

Śrī Muttuswāmy Dīkshitar's Compositions on Goddess Saraswatī

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Abstract: Music is perhaps the finest of the fine arts and Indian classical music stands out to be a crest jewel in the world of music. This is due to the enormous contribution of the musicians, musicologists and composers. This paper gives a description of the compositions on Goddess Saraswatī composed by Śrī Muttuswāmy Dīkshitar, one of the great saint composers of Karnāṭak Music and his portrayal of Goddess Saraswatī as depicted in Vedas and other ancient scriptures. It briefly describes some of the unique features and musical nuances found in his compositions on Goddess Saraswatī. Dīkshitar has composed eleven kritis on Goddess Saraswatī in Sanskrit. These compositions describe her beauty, attributes, iconography and geographical details of the temples and also her relationship with other deities. The author has also made an attempt to touch upon some of the important philosophical and musical aspects in the kritis through few examples. The understanding of Dīkshitar's kritis with respect to philosophical and musical aspects can make a performer aware of the lyrical and musical intricacies, thereby leading to perfect rendition. The kritis are also a base for better understanding of the rāgas propounded by Venkaṭamakhi, which are rarely in vogue at present and Dīkshitar is the only composer to have followed Venkaṭamakhi's Asampoorna Meḷa paddhati.

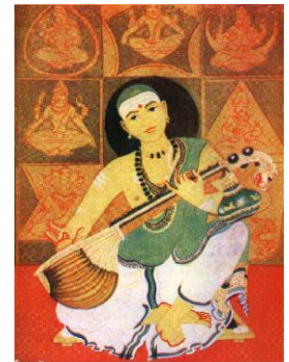
Key words: Karnāṭak Music, Goddess Saraswatī, Śrī Muttuswāmy Dīkshitar.

I. Introduction

Ancient scholars authenticated art as the way to attain wisdom. Among all art forms, fine arts can educate and reach the mankind faster than a language. Music occupying the primordial position among fine arts carries more responsibilities in depicting and representing *Bhārātīya Samskr̥ti* or the culture of India which is based on the texts of *Shruti* and *Smriti*. These texts not only preach the path of self-discipline and self-realization, but also the different paths of *Jñāna* or knowledge, *Karma* or action and *Bhakti* or devotion. Its ultimate goal is to attain *Moksha*. These principles are predominant in Classical music. *Vāggeyakāras* or composers of classical music incorporated the essence of *Vedas* and *Upanishads* as the prime values in their compositions which resulted in philosophy and spirituality as inseparable components of Indian classical music. Since ancient times, many musicians, musicologists and composers have been contributing to the development of Indian Music, thereby uplifting the philosophical and spiritual culture of India. Composers, blending this concept with aesthetic excellence, brought out many kritis, which are even to this day considered to be the finest gems of Karnāṭak music. Especially, during the eighteenth century, the contribution of music trinity viz, Śrī Shyāmā Shāstry, Śrī Tyāgarāja and Śrī Muttuswāmy Dīkshitar, brought out a drastic and radical improvement in karnāṭak music which created a landmark in the history. Hence their period is marked as the golden age in the history of Karnāṭak Music.

Śrī Muttuswāmy Dīkshitar (1775 A.D – 1835 A.D)

Śrī Muttuswāmy Dīkshitar is the youngest among the trinity and has composed hundreds of compositions incorporating *Guruguha* as his *ankita* or signature. His compositions include group kritis like *Shoḍasha Gaṇapati kritis*; *Kamalāmba*, *Abhayāmba* and *Neelōtpalāmba Navāvaraṇa kritis*; *Tyāgarājaswāmy* and *Guruguha Vibhakti kritis*; *Navagraha kritis* and *Pancha linga kshetra kritis*. Dīkshitar, being proficient in *Vedas*, *Upanishads*, *Purāṇas*, *Āgama*, *Mantra* and *Tantra Shastras* with a sound knowledge of Sanskrit, is credited with heavy and scholarly compositions filled with philosophical aspects. His expertise in *Jyotiṣhya* or astrology can be seen in *Navagraha kritis*. He was the first composer to adapt Hindustani *rāgas* and western tunes which gave a new dimension to karnāṭak music. Few Hindustani *rāgas* like *juhāvanti*, *yamunā kalyāṇi*, etc were used to tune his scholarly compositions. He composed notes called *Nōṭuswaras* consisting of



