

MAHARAJA SWATI TIRUNAL IN RELATION TO THE TRINITY OF KARNATIC MUSIC

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The three great composers of the last century, Saint Tyagaraja, Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Sastri, are together known as the "Trinity" of Karnatic Music on account of their distinct contribution to the system of music now current in South India. But a comparative study of these composers with their contemporary Maharaja Swati Tirunal will show that His Highness has a claim for equal rank with them on account of the vast bulk, wide variety and high quality of his compositions and that the Trinity should really be a Quartette.

GENERAL INFLUENCES

THE music of the period which is represented by the Musical Trinity and Sri Swati Tirunal, was subject to certain general influences.

Venkatamakhin's Melakarta-Janyaraga Scheme

The first and foremost influence was that of the epoch-making *Melakarta-Janyaraga* Scheme of Venkatamakhin propounded in his *Chaturdandi-prakasiha*. Venkatamakhin had fixed the number of possible parent scales based on the twelve *svara-sthanas* of the gamut and every *raga* could be brought under one or other of these. The scheme helped not only to stabilise the *ragas* current at that time but also to revive many old tunes and to form new ones by fresh combinations of the *svaras*. A vast store of *ragas* was thus made available to the composers and all these *ragas* could be defined in terms of their *svara-sthanas*.

After the *Chaturdandi-prakasiha* appeared the *Sangrahachudamani* of Govindacharya which gave the details of numerous *janyaragas* based on the scheme of Venkatamakhin and illustrated them all by *lakshanagitas*.

There were thus both rule and illustration for a very large number of beautiful melodies.

The Kriti Type of Composition

The second influence was that of the *Kriti* type of composition. The classical *prabandhas* with their numerous divisions and elaborate set-up which characterised the music of the earlier times had given place to simpler forms like the *Kirtana* and the *Kriti* wherein the essence of a *raga* is crystallised into a beautiful rhythmic pattern comprising the *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and *charana*. This form found particular favour with the composers being simple in structure, but at the same time affording ample scope for the display of the beauties of the *raga*. The composers further enriched this form by the introduction of *gamakas*, *sangatīs* and other musical embellishments.

Namasiddhanta

The *namasiddhanta* was the third factor which influenced the music of the time. During the previous century the three saints Sadasivabrahmendra, Bodhendrasarasvati and Sridhara Venkatesa Swami had greatly popularised the *Bhajanapaddhati* with the *namasankirtana* aspect of *Bhakti* and this exerted a remarkable influence on the development of the music of the time and on the contents of the compositions. There was a great demand for devotional songs and the composers met this by their *kirtanas* and *kritis* couched in devotional or ethical themes.

There were, thus, certain clearly perceptible influences both on the form and on the contents of the musical compositions of the time.

SPECIAL INFLUENCES

In this general background the Music Quartette—Tyagaraja, Dikshitar, Syama Sastri and Swati Tirunal—had two special influences, namely, a notable family tradition in music and a special initiation into the secrets of the art.

Musical Tradition

Tyagaraja's maternal grandfather was Kalahasti Ayya, a renowned Vina player, and his paternal grandfather Giriraja Kavi, a composer and musician. His father Ramabrahmam was the expounder of the *Ramayana* in the Royal Court at Tanjore and was possibly a musician as well.

Ramaswami Dikshitar, the father of Muthuswami Dikshitar, learnt music at the feet of Muddu Venkatamakhin, a descendant of the famous Venkatamakhin, the author of *Chaturdandiprahasika*.

Syama Sastri's uncle was a musician and it was under him that he learnt the rudiments of music.

The Royal family of Travancore to which Swati Tirunal belonged was well known for its musical tradition. Kartika Tirunal Balarama Varma Maharaja was the author of the treatise *Balarama-bharatam* on histrionics and of several *attakkathas*. Asvati Tirunal Rama Varma Yuvaraja had also written beautiful *attakkathas* and devotional songs. Several musicians were also patronised by this Royal House.

Such family traditions exerted a strong influence on these composers.

Special Initiation

All these four composers were initiated into the mysteries of higher music by persons of high spiritual attainments.

