

## KĀVYAS ON VĀGGEYAKĀRAS

(Lavanya Pravin, Research Scholar, K. S. R. Institute, Chennai)

Sanskrit is the mother of all languages and the repository of all arts. The ocean of Sanskrit has been fed all through the ages by streams of literature flowing from all parts of India. There have been ebb and flow in the waters of these streams; but at no time did they become completely dry. There exist Sanskrit treatises devoted to dance, drama and music and the arts as practised in both the Northern and Southern music schools. It is in Sanskrit literature that the art, the science and the history of Indian music are mainly embedded and a knowledge of Sanskrit and a study of the texts in that language becomes essential for every person pursuing Indian music.

The musical Trinity of India needs no introduction. After their epochal era of nurturement of *Saṅgīta*, there have been composers and poets in the 20<sup>th</sup> century who have written on Tyāga Brahmam and Muttusvāmi Dikṣitar, the great Vāggeyakāras. Harikesanallur Muthaiah Bhagavathar in his *Sri Tyāgarājavijayam* and T.S. Sundaresa Sarma in his *Sri Tyāgarājacaritam* have chronicled the life and *kṛtis* of Sri Tyāgarāja. Dr. V. Raghavan in his *Sri Muttusvāmi Dikṣitacaritam Mahākāvya* has recorded the same information about Dikṣitar. All the three works consist of mellifluous poems of great charm.

*Sri Tyāgarāja Vijayam* (TRV) and *Sri Tyāgarājacaritam* (TC) are two poems in Sanskrit on the life of Sri Tyāgarāja. According to Sanskrit rhetoricians, a Kāvya / Mahākāvya should deal with the life of a noble hero. In keeping with this, the authors have described the life of the saint singer and the rich contribution he has made to the field of music.

### Sri Tyāgarājavijayam

Harikesanallur Muthiah Bhagavathar was not only a great composer but an authentic *bhakta* and saint. He was one of the foremost exponents of the theoretical as well as the practical aspects of the musical heritage of South India. He was not only renowned as a *gāyaka*, but was also well-versed in many languages and had composed poems, songs and *kīrtanas* in Kannada, Tamil, Telugu and Sanskrit. Muthiah Bhagavathar was an ardent worshipper of Saint Tyāgarāja and held him as his model. His compositions are outstanding for the quality and originality.

The *Tyāgarājavijayam* consists of 7 cantos and is both a biography and critical appreciation of Sri Tyāgarāja's contribution to the theory and practice of music. The

whole story is replete with the devout understanding of a true disciple. The author has held that Sri Tyāgarāja was the progenitor of the present day musical methods and technique.

Muthiah Bhagavathar opens his *kāvya* with salutations to Nādabrahman, Vinayaka and Sarasvati (who is the embodiment of *raga*, *bhava* and *tala*) (TRV, I. 2-4):

यो नादः सर्वभूतानां सर्ववर्णस्य चाङ्कुरः ।  
 यो बीजं मन्त्रकोटीनां तं नादं प्रणमाम्यहम् ॥  
 नादोत्पत्तिकरं देवं नमामि प्रणवाकृतिम् ।  
 मूलाधारस्थितं ज्ञानमोक्षसिद्धिप्रदं गजम् ॥  
 नादविद्याप्रवीणं तां राग भाव लयात्मिकाम् ।  
 देवीं वागीश्वरीं वन्दे वीणवादनतत्पराम् ॥

In the second chapter the author uses as pun the names of various *ragas* while describing the life of Tyāgarāja (TRV, II.10-12):

कल्याण्याऽमृतवर्षिण्या श्रीरागविजयाढ्यया ।  
 कामोदर्या गिरा चक्रे शिशुः सारङ्गमोहनम् ॥  
 नायकीकृतभूपालः श्रीरञ्जिन्या त्विषा युतः ।  
 षण्मुखप्रियचर्योऽयं धन्यासीमकलोऽलसत् ॥

The author then talks of various technical features of *Saṅgītaśāstra* like *bhāṣāṅga*, *kriyāṅga*, *rāgāṅga*, various *ragas*, linking of melody, *rāga* and *tāla*, *gīta*, *alaṅkāra* (TRV, II.54-5):

भाषाङ्गानि क्रियाङ्गानि रागाङ्गानि च सर्वशः ।  
 रागान् विविच्य विज्ञाय रक्तिमानं सदाऽन्वभूत् ॥  
 गीतेष्वलङ्कियास्वेवं कीर्तनेषु पदेषु च ।  
 अधीतेषु च वर्णेषु व्यम्राक्षीलक्ष्मसङ्गतिम् ॥

There occur in the poem accounts relating to the revelation and even the direct appearance of the divinity on certain specific occasions, and the visit paid by Narada and his fruitful blessings. The well-known episode of Sri Tyāgarāja getting the manuscript of *Swarārṇava* from Narada is dealt with in detail by the author (TRV, V. 50, 55-6):