Sanskrit *sāhitya* in European major diatonic scale which correspond *rāga Shankarābharāṇa* of karnāṭak music. He was the pioneer of *Samashṭi Charaṇa*¹ and did not incorporate *sangatis* in his compositions. The laboured, ornate and polished style of his compositions, appeal more to the initiated. His kritis have to be studied repeatedly before their intrinsic merits are fully appreciated. The *vaiṇika* style of *gamakas* can be seen in his majestic pieces. All these features have made his style of compositions comparable to *Nārikelapāka* or coconut water i.e. to enjoy the essence of coconut water, one has to climb the tree, pluck the coconut, break the hard shell and then drink the water inside which is not an easy task.

Goddess Saraswatī

In Hindu mythology, we find many deities related to cultural practices. One among them, who is observed even from *Vedic* times, is Goddess Saraswatī. She is projected as Goddess of Speech (*Vāk*), Wisdom and Knowledge. She is also considered as a Goddess who is an authority to all art forms and the bestower of *Vidyas* especially *Brahma-Jnāna*. She is the consort of Lord Brahma and revered as his *Shakti* or power. There are only few shrines dedicated to Goddess Saraswatī.



II. Compositions

Śrī Muttuswāmy Dīkshitar has composed eleven kritis on Goddess Saraswatī, portraying her as *Vāgdevī*, *Kalāvati*, *Bhārati*, *Geervānī*, *Vidhiyuvatī*, *Shāradā*, *Gāyatrī*, *Sāvitrī*, etc. These kritis are rarely found now. *Śrī Saraswatī* is the only kriti which is popular among them. He has described the principles, characteristics and attributes of the goddess taking the references from ancient scriptures. To mention a few references found in his compositions –

Saraswatī was the name of a river during *Rig Vedic* period. But *Rig Veda mantras* mainly highlight Saraswatī as Goddess of inspiration and not merely a river. *Rig Veda* has seventy two mantras dedicated to her, some of which are repeated in *Yajur Veda* (Kashyap 2002:iv). The hymns describe her as a positive power of thought and an awakener of consciousness. Thus she is referred as goddess of wisdom who liberates one's life by controlling the emotions in jumping to the path of falsehood. There are differences in these *mantras* and the *stotras* that appear in *Purāṇas* and other ancient scriptures. In Dīkshitar's kriti *Bhārati maddhishanā jādyāpahe*, set to Devamanohari rāga and Roopaka tāḷa, he describes goddess Saraswatī as remover of unconsciousness – *maddhishanā jādyāpahe*.

Few Saraswatī *Sūktas* in *Rig Veda* are observed as *Vāgdevi stōtras*. Dīkshitar also has addressed goddess as *vāgvānī* in the kriti *Kalāvati kamalāsana yuvati* set to Kalā vati rāga, Ādi tāḷa and as *vāgdevi* in Shankarābharāṇa Noṭtuswara.

In *Kenōpaniṣhad*, Saraswatī appears as *Brahma Vidyā Guru*. She bestows *Ātma Jnāna* to *Dēvatas*, especially Lord Indra, for having felt proud of his own powers. He admits his mistake and worships her. This reference can be seen in the kriti, *Śrī Saraswatī namostute* set to Ārabhi rāga and Roopaka tāḷa – *Vāsavādī akhila nirjara vara vitarāṇa bahu keerte* – She is praised as the bestower of boons by Indra and other immortal *Devatas* (*Vāsava* is one of the synonyms of Lord Indra).