An ascetic came to Tyagaraja and presented him with the manuscript of an unknown musical work by name *Svaranava*. This ascetic is identified as sage Narada on the authority of Tyagaraja's own words. Some modern scholars regard the whole incident as a mere myth, but there is no reason to disbelieve the composer's own statements. It is also worthwhile to know that in the manuscript collection in the Walajapet Sampradaya, one of the four main schools of Tyagaraja's disciples, a manuscript containing several excerpts from the *Svaranava* has been recently discovered.

Muthuswami Dikshitar, while yet a boy, came into contact with a saint by name Chidambaranatha Yogi of Benares who was on a pilgrimage to the South. This Yogi saw the latent musical talents in Dikshitar and took him to Benares and initiated him into *Srividya* and into the mysteries of *Nadabrahman*.

A *sanyasi* by name Sangita Swami, who was well-versed in music and dancing, once had his *bhiksha* in Syama Sastri's house at the invitation of his father. Syama's music attracted the attention of the Swami and he took him as his pupil and taught him the intricacies of *raga*, *tala* and *svaraprastara*.

In the Royal Court of Travancore also there was a great yogi and musician called Anantapadmanabha Goswami alias Meruswami. He was a Mahratta Brahmin who settled in Trivandrum at the Maharaja's request. He was noted for his very melodious voice and had the title "Kokilakantha" meaning cuckoo-voiced. He was famous for his *Harikathakalakshepams* and it was for this purpose that Swati Tirunal wrote his two *prabandhas* *Kuchelopakhya* and *Ajamilopakhya*. A house was built for him near the western entrance to the Sripadmanabhaswami temple, which still remains quite intact under the direct management of the Palace and is known as "Meruswami Mathom". Swati Tirunal used to attend the special pujas of the Swami in this house and this itself shows the very high regard he had for him. A portrait of his was hung up in the Palace, reverence to which has ever since become a regular item in the daily religious routine of the Maharaja of Travancore, the Swami being regarded as a *Kulaguru*. And it is but proper that His Highness learnt many things in music from this yogi.

With such a valuable musical tradition behind them and being thus specially initiated into the intricacies of the art, the genius of these composers found full expression in the beautiful and melodious musical patterns with which they thrilled the world of music.

COMMON FEATURES—COMPARATIVE ESTIMATE

In the musical output of the Quartette certain common features are discernible.

Musical Forms

The main bulk of their output belongs to the *Kriti* type. All these compositions are fine illustrations of the different *ragas* in which they are

cast and serve as their correct *lakshyas*. But besides the *Kṛiti*, they have handled several other forms also. Tyagaraja has composed the *Pancharatna* which, though a class by itself, approximates to the *varna* in some respects, and written two operas the *Prahladabhata Vijaya* and *Nowkacharita*. Dikshitar has composed some *varnas*, *darus* and *ragamaliḱa*. Sastri is the author of many *svarjathis* and a few *varnas* and *ragamaliḱa*. Swati Tirunal has handled a much wider variety including *Jatisvaras*, *Tana-varnas*, *Chowkavarnas*, *Padas*, *Tillanas*, *Ragamaliḱas* and many Hindustani forms.

All the four have also composed group *Kritis*. Tyagaraja's *Kovoor Pancharatna* and *Tiruvottiyoor Pancharatna*, Dikshitar's *Navavaranas* on Kama-lamba and Abhayamba and *Navagrahakritis*, Syama Sastri's *Navaratnamaliḱa* on Goddess Minakshi and Swati Tirunal's *Navaratrikirtanas* and *Navaratnamaliḱa* are examples.