मया योऽदायि ते ग्रन्थः स स्वरार्णवनामकः ।  
 सुरेषु सुकृतोद्विक्तविबुधैकसुबोधनः ॥  
 श्रीरामकरुणां भूयो नारदानुग्रहं तथा ।  
 लाब्ध्वायं मुग्धदुःसाधं कृतिनं स्वममन्यत ॥  
 तदनु ज्ञानसम्पन्नस्तदनुग्रहसंग्रहात् ।  
 बहुभिः कृतिभी रामं तुष्टपूर्वमतोषयत् ॥

The story of the relation between Tyāgarāja and Saraboji, the Raja of Tanjore, and Tyāgarāja's indifference to money and position, the Raja's repentance and his ultimate appreciation of the real worth and quality of Tyāgarāja are also described in simple and melodious verses (*TRV*, VI. 10-11):

तथैव भगवद्भक्तः पक्वचित्तो गतस्पृहः ।  
 दीनोऽपि गुणहीनं तु नाश्रयेत् महाधनम् ॥  
 रामसन्निधितोऽन्यो मे निधिर्जातु न रोचते ।  
 इत्युपन्यस्य तस्याशां खण्डयामास पण्डितः ॥

The last canto, gives an account of his pilgrimage to various places in Southern India like Tirupati, Kovur, Srirangam, Tiruvanaikaval, Madhyarjuna, Govindapuram and finally Tiruvaiyaru. In this canto, the author gives reference only to the deity and not the songs rendered by Tyāgarāja. To quote (*TRV*, VII. 7, 14):

ततः पदैव सप्ताद्रीनारुह्यात्तजनैः सह ।  
 सोत्कण्ठं वेङ्कटेशस्य दर्शनार्थं यदागमत् ॥  
 अथ लक्ष्मीं महादेवीं दिव्ये पद्मसरोवरे ।  
 अभिवन्द्य सदारोऽयं गोग्रामं च ततो ब्रजन् ॥

### Sri Tyāgarājacaritam

This work is a poetic flight on the life of Tyāgarāja, divided into fifteen cantos, in chaste Sanskrit written by T.S. Sundaresa Sarma. This book is Sri Sarma's maiden venture into the art of poetry.

Though the hero of the poem is Tyāgarāja, the work is in praise of the hero's hero – Śrī Rāma himself. The author has based his work on the popular tradition that Sri Tyāgarāja was an incarnation of Vālmiki himself. The author also refers to the illustrious band of devotees of Sri Rama (*TC*, I. 36 and 42):

भाद्राचलो रामदासस्तुकारामः पुरंदरः ।  
 रामभद्रमखी चैव ये चान्ये रामपूजकाः ॥  
 शरभङ्गोऽथ वाल्मीकिः सुतीक्ष्णो गान्धिनन्दनः ।  
 भरद्वाजस्तथाऽन्ये च वसन्त्यत्र महर्षयः ॥

Since the author is a Sanskrit scholar we find more legendary details about birth of Tyāgarāja and emphasis on Rāma Bhakti which formed the *sāmrājya* of the saint. Imparting of the *Tāraka mantra* by sage Narada (which was imparted to Pārvati by Śiva) is also narrated (TC, V. 91ab-93cd):

इत्युत्त्वा श्रोत्रयोस्तस्य मन्त्रं पूतमुपादिशत् ।  
 तारकं सर्वपापेभ्यस्तारकं नाम नामतः ॥  
 उपदिष्टो ब्राह्मणेन सुप्रीतहृदयेन च ।  
 दृष्टेव राघवं साक्षात्त्यागेशो मुदमावहत् ॥

Another important observation on the greatness of Sri Tyāgarāja's songs made by this poet is that even the difficult truths that are given in the *Śāstras* were made simple and palatable in his songs. The poet further says that Sri Tyāgarāja composed songs on greatness of *bhakti mārga* which deals with different steps in it leading one to perfect devotion and final salvation (TC, VII.7):

दुरूहानपि शास्त्रार्थान्बोधयन्निजकीर्तनैः ।  
 सर्वांश्च विवशीकृत्याकरोत्साधुपथे स्थितान् ॥  
 पारम्यं भक्तियोगस्य तन्मार्गान्विविधांश्च सः ।  
 विषयीकृत्य गीतानि चकार मतिमांस्तदा ॥

In chapters 10 and 11 the poet discusses in detail the incident of Japyeśa throwing away the idols of Rama, Sita, Laksmana and Hanuman into Kaveri, the sorrow of Sri Tyāgarāja and his happiness on getting back the idols (TC, XI- 140,143):