In ancient scriptures Goddess Saraswatī is mentioned as the presiding deity of arts, especially music (Kashyap 2006:38). This can be seen in Dīkshitar's kriti *Saraswatya bhagavyā samrakshatu mā m* in rāga *Chāyāgowla* set to Mishra jāti Eka tāḷa, *chatushshashṭi kalātmikayā* – She is the soul of sixty four art forms and *sarasa sangeeta sāhitya stana dwayayā* – Music and literature are her two breasts; in *Saraswatī chāyātarangiṇī* kriti set to *Chāyātarangiṇī* rāga and Ādi tāḷa, she is described as *sakala kalā swarōpiṇī* – form of all arts.

Goddess Saraswatī appears as *Gupta Gāminī*, the secret channel, in *Tantra Shāstras* and she is also called *Rahasya Yoginī* (secret devata) in the seventh *āvaraṇa* of *Sri Chakra* in *Śrī Vidyā* tradition, who removes the illness of ignorance through *vāk*. Dīkshitar has referred this in one of his kritis, *Sandhyādevīm Savitrim vara gayatrīm Saraswatīm bhajeham*, Devakriya rāga and Ādi tāḷa – *Gupta tara mārga kula yoginīm*.

Several *Shilpa* and *Āgama* texts have specified the iconic characteristics of Saraswatī. There are only slight variations in these texts on the form, attributes, postures, mounts and attire of Saraswatī. In the present days she is represented with *Pāsha*, *Ankusha*, *Pustaka*, *Veenā*, *Amṛtaghaṭa*, *Akshamālā* and *Hamsa* or swan as her *vāhana* or vehicle. These references can be found in Dīkshitar's kritis. For eg, *varā shāradā parānkushadharā varadābhaya pāsha pustaka karā* in *Kalāvati kamalāsana yuvati* kriti; *vallakī pustaka abhaya varada komaḷa tara kare* in the kriti *Bhārati*; *hamsini* in Hindola rāga kriti *Saraswatī vidhiyuvatī* set to Roopaka

¹ Charana coming immediately after pallavi and there is no Anupallavi. Not more than one charana is composed.

tāḷa and *Sharāvati* kriti in *Sharāvati rāga*, *Tishra jāti Eka tāḷa*, etc. In the kriti *Kalāvati*, the geographical details of one of the temples dedicated to goddess is mentioned i.e. *kāshmirā vihāra* (who resides in Kashmir).

Dīkshitar has delineated *Saraswatī* as referred in *Lalitōpākhyāna*. This shows that, *Lalitā Tripurasundarī* who is *Māyā sahita Parabrahman*, is the complete incarnation and *Saraswatī* is one of her manifestations. In *Lalitā sahasranāma* (thousand names of goddess *Lalitā Maha Tripurasundarī*) *Saraswatī*, *Brahmāṇī*, *Gāyatrī*, *Sandhyā* and *Sāvitrī* are given as her names². As per *Lalitōpākhyāna*, goddess *Lalitā Tripurasundarī* engages in five fold functions by her different manifestations viz, *Sriṣṭi* – creation; *Sthiti* – protection or preservation; *Laya* or *samhāra* – destruction; *Tirōdāna* – conceal or obscurity and *Anugraha* – liberation or grace. Dīkshitar, in his compositions, has very well brought out the concept of five-fold principles which has been attributed to Goddess *Saraswatī* –