Old and New Ragas

In the music of the Quartette certain old *ragas* were revived and new *ragas* introduced, but there was always close adherence to the noblest traditions of higher music. Dikshitar looked more to the past and gave fresh life to old *ragas* like *Ardradesi*, *Chayagaula*, *Maruva*, *Suddhavasantam* and *Madhavamanoḱari*. Tyagaraja looked more to the future and poured forth his music in a variety of new *ragas* like *Nalinakanti*, *Navarasakannada*, *Chenchukamboji*, *Bindumalini*, *Malayomarutam*, *Koḱiladhvani* and a host of others and in full scale *ragas* like *Dhenuka*, *Koḱilapriya*, *Charukesi*, *Sarasangi*, *Lotangi*, etc., Syama Sastri mostly composed in the *ragas* which had continued to be popular in his own time, though certain rare *ragas* like *Kalagada* and *Chintamani* occasionally figure in his pieces. But Swati Tirunal had his thoughts both on the past as well as on the future. Not only are many old *ragas* like *Gopikavasantam*, *Mangalakaisiki*, *Lalithapanchamam*, *Khad* and *Kakubha* preserved in his pieces, but new *ragas* like *Puravakamboji*, *Suddhabhairavi* and *Mohanakalyani* are also handled. In fact in *ragas* like *Mohanakalyani* Swati Tirunal has indicated a method for forming new *ragas* by combining the *arohana* of one *raga* and the *avarohana* of another, since *Mohanakalyani* has the *arohana* of *Mohana* and the *avarohana* of *Kalyani* and forms a very melodious tune.

Simple Talas

All the four have chosen only simple *talas* for their songs, mostly *Adi*, *Chapu*, *Tripata*, *Rupakam* and *Jhampa*. They have not composed in the classical *Pancha talas* or the Hundred-and-eight *talas*. But it may be noted that Tyagaraja has also used the *Desadi* and *Madhyadi* forms of the *Adi tala*, Dikshitar the *Mathya* and *Dhrurva talas* and the *Tisra* and *Khanda* varieties of *Eḱa tala* and Syama Sastri the other varieties of *Eḱa tala* also. It may also be noted that Dikshitar had a partiality for *Rupaka tala* and Syama Sastri for *Chapu tala*. Swati Tirunal has composed in all the *talas* used by Tyagaraja and also in *Mathya* and *Raganamathya* and the Hindustani *talas* *Chow* and *Bilandi*.

Wide Range

The compositions of the Quartette comprehend a wide range. From very simple to very complex pieces they provide a very rich fare of musical products for the novice as well as for the expert. But while the difficult varieties are proportionately larger in the output of Dikshitar and Sastri, they may be said to be equally distributed in that of Tyagaraja and Swati Tirunal.

Bhakti—Ishtadevata

All these composers were the upholders of the doctrine of *Bhakti* and each had an *ishtadevata*, a favourite deity, of his own. There is nothing strange in this since they were all born as a result of special divine favour, for the birth of Dikshitar was the result of his father's fast before God Muthukumaraswami at Anantadvapuram for a period of forty days; Syama Sastri was born due to the blessing of Lord Venkatachalapathi; Tyagaraja, as is generally believed, was the incarnation of sage Valmiki; and Swati Tirunal was 'Garbhastriḱan' and a gift to the Travancore Royal family by Sripadmanabha. Their songs are all suffused with sincere devotion to the Lord and form either precepts for its cultivation or verbal expressions of their mystic experiences. They clearly show the intensity of their devotion to and the intimacy of their relation with the deity they had chosen as their favourite. Tyagaraja had Srirama for his *ishtadevata*, Dikshitar found his favourite in Subrahmanya, Syama Sastri had no deity other than Kamakshi and Swati Tirunal resigned himself to his own family deity Padmanabha. But their

attachment to their *ishtadevata* was more of a preferential sort than of an exclusive nature. Therefore they have sung of other deities also. We find a clear expression of this spirit of catholicity particularly in Tyagaraja, Dikshitar and Swathi Tirunal.

SPECIALITIES OF SWATI TIRUNAL

There are certain special features which mark out Swati Tirunal from his contemporaries.

Multilingual Production

His Highness was a multilingual composer. While the Trinity confined their songs for the most part to Telugu and Sanskrit, Tyagaraja and Syama Sastri having composed mostly in Telugu and Dikshitar in Sanskrit, Swati Tirunal handled several languages like Sanskrit, Malayalam, Hindustani, Telugu and Kanarese. The major bulk of his compositions is in Sanskrit and next in importance are Malayalam and Hindusthani.

