

# A Study of Navagraha Iconography in the Temples of India with Reference to Navagraha Kṛtis of Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar

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## Abstract

This paper examines the visual and symbolic vocabulary of Navagraha sculpture in Indian temples alongside the Navagraha Kṛtis of Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar. It sets out to show how the iconographic conventions governing the nine planetary deities — as recorded in temple sculpture — are echoed, and at points clarified, by the Sanskrit sāhitya of Dīkṣitar's compositions. Treating the kṛtis as a form of musical documentation, the study argues that they function as a secondary, oral record of temple iconography and ritual tradition, and it further asks how regional variation in temple layout is reflected in the structure of the compositions. Dīkṣitar's oeuvre, it is suggested, extends well beyond the purely musical: his kṛtis regularly preserve sthala purāṇam (temple foundation legend), particulars of the presiding deities, references to devotees, and the rivers or tanks associated with a given shrine.

**Keywords:** Navagraha Iconography, Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar, Temple Architecture, Carnatic Musicology, Interdisciplinary Research, Iconography.

## 1. Introduction

India's temples number among its oldest and most venerated institutions, drawing pilgrims from across the subcontinent and beyond even today. Far from being simple places of worship, they have long served as social, artistic and architectural centres that mirror the historical development of the country's religious life (Michell, 1988). A temple gathers a community around a shared centre of gravity: it is often read as a measure of a locality's prosperity and cohesion, and historically doubled as a civic hub and marketplace for the surrounding population.

Built according to the canons of Vāstu Śāstra, a temple is at once a work of art and a theological statement; its sculptural surfaces are meant to draw the viewer toward a state of feeling beyond the merely personal, even as they remind the visitor of his or her modest place within the larger design of the creator. As tangible heritage, temples are inseparable from the intangible practices — festival, ritual, recitation — that sustain them, so that a temple functions as much as a living institution as a static monument (Kramrisch, 1946).

The plan of a temple has traditionally been read as a working model of the cosmos: the garbhagṛha stands for the still centre of the universe where divine energy resides, while the towering śikhara above it marks the axis mundi linking earth and heaven. Every element of the fabric, from plinth to finial, carries symbolic weight — the erotic carvings on the outer walls of temples such as Khajuraho, for instance, have been read as an allegory of the passage from the material to the spiritual, while the maṇḍapa serves as a threshold between the profane and the sacred. Pillars, ceilings and walls throughout are carved with narrative and geometric motifs drawn from the Purāṇas, the Rāmāyaṇa and the Mahābhārata, arranged according to principles of sacred geometry thought to correspond with the order of the cosmos (Kramrisch, 1946; Michell, 1988).

Temple architecture in India assumed its classical form between roughly 600 and 750 CE, crystallising into the Nāgara idiom in the north and the Drāviḍa idiom in the south; a hybrid Vesara style subsequently emerged in the Deccan after 750 CE (Soundara Rajan, 1972; Meister & Dhaky, 1983). Despite considerable

regional variation, most Hindu temples retain a broadly common architectural grammar comprising the garbhagr̥ha, maṇḍapa, śikhara and vāhana.

Within this broad grammar, subsidiary shrines — for family deities, guardian figures, and cosmological groupings such as the Navagraha — occupy clearly designated positions within the temple compound, positions that are themselves governed by the Āgamas and by regional convention. The subsidiary shrine is rarely an afterthought: its placement, orientation and scale are calculated in relation to the main garbhagr̥ha, so that the temple compound as a whole reads as a coherent cosmological diagram rather than a series of unrelated structures (Kramrisch, 1946). It is within this larger diagrammatic logic that the Navagraha maṇḍapa must be situated and understood.

The persistence of temple-building activity across successive dynasties — Pallava, Cōla, Pāṇḍya, Hoysala, Vijayanagara and beyond — means that a single temple compound frequently preserves work from several distinct periods, each stratum bearing the stylistic fingerprints of its own age even as it submits to the same overarching cosmological plan. Navagraha shrines, added in many cases considerably later than the main sanctum, offer a particularly legible record of this layering, since their sculptural idiom and spatial arrangement often reflect the conventions current at the moment of their own construction rather than those of the original temple fabric (Meister & Dhaky, 1983).

### 1.1 Navagraha Iconography as a Cosmic Reflection

The Navagrahas — literally the 'nine seizers' (nava, nine; graha, 'to seize' or 'to grasp') — occupy a central place in Hindu cosmology and astrological practice. Each of the nine is believed to exert a karmic pull on human affairs that strengthens or weakens according to planetary position, shaping the fortunes of an individual, a family, or even an entire nation (Markel, 1995). Seven of the nine share their names with deities and correspond to the days of the Hindu week; the remaining two, Rāhu and Kētu, are shadow-planets associated with the lunar nodes and are traditionally identified with demons rather than gods.