- *Sriṣṭi* – She creates this universe through her knowledge. Eg, In the kriti *Sharāvati tāṭavāsini*, she is described as the soul of all movables and immovables in the universe – *charācharātmaka prapancha roopiṇī*; in the kriti *Veenāpustakadhāriṇīm āshraye* set to *Vegavā hini rāga*, *Khaṇḍa jāti Eka tāḷa*, as, *nikhila prapancha sankocha vikāsām* – she dispels and originates the entire universe
- *Sthiti* – She bestows knowledge to protect her devotees. Eg, She is described as *chāyātarangiṇī* – waves of protection, in the kriti *Saraswatī chāyātarangiṇī*³; *shr̥tajana pālakayā* – protects people who approach for refuge, in the kriti *Saraswatī bhagavatyā* and *bhaktakalpakamahīruhe* in the kriti *Bhārati* which means that she is the *kalpaka vr̥ksha* for her devotees
- *Laya* – She bestows true knowledge and makes the mind pure which destroys the fear and illusion of the materialistic world. Eg, She is mentioned as the goddess who takes out the sorrows of life – *samsāra dukkha shamanīm* in the kriti *Sandhyādevīm*; as the remover of fear in *samsāra – samsārabhītyāpahe* in the kriti *Śrī Saraswati namostute* and as *sakala durita bhanjanī* – who removes all sorts of evils and difficulties, in the kriti *Saraswatī chāyātarangiṇī*
- *Tirōdāna* – Her pure knowledge and wisdom personifies the ultimate, divine and hidden truth and to realize this truth, *devatas* and humans worship her. Eg, She is worshipped by wise people – *sumanopāsita kalyāṇī*, as described in the kriti *Namō Namaste* set to *Geeravāni rāga*, *Tishra jāti Tripuṭa tāḷa*; *budhajanōpāshr̥ta sachchitsukhī* – meditated by intellectuals, as seen in the kriti *Saraswatī chāyātarangiṇī*; *naraharihara poojita vighrahām* – worshipped by humans and lords, as in the kriti *Veenāpustakadhāriṇīm*; *dēva surapati vinuta vidhivihī te* – goddess worshipped by Lord Indra as described in *Shankarābharaṇa Noṭṭuswara*, *Vāgdevī* and in the kriti *Saraswatī bhagavatyā* she is portrayed as the goddess adored by Indra, Rati, Rama, Girija and other *devatas* – *natēndrādi akhila dēvatayā susevitayā rati ramā girijārchitayā*
- *Anugraha* – Her grace, in the form of pure knowledge, to devotees leads to the path of liberation. Eg, In the kriti *Saraswatī bhagavatyā* Dīkshitar describes goddess as *mangaḷa pradayā* – bestower of auspiciousness; *vānchitārtha prade vare* – bestower of desired boons, in the kriti *Bhārati*; *vara vitarāṇa bahukeerte* – praised as the bestower of boons, in the kriti *Śrī Saraswati namostute*; *nirantaram bhakta jihvāgra vāsām* – she always resides on the tongue of devotees, as referred in the kriti *Veenā pustaka dhāriṇīm*.

Apart from the references, one can also notice some unique features in his kritis –

There is a justification behind every compared description of the goddess. Dīkshitar relates the beauty of the deity with lotus mainly because of its characters.

- If one looks at the shape of lotus petals, only one corner is sharp and its colour is also not fully whitish or fully reddish/pinkish but mixture of both. This resembles the human eyes and hence Dīkshitar compares the eyes of the goddess to lotus, eg, *sarasīruhalochani* as seen in *Saraswatī vidhiyuvati* kriti.
- Lotus is compared to the face of the deity. In general, face is considered to be very important among the parts of the body. It plays a key role in reflecting or conveying the expressions. Same as every petal in the lotus looks clear when spread, just a smile on the deity's face looks clear and bright which spreads happiness to devotees, eg, *mukhāmbōruhe* as seen in *Bhārati* kriti and *vaktrābje* in *Shankarābharaṇa Noṭṭuswara*.
- Then looking on to the lotus petals, they are very soft, tender but are strong and does not slit easily. Hence they are compared to describe the deity's hands and feet which are soft, tender but bestows an intense grace on devotees without any pause, eg, *charānāmbōruhe* as seen in the kriti *Śrī Saraswati; pada kamale* in *Shankarābharaṇa Noṭṭuswara* and *karāravindām* in *Veenāpustaka dhāriṇīm* kriti.
- Lotus is free from the pollutants of water and looks fresh and pure always, even though it blooms and grows in grimy water. Even the water drops on the petals will not stick to them but is just surfaced on

² 703, 821, 420, 422 and 699th names respectively

³ Chāyā in Sanskrit means beauty and protection

it. This symbolizes the divine truth, that – every soul in this materialistic world must live without any firm attachment. Hence lotus is described as an *āsana* for the deity, who blesses to develop the power of detachment over attachments, eg, *kamalāsana* as seen in the kriti *Kalāvati*.

