

THE MUTHUSWAMY DIKSHITAR RENAISSANCE

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"A supreme genius is like a mountain range. He has summits which only the devoted and indefatigable student can hope to scale", it has been said. This is very true of nadayogi, Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar (1775-1835), one of the three immortals who built up the gigantic edifice of carnatic music, as we know it to day and who was a contemporary of Syama Sastry (1762-1827) and Tyagaraja (1767-1847). Dikshitar, to use the apt words of Dilip Kumar Roy, was "a bard who revealed through hymns that music had a holier part to play through high devotion which appealed to the soul... no mere skilled artist but a Yogi whose vow was to ensoul art with God-love's harmony". Dikshitar's music is sublime music instilling sublime ideas, a commingling of sense and sound attaining perfection and disciplined splendour. There are critics who consider that "Dikshitar was the greater composer, that the architectural build of his pieces is at once more subtle, intricate and intellectually satisfying".

Yet, for nearly 100 years, Dikshitar's compositions, except a handful were not exposed to the public for one reason or the other - despite the fact that Subbarama Dikshitar (1839 - 1906) had mapped out a great many of his compositions quite intelligibly in his monumental work, the "Sangitha Sampradaya Pradarshini". In the last three decades, however, some progress has been achieved. The great merit of his

Kritis is known more widely and they have been 'sold', in commercial parlance, to the public, which has become enlightened enough to appreciate the perennial quality of his work, especially the comprehensive Ragabhava of his compositions and the exposition of music grammar inherent in them. A lot of informed exegesis of Dikshitar's solid contribution to Carnatic music has been made available to scholars. Still, it could be said, that public appreciation of the salient aspects of his music is far less, as compared to Tyagaraja's and Syama Sastry's life-work.

The current movement for the revivication of neglected temples and the recent resurgence in carnatic music makes the present an opportune time to give a new impetus to propagating the great music of Sri Muthusami Dikshitar. Among performing musicians, Sri Tyagaraja is still the favourite, while Syama Sastri's compositions have definitely made some headway on the concert platform. Ariakudi Ramanuja lyengar invariably rendered three or four Kritis. It is a sad fact, however, that barring a few of Dikshitar's monumental Kritis, a large number do not yet find a place in the concert programmes. The music of Dikshitar is still an 'endangered species', despite spasmodic attempts to revive it eg. the celebrations organized by the Trinity Trust at Tiruvarur and the Dikshitar anniversary observances in Sabhas, conducted more routinely than otherwise.

This state of affairs is grossly unfair to the expanding music consciousness of rasikas today, particularly among the young musicians of talent. Familiarity with Dikshitar's colossal musical output can help both performer and listener in promoting a wider musical outlook, sharper appreciation of minute subtleties and fluid, sensitive, artistic expression, particularly the architectonics of raga elaboration. In Dikshitar's music, there is a sense sublime of things deeply interfused in religious and artistic consciousness, a sense of infinity, of what the human spirit in its most inspired moments can achieve.

Popular metaphors conjuring up the Trinity's music as 'Draksharasa' (Tyagaraja), Kadali rasa (Syama Sastry) and 'Nalikeera' (Dikshitar) unconsciously overstressed the difficulty of learning Dikshitar's Kritis. It is true that he deliberately composed in the Devabasha Sanskrit (though he knew enough to compose in Telugu); that he, again deliberately, made his Kritis the vehicle of esoteric scholarship such as the Agama, Tantra and Yoga sastras; and that their gamut runs from philosophical to aesthetic, achieving a grandeur in its totality.

Why should these elements of his music be an obstacle to comprehending and learning his output? Even seasoned musicologists have observed that Dikshitar's music is 'cold and impersonal', that his style is 'pedantic, massive' etc. What else did we expect from a Vedantin, a great Advaita scholar, a 'detached metaphysician' (as one writer put it), a profound scholar of sangita sastra?

Carnatic music embodies Bhava, Raga, Tala in their highest forms of expression. 'Bhava' consists of Artha bhava and Raga bhava. In the slot of the former, Dikshitar carried descriptions of the agama of the temples visited by him and of the worship of 'Sri Chakra'. They indicate his under-lying faith that 'Devi' is the Brahman residing in all of us, who has to be reached through an exacting discipline. He was, after all, a 'Sri Vidya upasaka'. The Navavarna Kritis, the Abhayamba Kritis, are the fruits of this avenue of his search for 'Satchit-Ananda', the merger of the soul with the god-head. The deities at dozens of temples visited and worshipped by him had given the necessary inspiration for Dikshitar to compose immortal songs.