In most South Indian shrines the Navagraha images are carved from unpolished black granite, their features left comparatively unrefined but dressed daily in cloth of the colour associated with each planet; the stone pedestal on which they stand is channelled to carry away the water, milk, curd and oil used in abhiṣeka. Embedding the Navagrahas within a temple's architectural programme gives literal, physical form to the belief that a temple replicates the macrocosm: the shrine becomes a microcosm in which the flow of celestial time is localised and harmonised around the divine energy seated in the garbhagr̥ha.

#### 1.1.1 Origin of the Navagrahas

The conceptual roots of Navagraha worship reach back to the Ṛgveda and the Atharvaveda, where celestial bodies were venerated as divine presences rather than treated merely as astronomical phenomena (Gupta, 2024). Purāṇic mythology credits Brahmā with fashioning the nine as guarantors of cosmic equilibrium, each entrusted with a distinct sphere of influence over human destiny. Their combined energies are held to shape temperament, circumstance and relationship, which is why the Navagrahas remain central to Hindu astrological practice to the present day.

Later astronomical and astrological literature, notably the Sūrya Siddhānta, systematised these Vedic intuitions into a workable calendrical and predictive science, fixing the periods, motions and mutual relationships of the nine bodies in terms that would go on to inform temple ritual as well as personal horoscopy (Gupta, 2024). By the time image-worship of the Navagraha becomes archaeologically visible, in temple sculpture of the early medieval period, the group had already accumulated a dense layer of mythological narrative — accounts of origin, of rivalry between the deities, and of the specific afflictions each was capable of inflicting or lifting — much of which survives today only in fragmentary or regionally divergent form (Markel, 1995). It is precisely this gap in the narrative record that later commentators, including Dīkṣitar himself, would find occasion to fill through devotional composition.

### 1.2 Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar's Contributions

Śrī Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar (24 March 1775 – 21 October 1835), youngest of the Carnatic musical Trinity, was born at Tiruvārūr to Rāmasvāmi Dīkṣitar and Subbammā, reputedly after his parents' prayers were

answered at the Vaitīśvaran temple — hence his name, taken from the temple's presiding deity, Muttukumārasvāmi (Raghavan, 1975). His siblings were Bālasvāmi, Cinnasvāmi and a sister, Bālāmbāl. He received his earliest training from his father, himself an accomplished vidvān, in both the lakṣya (performance practice) and lakṣaṇa (theory) of Karnāṭaka saṅgīta, and, in keeping with family tradition, was also schooled in Sanskrit, the Vedas and the principal śāstras. Under the guidance of Cidambaranātha Yōgi, with whom he undertook an extended pilgrimage through North India, his musical and philosophical horizons broadened considerably, and he emerged as an accomplished vocalist and vīṇa player (Music Academy Madras, 1976).

His command of Sanskrit and evident fondness for śabdālāṅkāra — the ornamental play of sound and sense — lend his kṛtis their characteristic blend of poetic imagery and devotional gravity. Dīkṣitar was, in addition, versed in jyotiṣa, āyurveda, iconography and temple architecture, a breadth of learning that is unmistakably present throughout the Navagraha Kṛtis (Partasarathy, 1985). His disciples were drawn from every community, gender and instrumental tradition, which ensured that his compositions travelled widely across the diverse musical lineages of South India.

One such disciple, Tambiappan, custodian of the rare Śuddha Maddhaḷam tradition at the Tiruvārūr temple, is traditionally credited with occasioning the composition of the Navagraha Kṛtis (Bhagyalekshmy, 2009). Suffering from a stomach ailment that resisted medical treatment, Tambiappan sought his guru's counsel; on examining his horoscope, Dīkṣitar found Bṛhaspati (Jupiter) afflicted and, rather than prescribe the customary and elaborate navagraha śānti, composed a kṛti in the planet's praise. The result, 'Bṛhaspate', set in rāga Aṭhāṇa, is said to have restored Tambiappan to health within a matter of weeks — an episode traditionally cited as evidence of the practical, curative intent behind the series, which subsequently grew to encompass all nine celestial bodies.

Dīkṣitar's output as a whole runs to several hundred kṛtis, the great majority in Sanskrit, and is distinguished within the Carnatic tradition by its close attention to sthala purāṇam, iconographic detail and Vedāntic philosophy — qualities that led later commentators to describe his compositions as musical treatises in their own right rather than devotional lyrics alone (Central University of Tamil Nadu, 2020). His travels through the temple towns of Tamil Nadu, undertaken initially under Cidambaranātha Yōgi and continued independently in later life, brought him into direct contact with the specific iconographic programmes of dozens of shrines, a first-hand familiarity that this study takes to be the most plausible explanation for the precision of his planetary descriptions (Seetha, 1981).