Usually kritis are composed in *Prathamā* and *Sambodhanā vibhaktis*⁴. Composing in all *vibhaktis* is a unique style of Dīkshitar. This enhanced his profound knowledge and command over the language. One more unique feature of Dīkshitar's kritis is that, his compositions highly showcase the description of deities. In *Bhajana Sampradāya*, these types of compositions are called *Dhyāna* kritis. It is as simple as meditating upon any deity. Even though Dīkshitar has composed in different *vibhaktis*, they still appear as *dhyāna* kritis. In the kritis on Goddess Saraswatī, he has composed in *prathamā*, *dwitīya*, *tritīya* and *sambōdhanā vibhaktis*. He adds only one verb which connects all the adjectives. Yet these kritis cannot be considered as mere devotional *Nāmāvalīs*, but a master piece of poetry and music, brimming with the allusions from *Vedic* and other ancient scriptures.

Samashṭi charaṇa is also one of his significant forte in the compositional style and among the kritis on goddess Saraswatī, *Namo Namaste geervāṇi*, *Saraswatī chāyātarangiṇī*, *Saraswatī vidhiyuvatī*, *Sharāvati taṭavāsini* and *Śrī Saraswati* have *samashṭi charaṇas*.

He has not set in *chāpu tāḷas* and has adopted only *Soolādi sapta tāḷas* with its variations for his compositions. For eg, *Mishra eka*, *tishra eka*, *tishra tripuṭa* and *khaṇḍa eka tāḷas*.

Dīkshitar has composed in the *rāgas* propounded by Venkaṭamakhi viz, *Kalāvati*, *Geervāṇi*, *Devakriya* and *Toyavegavāhini*. These are the corresponding *rāgas* to *Yāgapriya*, *Gavāmbhodi*, *Shuddha Sāveri* and *Chakravāka* according to Govindāchārya's Meḷa paddhati, which was followed by Dīkshitar's contemporaries, Shyāma Shāstry and Tyāgarāja.

Another note-worthy feature of Dīkshitar's kritis is that he incorporates musical rhetorics like *swarākshara*, *yamakāṅkāra* and prosodies like *yati*, *prāsa* which perfectly blends with the *sāhitya* without affecting its meaning.

Swarākshara – || S ṅ ḍ | m g R p m g r || m p ḍ ṣ | Ṣ ḍ p m g r p ||
 || śrī**pa ti**|| gow . ri* pa*tī gu**ru**|| gu ha vi nu | te vi dhi yu va te . ||
 – *Mishra swarākshara*⁵ – in the kriti *Śrī Saraswati namostute*

Yamakāṅkāra – || *Garuḍa vṛṣha turaga harihara karimukha* | *guruguha mukhamati vitarāṇa guṇinī* || – in the kriti *Saraswatī Chāyātarangiṇī*

The word *mukha* is *yamaka*⁶ here – in the phrase *karimukha*, the meaning is elephant face but in the phrase *guruguha mukha*, the meaning changes. In this context *mukha* means beginning. She bestows knowledge to all, beginning or starting from *guruguha*.

⁷**Yati** – || *Bhaaratī maddhiṣhaṇā jādyāpahe twad*
Bhaktakalpamakamahīruhe mukhāmboruhe || – in the kriti *Bhārati*

⁸**Prāsa** – *Vṛshabha prasa* – in the kriti *Sandhyādevīm*
 || *Sandhyādevīm sāvitṛīm vara* | *gāyatrīm saraswatīm bhajeham* ||
 || *Vindhyāchalanivasita vishālinīm* | *vidhi guruguha sannuta varadāyinīm* ||
Sharabha prāsa –
 || *Guptatara mārga kulayōginīm* | *guṇinīm govinda jananīm naḷinīm* ||
 || *Saptaswara mātrīkāroopinīm* | *samsāra dukkha shamanīm dhaninīm* ||

The *madhyamakāla sāhityas* in his kritis naturally provide a welcome change after the long drawn patterns of *dhātus*.

