

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture – 52
Syama Sastri

(Singing Starts: 00:20) (Singing Ends: 01:58)
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Syama sastri was also born in Tiruvarur, he was the eldest among the carnatic trinity. But when we talk of the trinity, his name comes last, Thygaraja, Dikshitar, Syama Sastri. But in no respect, is, his musical work is the least, except perhaps, in the number of compositions, that we have the that has come down to us, it is said that he has composed about three hundred compositions, but what we do have today around eighty.

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He was born in Tiruvarur, but he lived in Tanjavur. In fact, he was the priest at the Bangaru Kamakshi Temple in Tanjavur. The Bangaru Kamakshi, the idol, actually was earlier in Kamakshi temple in Kanchipuram. And there is a very interesting story of, how she came to be in Tanjavur.

When there were, hostile armies marching in to Kanchipuram, a group of families took this idol. Bangaru Kamakshi is an idol, made of all gold, full solid gold, and they took this idol away. And after a few decades they found a sanctuary in Tanjavur, where the Maratha king gave them land to build a temple and that is where she is today.

So, Syama Sastri was the priest in this temple and he was obviously, very devout, as he worn out in his compositions. And musical loar also, has said that, many of the compositions were sung, when he was in the close proximity with the deity. And many of them were composed in the state of religious verges with the deity.

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Almost all his composition are in praise of Bangaru Kamakshi. A few are addressed to Madurai Meenakshi, these are called the Meenakshi Navratnams, nine compositions they are called Navratnam very appropriately they are truly, gems of compositions all in rakthi ragas. The composition you have earlier heard in this course “mayama yani nee pilacite matlada radha”, that is one of the navratnas, meenakshi navratnas addressed to Meenakshi of Madurai.

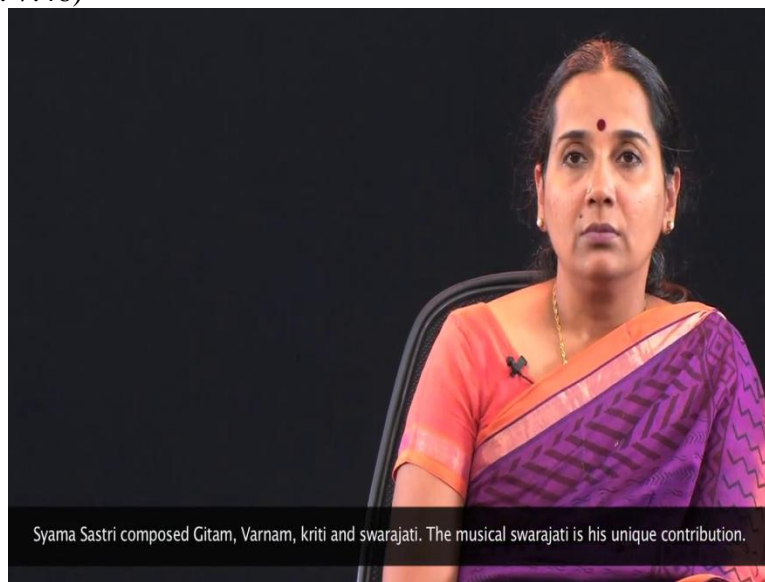
Now, Syama Sastri was born in Tiruvarur, they went to Tanjavur later and where he was tutored in Sanskrit and Telugu. There was not much music in the family apparently, until the family hosted one yogi a sanyasi a Swami Sangeetha Swami, when Syama Sastri was in his late teens.

And a sanyasi is expected to stay in one place chaturmasya, during the months of rain. And this sanyasi was a guest of Syama Sastri family and he saw the latten musicianship in Syama Sastri. And is said that, he taught Syama Sastri many other intricacies of music and even gave him some treatises Lakshana Granthas of music.

Syama Sastri, is supposed to have been a fine singer, reputed singer, of course a devout, priest at the temple. There is a legend that, a very eminent musician from Bobbili , very eminent musician Bobbili Kesavayya, he challenged Tanjavur court, to find musician who could match his profess as a singer.

And it is said that, Syama Sastri who met this challenge and responded with a very difficult pallavi. Legend has it that, Kesavayya sang a pallavi in Simhanandana tala, which is hundred and twenty-eight mathras. And Syama Sastri sang, a pallavi, in response to that Sharabhanandana tala, which is of seventy-five mathras. Syama Sastri won the contest, in fact stories of such musical dowels, stud musical lour, we have stories of, so many such dowels very interesting of such dowels.

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So, this was Syama Sastri's stature as musician, he composed varnams, composed geethams varnams, swarajatis, kritis. Now swarajati of which, obviously, we talk a little later on. Swarajatis, the musical swarajathis are unique contribution of Syama Sastri. Swarajatis is typically part of the repertoire of the dancer, there you also have Jati passages. But, Syama Sastri gave us three great swarajathis which are completely belong to the music world. They have not anything to do with dance, though of course, dancers could use them, they do use them to perform.

