

**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 Saraswati composed by Śrī Muttswāmy Dīkshitar, one of the great saint composers of Karnāṭak Music and his portrayal of Goddess Saraswati 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 Saraswati. Dīkshitar has composed eleven kritis on Goddess Saraswati 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 Asampoorṇa Meḷa paddhati.

**Key words:** Karnāṭak Music, Goddess Saraswati, Śrī Muttswāmy 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 Bhāratīya Sanskrīti or the culture of India which is based on the texts of Shruti and Smrīti. These texts not only preach the path of self-discipline and self-realization, but also the different paths of Jnāna or knowledge, Karma or action and Bhakti or devotion. Its ultimate goal is to attain Moksha. These principles are predominant in Classical music. Vāgyeyakāras or composers of classical music incorporated the essence of Vedas and Upaniṣhads 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 Śhāstry, Śrī Tyāgarāj and Śrī Muttswāmy 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 Muttswāmy Dīkshitar (1775 A.D – 1835 A.D)**

Śrī Muttswāmy Dīkshitar is the youngest among the trinity and has composed hundreds of compositions incorporating Guruguha as his ankīta or signature. His compositions include group kritis like Śhodasha Gaṇapati kritis; Kamalāmba, Abhayāmba and Neelōṭpalāmba Navāvaraṇa kritis; Tyāgarājāsāmy and Guruguha Viśhakti kritis; Navagraha kritis and Pancha linga kshetra kritis. Dīkshitar, being proficient in Vedas, Upaniṣhads, 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 Jyotishya 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 Hindustānī rāgas like jujāvanti, yamunā kalyāṇī, etc were used to tune his scholarly compositions. He composed notes called Nōṭṭuswaras consisting of
Sanskrit sāhitya in European major diatonic scale which correspond rāga Shankarābharaṇa of kannāṭak music.
He was the pioneer of Śamāṣṭhi Charaṇa' 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 vaṇiṇka style of gamakas can be seen in his majestic pieces. All these features have made his style of compositions comparable to Nārīkelpākā 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 Mutuswāmy Dikshitar has composed eleven kritis on Goddess Saraswatī, portraying her as Vāgdevī, Kalāvatī, Bhārati, Geervāṇī, Viddhiyuvaṇī, 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 Dikshitar’s kriti Bhārati maddhishanā jāddyāpāhe, set to Devamanohari rāga and Roopaka tāḷa, he describes goddess Saraswatī as remover of unconsciousness – maddhishanā jāddyāpāhe.

Few Saraswatī Sāktas in Rig Veda are observed as Vāgdevi stōtras. Dikshitar also has addressed goddess as vāgvanī in the kriti Kalāvatī kamalāsana yuvati set to Kalā vati rāga, Ādī tāḷa and as vāgdevi in Shankarābharaṇa Noṭṭuswara.

In Kenōpaniṣad, 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 namostate set to Ārābhī rāga and Roopaka tāḷa – Vāsavadāvi akhilā mirjara vara vītarāṇa 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 Śrī kshitar’s kriti Saraswatīyā bhagavatīyā samrakshatu mā m in rāga Chāyāgowlal set to Mishra jāti Ekā tāḷa, chaṭuṭhāshṭhī kalātmikāyā – She is the soul of sixty four art forms and sarasa sangeeta sāhitya stana dwayāyā – Music and literature are her two breasts; in Saraswatī chāyātarāngiṇī kriti set to Chāyātarāngini rāga and Ādī tāḷa, she is described as sakala kalā swarōpiṇī – form of all arts.

Goddess Saraswatī appears as Gupta Gāmini, the secret channel, in Tantra Shāstras and she is also called Rahasya Yogiṇī (secret devata) in the seventh āvaraṇa of Śrī Chakra in Śrī Vidyā tradition, who removes the illness of ignorance through vāk. Dikshitar has referred this in one of his kritis, Sandhyāydvīm Savitrim vara gayatrim Saraswatīm bhajeham, Devakriya rāga and Ādī tāḷa – Gupta tara mārga kula yogiṇī.

