

NOTES ON SONGS

In the following pages notes are given for all the songs that Subbulakshmi will be rendering in her concert programmes in Europe and in the United Kingdom by S. RAMANATHAN (Professor of Musicology, Central College of Karnataka Music, Madras, recently Visiting Lecturer, Wesleyan University, Middletown, Conn. U.S.A.)

The gist and significance of the text of the songs are given by DR. V. RAGHAVAN.

Part I consists of the more austere and classical pieces. Part II contains songs in which devotion is more pronounced and songs in a lighter vein.

Each part is arranged in the chronological order of the composers.

PART I

Song 1 : ĀRTTAPIṬAVI

Language : Tamil

Composer : Māṇikkavācaka

Rāga : Śaṅkarābharaṇa

Ascent* : C D E F G A B c

Descent : c B A G F E D C

Tāla : Ādi—8 units (akṣaras) per rhythmic cycle. Beat + 3 finger counts + beat + wave of the hand + beat + wave of the hand.

In this song, Saint Māṇikkavācaka in the role of a maid in love of God, invites the other girls to a purificatory bath in the river, prior to worship.

Song 2 : RĀMA NANNU BRŌVARĀ

Language : Telugu

Composer : Tyāgarāja

Rāga : Harikāmbhōji

Ascent : C D E F G A B \flat c

Descent : c B \flat A G F E D C

Tāla : Rūpakam—3 units per rhythmic cycle. Beat + Beat + wave of the hand.

Here the composer pleads with the Lord that he is not beset with sins of vanity and haughtiness like others and asks the Lord why He does not come to his protection.

* The notes occurring in the various *rāgas* are given in terms of C D E F G A B. But C does not represent the C of the piano, but should be considered as the equivalent of the tonic note, chosen by the musician. The small c denotes the octave.

Song 3 : EVARIMĀṬA

Language : Telugu

Composer : Tyāgarāja

Rāga : Kāmbhōji

Ascent : G D E F G A c

Descent : c B♭ A G F E D C

Tāla : Ādi—same as item 1

This song is set in a mood of despondent appeal. Tyagaraja pleads to the Lord placing his faith and belief in His sense of fairness and concern for devotees.

Song 4 : KṢIṆAMAI

Language : Telugu

Composer : Tyāgarāja

Rāga : Mukhāri

Ascent : C D F G B♭ A c

Descent : c B♭ A♭ G F E♭ D C

Tāla : Ādi—same as item 1

The idea in this piece is that : and miraculous achievements are short-lived ; only devotion to the Lord confers real and lasting status.

Song 5 : NINUVINĀ NĀMADENDU

Language : Telugu

Composer : Tyāgarāja

Rāga : Navarasakannaḍa

Ascent : C E F G c

Descent : c B_b A F E D C

Tāla : Rūpakam—same as item 2

The composer pours out his experience of God's omnipresence.

Song 6 : NIDHI CĀLA SUKHAMĀ

Language : Telugu

Composer : Tyāgarāja

Rāga : Kalyāṇi

Ascent : C D E F[#] G A B c

Descent : c B A G F[#] E D C

Tāla : Miśra Cāpu—7 units per rhythmic cycle consisting of 2 unequal divisions (3+4).

In this song the composer poses the question : "Which is greatly conducive to happiness—wealth, or the state of being near Rāma? Which is better, flattering conceited men, or singing the praise of Rāma?"

The song suggests that only service to Rāma is the greatest wealth.

Song : 7: KALIGIYUNṬE

Language : Telugu

Composer : Tyāgarāja

Rāga : Kīravāṇi

Ascent : C D Eḥ F G Aḥ B c

Descent : c B Aḥ G F Eḥ D C

Tāḷa : Adi—same as item 1

‘Good can come to one only if he deserves it by past merit,’ says the composer.

If he has not received the grace of Rāma in abundant measure, it only means that he is not devoted to God like the great devotees of yore.

Song 8: HARIHARAPUTRAM

Language : Sanskrit

Composer : Muttusvāmi Dikṣita

Rāga : Vasanta

Ascent : C F E F A B c

Descent : c B A F E Dḥ C

Tāḷa : Khaṇḍa Ēkam—5 units per rhythmic cycle. Beat+4 finger counts.

A devotional song on the deity Śāsta, worshipped at the famous hill-shrine Śabarimalai in Travancore.

Song 9 : KAṆJADALĀYATAKṢI

Language : Sanskrit

Composer : Muttusvāmi Dikṣita

Rāga : Kamalamanōhari

Ascent : C E F G B c

Descent : c B A_♭ G F E C

Tāla : Ādi—same as item 1

In this composition Dikṣita extols the greatness of Kāmākṣī, the mother-goddess in the temple at Kāñcīpuram.