Hindustani and Maharatti Forms

Unique among the Quartette, Swati Tirunal has handled with great facility Hindusthani forms and tunes. While others were content with using North Indian ragas which had been adopted into Karnatic Music such as *Yamunakalyani*, *Hamirkalyani*, *Brindavanasarangam*, *Dvijavanti*, *Kapi*, *Bihag*, *Sindubhairavi* and *Hindolam*, Swati Tirunal also composed in pure Hindusthani ragas like *Hamirkalpa*, *Rektha*, *Kaki* and *Bibhas*, in Hindusthani talas like *Desadi*, *Chow* and *Bilandi*, in Hindusthani modes like *Dhrupad*, *Tappa* and *Khayal* and in the Hindusthani language. He has also composed a *ragamala*, a *dhrupad* in *chow tala*, in the ragas, *Bibhas*, *Malhar*, *Manirang*, *Eman*, *Kanada*, *Saranga*, *Hindola*, *Athana* and *Sama*. His known Hindi compositions number about forty and he is the only South Indian composer who has made such a substantial contribution to North Indian music.

He has also written some *Abhangs* and *Dindis*, the two main forms of composition in Maharatti music.

Poetic Diction

The songs of the Maharaja have a stately poetic diction. They abound in beautiful poetic conceits and have a distinctive assonance. They are well known for their alliterative quality and for their strict adherence to the rules relating to verbo-

musical embellishments like *muhana*, *prasa* etc. They are also fine examples of the *ganalankara* known as *svarakshara*, namely the identity of the *svara* in the *dhatu* with the syllable in the *sahitya*. In fact none has excelled Swati Tirunal in the use of *svarakshara*.

Varnas

As a composer of *Varnas*, Swati Tirunal has very few equals and none among the Trinity. The ability to compose good *varnas* is the last reward of consummate musical scholarship. Just as it is said that the drama is the most mature product of a poet's genius, the sure test of his real ability, (*natahantam kavituam*), it may be said that the *varana* is the most mature product of a composer's genius (*varnantam vaggeyakaratvam*). Swati Tirunal has composed both *Tanavarnas* and *Chowkavarnas*, and half a dozen of the first kind and about a score of the second are so far known. They include ragas like *Khanta*, *Purnachandrika* and *Saurasthram* in which *varnas* of other composers are not commonly known. We also get more than one *varna* in certain ragas. The *varnas* *Chalamela* in *Sankarabharana* and *Sarasijanabha* in *Kambhoji* are exquisite compositions and they have rightly gained very wide popularity. The *varna* *Sumasayaka* in *Kapi* with its excellent *dhatu* and numerous *Sangatis* and with the last *ethukkadassvara* as a *ragamaliika*, is a class by itself.

Dance Forms

The *varnas*, especially the *chowka* variety, are meant for dance. Besides these *varnas* Swati Tirunal has composed a large number of other dance forms like *Svarajatis*, *Padas*, and *Tillanas* and thus enriched dance music. In this respect also he is distinct from the Trinity.

Lack of Disciples

The lack of disciples is a feature pertaining to Swati Tirunal among the Quartette. His royal position did not allow him the convenience for having disciples. But what the Trinity could achieve through their pupils and descendants, Swati Tirunal could achieve to some extent through the numerous musicians he had in his court, among whom were very eminent figures like Vadivel and his brothers, Shatkala Govinda Marar, Iravi Varman Tampi, Meruswami, Veena Subbukkutti Ayyar, Kannayya Bhagavatar Tanjore Ranga Ayyangar, Palghat Parameswara Bhagavatar and others.

Through these court-musicians and their disciples some songs of Swati Tirunal had gained considerable popularity throughout South India even in his own time. The *varnas Chalamela* and *Sarasijana-bha* mentioned above, the *kirtanas Sarasaksha* in *Pantuvarali*, *Sarasasamamukha* in *Khamas*, *Padasanati* in *Kambhoji*, *Smarajanaka* in *Bihag*, *Pahi parvatanandini* in *Arabhi*, *Sriramachandra* in *Todi*, and *Anandavalli* in *Nilambari*, the *ragamalas Pannagendrasayana* and *Kamalajasyahrita* are examples. Imitations of his compositions also began to appear, a different *sahitya* being given to his *varnamettu*, and the *ragamala Pannagadrisayana* and the *Nilambari kirtana Sringaralahari* are instances.