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, Ankasha, Pustaka, Veena, Amrātha, Akhamāla and Hamsa or swan as her vāhana or vehicle. These references can be found in Dī kshitar’s kritis. For eg, varā śhāradā parānikushadhārā varadābhāyā pāśha pustaka karā in Kalāvatī kamalāsana yuvati kriti; vallaki pustaka abhayā varada komala tara kare in the kriti Bhārati; hamsini in Hindola rāga kriti Saraswatī vidhiyuvaṇī set to Roopaka

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

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

Dikshitar has delineated Saraswati as referred in Lalitopakhyāna. This shows that, Lalitā Tripurasundarī who is Māyā sahita Parabrahman, is the complete incarnation and Saraswati is one of her manifestations. In Lalitā sahasranāma (thousand names of goddess Lalitā Maha Tripurasundari) Saraswati, Bhrahmāṇi, Gāyatrī, Sandhyā and Śaivitri are given as her names. As per Lalitopakhyāna, goddess Lalitā Tripurasundarī engages in five fold functions by her different manifestations viz, Śrīṣṭi – creation; Śhiti – protection or preservation; Layā or saṁhāra – destruction; Tirōdāna – conceal or obscuration and Anugraha – liberation or grace.

Dikshitar, in his compositions, has very well brought out the concept of five-fold functions which has been attributed to Goddess Saraswati –

- **Śrīṣṭi** – She creates this universe through her knowledge. Eg, In the kriti Sharāvati tātāvasiṇī, she is described as the soul of all movable and immovable in the universe – charācharāmakā prapancha roopini; in the kriti Veenāpustakadhāriṇī āśraye set to Vegavā hini rāga, Khanda jāti Eka tāla, as, nikhila prapancha sankocha vikāśam – she dispels and originates the entire universe

- **Śhiti** – She bestows knowledge to protect her devotees, Eg, She is described as chāyātarangini – waves of protection, in the kriti Saraswati chāyātarangini; śhītajana pālakayā – protects people who approach for refuge, in the kriti Sarasvatayā bhagavatīyā and bhaktakalpakamahārahe in the kriti Bhāratī which means that she is the kalpaka virsha for her devotees

- **Layā** – 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 duḥkha shamanīm – as the remover of fear in samsāra – samsārabhītyāpahī in the kriti Śrī Saraswati namostute and as sakala durita bhājanī – who removes all sorts of evils and difficulties, in the kriti Saraswati chāyātarangini

- **Tirōdāna** – Her pure knowledge and wisdom personifies the ultimate, divine and hidden truth and to realise this truth, devatas and humans worship her. Eg, She is worshipped by wise people – sumanopāsaṇa kalayā, as described in the kriti Namō Namaste set to Geervāṇi rāga, Tishra jāti Tripūta tāla; budhajanopāśhīra sachehīsukha – meditated by intellectuals, as seen in the kriti Saraswati chāyātarangini; naraḥarīhara poopīta virahām – worshipped by humans and lords, as in the kriti Veenāpustakadhāriṇī; dēva surapati vinuta vidhīvī te – goddess worshipped by Lord Indra as described in Shankarābharaṇa Noṭūswara, Vāgdevī and in the kriti Sarasvatīyā bhagavatīyā she is portrayed as the goddess adored by Indra, Rāti, Rama, Girīja and other devatas – naṭēndrādi akhila dēvatavā susevitavā rati ramā girijārchitayā

- **Anugraha** – Her grace, in the form of pure knowledge, to devotees leads to the path of liberation. Eg, In the kriti Sarasvatīyā bhagavatīyā Dikshitar describes goddess as mangaḷa pradāyā – bestower of auspiciousness; vānchitārtha prade vare – bestower of desired boons, in the kriti Bhārati; vara vitaraṇa bahukeerte – praised as the bestower of boons, in the kriti Śrī Saraswati namostute; nirantarabhartka jīhvāgra vāsām – she always resides on the tongue of devotees, as referred in the kriti Veenā pustaka dhārīnī.

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. Dikshitar 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 Dikshitar compares the eyes of the goddess to lotus, eg, sarasirūhalocchani as seen in Saraswatī vihīyavatī kriti.

- Lotus is compared to the face of the deity. In general, it 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 and vakrābhe in Shankarābharaṇa Noṭūswara.

