

Random Notes

Tyagaraja & Muthuswami Dikshitar: Did They Ever Meet?

Tyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar were contemporaries who lived in the same town-- Tiruvarur-- for many years. But did they ever meet? Scholar V.V. SRIVATSA offers some clues.

Muthuswami Dikshitar spent nearly three years in Tanjavur, teaching music to the (Tanjavur) Quartet and composing samashti-charana compositions. He seems to have sojourned in Tiruvaiyaru for a reasonable time, as seen from six of his compositions which are dedicated to deities enshrined in the Tiruvaiyaru temple complex, namely, Panchanadeeswarar, Dharmasamvardhini, Vatukanatha (Aatkondar) and Ganesa.

It appears that, during this time, he established contact with Tyagaraja, the resident-bard, and visited the latter at his residence. There, he was given the honour of singing the mangalam at the conclusion of the pooja and he rendered the now-famous *Mamava Pattabhirama* in raga Manirangu



Dikshitar is known for descriptive fidelity and precision. Iconographic similarity with the description in this song is found only with the idols worshipped by Tyagaraja. Some similarity is found with idols in the Ramaswami temple in Kumbakonam but this is duly negated by Hanuman's posture found as reading the *Ramayana*. The images worshipped by Tyagaraja, now in Tanjavur, conform to Dikshitar's portrayal and confirm the meeting between these two great composers.

Reciprocally, Tyagaraja visited Dikshitar's camp in Tiruvaiyaru and rendered *Varasikhi vaahana* (raga Supradeepa), inspired by the portrait worshipped by Dikshitar.

There is a corollary to this meeting which, however, is substantiated only inferentially. It is established that whilst he was in Tanjavur/Tiruvaiyaru, Dikshitar was in a mood to compose in raga Nayaki. His three compositions in this raga are dedicated to the temples in Tanjavur, Tiruvaiyaru and Srirangam. It is said that Tyagaraja liked Dikshitar's *Ranganayakam* so much that he repeatedly requested him to sing this song for him. Dikshitar, with due modesty, praised Tyagaraja's virtuosity, especially as seen in *Kanugonu saukhyamu* in raga Nayaki. Tyagaraja still felt that Dikshitar's concept of raga Nayaki was superior to his and is said to have rendered the composition *Nee bhajana gana rasikula nenendu gaanaraa*. So it is said!

This parable appears as an oasis in the desert of current internecine criticism and destruction.