The seven vāra kṛtis, forming a related but distinct corpus, are set to the seven sūlādi sapta tālas and stand as a virtuosic exploration of some of Carnatic music's most demanding rāgas, doubling as a demonstration of Dīkṣitar's own grounding in astrology (Govinda Rao, 2002):

| Planet    | Composition            | Rāga              | Tāla                  |
|-----------|------------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Sūrya     | Sūryamūrte             | Saurāṣṭram        | Caturaśra Jāti Dhruva |
| Candra    | CandramBhaja Mānasa    | Āsāverī           | Caturaśra Jāti Maṭhya |
| Aṅgāraka  | Aṅgārakam Āśrayāmyaham | Suraṭi            | Caturaśra Jāti Rūpaka |
| Budha     | Budham Āśrayāmi        | Nāṭakurañji       | Miśra Jāti Jhampā     |
| Bṛhaspati | Bṛhaspate              | Aṭhāṇa            | Tiśra Jāti Tripuṭa    |
| Śukra     | Śrī Śukra Bhagavantam  | Pharaju           | Khaṇḍa Jāti Aṭa       |
| Śani      | Divākaratanujam        | Yadukula Kāmbhōji | Caturaśra Jāti Eka    |

Taken as a set, the nine Navagraha Kṛtis form a single devotional cycle addressed in turn to Sūrya, Candra, Aṅgāraka, Budha, Guru, Śukra, Śani, Rāhu and Kētu — the Sun, Moon, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter, Venus,

Saturn and the two lunar nodes. The first seven are planets proper; the remaining two are 'shadow' bodies granted celestial status within Indian astrology. It is generally accepted among scholars that the kṛtis on Rāhu and Kētu are later additions to the corpus rather than Dikṣitar's own compositions (Ranganathan, 2020).

### 1.3 Problem Statement

Considerable scholarship already exists on the Navagraha Kṛtis, both as literary and musical texts, and, separately, on the architectural evolution of Indian temples; comparatively little work, however, brings the two together. In particular, it remains unclear how far Dikṣitar's lyrical descriptions (sāhitya) can be read as a textual record of temple iconography. Without such an interdisciplinary reading, our sense of how oral tradition and visual art historically corroborated one another remains incomplete.

### 1.4 Research Objectives

The principal aim of this study is to assess the correlation between the iconographic descriptions found in Dikṣitar's Navagraha Kṛtis and the physical sculptural representation of the same deities at major Indian temple sites. In pursuit of this aim, the study seeks to:

- Analyse the sāhitya of the nine kṛtis for specific iconographic markers, including vāhanas (mounts), āyudhas (weapons/attributes) and posture.
- Compare these lyrical descriptions with the physical images found at significant sites, including the Kumbakonam Navagraha cluster, Sūryanār Kōil and the Konārka Sun Temple.
- Explore regional differences in temple layout — circular, square or linear — and consider how these align with the cosmic order implied in Dikṣitar's compositions.
- Assess the extent to which Carnatic musicology can be treated as a 'verbal icon' and secondary source for the preservation of medieval Indian temple tradition and ritual iconography.

## 2. Literature Review

Scholars have traced the development of Navagraha iconography from the linear panels typical of early North Indian temples to the dedicated prakāra shrines that later became characteristic of the South. Foundational work on this iconographic vocabulary was carried out by Gopinatha Rao (1914) and Banerjea (1956), both of whom drew heavily on the Śilpa Śāstras and Āgamas governing the weapons, vehicles and symbolic postures assigned to each deity, a line of textual scholarship extended by Shukla (1958) and Acharya (1996). Of the Āgamic sources, the Aṅsumadbhedāgama and the Suprabhedāgama are the primary texts offering precise iconometric prescriptions — proportion (tālamāna), posture and diagnostic attribute — for the sculpting of individual planetary deities; together they codified a visual vocabulary that standardised planetary worship across Indian temples. Complementary iconographic surveys by Rao (1988), Liebert (1976) and Sivaramamurti (1961) extend this documentary base to a wider set of regional idioms.

Running alongside this art-historical scholarship, a body of musicological work has examined Dikṣitar's capacity to embed complex theological detail within his lyrics. Even so, a gap remains in the literature regarding the direct correspondence between these lyrical 'word-paintings' and the specific sculptural programmes found in Indian sanctums. This review accordingly considers how Dikṣitar's esoteric musical blueprints might serve as a bridge between static stone icons and the living tradition of planetary worship.

- Gayathri (2023) traces astrolatry — the ancient practice of celestial-body worship — through its architectural evolution alongside broader shifts in Indian astronomical thought.
- Gupta (2024) offers a historical timeline for the Navagraha concept, tracing its passage from the Ṛgveda through Purāṇic literature such as the Sūrya Siddhānta, and is particularly useful in showing how these deities moved from Vedic symbol to temple icon.
- Santhoshini and Pavani (2024) argue that Dikṣitar's music bridges artistic composition and mathematical planetary mapping, treating the repertoire as an authentic vessel for the preservation of historical cosmic data alongside its devotional function.