He does not incorporate *Sangatis* in his compositions unless if there is a necessity for improvisation of *sāhitya*. For eg, in the kriti *Saraswatī chāyātarangiṇī*, he adds an extra sangati in the pallavi, where he shows the wave like pattern in the swaras – g R g R for the phrase *tarangiṇī* – meaning waves in Sanskrit.

⁴ Declension in Sanskrit grammar

⁵ Combination of *Shuddha** and *Soochita swarākshara***. In a composition if the syllables of *swara* and *sāhitya* are identical and like sounding, it is called *Shuddha* and *Soochita Swarākshara* respectively.

⁶ *Yamaka* is a word that occurs twice or more times in a section but gives different meanings due to *padaçhcheda*.

⁷ *Yati* is the division of a *pāda* in a composition and the syllable that divides is called *yatyakshara*. The syllable may be identical or similar.

⁸ It is the rhyming syllable. They are of many types viz, *Simha*, *Gaja*, *Vṛshabha*, *Aja*, *Sharabha*, *Haya*, *Antya*, *Anu prāsa*. Only two examples are given here.

III. Conclusion

Since Vedic times, Goddess Saraswatī is worshipped as a significant deity for knowledge in Hindu mythology, who is primely meditated upon by spiritual seekers to develop the resisting power towards materialistic obsession. She is depicted in white colour representing the *Satwa guṇa* or pure mind which is very much essential to attain and sustain true knowledge. Even in the iconographic description, she is always represented with veṇa and book symbolising her as an authority on knowledge and art. There are sixty four art forms described in *Kāma Sūtra* and knowledge is the foremost aspect to pursue any art form. Saraswatī, being the goddess of knowledge, is worshipped to achieve greatest heights in the art field. Knowledge is necessary to remove illusory mind and realize eternal truth. *Jnāna mārga* helps to pursue *karma* and *bhakti mārgas*. Dīkshitar has very well brought out this concept in his compositions on Goddess Sarsawatī. A *Subhāshita* describes knowledge as the greatest and supreme wealth –

॥ नचोरहार्यं नचराजहार्यम् न भ्रातृभाज्यं नचभारकारी व्ययेकृते वर्धत एव नित्यं विद्याधनं सर्वधन प्रधानं ॥

which means, knowledge is the most important among all kinds of wealth at all times because neither thieves can steal nor kings can seize, neither it can be divided amongst brothers nor is too heavy to carry. The more you spend the more it flourishes.

In the kriti *Sandhyādevīm*, Dīkshitar narrates goddess Saraswatī as *dhaninīm* (goddess of wealth) reflecting the same aspect.

The most important attribute of *Paramātma* or *Parabrahman* is one, according to *Vedas*, *Upanishads* and *Shāstras*. While worshipping a specific manifestation, all the principles and aspects of *Parabrahman* are attributed to that particular deity. Since Dīkshitar was a true *jnāni*, he composed on all deities with similar qualities and principles, even though the purpose of the deity's attribute differ. Dīkshitar, not only incorporates philosophical and spiritual essence of the scriptures, but also makes his kritis a scholarly piece by applying all the musical nuances in the sāhitya. No doubt, his master pieces can be considered as Vedas to a layman, which are filled with grammars of both music and the literature, creating oneness, like fire and its heat or word and its meaning. The ultimate goal of *upāsana* is to free oneself from worldly or materialistic affairs. This *upāsana* may be spiritual rituals such as *pooja*, meditation, yoga, etc or also through music – *Sangeetōpāsana*. With the knowledge in karnāṭak music, which comprises both *pooja vidhāna* (worship) and *jnāna*, and by practising it, one can get a thorough knowledge on the aesthetics of karnāṭak music imbibed with the philosophical values. Dīkshitar, who was a *Śrī Vidyā upāsaka* and *Sangeetōpāsaka* established *jnāna mārga* through his compositions, which is a significant contribution to karnāṭak music.

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