Syama Sastri's compositions are really sophisticated, they have a high level of evocativeness. There is no attempt at incorporating, any kind of scholarship into this composition. And even in terms of moods that you find in Thyagaraja, we do not find a variety of moods in Syama Sastri or

variety of themes. There is only one theme in composition and mood and that is this the mood of complete supplication, complete surrender at the goddesses feet.

In every composition, you find him asking, Kamakshi or Meenakshi to treat him, to show him grace, as if she were his mother. In the Madyamavathi composition, “palinchu kamakshi pavane papashamani” these are all “pavane, papashamani” these are all various ways of addressing the mother. And he just says “palinchu” protect me.

He says these in this same song “kapadi na thalli gadha nenu needu biddanu lalinchi”, protect me kapadi, na thalli my mother, won't you protect me, am I not your child, “gada nenu needu biddanu lalinchi, lalinchi” means soothe me, “lali” is actually, we speak of lali as, song lali where the mother sings to lull her child sleep. So, anything that gives you comfort me, protect me, soothe me, and this is the enduring theme, enduring mood across all his compositions.

Thyagaraja could sometimes be sarcastic with Rama. He could play with Rama. But Syama Sastri, there is only one mood, as it is been put there is “Karuna Rasam” throughout. And there are no surprises in Syama Sastri's compositions, from literary point of view, in fact, anyone who have who has a fair understanding of Sanskrit or even a non-Telugu speaking person like I can follow his compositions.

In fact, if you hear the compositions, you can almost sense what they mean. That is how perfectly the musical setting matches the mood of the compositions. For instance, again the compositions which you have heard earlier “mayama yani nee pilacite matlada radha”, I am calling you my mother, can you not talk to me “matlada radha, ninuvina vere dikku evaru unnaru” without you, what other recourse I have, who else is my, who else can offer me succor.

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pallavi
 'mA(y)ammaA(y)ani nE 'p'ilacitE
 mA(TI(A)Da rAdA 'nAto ambA
 anupallavi
 'nyAyamA (mIn(A)ksh(ā)mmA) mIn(A)kshik(ī)di
 ninnu vinA 'yErE dikk(e)var(u)nnAru (m'AyammA)
 caraNam 1
 sarasija bhava hari hara nuta sulalita
 nee pada pankajamula
 sthiramini nammiti nammiti nammitini
 karuNa jUDave 'kAtyAyani kALika bhavAni
 paramESvari sundarESu rANi
 bAl(A)mbA madhura vANi (m'AyammA)
 caraNam 2
 vinuta jana pApa vimOcani O janani
 ghana nlla vENi
 'vidalita dAnava maNDala damani
 vanaja iOcanA sudhA-kar(A)nanA vara dAyaki
 anayamu nimu kOri(y)unnaAn(ā)mmA
 bangAru bomimA (m'AyammA)
 caraNam 3
 abhayam(o)sga nannu brOvumu O varadA
 'nera dAtavu gadA
 ambikA biDDapai goppaga daya rAdA
 akhila iOka janani anAtha rakshaki
 anETi birudu gAdA
 vaibhavamu gala SyAma kRohNa sOdari
 'vira Sakti tripura sundari (m'AyammA)

The charanam line again “sarasija bhava hari hara nuta sulalita nee pada pankajamula sthiramini nammiti nammiti nammitini”. In your lotus feet, I am steady with the devotion. I completely believe, I have a complete faith in your feet, “karuna judave” look at me with compassion “kalyane kalika bavani paramesvari sunderesu rani balamba Madhura vani”. All these are various enduring epithets of the goddess. So, this is from the literary point of view, they just ooze, the feeling of devotion and there is no other deviation in Syama Sastri’s works.

Syama Sastri has mostly handled rakthi ragas. Ragas that are majestic they are immense potential like, ragas like, Sankarabharanam, Kalyani, Thodi, Ananda Bhairavi, Bhairavi, Ahiri and rarer ragas like Manji, Kalgada and even Chintamani.

In fact, the raga Chintamani is regarded as his creation. And it is said that, before just, a day before the musical dowl, that I refer to earlier with Bobbili Kesavayya. It is just said that Syama Sastri went into the sanctum of Kamakshi and sang this song in Chintamani “devi brova samayamidhe”. You, this is the time to protect me, “lokha janani napai daya ledha”, you are the mother of the whole universe, don’t you have compassion on me, can you not show me grace “napai daya ledha, daya” is pity, you have no pity on me, and this is how the composition goes.

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Two great compositions in Ananda Bairavi “madi vere gadi evarama” and “oh jagadamba”. Anandha Bairavi, is supposed to have a very favored raga of his and. Among talas he has reveled in mishra chapu talam. Mishra chapu if you remember is a cycle of seven beats, one two three four five six seven.