- Joge, Ganvir and Vaidya (2015) document the visual imagery of the Navagrahas at Khidrapur in Maharashtra, extending the geographic scope of Navagraha iconographic scholarship beyond Tamil Nadu.
- Vasanthi (2021) reads Dikṣitar's iconographic descriptions as a fusion of contemplative and musical modes, a perspective this study builds on in its treatment of the *ṛti* as 'verbal icons'.
- Sompur and Udachan (2024) survey iconography and symbolism across Indian temple architecture more broadly, providing useful comparative context for the Navagraha shrine within the wider temple complex.
- Sears (2014) situates temple construction within a broader sacred geography, arguing that the spatial agency of medieval Indian shrines extended well beyond the boundary wall of the temple compound itself; this framework is useful in reading the Navagraha maṇḍapa as one node within a wider regional network of sacred sites rather than as an isolated architectural unit.
- Seetha (1981) offers a detailed formal analysis of the *ṛti* as a musical structure, establishing the conventions of pallavi, anupallavi and caraṇa against which Dikṣitar's Navagraha compositions can be measured, and against which his departures from convention become historically legible.
- Rao, A. N. (2020) examines the structural rāgas favoured by Dikṣitar, including Guṇḍakriyā and related forms, and argues that his choice of rāga was rarely incidental to the subject of a composition — a claim this study extends to the Navagraha *Ṛti* in its discussion of rāga-tāla symbolism below.
- Bhattacharyya (2024) undertakes a critical, quasi-scientific reading of 'Sūryamūrte', proposing that certain lyrical passages encode observationally accurate planetary detail; while the present study is more cautious about attributing empirical astronomical intent to Dikṣitar, Bhattacharyya's close reading of the Sūrya *ṛti* has informed the treatment of that composition in Section 4.1.1.
- Sankaranarayana (2025) compares the Navagraha compositions of the post-Trinity generation of composers with Dikṣitar's own set, concluding that later composers drew heavily on Dikṣitar's iconographic vocabulary even where they departed from his musical structures — a finding that reinforces the present study's characterisation of the Navagraha *Ṛti* as a durable reference template.

Taken together, this body of scholarship establishes two things clearly: first, that the Āgamic and Śilpa Śāstra tradition provides a detailed and internally consistent iconographic programme for the Navagraha; and second, that Dikṣitar's compositions have independently been recognised, from a musicological standpoint, as unusually rich in descriptive and theological content. What remains comparatively underexplored — and what this study attempts — is a systematic, deity-by-deity correlation of the two bodies of material, read alongside first-hand documentation of the temple sites themselves.

This study takes these strands of scholarship as its starting point but departs from them in attempting a direct, verse-by-verse correlation between Dikṣitar's sāhitya and the Āgamic prescriptions underlying South Indian Navagraha sculpture, an exercise not undertaken at this level of detail in the existing literature.

### 3. Research Methodology

This study adopts an interdisciplinary, qualitative methodology spanning iconography, temple architecture, musicology, religious studies and cultural history, and combines descriptive, analytical and comparative approaches. The descriptive component documents the iconographic features of Navagraha images at selected temples; the analytical component interprets the symbolism and theological meaning attached to both sculpture and composition; and the comparative component sets the iconographic depictions found in temples against the descriptions embedded in the Navagraha *Ṛti*.

Primary data were gathered through field visits to temples associated with Navagraha worship, chiefly in South India, using direct observation, photography and note-taking to record posture, number of arms, attributes, vehicle, ornament, mudrā and spatial placement within the temple complex. Key sites visited for this purpose include Sūryanār Kōvil, the Bṛhadīśvara Temple and the Mīnākṣī Amman Temple, among other shrines associated with Navagraha worship traditions (Rajagopal, 2009).

Primary musical sources comprise the original sāhitya and notation of the Navagraha Kṛtis, recorded renditions by established Carnatic musicians, and published editions of Dīkṣitar's compositions, principally Govinda Rao (2002) and Bhagyalekshmy (2009); the analysis of the kṛtis themselves considers lyrical content, rāga structure, tāla system, astrological reference and devotional symbolism. Secondary sources consulted include Āgamic texts, Śilpa Śāstras, Purāṇas, temple inscriptions, and the wider body of scholarship on Indian iconography, temple architecture, astrology and Carnatic music cited throughout this paper.

