

Veena Playing - Mysore School

History of Veena Playing in Mysore

In the early days of 'Wadiyars' dynasty the state of Mysore was being ruled from Srirangapatnam and the Rajahs gave unstinted encouragement to the growth and spread of classical music in the state. Besides, the well known temples of the region also employed on a permanent basis Veena Players and other musicians.

The earliest name that we come across is that of Veena Krishnaiah who was a court musician of maharaja Kanteerava Narasaraja Wadiyar (1638-1659) during the 17th Century. During the later years maharaja Chikkadevaraja Wadiyar (1673 - 1704) had earned a name for himself as an expert in veena playing.

In the latter half of the 18th Century, the administration of Mysore State was taken over by Nawab Hyder Ali and his son Tippu Sultan. However, the Rajahs were allowed to have all the other privileges and facilities enjoyed by them as rulers. This allowed the Wadiyars to continue their patronage to the several families of vainikas who were in their employ. It is said that these vainikas used to teach Veena playing not only to the lady members of the Royal family but also to the ladies of the Zenana of Hyder Ali and Tippu Sultan.

After the fall of Srirangapatnam in the Fourth Mysore War in 1799, the capital was shifted to Mysore from Srirangapatnam. The several Vainika families which served the Royal court in Srirangapatnam also shifted to Mysore. The king of the time, Mummadi Krishnaraja Wadiyar, was a very great patron of arts and attracted Musicians from far and

near. Apart from the several vainika families which were already serving the Royal court, many musicians from Tanjore, also came to Mysore and were given permanent employment by the Maharaja. Veena Venkataramaiah, Veena Sambaiah, Veena Rama Iyer, Veena Lakshmana Iyer and Tanjore Rama Bhagavathar were some of them.

Birth of Mysore Style

With so many reputed Veena players settling down in Mysore, the art of Veena playing became very popular in Mysore. Initially there were two schools of thought regarding the method of playing veena. The first school was of the opinion that confining the Veena to strict vocal regimen would limit the scope of the instrument. They strongly felt that supremacy of instrumental technique over the vocal should be maintained. The second school insisted that the vocalism of Karnataka Classical music alone should dominate and not the instrumental technique. With the passage of time a golden mean was struck and now the Mysore style is a combination of both instrumental technique and the vocal idiom.

In the olden days the Veena players used to hold the Veena in a vertical position and it was difficult for the left hand to traverse the instrument easily. Sometimes this resulted in production of harsh sounds and also made it difficult for producing intricate swara patterns. Subsequently it was found that in the horizontal position it becomes easier to play the Veena. This change to horizontal position was effected in the Mysore region by Veena Seshanna.

An innovation, namely the split fingering technique in playing the Veena was also developed by the Mysore Vainikas. The playing of notes by seperating the left hand fingers is also one way of achieving Gamaka and this was found to enhance the total excellence of the veena. Even while teaching the rudiments of Veena playing, the beginners were taught to play the Arohanam and Avarohanam by separating the left hand fingers. This technique is special to the Mysore Style and forms an important aspect in the Mysore style of playing.

Till recently Veena music was being broadly classified under the heading of different schools like Tanjore school with dominant vocal idiom, the Andhra school with instrumental technique and technical excellence, and the Mysore school which gave equal importance to both the instrumental technique and the vocal idiom.

Thus, the Mysore Style can be considered to be a happy blend of both the Tanjore school and the Andhra School. But, with the advent of electronic media the broad distinctions are fast disappearing.

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