

**Ooththukkād Venkata Subbaiyer's
Kāmākshi Navāvaranam - A Study**

**Proposal submitted to
Sree Sankarāchārya University of Sanskrit, Kālady**

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1. Title of the Project: Ooththukkād Venkata Subbaiyer's Kāmākshi Navāvaranam - A Study

2. Abstract:

As the title suggests, these krithis are in praise of Goddess Kāmākshi, the presiding deity of Kānchipuram Temple. Navāvarana literally means nine veils of enclosure from Bhupura to Bindu Sthāna. For over a thousand years in India, the worship of Devi has taken the form of worship of the Sri Chakra; the divine yantra. As per this mandala, Sri Lalitha Tripura Sundari is seated at the central point of the Sri Chakra and nine āvaranā-s, nine chakra-s and nine yogini-s lead up to her. Venkatakavi is reputed to have got initiation into Āvarana Pooja from none other than Bhaskararāya, who is considered to be next to Adi Sankara in the subject of Devi Upāsana. Bhaskararāya was a celebrated authority on the philosophy and practice of Tantra Sāstra, especially on the Sri Vidya Upāsana.

The word Navāvarana is very familiar to Sakthi upāsakās and the lovers of Carnatic music. The latter associate with it the celebrated Navāvarana Krithis of Muthuswāmi Dikshitar. Decades before Muthuswāmi Dikshitar's āvarana krithis, Ooththukkād Venkata Subbaiyer composed a set of krithis in Sanskrit known as Kāmākshi Navāvarana Krithis. The Kāmākshi Navāvarana Krithis are the most esoteric set of krithis based on the theme of Srividya, that was composed first. The intricate details mentioned and described with great felicity by the composer right from the opening invocation - Sri Ganeshwara - to the last piece in Punnāgavarāli prove that his knowledge in this area was very high indeed. Venkatakavi knew the intricacies of worship through mantra, yantra and tantra and other aspects of Devi worship, though his ishta devatha was Lord Krishna. These krithis numbering 14 (there are alternative krithis for 6th and 9th āvaranās), were divinely inspired and exemplary pieces for both lakshya and lakshana values.

Sree Ganeshwara in Shanmukhapriya is the opening piece in the set. In the Pallavi lines itself he has brought out the words Srividyaopāsana Bhodakara, making it very clear that this composition belongs to this set of Navavarana Krithis. Venkatakavi's krithis are replete with madhyamakāla sanchārās. For instance, the Devi Dhyāna Krithi in Raga Kalyāni is a colourful example of krithi where he switches back and forth from normal speed to madhyamakālam. The emotional appeal of these compositions and the intricacies of rhythm are noteworthy features.

3. Objective and scope of the project

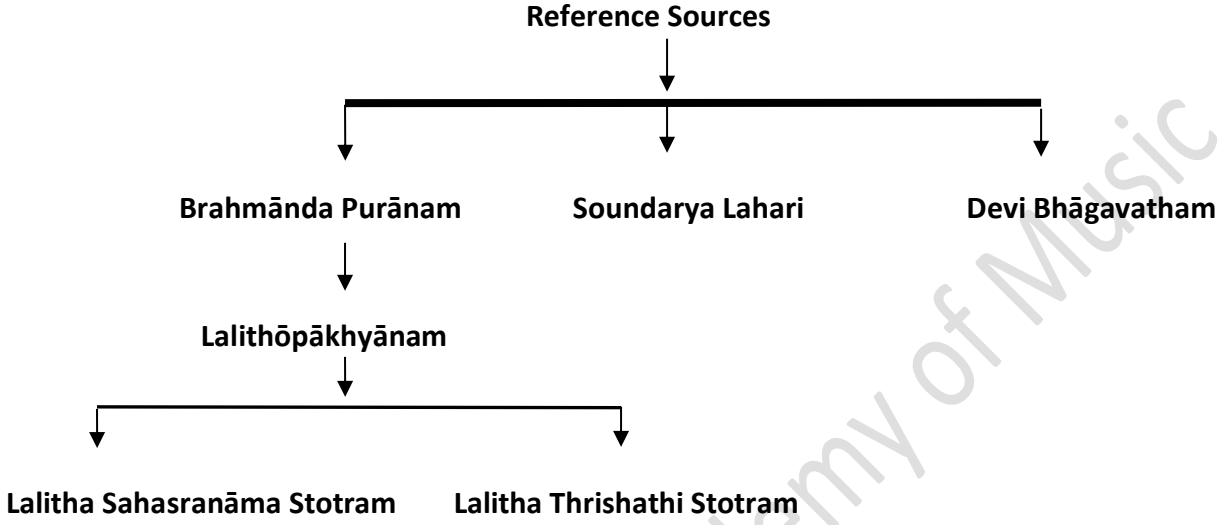
The objective of this work is to bring out the **Intellectual, Aesthetic, Philosophical, and Spiritual Aspects** in addition to **Structural, Musical, Literary and Thematic Analysis** of these compositions. It also highlights the following.