Temples for the study were selected purposively, on grounds of historical importance, artistic significance, regional representation and demonstrable connection to Navagraha worship, with particular emphasis placed on the Navagraha temples of Tamil Nadu because of their close historical association with Dīkṣitar himself. The geographical scope of the fieldwork extends across Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha; the study is necessarily confined to a purposive sample of temples and compositions rather than an exhaustive survey, owing to constraints of time and access.

Data analysis proceeded in three stages. In the first stage, each of the nine kṛtis was segmented into its constituent lyrical units — pallavi, anupallavi and caraṇa — and every phrase bearing on physical description, vehicle, weapon, ornament or posture was extracted and transliterated. In the second stage, each extracted phrase was cross-checked against the relevant prescriptions in the Anṣumadbhedāgama, the Suprabhedāgama, the Viṣṇudharmōttara Purāṇa and secondary iconographic compendia (Rao, 1988; Liebert, 1976), and classified as either concordant, divergent, or additional to the standard textual prescription. In the third stage, the resulting classification was checked against the field photography and observational notes gathered at each temple, allowing the study to distinguish, where possible, between iconographic features that are widely standardised and those that are the product of regional or period-specific sculptural convention.

This three-stage procedure was applied uniformly across all nine kṛtis, including the two — the Rāhu and Kētu compositions — whose authorship is disputed, on the grounds that even a later interpolation may usefully be checked against the same Āgamic standard, whatever its implications for questions of attribution (Ranganathan, 2020). Any conflicts between primary textual authorities were noted rather than resolved, since the Śilpa Śāstra tradition itself frequently preserves more than one accepted prescription for a given deity, a plurality that this study treats as a feature of the tradition rather than an inconsistency to be eliminated.

## 4. Analysis & Findings

The Navagrahas — a group of nine celestial deities revered across Hindu ritual, Vedic astrology and temple architecture — are held to embody the cosmic forces that shape karma and human circumstance. Nearly every major Śaiva temple in South India houses an image or carved representation of the group, offered both individual and collective reverence by devotees seeking to balance planetary doṣas, the adverse influences believed to disrupt an individual's path.

Dīkṣitar's Navagraha Kṛtis are widely regarded as the high-water mark of this devotional genre. Read together with their sculptural counterparts, they open a distinctive window onto medieval Indian cosmology and iconography, functioning in effect as auditory blueprints of the very icons they describe. The translations used in this analysis are drawn from Govinda Rao's *Compositions of Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar* (2002), which served as the principal aid for this study; all nine compositions have been considered, alongside several iconographic concepts that recur across the set.

#### 4.1 Navagraha Maṇḍala

In most South Indian temples the Navagrahas are installed as a discrete unit to the north-east of the sanctum, typically arranged within a single square with Sūrya at the centre and the remaining eight deities disposed around him; no two images are positioned to face one another. Within Indian philosophical thought, the formless absolute (nirguṇa) is understood to take on relatable, worshipping form (saguṇa) through the act of consecration. Prāṇa pratiṣṭhā, the ritual invocation of divine life-force into an idol, is what accomplishes this transformation, converting inert stone into a living vibhūti, or energy centre, through which devotees may access the divine (Rajagopal, 2009).

Two principal modes of Navagraha consecration are recognised: Āgama Pratiṣṭhā, following temple canon, and Vaidika Pratiṣṭhā, following Vedic scriptural convention. The two differ chiefly in the spatial arrangement of the deities, the mantras employed and the method of ritual invocation.



**Image 1: Navagraha Pedestal at Bhoga Nandeeshwara Temple, Nandi Hills, Chikballapur, Karnataka, India.**

Under Āgama Pratiṣṭhā, Sūrya occupies the centre, with Candra to his east, Budha to his south, Bṛhaspati to his west, Śukra to his north, Aṅgāraka to the south-east, Śani to the south-west, Rāhu to the north-west and Kētu to the north-east — an arrangement followed at Sūryanār temple, Tiruviṭaimarudūr, Tiruvaiyāru and Tiruchirāpalli. Under Vaidika Pratiṣṭhā, Sūrya again occupies the centre, but Śukra moves to the east, Aṅgāraka to the south, Śani to the west, Bṛhaspati to the north, Candra to the south-east, Rāhu to the south-west, Kētu to the north-west and Budha to the north-east. At a small number of temples, notably Tirukkuṇai and Tiruvārūr, the nine planets are instead arranged in a single straight line.

A further variant appears at the Agastyar temple in Pondy Bazaar, Chennai, where Sūrya is raised at the centre of an octagonal arrangement of the remaining eight deities, a configuration known as Agastyar Kaṭṭu after the sage credited with promoting it, as shown in the image 2.

