

Topic: Recreating the musical library of Muddusvāmi Dīkṣitar

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Abstract:

Muddusvāmi Dīkṣita's body of work holds a unique place in the Carnatic tradition, marked by distinctive forms and a striking musical imagination. This paper examines the structure and sound of his compositions, while also pointing to unexamined compositional frameworks that quietly shape his style. What were his sources? Can we, in some sense, reimagine his library?

In terms of form, three features stand out. First is his consistent use of *madhyama-kāla sāhitya*. Second is his preference for two-section structures- *pallavi* with *anupallavi* or *pallavi/caraṇam* - which set him apart from his contemporaries. Third is the measured pace seen in his *vilamba-kāla kṛti*-s.

Equally distinctive is the sound of his music. Dīkṣitar avoids conventional *varṇa meṭṭu* motifs and develops rāga-s through meandering caraṇam-s rather than expanding it through saṅgati-s. He draws on archaic forms of rāga-s, such as the extensive use of śuddha dhaivata in Bhairavī, and use of the 'grahasvara' concept - demonstrating his grounding in rāga grammar rather than performance practice alone. At the same time, his choice of *deśya* rāga-s shows a deliberate widening of the Carnatic repertoire, often explained through his stay in Varanasi but open to other readings.

By setting his music against hitherto unexamined frameworks, the study highlights how Dīkṣitar created compositions that are both rooted in tradition and strikingly innovative.