

The Study of Muthuswami Dikshitar's expertise on Veena reflected in his compositions

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Abstract

Since time immemorial, Veena has been the musical instrument of the Gods and precisely considered sacred since it is attributed to the Goddess Saraswati. Playing of veena was a common practice especially in south India and the making started during the reign of 'Pedda rayudu' in the 17th century. The euphonious Nada or sounds of the various musical instruments helps the sadaka (aspirant) to connect spirituality through the medium of music. This paper aims to study the Veena exhaustively by summarizing the various types of veena, the making and its various benefits unknown to man-kind. This paper also emphasizes the role of Veena which brought an era of renaissance in carnatic music through Dikshitar's compositions by introduction of gamakas, tanams and other subtle nuances that can be only played by the perfection of Veena.

Keywords: Vainika-Gayaka, Gamakas, Vilambakala, Dikshitar.

Introduction:

Veena is described in epics as a celestial as Goddess Lakshmi is personified in it, her Veena is called kacchapi. She is the Goddess of Arts and Learning as she holds Veena and Veda in her hand which portrays sound and wisdom. The Sanskrit word 'Veena' is taken from Rigveda, it is a generic name referring to all stringed instruments. Bharat muni also called 'the music created by string instruments, played with several other types of musical instruments is called 'Gandharva'. Nadopasana is the worship of the Divine through music and every musician is a Karma yogi. Veena, mrudangam, and flute together are called 'Vadyatriyam' in the world of Carnatic music. There are at least five hundred instruments known, each with a distinct name, the technique of playing, and the quality of tone and timbre (Dimpy, 2012).

Area of Study:

This study enunciates the influence of Veena in Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar's music. The nature and scope of Veena express the sacredness of the instrument, its evolution, various types of Veena, information on the construction of the instrument, and various benefits provided by this instrument to the man-kind.

Methods:**Syntactical Approach:**

Searching for words related to Veena like Yali, celestial, Vainika-Gayaka, Nadopasaka, in Dikshitar's compositions and finding what Dikshitar says about its influence on his works is a method adopted here. The names of various types of Veena and their benefits, evolution, and nature of Veena can be searched for.

Nature and Scope of Veena:

Being one of the oldest instruments, it also belongs to the musical instruments category of 'Thatha' or Chordophones, which are the class of stringed instruments. Dhruvapada or dhruvad style is a type of music which is original, real and stable in nature and since Veena is designed and modified to the Dhruvad style of 'Anga Alap', it further created a Dhruvad recital. The veena nada symbolizes our thoughts and actions through its music or sound.

The hunter's bow was the first stringed instrument invented by man. Bowstring produced a pleasant sound when the hunter shot his arrow. The string was later replaced by materials like flax and gut. The Veena consists of a spherical bowl-shaped resonator, a long stem called dandi ending in a curve shaped like a Yali near which the strings are fixed utilizing pegs. Veena consists of seven strings, twenty-four frets these frets are sometimes fixed and also movable as in other prototypes, and a camel bone is used for the inlay.

In Sangita Ratnakara, Sarangadeva describes Veena, "Veena is an instrument that eradicates all evils and sins and bestows harmony in life. Merely touching the Veena can bestow comfort both during and after one's lifetime. It cleanses and purifies all sins and evils of not only the downtrodden but also of those who have committed heinous crimes". He mentions the fixing of frets on the veena is called 'Kinnari'.

The sage Yagnavalkya says in his sloka from Yagnavalkya Smriti;

Vīṇā vādāna tatvajñāḥ śrutijāti viśāradhāḥ tālajñānāscā aprayāsena mokṣa mārgam sa gaccatiḥ

Speaks of the greatness of the Veena: "one, who is well versed in playing the Veena and has mastered in sruthi and jathi, has a sound knowledge of tala, effortlessly finds himself on the way to liberation or moksha', requires a lot of mental, physical efforts and one-point concentration to reach the goal (Srivatsa, 2001).

Types of Veena:

The variety of musical instruments in musical treatises can be classified under four heads; Tata or stringed instruments(chordophones), Sushira or wind instruments (aerophones),

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Avanaddha, or percussion instruments (membrophones) like the drums and Ghana or the instruments (idiophones) which are struck against each other.