##### 4.1.1 Sūryamūrte Namōstutē — Saurāṣṭram, Dhruva Tāla



**Image 2: Navagraha Pedestal in the "Agasthiyar Kattu" style at Agasthiyar Temple, Pondy Bazar, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India.**

According to the Anṣumadbhedāgama and the Suprabhedāgama, the sun-god should be sculpted with two hands, each raised to shoulder height and holding a lotus (Gopinatha Rao, 1914). In the caraṇa of 'Sūryamūrte', Dikṣitar describes Sūrya as sārasa mitra, 'friend of the lotus' — an indirect but unmistakable reference to this attribute. The lotus itself is heliotropic, opening at dawn and closing at dusk over a cycle of several days before the petals eventually fall, a natural pattern long read as an image of the soul unfolding in the light of higher consciousness.

The prescribed image further calls for a halo (kāntimaṇḍala), a karaṇḍa-makuṭa, red garments, ruby earrings, a hāra across the chest, a single delicately woven cloth revealing the body beneath, and a yajñopavīta; Sūrya may stand upon a padma-pīṭha or be shown riding a single-wheeled, hexagonal chariot drawn by seven horses and driven by the lame Aruṇa (Rao, 1988). Dikṣitar's 'Sūryamūrte' offers little further iconographic detail, but its caraṇa does include the phrase divyatara saptāśvarathinē, 'one with an exceptionally divine seven-horse chariot' — a single feature sufficient, within the Navagraha cluster, to identify the deity unambiguously.



**Image 3: This carving of Surya Narayana (Sun god) is seen on the outer wall of Beluru Chennakeshava temple. Here the lord Sun is seen holding the lotus in lower two hands and the upper two hands are seen holding the Disc (chakra) and conch (Shankha) which symbolizes Narayana, hence here lord sun is also called as Surya Narayana.**

Regional practice diverges considerably from this composite Āgamic prescription. At the Konārka Sun Temple, discussed further in Section 4.2.1, Sūrya is monumentalised rather than merely depicted: the entire structure is conceived as his chariot, its twelve pairs of stone wheels and seven straining horses rendering at architectural scale the single-wheeled, seven-horse chariot that Dīkṣitar compresses into a single Sanskrit compound. At Belūr, by contrast, the Hoysala sculptors fuse Sūrya with Viṣṇu to produce the composite form Sūrya Nārāyaṇa shown in Image 3, in which the lower hands hold the customary lotuses while the upper pair carry the cakṛa and śaṅkha — an iconographic innovation local to the Hoysala idiom and without direct parallel in Dīkṣitar's sāhitya, which nowhere mentions Viṣṇu's attributes in connection with Sūrya (Sivaramamurti, 1961). The Sūryanār Kōvil image, by comparison, hews closely to the plainer two-armed, lotus-bearing form that the kṛti itself most directly supports.

#### 4.1.2 CandramBhaja Mānasa — Āsāverī, Maṭhya Tāla

Candra, also known as Soma, may according to the Anṣumadbhedāgama be shown either standing or seated on a sinhāsana; his complexion is prescribed as pure white, his head encircled by a prabhāmaṇḍala, and his person adorned with ornaments and a garland of mixed flowers, clothed throughout in white. This description recurs almost verbatim in the madhyamakāla portion of Dīkṣitar's caraṇa, kaṅkaṇa kēyūra-hāra-makuṭādi dharaṇi 'wearing bracelets, shoulder-plates, necklaces and a crown'. The prescribed four arms — two of which should each hold a white water-lily, or kumuda — are likewise confirmed by Dīkṣitar's caturbhujam ('the four-armed one'), while, as with Sūrya's fondness for the lotus, Candra's attachment to the water-lily is conveyed indirectly through kumuda mitraṇi 'friend of the lily'.

The Rāmacaṇḍī panel from Konārka, illustrated in Image 4, depicts Candra in the same forward-facing, linear format applied to the rest of the group, seated rather than standing, and without the elaborate four-armed water-lily attributes that Dīkṣitar's kṛti describes in such detail. This divergence is consistent with the broader pattern, developed further in Section 4.2.1, whereby the early medieval linear panels of Odisha favour a simplified, uniform treatment of the nine deities over the more differentiated, attribute-rich

iconography that later South Indian sculptors — and, in a parallel medium, Dikṣitar himself — would go on to develop.



**Image 4: Unique Navagraha Panel from the Ramchandi Temple, Konark, Odisha. (Navagrahas from left to right) Surya, Chandra, Kuja, Buddha, Brihaspati, Sukra, Sani, Rahu and Ketu.**

#### 4.1.3 Aṅgarakamāśrayāmyaham — Surāṭi, Rūpaka Tāla

Textual authorities differ on the seat appropriate to Bhauma (Aṅgaraka): some prescribe a goat, others a *siṅhāsana*, others still a golden chariot drawn by eight horses (Liebert, 1976). Dikṣitar sides with the first of these through the phrase *mēṣa turaṅgaṃ* 'one whose steed is a ram/goat'. His complexion is fire-red; he carries four arms, one hand in *abhaya* or *varada* pose, another bearing the *śakti*, and the remaining two holding a *gadā* and a *śūla*; his garments and ornaments should likewise be red — a description Dikṣitar renders almost exactly as *raktāṅgaṃraktāmbarādi dharaṃśakti śūla dharam*, 'the red-bodied one, clad in red garments, bearing the lance and trident'.