Song 10 : SARŌJADALĀNETRI

Language : Telugu

Composer : Śyāma Śāstri

Rāga : Śaṅkarābharaṇa

Ascent : C D E F G A B c

Descent : c B A G F E D C

Tāla : Ādi—same as item 1

The composer here affirms his faith in Goddess Mīnākṣī enshrined in the famous City of Madurai and appeals to Her to come to his rescue as She has earned a fame for protecting the supplicant.

Song 11 : SĀRASĀKṢA

Language : Sanskrit

Composer : Svāti Tirunāḷ

Rāga : Pantuvarāḷi

Ascent : C D♭ E F# G A♭ B c

Descent : c B A♭ G F# E D♭ C

Tāla : Ādi—same as item 1

In this song the royal composer prays to Lord Viṣṇu incarnated as Padmanābha in Trivandrum and praises His qualities and glory.

Song 12 : ĒRĀ NĀPAI (Varṇam)

Language : Telugu

Composer : Paṇṇam Subrahmaṇya Aiyar

Rāga : Tōḍi

Ascent : C D♭ E♭ F G A♭ B♭ c

Descent : c B♭ A♭ G F E♭ D♭ C

Tāla : Ādi—same as item 1

Varṇams in Karnāṭak music are like studies of a rāga. They bring out the essential features of a rāga and are good opening pieces for recitals. In the melodic exercise of a Varṇam, a small love theme is inlaid, although the few words of this theme are always lost in the flood of the music. The words in this Varṇam depict a lady remonstrating against her lover, Lord Vēṅkaṭēśvara, that it is not proper for Him to ill-treat her as a result of lending His ears to a rival lady.

Song 13 : BRŌCĒVĀRŪ

Language : Telugu

Composer : Mysore Vāsudēvācār

Rāga : Khamās

Ascent : C F E F G A B♭ c

Descent : c B♭ A G F E D C

Tāla : Ādi—same as item 1

A submission to Lord Rāma that there is none but Him to protect the devotee. The composer prays to the Lord to remove all his sins and anxieties, bless him and never abandon him.

Song 14 : KĀ VĀ VĀ

Language : Tamil

Composer : Pāpanāśam Śivan

Rāga: Varāḷi

Ascent : C D♭ E♭ F♯ G A♭ B c

Descent : c B A♭ G F♯ E♭ D♭ C

Tāla: Ādi—same as item 1

In a plaintive mood the composer appeals to God Kumāra (son of Śiva) enshrined in the Hills of Paḷani to come and protect him.

PART II

Song 15 : ŚIVA ŚIVA ŚIVA BHŌ

Language : Sanskrit

*Composer : Jayachāmarāja Wāḍiyār, His
Highness the Mahārāja of Mysore*

Rāga : Nādarāmakriya

Ascent : C D♭ E F G A♭ B

Descent : B A♭ G F E D♭ C

*Tāla : Miśra Jhampa—10 units per
rhythmic cycle. Beat+6 finger counts+
Beat+Beat+wave of the hand.*

This song recalls the transcendental qualities and sports of Śiva and conveys the composer's moving plea for the absolution of all sins.

Song 16 : VAḌAVARAIYA

Language : Tamil

Composer : Iḷaṅgōvaḍigal

*Rāga : The six stanzas are rendered in six
rāgas.*

Tāla : Ādi—same as item 1

This is a selection from the Tamil Epic *Silappadikāram*, "Lay of the Anklet." In the original, these stanzas are sung by cowherd-lasses. It extols the sports and exploits of Lord Viṣṇu in His incarnations, contrasting His transcendent greatness with the ease and grace with which He did the small things out of affection for the devotees. The poet says : 'The ear that does not hear His praise, the eye that does not see His form, the tongue that does not sing His name, are not worth their name.'

Song 17 : MUḌIYONṚI

Language : Tamiḷ

Composer : Periyālvār

Rāga : The four stanzas are rendered in four different Rāgas.

Tāḷa : Ādi—same as item 1

In this selection of four verses, the Saint expresses the joy of singing of the Lord. He sings here in alternate verses the glory and grace of the Lord in His two leading incarnations, Rāma and Kṛṣṇa, of His chastising the wrong-doers and His blessing the good and the devout.

Song 18 : BHAJARE BHAIYĀ

Language : Hindi

Composer : Kabīrdās

In this Bhajan, Kabīrdās says that neither money nor austerities are of avail and only the recitation of the name of Viṣṇu in His aspects of Rāma and Kṛṣṇa gives eternal happiness.

Song 19 : MÖRĒTŌ GIRIDHARA

Language : Hindi

Composer : Mīra

In Mōrētō, one of Mīra's most moving songs, she says there is none beside Kṛṣṇa for her. She has tended the creeper of her love for Kṛṣṇa with tears for water. The Lord should not forsake her.

