journey through the compositions of great composers will not only broaden one’s knowledge – the journey itself
can be viewed as rewarding as the destination! The task of the researcher here is to understand what constitutes greatness and how great and diverse the works of different composers are. Though it has been attempted to make the analysis as objective as possible, in music as in all arts, aesthetic appreciation will always have an element of subjectivity.

Finally, the conclusions presented here are only the impression of the researcher after going through the work and literature of and upon the Trinity and the researcher does not purport to be an authority on the subject or insist that this is the view that others should adopt. It may possibly appear to a learned person reading this thesis that many crucial aspects that were relevant have been left out. This could be either due to the fact that this thesis strives to keep strictly to aspects concerning the immediate framework set out without straying into ancillary areas and topics and hence has left out things, which though relevant, could nevertheless not be accommodated into the thesis, given the constraints of time and length of the document. This is not intended to be a comprehensive review of everything that the Trinity or their contemporaries have done, but merely indicative to show the variety of great contributions they have made to Karnatic music.