Dikṣitar's treatment of Aṅgaraka is unusually detailed by comparison with the other kṛtis in the set. He describes him further as *kambu gaḷ ammañḷuḷ atara padayugaḷ am* ('conch-necked, with two exceedingly lovely feet'), *manda-smita vilasita vaktraṃ* ('face lit with a gentle smile'), *rakta nētraṃ* ('blood-red eyes'), *jānuṣṭha hasta citraṃ* ('the striking figure seated with hands resting on the knees') and *caturbhujaṃ* ('four-armed').

This unusual density of physical description is worth pausing over. Of the nine kṛtis, only the Aṅgaraka composition approaches anything like a head-to-foot physical portrait, a feature this study is inclined to connect with Dikṣitar's personal association with Vaitīśvaran Kōil, the Aṅgaraka *sthalam* discussed in Section 4.3, at which his own parents are traditionally said to have prayed for a child. Whether or not a direct biographical link can be established with certainty, the concentration of descriptive detail in this particular kṛti stands out clearly against the comparatively spare treatment Dikṣitar affords Bṛhaspati and Śukra elsewhere in the set.

#### 4.1.4 Budhamāśrayāmi — Nāṭakurañji, Mīśra Jhampā Tāla

Budha, sometimes called *Grahaṭi* and reckoned the son of Candra, is prescribed a lion mount, garlands of yellow flowers, gold ornaments, and a body the colour of the *karnikāra* blossom, clothed likewise in yellow. Dikṣitar's *kunkumasama dyutiṃ* 'radiant as the saffron flower', and his description of Budha wearing a gem-studded crown, necklaces, shoulder-plates and bracelets (*maṇimakuṭa hāra kēyūra kaṅkaṇādi dharaṇam*) closely track this prescription.

Budha is further specified with four arms, one in *varada* pose, the remaining three bearing *khaḍga*, *khēṭṭaka* and *gadā*; Dikṣitar's specific reference to *pustaka karaṇ* 'the one holding a book', is notable, since the *Viṣṇudharmōttara Purāṇa* states that Budha's image should in fact resemble that of Viṣṇu and be shown riding a chariot like that of Bhauma.

The book-bearing attribute singled out by Dikṣitar is of some independent interest, since it is not uniformly present across the temples surveyed for this study: it appears clearly at Tiruveṅkāḍu, the Budha *sthalam* discussed in Section 4.3, but is frequently effaced or replaced at temples that have undergone repeated *kumbhābhiṣēkam* renovation, a point taken up further in the discussion of methodological limitations in Section 5.4. Where the attribute does survive, it offers one of the clearer instances in this study of a specific, testable correspondence between an isolated lyrical phrase and a persisting physical detail in stone.

#### 4.1.5 Bṛhaspatē Tārāpatē — Aṭhāṇa, Tripuṭa Tāla

Bṛhaspati is generally prescribed four arms — one in *varada* pose, the remaining three carrying a *kamaṇḍalu*, an *akṣamālā* and a *daṇḍa* — and a golden-yellow complexion, though the *Viṣṇudharmōttara*

instead allows him only two arms, bearing a pustaka and an akṣamālā. Dīkṣitar, notably, subordinates physical description almost entirely to praise of Bṛhaspati's qualities and greatness, offering only the single epithet vajra dhara, 'wielder of the thunderbolt'.

This relative reticence is consistent with the circumstances traditionally attached to the kṛti's composition, recounted in Section 1.2: a work composed under pressure of illness, and addressed to the most benefic of the nine grahas, might reasonably be expected to privilege supplication and praise over inventory-like physical description. It is nonetheless the epithet vajra dhara, rather than any fuller iconographic passage, that most directly links the kṛti to the vajra-bearing tradition recorded at Āḷaṅkuḍi, the Bṛhaspati sthala discussed in Section 4.3, where the thunderbolt remains among the deity's most consistently preserved attributes.

#### 4.1.6 Śrī Śukra Bhagavantam — Pharaju, Aṭṭa Tāla

Śukra, too, is prescribed four arms carrying the kamaṇḍalu, akṣamālā and daṇḍa, though the Viṣṇudharmōttara again offers an alternative account: as the son of Bhṛgu, Śukra should be white-complexioned, two-armed, holding a nidhi (treasure) and a pustaka, and seated in a silver chariot drawn by eight horses, clothed in white. Dīkṣitar's dhavaḷa gātraṁ ('white-bodied') and kirīṭadharaṁ ('crown-bearing') correspond closely to this second tradition.