Song 20 : HARĪ TUMĀ HARŌ

Language : Hindi

Composer : Mīra

In this song Mīra recounts the various sports of Lord Viṣṇu when He came down to this earth to alleviate the sufferings of His devotees. The refrain of the song is : 'Oh Lord, take away pain from mankind.'

Song 21 : HARI ĀVAN KĪ ĀVĀZ

Language : Hindi

Composer : Mīra

In this song Mīra tells that she verily heard the footsteps of her Lord. It is the rainy season and the birds of song and dance are all joyous. Every minute the fields take a new hue of green. So also should the King of kings come as a shower and breathe new life into Mīra.

Song 22 : CĀKARA RĀKHŌ

Language : Hindi

Composer : Mīra

This Bhajan shows us Queen Mīra longing for the post of a maid-servant in the Lord's arbour. She quietens her mind, "Be patient. The Lord who is as deep as the seas will certainly turn up on the banks of the river of Love".

Song 23: JAGADĀDDHĀRAṆA

Language : Kannaḍa

Composer : Purandaradāsa

Rāga : Kāpi

Ascent : C D F G B c

Descent : c B \flat A B \flat G F E \flat D C

Tāla : Ādi—same as item 1

A song on the Lord in His incarnation as a child among the cowherds of Bṛndāvan on the Jumna. The composer brings out the contrast between the child and the Supreme Being. The reflection is expressed through mother Yaśōda who rocks the divine child in the cradle.

Song 24 : BRŪHI MUKUNDETI

Language : Sanskrit

Composer : Sadāśiva Brahmēndra

Rāga : Kurañji

Ascent : C D E F G A

Decent : A G F E D C B

Tāla : Ādi—same as item 1

The Saint calls upon his tongue to go on uttering the many sacred names of the Lord.

Song 25 : RAṄGAPURAVIHĀRA

Language : Sanskrit.

Composer : Muttusvāmi Dīkṣita

Rāga : Bṛndāvana 'Sāraṅga

Ascent : C D F G B♭ c

Descent : c B♭ G F D C

Tāla : Rūpakam—same as item 2

A song on Raṅganātha, a form of Lord Viṣṇu, reclining on the serpent-couch.

Song 26 : ŚAMBHŌ MAHĀDĒVA

Language : Tamil

Composer : Nīlakaṇṭha Śivan

Rāga : Bauli

Ascent : C D♭ E G A♭ c

Descent : c B A♭ G E D♭ C

Tāla : Rūpakam—same as item 2

This composition is a fervent prayer to Śiva for the expiation of one's sins. The song is prefaced by a similar prayer of Śaṅkarācārya in Sanskrit.

Song 27 : TILLĀNA

Language : Telugu

Composer : Mysore Viṇā Śēṣappa

Rāga : Śēṇcuruttā

Ascent : C D E F G A

Descent : B♭ A G F E D C

Tāla : Dēśādi—4 units per rhythmic cycle.
Wave of the hand+3 beats.

Tillānas are pieces intended for dancing. The text contains mostly drum syllables, with a few solfa syllables, and also a few meaningful words at end.

Song 28 : NENCUKKU NITIYUM

Language : Tamil

Composer : Subrahmanya Bhārati

Rāga : Sindhu Bhairavi

Ascent : C E♭ F A♭ B♭ c

Descent : c B♭ A♭ G F E♭ D♭ C

Tāla : Ādi—same as item I

The national poet Bhārati who sang numerous patriotic songs in Tamil was an ardent devotee of the Supreme Mother Goddess Śakti. He prays to the Divine Mother to bestow on earth a sense of justice, valour, universal goodwill and the gift to sing Her glory.

Song 29 : HĒ NŪTAN

Language : Bengālī

Composer : Rabindranāth Tagore

‘Hē Nūtan’ is an invocation to the New, the ever unfolding wonder of life which the poet first experienced when he was born and which constantly recurs in ever new visions. Addressing this New, the poet says: “Come out like the sun through the mist, and piercing the bottom of emptiness, reveal yourself. Express the victory that is life and the constantly new marvel of the Infinite which you secretly hold. My heart responds to the conch blowing in the eastern horizon—a call to the ever New.”

Song 30 : YAD ĀVĒ

Language : Hindi

Composer : Rehna Tyābji

This is a composition of the living poetess Rehna Tyābji, an ardent disciple of Mahatma Gandhi. Though a Muslim by birth, she recalls here the divine and human sports of young Kṛṣṇa around the banks of Yamuna and amidst the groves of Bṛndāvan.



Lord and Lady Harwood in the home of Sadasivam and Subbulakshmi