And Syama Sastri has experimented, so to say with this tala, very successfully and he has given his compositions with various eduppus. So, you have compositions starting with this “Samam”, starting a little into the avarthana also what is called “Viloma Chapu”.

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So, if the Chapu talam goes, one two three four five six seven, he has given the composition with a Viloma Chapu, that is chapu in reverse order so, three plus four, Viloma chapu is, four plus three, one two three four five six seven, one two three four five six seven, this is a composition in Purvi Kalyani (Singing Starts: 18:19) (Singing Ends: 19:53)

So, that was in viloma chapu talam “ninu vinaga mari dikku evaru unnaru nikhila loka janani nannu brochudava”, so the, again the, mood is the same, the raga very appropriate to the mood, purvi kalyani and instead of going, the chapu talam goes, one two three four five six seven. But here the song is set like this “ninu vinaga mari dikku evaru”. Now these are all interesting things that he has created with mishra chapu talam. In fact, he has played with chapu talam like very few other composers have done.

But the tala element. Whatever creativity or whatever novelty, that he has experimented still completely subsidiary to the mood. He does not get in the way of the mood. There is no exhibition of rhythmic complexity. It is very subtle, the achievement in his compositions are noted for their laya subtlety, more than anything else, no more rhythmic fireworks.

This composition “sankari sankaru” he has composed in tisra nadai, one composition you have already heard in the course, “Virana varaninchi bro” in Kalyani. This is another composition in

tisra nadai, where the sahitya text is actually set in fours, but the composition is in tisra nadai (Singing Starts: 21:50) (Singing Ends: 22:20).

So, here though the tala is tisra nadai, one two three, one two three. The sahitya, the text separation of the words, is in force. “Sankari Sankuru chandramukhi” so sankari that is a four, Sankuru that is another four, chandramukhi that is an eight, so four, four and eight that is how the sahitya is split. But the, these is fitted into a tisra nadai.

These are very a subtly thing to do and you cannot really make out that, there is some tala complexity here. And yet it is there, and that is Syama Sastris laya expertise. So, in a sense you can even, if you sing it in adi talam, just in “chatu saranam”. (Singing Starts: 23:30) (Singing Ends: 23:41).

So, elsewhere in the composition, you can say the tisra nadai, the sahityam is also split into threes. (Singing Starts: 23:50) (Singing Ends: 23:59). So here it is in threes “Syama krishna sodari”, so here the sahitya is split into three and the tisra nadai is also there. But the pallavi line is extremely interesting, because this is what Syama Sastri has done. Sahitya is split into fours, but the tala is thrisira nadai.

Now when we speak of the pancha rathnas of Thyagaraja or many Vibhakthi kritis of the Navavarna kritis, especially of kamalamba navavarnams of dikshitar. The most famous group of compositions of Syama Sastri is what is called “Ratna Thrayam” is the three gems .

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And here we are talking of the three swarajathis that he has composed. Swarajathi's, as I said has always had a presence in dance, presence in dance was even before him, but he gave it a status of a musical composition. These swarajathis, that he has composed, are in very heavy ragas, cannot get much heavier than these, Bairavi, Yadhukula kambhoji and Thodi.

The swarajathi, all three are patterned like this. There is a pallavi line, one or two avarthanas and then you have what is called swarasahityam. So, you have a set of swaras, swara patterns, two avarthanas and so on and to that there is also sahityam.

The, all three of them are, very serious somber and the composition is built up slowly from the mandra or the lower regions to the higher regions. The yadhukula kambhoji for instance (Singing Starts: 26:10) (Singing Ends: 27:55). This was a first swara sahityam that I just sang for you. The Thodi swarajathi is in adi talam, randa kalai, and it is very heavy piece, and again I am starting with a lower region (Singing Starts: 28:13) (Singing Ends: 30:34) and so on.

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And this again is the first sahitya portion that I sang that, the links to these swarajathis are here. The Bhairavi swarajathi is probably the most popularly sung, though the other two are musically no less meritorious, for some reason. Possibly because the great performer of last centuries Semmangudi Srinivasan used to sing the Bhairavi swarajathi frequently in his concerts. So, Bhairavi swarajathi is most popularly heard.

And here there is an interesting progression each swara sahityam. There is a progression in the swara sahityam, the first starts with sa, the second with ri, the third with ga, and so on till the last. In which the mudra Syama Krishna occur.

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Syama Sastri's ankita was "Syama Krishna" and because he was addressing the goddess. Very often have the expression "Syama Krishna Sodari" Syama Krishna of course refers to Krishna or Vishnu and Devi Kamakshi, Parvathi is supposed to be the sister of Vishnu. And so, in most of the composition we find the expression "Syama Krishna sodari or Syama Krishna sahodari" and the Bhairavi swarajathi also has the Syama Krishna ankitha in the last swara sahitya.

But many of his kritis, have multiple charanams not just one and the ankita usually found in the last charanam.