त्यागराजश्च तान्दृष्ट्वा विग्रहान्पूर्ववत्स्थितान् ।  
 तोषाम्बुधिनिमग्नश्च न पारं प्राप्तवांस्तदा ॥  
 तांश्च संगृह्य हस्तेन वक्षसाऽऽलिङ्ग्य सत्वरम् ।  
 गायन्गृहं ताननयद्रारा मा इण्टिकीति च ॥

The 14<sup>th</sup> chapter titled *kṣetrāṭanam* provides the route of Sri Tyāgarāja's travel and the *kṛtis* sung by him on these *Kṣetras* – Śrīraṅgam, Tirupati, Kovur, Kāñci and Tiruvaiyāru. The songs composed by the saint on the deities in these places are also recorded by the poet. To quote:

Śrīraṅgam (TC, XIV.22):

तत्र दृष्ट्वा रङ्गनाथं तुष्टाव मधुसूदनम् ।  
करुणा जूटव्येति रङ्गशायीति कीर्तनैः ॥

Kovur (TC, XIV. 44):

सौन्दर्यनायिकायुक्तो यत्रास्ते सुन्दरेश्वरः ।  
कोरिसेविम्पारेति नम्मिच्चिन नन्विति ॥

### Sri Muttusvāmi Dikṣitacaritam Mahākāvyaṃ

This is an epic poem of special value composed by Dr. V. Raghavan. He had special interest in the great life and invaluable contribution made by the *Vāggeyakāras*, which resulted in his composing this Mahākāvya on Sri Muttusvāmi Dikṣitar who was a great *upāsaka* and music composer. This work embodies not only the sublime biography of the great musician but also an account of the evolution of Carnatic music in its greatest times around the Tanjore court. Apart from Sri Dikṣitar, Dr. Raghavan also penned a verse and a song on the other two of the musical Trinity.

This work consists of 17 *sargas* and the hero is one of those saints who realised Godhead within himself through music. The poem begins with a description of the background of the great composer. The opening stanzas, in praise of sage Agastya are well worth quoting as they form a good illustration of the easy style and flow which characterise the poem. Then there is the mention of Tiruvarur, the birth-place of Muttusvāmi Dikṣitar, and the Lord Tyāgarāja worshipped there (MC, I.13):

न कर्मणा न प्रजया धनेन  
त्यागेन केऽप्यानशिरेऽमृतत्वम् ।  
इत्यागमार्थोद्धलनाय यत्र  
त्यागाभिधानेन विभुर्विभाति ॥

When Dikṣitar was born the annual *Vasantotsava* in the Tyāgarāja temple was taking place, with the idol of the lord being brought out with a special dance of *Hamsa nāṭya* or *Ajapā naṭana* . This is how the poet puts it (MC, IV.15):

महीतलस्पर्शनिमेष एव त-  
च्छिशोः सुपुण्यस्य पपात कर्णयोः ।  
स हंसनाट्यध्वनिरीश्वरालयात्  
समुज्जिहानः परमोपदेशवत् ॥

A detailed account of the early life of Sri Dikṣitar, how he became proficient in Vedas and Sastras and acquired mastery of both Sanskrit and music, how his father Ramaswami Dikṣitar shifted to Manali and the visit of Chidambaranatha Yogi are all well described by the author.

The author further mentions that it was during Dikṣitar's stay at Kāśi, that he acquired a mastery of Hindustani music and in particular of the Dhruvad style. On his return from Varanasi, Sri Dikṣitar first visited Tiruttani and on being blessed by Lord Kumara he wrote eight compositions on Kumara in the eight *Vibhakti-s* of Sanskrit beginning with the *Prathama* and so on. These are considered as his first *kṛti-s*. Sri Dikṣitar took Kumara or Guha as his teacher and used the name 'Guru-Guha' as the mudra in all his songs. The first of this series is *Śrīnāthādi Guruguho jayati jayati* in Mayamalavagaula raga (MC, XI- 12, 14):

गुहो मम श्रीगुरुनाथ आदिमो  
जयत्यसावित्युदगायदादिमम् ।  
स कीर्तनं मालवगौलमादिमं  
विधाय रागं मनसः प्रसादनम् ॥  
इति प्रगायन् प्रथमेऽत्र कीर्तने  
निजां चिदानन्दरहोऽभिधां तथा ।  
स्वसर्वगीताङ्कतया समादृतां  
गुरोर्गुहस्याप्यभिधां न्यवेशयत् ॥

It is one of the distinguishing features of Dr. Raghavan's poem that it mentions the occasions on which particular songs of Dikṣitar were composed, and it is to be noted that the poet speaks in the language of the composer. For example (MC, IX.16):

गुहस्य रूपं भज मानसानघं  
 त्यजोरुमायामयतापमात्मनः ।  
 सतीदृशे जन्मनि मानवे सुखं  
 ब्रजव्यपेतातिस्त्र्यं परात्मनि ॥

Here the first line of the verse is reflective of the song of Śri Dikṣitar which is – “मानसगुरुगुह”. Dr. Raghavan also mentions in this great work certain interesting incidents in the life of Śri Dikṣitar which led him to compose certain well-known *kṛtis*. When Śri Dikṣitar visited the Śiva temple at Kivalur, the midday worship was over and the arcaka closed the doors of the Sanctum Sanctorum. Then Śri Dikṣitar sat down and sang the famous Śaṅkarābharaṇam *kṛti* ‘Akṣayaliṅga vibho’.