- How the composer bring out the concept of Sri Chakra and its different aspects
- The description of Āvaranas
- The essence of Srividya Upāsana, Sri Chakra Rahasya and the Navāvarana method of worshipping mother goddess.
- How the composer draws inspiration from or relate his work to our rich heritage by quoting directly from Lalithā Sahasranāmam which is a text in Brahmānda Purānam, Taitthariya Upanishad and rare instances of Lalithōpākhyānam, Lalithā Thrishathi, Soundarya Lahari, Srimad Devi Bhāgavatham and many other such purānic sources, using different lyrical expressions.

Another objective of this study is to compare and contrast the two sets of Navāvaranams, namely, Kāmākshi Navāvaranams by Venkatakavi and Kamalāmba Navāvaranams by Muthuswāmi Dikshitar in a brief manner. These monumental creations of the great vāggeyakaras reflects their philosophy, proficiency in Samskritham and their erudition in Sangeetham, Sāhityam and Tālam along with devotion, intellect and a soul that was in a state of spiritual bliss. The prāsa and other prosodic refinements in the krithis testify their command over the language and gift of poesy.

These composers were not just familiar with purānic texts but have deeply internalized their content and spirit and reproduced them in their Āvarana Krithis. In order to convey the great divine truths to the common man in a simple straight forward way, Venkatakavi first composed Kāmākshi Navāvaranams. Muthuswāmi Dikshitar, probably inspired by these Kāmākshi Navāvarana krithis, later composed Kamalāmba Navāvarana Krithis. Both the vāggeyakaras combined the music and meaning and elevated the krithis to an exalted plane. The singing of these krithis is nothing but worship systematised by the rhythmic meters or talas, unfolding the beauty of rāgās along with the scholarly lyrics thus presenting a fleeting glance of Srividya Cult.

4. Primary Source of References directly found in the krithis



5. Aim of the Project

Aim of this work is to introduce and popularize Kāmākshi Navāvarana Krithis among common people in general and musically inclined souls in particular. As part of this project, it is proposed to release a CD that contains the audio lessons of Kāmākshi Navāvaranams, supported with notations.

The Krithis are as follows.

Sl.No.	Song	Rāga	Tāla	Remarks
1	Sri Ganeshwara	Shanmukhapriya	Adi	Vināyaka stuthi
2	Vānchayasi yedi kushalam	Kalyāni	Adi	Dhyāna stuthi
3	Santatam aham seve	Desākshi	Adi	1st āvaranam
4	Bhajaswa sri tripura sundari	Nādanāmakriya	Adi	2nd āvaranam
5	Sarva jeeva dayāpari	Shuddhasāveri	Misra Chappu	3rd āvaranam
6	Yogayogeshwari	Anandabhairavi	Khanda Triputa	4th āvaranam
7	Neela lohita ramani	Balahamsa	Khanda Dhruvam	5th āvaranam
8	Sadānandamayi	Hindolam	Sankeerna Matyam	6th āvaranam
9	Sakala loka nāyike	Arabhi	Adi	7th āvaranam
10	Shankari sri Rajarajeshwari	Madhyamāvati	Adi	8th āvaranam
11	Natajana kalpa valli	Punnāgavarāli	Adi	9th āvaranam
12	Haladharānujam	Manirangu	Adi	Phala stuthi

6. Chapterisation

The entire project is thought to be divided into the following chapters in the initial stage.