Remodelling of Kerala Music

Swati Tirunal has remodelled the music of Kerala. The system of music current here was what is called the 'Sopana' system, which, though it has a majesty and charm of its own due to its slow and stately flow, is of a simple type and without *gamakas*, *sangatis*, etc., which characterise modern Karnatic music and give it its distinctive individuality. The notes, as a rule, were all straight and the ragas which are distinguished by slight differences in the srutis of their notes or in their arrangement were practically unknown. There were certain ragas which were well known and which the average listener could easily identify and these were handed down from master to pupil. In this system *soara* singing does not seem to have been in vogue and so the relative values of the svaras in a raga were not precisely defined. The general absence of the *ganavadyas* was also perhaps responsible for lack of advance in that direction. This system of music is best represented in our *Kathakals* especially in the earlier ones.

But in Swati Tirunal's court the influence of modern Karnatic music was clearly perceptible. The many musicians and dancers who came from Tanjore and other places exerted a strong influence on him and enabled him to adopt this system for his compositions and build an attractive super-structure of Karnatic Music on the bedrock of the *Sopana* system. Though many of his compositions are cast on the pure Karnatic mould, they all possess a distinctive flavour which enables a connoisseur to mark out these from those of others. A harmonious blending of the *sopana* and

Karnatic systems is also found in some pieces. The *kirtanas Pahi mam srivageeswari* in *Kalyani*, *Bhavayami Raghuramam* in *Saveri*, *Bhavaye srigopalam* in *Punnagavarali*, *Chintaye Padmanabham* in *Mohanam* and almost all the *Manipravala padas* are instances.

The new style set by Swati Tirunal soon attained great popularity. His songs very soon spread throughout the country and *kirtanas* like *Sarasaksha* in *Pantuvarali*, *Saure* in *Darbar*, *Bhaktaparayana* in *Sankarabharana*, *Sarasasamamukha* in *Khamas*, *Deva mamayi* in *Kedaragaula*, *Pahi saure* in *Nata*, etc., could be heard even in the remote villages. The contemporary *Kathakali* writers like Iravi Varman Tampi and Vidvan Koil Tampuran also adopted many of the *dhatas* devised by His Highness, sometimes with slight variations.

Literary Works

While the creative genius of the Trinity confined itself to musical forms, that of Swati Tirunal embraced purely literary forms as well. His Highness was, therefore, an author besides a composer, and an author of no mean worth. The *Bhaktimanjari*, a poem expounding the ninefold path of devotion, the *Syanandurapuravarnanaprabhanda*, a *champu-kavya* detailing the legendary history of and the contemporary festivals in the Sripadmanabhaswami temple, the *Padmanabhasataka*, a *stotra* on Sripadmanabha, all bespeak his sincere devotion and supreme talents as a literary artist. His *sandarbhavarana* of the *Amarusataka* shows him as a literary critic also.

It is also worthwhile to note that Maharaja Swati Tirunal has written a small treatise on music by name *Muhanaprasantiyaprasavyavastha* enunciating the principles of *sabdalanakara* to be used in musical compositions. We know of a table of *Talaprastara* worked out by Syama Sastri but of no work on music either by him or by the other members of the Trinity.

A short life full of responsibility

Swati Tirunal had only a short life and that too was one of heavy responsibility. While Tyagaraja lived for eighty years, Syama Sastri for sixty-five years and Dikshitar for sixty years, Swati Tirunal lived only for thirty-five years out of which only a decade and a half can be assigned for his literary and musical activities. Moreover he had the onerous task of political administration, which he

fulfilled in a distinguished manner bringing about numerous reforms and laying the foundation for all the later cultural advancement of the State. It is when we view his compositions in this background that their magnitude and value become more apparent. What the Trinity accomplished in a long life of leisure dedicated to music, Swati Tirunal accomplished in a short life full of varied activity and serious responsibility.

Maharaja Swati Tirunal was, therefore, a great

musical and literary artist, who has given to the world a rich and a variegated fare of charming specimens of both music and poetry. By their wide variety uniformly high quality and eloquent appeal for *bhakti*, his compositions have claim for a place along with those of Tyagaraja, Dikshitar and Syama Sastri. It is gratifying to note that there is, of late, a revival of interest in these compositions. But they deserve still wider publicity and still better appreciation.



MAHARAJA SRI SWATI TIRUNAL (1813-1847)