Śri Dikṣitar has also composed *kṛtis* on the *Navagrahas*, which Dr. Raghavan has discussed in the 13<sup>th</sup> chapter. To quote: Sūryagraha (MC, XIII.56):

छायापते तव नमोऽस्तु सहस्रभानो  
 लोकप्रकाश विधिविष्णुशिवस्वरूप  
 आरोग्यमुख्यफुलदार्यनुतोरुतेजः  
 स्फूर्ते महाघहरणाखिलकर्मसाक्षिन् ॥

In the 14<sup>th</sup> chapter, the various *kṛtis* composed by Śri Dikṣitar on goddess Mīnākṣī at Madurai has been beautifully portrayed by the poet. It is said that Śri Dikṣitar offered a whole series of *kṛtis* in the eight cases of Sanskrit. To quote (MC, XIV.21):

देवक्रियां विशदयन् प्रथमां विभक्तिं  
 तुष्टाव “रक्षतु दृढं मधुराम्बिका माम् ।  
 वाग्वादिनीप्रमुखमात्रुपसेव्यमाना  
 वेदान्तबोधनकरी समनुत्रिकोणा” ॥

Here Dr. Raghavan incorporates the song of Śri Dikṣitar in his text, quite easily; he also mentions the name of the *raga*. Whenever Śri Dikṣitar visited a shrine and sang in praise of the deity, he embodied in his *Kīrtana* the traditions that had grown around the shrine. Dr. Raghavan has taken considerable pains to expound these traditions, and his poem is a rich store-house of the religious traditions of South Indian temples.

Dr. Raghavan in this work enumerates the popular *kṛtis* composed by Śri Dikṣitar at the famous temples in Kāñcī, Tiruvārūr, Cidambaram, etc. It is worthy to name a few:

- Kāñcīpuram:**      *Cintaya makanda* in raga Bhairavi on Ekambaranatha  
                           *Kañcadalāyatashi* in Kamala Manohari and  
                           *Nirajākṣi Kāmākṣi* in Hindolam on Kāmākṣi
- Tiruvārūr:**        Five *kṛtis* on the five *Liṅgas* representing the five elements  
                           *Navāvaraṇa kṛtis* on Kamalāmba etc.
- Cidambaram:**    *Ānanda Naṭana prakāśam* in Kedaram on Nataraja and so on...

Sri Dikṣitar's life may be summed up as one continuous pilgrimage from temple to temple, dedicated to Siva, Vishnu, Ganesa, Kumara, all over South India, and singing the praise of the dieties. It is well brought out by the poet in the following verses (MC, X.4-5):

क्षेत्रं क्षेत्रं गत्वा देवो दिव्येन गीतयोगेन ।  
 सेव्यो मयापि भक्तयेत्यास मनस्तस्य बाल्यतः प्रभृति ॥  
 आल्वार नायन्मार् इति येऽभूवन् गायकाः भक्ताः ।  
 तद्वरमार्गानुसृतावुत्कण्ठा तस्य सुदृढमेवासीत् ॥

The three poets have skilfully interspersed their work with noteworthy concepts of music. As such these *Kāvya*s hold a valuable place in the field of Sanskrit as well as music literature. The Vāggeyakaras' life recorded in these works give an account of their devotion to lord and non-attachment to wealth and worldly possessions. These works also detail their affinity to the value of Sanskrit in Indian traditional music with its well etched format and abundant expression. Narayana Tirtha, Sadasiva Brahmendra and Margadarsi Sesha Ayyanar who were the eminent predecessors of Dikṣitar used Sanskrit as the vehicle to convey their thoughts and expressions in the *kṛtis*. The Sanskrit medium established the continuity with the classical past and the link with sacred literature, *Veda*, *Mantra*, *Tantra*, *Kshetramahatmya*. In the words of Sir C. P Ramaswamy Iyer, "A nation is made, its genius moulded and its spirit kept alive by its dreamers, its thinkers, its poets and its musicians."

The three works presented herein above are a fitting tribute to the two Vāggeyakāras, Tyāgarāja and Dikṣitar. Not only have they recorded the life of these saints for posterity, they also stand as a testimony to the fact that Sanskrit is a living language.

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