

Topic: The Vīṇā tradition of Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar

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Abstract:

Nādayōti Śrī Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar was, by his own admission, a Vaiṇika Gāyaka. He also puts the epithet Vaiṇika before the word Gāyaka. The profundity of this is quite striking. The natural outcome of his being a Vīṇā Player (Vaiṇika) is the obvious reflection of the character of Vīṇā music in his compositions. Most of his kṛti-s are in slow tempo or cauka kāla. And almost all his kṛti-s have a medium tempo or madhyama kāla passage towards the end of a paragraph, which is mostly in the caraṇa of the kṛti, sometimes in the anupallavi and pallavi too. Dīkṣitar having spent quite a bit of time in Varanasi was influenced by Hindustani Music where in the Bīṅkar (Vaiṇika in the North of India) tradition, the recital commences in a very slow paced ālāp and then goes on to pick up speed with the jōḍ and jhāla. The Bīṅkar-s were famous for the Dhrupad tradition and this pace is the core identity of Dīkṣitar's compositions, and he made it a style his own to the point where anything slow pace has come to be known as Dīkṣitar-style kṛti!

Secondly the gamaka oriented phrases in Dīkṣitar compositions are best expressed on the vīṇā when played in the Gāyaki style. In the composition mīnākṣī mēmudam dēhi Dīkṣitar talks about vīṇā gāna daśagamakriyē, clearly talking about vīṇā music as being distinct and representative of the 10 gamaka-s. There are 15 gamaka-s given in the Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśini and some of them will be demonstrated with respect to Dīkṣitar compositions, in particular, the jāru-s which are so special to vīṇā.

Thirdly, an examination of the splitting of sāhitya in his compositions is aligned almost always with the playing of the vīṇā. This we will demonstrate with some telling examples, to show how the word in a kṛti very rarely split between the sārīṇi and pañcama strings of the vīṇā. The fact that Dīkṣitar composed short samaṣṭi caraṇa kṛti-s to convey the characteristic of many a rare rāga through prayōga-s natural to the vīṇā, is very valuable in inferring that Dīkṣitar was the quintessential vīṇā player who expressed his musical creations thinking with and through his vīṇā.