- **Chapter 1 - Introduction**
- **Chapter 2 - Sree Chakram - A Note on Tantra and Yantra Sāstra**
- **Chapter 3 - Biography of Ooththukkād Venkatakavi and Muthuswāmi Dikshitar**
- **Chapter 4 - Kāmākshi Navāvaranams and its key features**

- 4.1 Introductory note to explain the salient features of the Sāhityam.
- 4.2 Text of the Sāhityam transliterated in English
- 4.3 Meaning of the Krithi
- 4.4 Structural Analysis of the krithi
- 4.5 Musical Analysis of the Krithi and Specialty in the rhythmic structure, Kalai change and Gathi Change within the composition
- 4.6 Literary / Prosodical Beauty figured in the compositions
- 4.7 Usage of Manthra Syllables and Chakra names and the purānic sources referred by the composer
- 4.8 Comparing /Contrasting Kāmākshi Navāvaranams with that of Muthuswāmi Dikshitar's Kamalāmba Navāvaranams

- **Chapter 5 - Conclusion**

7. Hypothesis

These garland of songs can be amazingly related to several Purānās, Upanishads and ancient treatises. This research project humbly begins with the hypothesis that the Kāmākshi Navāvaranams can bring into focus the ancient purānās from which the composer has coined in various phrases and words. Secondly, how the composer has connected the meters used in Sanskrit with the inbuilt rhythmical structure in the musical setting of these krithis.

8. Phases of the Project

This work is to be accomplished in the following phases:

- Collection of data sources namely printed books, articles and journals pertaining to these āvarana krithis
- Collection of Audio sources of Kāmākshi Navāvaranams and Lecture Demonstrations.
- Meeting musicians who are familiar and well versed with these āvarana krithis and enquiring their insight about these compositions
- Transcription into musical notation
- Preparation of final product – Book & CD
- Evaluation and publication
- Popularising the product amongst musicians and music lovers.

9. Implications

Not many studies have examined the in-depth analysis of Kāmākshi Navāvaranams within the musical fraternity. Such an analysis will throw more light into the Srividya Cult and Upāsana by singing these Āvarana Krithis.

Navāvarana pooja is the form of worshipping Goddess in the form of Sri Chakra. The Tantra Sāstra says that the worship of any deity can be conducted in Sri Chakra, as this is the foundation, basis and continent for all other chakras. The Navāvarana pooja forms the mantric-tantric ritualistic part of Devi worship, associated with the Sri Chakra. Sri Chakra is the most auspicious one that does the highest good for the devotees. That's the reason for the installation of Sri Chakra in centres of worship. Achārya Sankara is celebrated for arranging such installations in the centres of worship he visited during his digvijaya yātra.

Unlike Navāvarana pooja, rendering the Navāvarana krithis do not need any initiation. Anyone who has learned these krithis can sing them. And if that person has an understanding of the meaning of the krithis, particularly the significance of the terms and expressions used therein, he/she will have an elevating experience. These Navāvarana krithis have a four-fold excellence. They are melodiously captivating, poetically superb, musically well-structured and morally elevating. The rhythmic structure in compositions are very unique bringing in variety of talas from simple Adi Tālam to complex Tālas like

Khanda Dhruvam, Sankeerna Matyam, and Khanda Triputa. In addition to this there is Kalai /Gathi change in a couple of these krithis.

Use of meters is one of the significant contributions of Venkata Kavi to Carnatic compositions. For instance, the krithi Neelalohitharamani in Rāga Balahamsa, is set to Khanda Dhruva Tālam. Khanda Druvam that has 17 units, can be related to the Sikharini Meter used in Soundaryalahari Stotram of Adi Sankara. There is no doubt that Venkata Kavi's Navāvarana krithis blend intellectual, aesthetic, rhythmic, lyrical, esoteric and spiritual aspects in a manner that uplifts musicians, students and music lovers as well as practitioners of Sri Chakra worship.

The Navāvaranams ultimately exemplifies the Shiva Sakthi Aikyam. Special reference is made to the Bindu Chakra - the Sarvānandamaya Chakram where HER Majesty Mahā Tripurasundari resides with HER Consort as Kameswara and Kameswari. The concept advaita bhāvana or Aham Brahmāsmi were duality merges to Pure Consciousness is reflected in this Chakra.

Siva and Sakthi are like the lamp and the light, the flower and its fragrance, honey and its sweetness, milk and its whiteness, word and its meaning, Sun and its heat, Moon and the moonlight, grain and oil etc. They exist together. The bottom line is we cannot separate milk from its whiteness or flower from its fragrance. Similarly in all aspects of Sakthi, Sivam has to be present. A very sincere upāsaka will experience this bliss within himself/herself by meditating on these Āvarana krithis.

10. References

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