Major types of Veena:

Aitareya Brahmana gives two major classifications of Veena: Daivi Veena or the God made which refers to the human body Daru Veena or the man-made also called Manushi Veena which is made of different types of wood.

Daivi Veena (the human body):

The Aitareya Brahmana which exquisitely explains the Daivi veena and says;

‘The daivi veena as divine and created by god whereas manushi veena was created by wood and said that man is known as gatra veena where he only denotes the human body and not the human voice’.

The structure of the backbone (spinal column) of a human has 24 (vertebrae) important centers compared to the 24 frets of the veena. The veena resembles the human body in the gross form and the subtle nada form. The spinal cord stands straight from the Mooladhara (seat of kundalini) and up to the head (Sahasrara), there exists the Brahmarastra. Swaras directly correspond to the psychic centers emerging from the lower end of the body (near the hipbone) to the Sahasrara. When the pitch is raised, the kundalini shakti rises from the Muladhara chakra to the Sahasrara (seat of the union of Shiva and shakti) this process is referred to as kundalini awakening, kind of yogic technique to merge in Supreme Consciousness. Naada is produced by the union of wind and fire (Praanagni samyoga) (Weissmann, 1955).

Daru Veena (the man-made veena):

In Aitareya Brahman, Manushi veena is mentioned as made from the wood of ‘Tantris’(a type of wood especially for the making of veena). Other woods used are Rosewood, Jackwood, etc. Veenas at that time were bow-shaped, resembling a harp, though some were straight. The wood ‘Ambana’, being hollow, was used to build the lower part of the veena and the front part was covered by stretched leather. In Aitareya Aranyaka, it was called ‘Lomshen Charmnasspihita’. The Veenas seen in the ‘Bahut sculpture’ were bow-shaped and were called ‘Vanas’.

Types of Manushi Veena:

1. Ekatantriveena- made out of the Khadira tree.
2. Alapiniveena- veena is 36 inches and made out of red sandalwood or khadira wood. silk threads were used to make the strings and not made out of metal.
3. Kinnariveena- the veena is 31/2 stretched palms made out of shaka wood.
4. Pinaakeeveena- it is geometrically constructed. It is a bowed instrument.
5. Rudra veena- Mythology describes Rudra veena with seven strings, four playing strings and three strings for the drone and tala. The historical evolution says it was created by Lord Shiva and is widely used in Hindustani classical music.

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6. The North Indian Veena is called Vichitraveena and has no frets. A small piece was used to glide over the playing strings to produce notes of different pitches.
7. The new name of the 'Hanumad veena' is 'Chitraveena' and Lord Hanuman was proficient in playing this instrument (Swami, 1963).

Other types of Veena:

- The best example of veena engraved on coins can be seen Samudragupta playing Veena called 'Parivadini' which bow shaped and having seven strings known as 'Yazh' in Tamil Literature.
- The veena found in Egypt is known as 'Ban' and in India, it is called 'Indian Bana' or 'Bin', among the Gond tribes in Madhya Pradesh this veena, is known as 'Gogia Bana' even today.
- The Veena of Goddess Saraswati is known as 'Kachchapi veena' is made out of Jackwood and is still found in the Philippines where it is known as 'Kadjapi'.
- In Yajurveda, different kinds of Veena have been used: Talukveena, GodhaVeena, Aghati, Ghatika, KandVeena, Pichola, Alabu, and others.
- Aeolian Hgtarp is the name of veena which has a Greek origin and is constructed with Hundreds of strings and are they are tuned simultaneously. It is created in such way as the sound of veena resembles the gust of wind. The veena named after the wind god is called 'Marud veena' by the author named Sayana who is the commentator of Vedas.
- The Pichoda and the Kanda Veena are examples of instruments, especially for women.

Other types of Veenas mentioned in scriptures:

- Ganaveena- for playing classical music.
- Pradarshanveena- this instrument used for explaining certain laws of music, facts and other phenomena to be known about veena.
- Dhruvaveena- specially designed by Bharata muni for the experimental purpose to prove the frequencies of sruthis and facts relating to the tonal system of India.
- Sthiraveena- the veena was tuned and stationed at a particular place for when the wind blew caused certain vibration against the strings.
- Akashaveena- veena when tied on the top of trees, produced sound due to the wind blowing through them.
- Sari veena- veenas with frets are called sari veena.
- Nissariveena- veena without frets.
- Dhanurveena- veena played with a bow.
- Sruthiveena- designed by Sarangadeva to explain the twenty-two Sruthis.
- Swara veena- veena for playing creative music like Alapanas and compositions

(Sahana, 2016).

