



Abstract

Oktoēchos of the Syrian Orthodox Churches in South India

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The system of classifying melodies in an eight-week cycle in the liturgy of the Syrian Orthodox churches, known as *oktoēchos* ("eight voices"), took final shape in Syria and Palestine by the eighth century. As a result of the ecclesiastical relation between a section of the St. Thomas Christians in South India and the Antiochene Church, the system came to be introduced in Kerala, progressively from 1751 to 1876. Since then, this strictly vocal, monodic, and mostly syllabic style of music has taken a life of its own in its new home, where it is designated as *eṭṭuniṟam* or *eṭṭurāgam*, meaning "eight colors." Since the 1960s, the melodies of *eṭṭuniṟam* are sung both in the original Syriac texts and in their translations in Malayalam, the local language. This article examines the application of the concept of 'color' to an aggregate of musical characteristics intended to generate aesthetic and emotive effects in the practitioners. *Eṭṭuniṟam* is an example of a musical system that has explicit theory (as opposed to implicit theory in many folk music traditions) and yet falls outside the realm of the classical music discourse in India.

(Author)