

Evolution of Carnatic music- a series

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, last month, we took a look at one of the most important contributions bequeathed to India by the British viz. the violin and its role in assuming a prominent position in the field of Carnatic music. While Carnatic music has retained its pristine nature over the ages, at the same time, it has also imbibed the influence of cultures from all over the country as well as other parts of the world.

This week, we take a look at some of the other influences of the British Raj on Carnatic music. Instruments such as the piano and saxophone were among others popularized by the British though none of these instruments became as ubiquitous as the violin in Carnatic music. The famous Carnatic composers Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar as well as Sri Thyagaraja were both inspired by music of the western orchestra. Dikshitar was requested by the collector of Madras to compose Sanskrit texts for the famous European Airs. These compositions include "*Santatam Pahimam*" based on the tune of the British National anthem *God Save the Queen* and "*Shakti Sahitha Gaapathim*". Dikshitar also has composed several other verses in the Western C-major scale, which corresponds to the Carnatic *raga Shankarabharana*. These compositions all clearly have a western feel to the notes.

Similarly Thyagaraja also has compositions like "*Vara Leela Gana Lola*" that were clearly inspired by Western brass band tunes. Patnam Subramaya Iyer, a composer who lived in Madras (now Chennai) created the *raga Kadanakutuhalam* also inspired by British marching bands. His composition "*Raghuvamsa Sudha*" in this raga is a favorite among instrumentalists as well as audiences for its lively and upbeat notes. Several other Carnatic composers also have compositions that praised King George V as well as the Queen Mary.

Till we meet next time, do listen to the composition "*Raghuvamsa Sudha*" on the Internet. You will hear the Western influence in this composition as well as realize why this composition is so popular with instrumentalists. The veteran vocalist Sri Maharajapuram Santhanam has also rendered this composition in all its majestic beauty.

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