

GEOGRAPHY AS MELODY IN MUTTUSVAMI DIKSHITA'S INDIAN MUSICAL WORKS*

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ABSTRACT. The life and works of Muttusvami Dikshita (1775–1834), a luminary of South Indian Karnatak classical music, abound in spatiocultural symbolisms of integration and harmony. Dikshita's peregrinations symbolize a cultural circuit of Hindu pilgrimage. His studies of North Indian Hindustani music at Varanasi (formerly Benares), and his transplantation of them throughout South India, make him an active agent of cultural diffusion, harmonizing cultural traditions through spatiosymbolic anchors. The religious expression of his musical genius, his songs, and his melodies contributed to linking linguistically and politically disparate regions of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century India. The works of Dikshita affirm India's cultural continuity and underscore its enduring cultural empathies and similarities. *Keywords:* cultural diffusion, Muttusvami Dikshita, India, music.

Lord of the Universe, You who are situated in Kashi [Varanasi], come, bless me. . . . Like the region of Kashi, You bestow many boons. . . . O Deity, by the grace of the itinerant teacher, You are seen.

—Muttusvami Dikshita, quoted Shrinivasan 1996 [our translation]

Scant attention has been accorded the intersection of geography and music. The pioneering effort was by Peter Nash, who explored the geography of music across a global canvas (1968). Later, Martin Monkman offered a detailed look at geography and music pertaining to classical and popular Western musical styles (1992), and American country and popular music remain grist for the mill of George Carney (2002). Rolf Sternberg discussed the links of music and geography in the case of the “footloose” composer-conductor Wilhelm Richard Wagner, whose travels saw vivid expression as place experience in his librettos, orchestrations, and opera staging (1998).

The paucity of studies that explore the ties between geography and music is even more signal when the music being considered belongs to non-Western cultures. Cultural geographers and anthropologists have long agreed that the spatiocultural symbolisms of integration and harmony, especially in the context of large, complex non-Western societies, are inherently meaningful, but these cases tend to be little known beyond tight cultural bounds. Such exemplars should instead be part of the collective heritage of global cultural geography, if the discipline is to escape being mired in its currently dominant Western tradition. In this article we examine geographical themes in the musical works of Muttusvami Dikshita (1775–1834), a famous itinerant composer of classical South Indian Karnatak music.

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