- 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, charanāmbōruhe as seen in the kriti Śrī Saraswati; pada kamale in Shankarābharaṇa Noṭūswara and karāravindum in Veenāpustaka dhārīnī 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

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

3 Ćhāya in Sanskrit means beauty and protection

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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 vibhakti. Composing in all vibhaktis is a unique style of Dikshitar. This enhanced his profound knowledge and command over the language. One more unique feature of Dikshitar’s kritis is that, his compositions highly showcase the description of deities. In Bhājana Sampradāya, these types of compositions are called Dhyāna kritis. It is as simple as meditating upon any deity. Even though Dikshitar has composed in different vibhaktis, they still appear as dhyāna kritis. In the kriti on Goddess Saraswati, he has composed in prathamā, dvitiya, tritiya and sambodhanā vibhaktis. He adds only one verb which connects all the adjectives. Yet these kritis cannot be considered as mere devotional Nāmāvālīs, but a master piece of poetry and music, brimming with the allusions with Vedic and other ancient scriptures.

Samashti charana is also one of his significant feature in the compositional style and among the kritis on goddess Saraswati, Namo Namaste geervā, Saraswati chāyātarangini, Saraswati vidhiyuvati, Sharāvatī tatavāsini and Śrī Sarasvatī have samashti charanas.

He has not set in chāpū tālas and has adopted only Soolādi sapta tālas with its variations for his compositions. For eg, Mishra eka, tīshra eka, tīshra trium and khanda eka tālas.

Dikshitar has composed in the rāgas propounded by Venkaṭamakhi viz, Kalāvati, Geervāni, Devakriya and Tovavegavāhini. These are the corresponding rā gas to Gayapi, Gavāmbhodi, Shuddha Sā veri and Chakravāka according to Govindāchārya’s Meja paddhati, which was followed by Dī kshitar’s contemporaries, Shyāma Shāstry and Tyāgarāja.

Another note-worthy feature of Dikshitar’s kritis that he incorporates musical rhetorics like swarākshara, yanmālankāra and prosodies like yati, prāsa which perfectly blends with the sāhitya without affecting its meaning.

Swarākshara – || S p d | m g R p m g r || m p d s | Š d p m g r p ||

|| śrī[**]*pa ti** || gow . ri[**]*ti gu[**]*ru** || gu ha vi nu | te vi dhī yu va te . ||

– Mishra swaraksharā – in the kriti Śrī Sarasvatī namostute

Yanmālankāra – || Garuḍa vṛṣa turaga harihara karimukha | guruguha mukhamati vitarana guṇini || – in the kriti Śrī Sarasvatī Chāyātarangini

The word mukha is yanma 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.

6 Yati – || Bhārati maddhiṣṭanā jāḍyāpahe twad

Bhāṭkakalpakamahiruha mukhamboruha || – in the kriti Bhārati

6 Prāsa – Vīshabha prasa – in the kriti Sandhyāveṃ

|| Sandhyāveṃi śātvitṛ varā | gāyatrim sarasvatiṃ bhajeham ||

|| Vidyāchaliṇivasita vishālinim | vidhi guruguha sannuta varadāyinim ||

Sharabha prāsa –

|| Gopura mārga kulayoginim | guṇinim govinda jananim naśinim ||

|| Śaptaśwara māṭrākaroopinim | samsāra duhkha shamanim dhaninim ||

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 chāyātarangini, 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 tarangini – meaning waves in Sanskrit.

6 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 Svarākshara respectively.

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

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

8 It is the rhyming syllable. They are of many types viz, Simha, Gaja, Vīrshabha, 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 primarily meditated upon by spiritual seekers to develop the resisting power towards materialistic obsession. She is depicted in white colour representing the Satwa gīța or pure mind which is very much essential to attain and sustain true knowledge. Even in the iconographic description, she is always represented with veena and book symbolising her as an authority on knowledge and art. There are sixty four art forms described in Kāma Sātra 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 Saraswatī. A Śubhāṣīta describes knowledge as the greatest and supreme wealth – 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 dhanimal (goddess of wealth) reflecting the same aspect. The most important attribute of Paramātma or Parabrahman is one, according to Vedas, Upanishads and Śhāstras. 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 kārṇaṭak music, which comprises both pooja vidhāna (worship) and jnāna, and by practising it, one can get a thorough knowledge on the aesthetics of kārṇaṭak music imbided 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 kārṇaṭak music.

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