So, too, the Kritis, on Lord GANESHA, whom Dikshitar extolled thus: "There is no God other than Ganesha on whom the mind can meditate" (Vide Kriti "Ganeshaatparam" dedicated to Ganesha at Vaideeswarankoil - especially sacrosanct to him as he was born with the blessings of Goddess Balamba at the same place after long penance by his parents. In fact, to Dikshitar belongs the unique credit (or bhagya?) of having composed 26 Kritis on Ganesha in ragas as diverse as Hamsadwani, Chamaram, Navaraj, Adradesi, Vegavahini (2) Kapi, Ramakriya, Rudrapriya, Malahari, Natanarayani, Saveri, Todi, Mohanam, Begada, etc. The Kritis contain a fund of information about the deities, seven of whom are in Thiruvarur itself, where the 'Mooladhara kshetra' of Tyagesa is situated. Readers would do well to study the monograph on the Ragamalika kriti "Sri Viswanatham Bhajeham" (14 ragas),

authored by the very erudite scholar Dr. S.S. Janaki, Director of the Kuppaswamy Sastry Research Institute, Madras-4. The same scholar has also to her immense credit another monography on the 'Maha', 'ucchishta'. Ganapathis in Dikshitar's songs.

And then there are the famous Navagraha Kritis of Dikshitar some of which, fortunately for us, find a place in latter day concerts, like "Suryamurthe", "Bhudamasrayami" "Diwakaram" sheds a powerful light on Lord Saniswara, stressing his beneficent response if worshipped properly. (The average man's attitude to Sani is one of fear). Composed in different talas, the Navagraha Kritis are of outstanding musical excellence. It is the bounden duty of every musician to learn these Kritis and to render the navagraha Kriti of the day on which his performance is scheduled. That way, the public would get sensitized to their artistic and religious impact.

There is now general acceptance of the view of great scholars and researchers that his Kritis contain "an ordered and intellectual exposition of the form and complexion of a raga" and that "the architectural build of his pieces is at once more subtle, intricate and intellectually satisfying" (M. Ananthanarayanan, former Chief Justice, Madras). A very happy upshot of the ideal of individual elaboration of ragas through the compositions or melody moulds is that "the musician was always, in some sense, a creator of music, as distinguished from the role of mere interpreter or expositor", which he played in Western Systems" (same author).

No writer on the 'Trinity' has ever been able to escape from the temptation to compare Dikshitar with his contemporary Sri Tyagaraja. The temptation is natural as they represent separate summits in Carnatic music. Just as Mt. Everest can be reached either from the South Col. or the east face of the Himalayas, Dikshitar and Tyagaraja attained the peak in differing ways - respectively, the Vilamba or Madhyakala; full or partial depiction of raga chaya; and the asampurna and Kadapayadi paddhatis of raga classification. But it is undeniable that both succeeded eminently in their separate quests.

The slow tempo is actually needed for Dikshitar Kritis, to convey the beauty of the sahitya which is rich in sastra and solemnity and weighty in meaning - that is why he chose Sanskrit for the medium perhaps. Every Kriti of his is a comprehensive and complete delineation of the raga in question, its scale, the jivasawaras, appropriate glides and gamakas. (The Navavarna Kritis are outstanding examples). Samashti charna was sufficient and the slightly faster tempo of the charna was just to lessen the overload in the preceding vilambakala sections of the Kriti.

Sri Tyagaraja, with his intensely human and mercurial appeal, could afford to experiment with sangatis, bring out aspects of a raga through different creations of different moods; and with his wit, sometimes cock a snook at human frailties and got away with an emotional picture that appeals easily to the common man. Where Dikshitar was austere, scholarly and scrupulous, Tyagaraja was

all devotion and compassion, expressed through poetry and music. To put it briefly, Dikshitar was like Rama Avatar-. Tyagaraja was Kirshna Avatar. The manifestations may differ, but it is the same godhead for their music.

A specific drive is needed to bring Dikshitar home to all musicians and learners. Otherwise, the comparative neglect of Dikshitar seems likely to continue, notwithstanding the efforts of bodies like the "Saraswathi Vaggeyakar Trust". It is too late to buy the argument that Dikshitar Kritis have not been authentically notated and published. Subbarama Dikshitar's "Sangitha Sampradaya Pradarsini", Justice T.L. Venkataramier's interpretation and teaching of the Kritis to his many disciples viz. Sangeetha Kalanidhi D.K. Pattammal, (and through her, D.K. Jayaraman's repertoire). Sandhyavandanam Srinivasa Rao, Sangitha Kalanidhi B. Rajam Iyer, the Kritis popularised by descendants of Veena Dhanammal and by the Kallidaikurichi school - provide avenues

for learning, practising and rendering Dikshitar's precious sadhana.

Of course, the undaunted will and persistence of a sincere-seeker is needed to master the Dikshitar Kritis. Almost every Sabha in Madras and elsewhere, runs classes to teach music.

They should direct the teachers concerned to pay special attention to the teaching of Dikshitar Kritis at least to senior students. Institutions like the Music Academy, the Madras University Department of Music, Kalakshetra, the Trinity Trust, and the Music College at Tiruvaiyaru, should be given grants by the Central Government for engaging experts to bring about a Dikshitar revolution in Carnatic music. A special responsibility lies on Sabhas too, to wean their members from the worship of false goods like tempo, concert effect and lighthearted entertainment, and to enable them to dip into the golden treasury that Dikshitar's music represent. A Dikshitar revolution is overdue. If it comes about, it can reinstate Carnatic classical music to its high estate. □