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Veena nada invokes hidden and untapped spiritual energy in the subtler regions of the body creating an extreme sense of blissfulness and joy in the vainika (the person who plays veena), also symbolizes our thoughts and actions through its music or sound. The renowned musicologist, Prof. Sambamoorthy suggests that singing when accompanied by veena nada, sharpens the melodic tones making singing precise and improves the quality of voice, resembling the sound of veena. The yogic technique is called 'Kumbakam' or retention of breath. ie. Neither inhalation nor exhalation of breath occurs with sitting in crossed legged (padmasana or siddhasana), which is practiced by the vainika while playing the veena. Dr. Sairam in his "RagaTherapy" on p.16 refers to certain ragas having a therapeutic value when played with certain instruments, credit goes to the unique texture of sound or timbre, referring to the sweet melodious sound of veena or 'Veena Naada'. According to Patanjali yoga sutras, Pratyahara is the withdrawal of senses which is precisely experienced by the sadhaka while concentrating on the notes and the frets to be strung (Sanivarapu, 2015).

Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar Life and his Works:

The Veena brought many manifestations in the music of the great vaggeyakara, Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar's such as 'gamakas', subtle manipulation of note in any manner to produce a musical effect, consoling grieving hearts. In ancient days, 'oppari'(song from Tamil Nadu) was sung in event of the death of a person, gamakas were used in excess to suppress the emotions of the survivors of the deceased. Dikshitar was introduced to this unique Veena as blessings from Goddess Ganga with the Yali Mukhi upwards and the name of Shri Rama inscribed in Devanagari on it. In his famous composition 'Balagopala' he refers to himself as 'Vainika-Gayaka, i.e, adept in playing Veena and singing. He is the master of this instrument.

Gamakas:

Matangamuni of Brihaddeshi was the first to coin the word 'Gamakam' in his works. Gamakas are defined as "subtle manipulations of note in any manner to produce a musical effect consoling grieving hearts these delicate vibrations adorn the musical note and produce an emotional effect called raga bhava. The austerity of songs inflicted by the particular type of ragas is subtle by ornamentations known as 'Gamakas', by providing grace notes, slides, tremolos, and variegated shadings, it is said that without gamakas melody cannot smile. (Weissmann, 1955).

Dikshitar mentions Goddess as 'Dasha Gamakriya' in the famous Kriti 'Menakshi me mudam dehi'. He uses ten kinds of Gamakas on the Veena. The speed or tempo of the songs was rendered in Vilambakala (slow tempo) in a uniform style with rich usage of Sanskrit language and full of gamakas which brought out the Bhakti Rasa in his compositions. The influence of Hindustani classical music which brings out the best features of the Kriti as when played on Veena. When the songs are rendered in fast pace the subtle manipulations of the swaras can get lost leaving a pale impression on the music. Gamakas are a type of sliding 'Meends' (smooth glide from one note to other). Dikshitar used ten types of Gamakas in his

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compositions: Arohana, Avarohana, Dhalu, Spuritha, Kampitha, Ahata, Pratyahata, Thripuca, Andola, Murcana (Acharya, 2000).

Conclusion:

Emphasizing the role of musical instruments, to enhance the effectiveness of the vocal music or the lead instruments and not outperform the vocalist by a show of force. Carnatic music whether instrumental or vocal form creates an ideal path towards the Indian culture and music of India by providing a blissful experience and tranquility owing to its melodic and spiritual content. Being both vocalist and Vainika, created distinctive characteristics and their combinations made a new style which no composer of Carnatic music whose compositions we can see such wealth of Gamakas as that of Dikshitar. He was very particular about the harmonious blending of music and Sahitya in his songs. The significance of Veena can be seen in the life of the great vaggeyakara or composer Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar which is portrayed through his pioneering work of art in the field of Carnatic music.

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