As with Bṛhaspati, Dīkṣitar's treatment of Śukra is comparatively economical, offering two attributes rather than a full inventory. Both selected attributes, notably, align with the two-armed Viṣṇudharmōttara tradition rather than the four-armed alternative, a pattern this study also finds at Kañjanūr, the Śukra sthala discussed in Section 4.3, where the temple's own image likewise follows the simpler, two-armed convention. This consistency across an independent textual authority, a specific temple image, and Dīkṣitar's sāhitya offers one of the more secure correlations documented in this analysis.

#### 4.1.7 Divākaratanujam — Yadukula Kāmbhōji, Ēka Tāla

Śanaīścara (Śani) is prescribed a black complexion and black garments, rendered by Dīkṣitar as kālāñjana kānti yukta dēhaṁ 'body glowing like black collyrium'. He is described as short of stature and lame in one leg, two-armed, bearing a daṇḍa and an akṣamālā; textual authorities differ on his seat, prescribing variously a padma-pīṭha or an iron chariot drawn by eight horses, while some sources instead give him a crow as vehicle — a detail Dīkṣitar confirms directly with kāka vāhaṁ 'whose vehicle is the crow'. He is further described as decked in blue garments and blue-flower garlands (nīlāñśuka puṣpa mālāvṛtaṁ) and adorned with blue, gem-studded ornaments (nīla ratna bhūṣaṇālaṅkāraṁ).



**Image 5: Navagraha Stone Slab from the Konark Sun Temple, which was originally set above the temple's ornamental doorways (Jaganmohana) and is now kept inside the Navagraha Temple.**

#### 4.1.8 Smarāmyaham Sadā Rāhum — Ramāmanōhari, Rūpaka Tāla

Rāhu's seat is given as a siṅhāsana according to the Śilparatna, or a silver chariot drawn by eight horses according to the Viṣṇudharmōttara. Under the first tradition Rāhu is four-armed (caturbhujāṁ), one hand in varada pose, the remaining three bearing khaḍga, khēṭaka and śūla — matched in the kṛti by śūlāyudha dharakaram, 'bearing the trident as weapon', and khaḍga khēṭādi dharaṇaṁ 'wielder of sword and shield'. Under the second tradition, by contrast, Rāhu has only two hands, holding a book and a woollen blanket, the left hand empty. The composition further specifies that Rāhu wears blue garments of skin (carmādi nīla vastraṁ) and is adorned with the gōmēdhaka, or hessonite, gem (gōmēdhakābharaṇaṁ).

The image preserved at Tirunāgeśvaram, the Rāhu sthalam discussed in Section 4.3, in fact combines elements of both textual traditions, showing the deity multi-armed but with an emphasis on serpentine rather than strictly planetary attributes, reflecting the temple's own Nāga-centred dedication. This local hybridity is worth noting as a caution against treating the Āgamic prescriptions surveyed in this paper as uniformly determinative of temple practice: even where a kṛti's lyrical description tracks one textual authority closely, the corresponding physical image may in practice draw on a third, locally specific tradition unrecorded in the standard iconographic compendia (Rao, 1988; Liebert, 1976).

#### 4.1.9 Mahāsuram Kētu Maham — Cāmaram, Rūpaka Tāla

Kētu is prescribed a dark complexion, two arms — one in abhaya pose, the other bearing a gadā — and a kite as mount; the Viśvakarma-Śilpa holds that Kētu should otherwise resemble Bhauma, save that his chariot is drawn by ten horses. Dīkṣitar's composition adds further detail not found in the standard prescriptions: mahā vicitra makuṭadharaṁ ('bearer of a strikingly unusual crown'), maṅgaḷa vastrādi dharaṁ ('wearer of auspicious garments') and nara pīṭhaṣṭhitasukhaṁ ('seated comfortably upon a human being').

This last phrase is among the most iconographically distinctive in the entire cycle, since neither the Viśvakarma-Śilpa nor the other authorities consulted for this study prescribe a human vāhana for any of the nine grahas. Its most plausible source, discussed further in Section 4.3, is the specific iconographic tradition of Kīlapperumpalāṁ, where Kētu's image is traditionally shown mounted in this unusual fashion — a detail that, if the attribution holds, would constitute one of the clearest instances in this study of a Sthalam-specific rather than pan-Indian iconographic source for a Dīkṣitar lyric.

#### 4.2 Comparative Analysis of Regional Layout Variations

The spatial arrangement of the Navagraha maṇḍala is not standardised across Hindu temple architecture; it varies instead with regional geography, chronological period, and the scriptural school followed at a given site. Mapping these variations allows an assessment of how far spatial orientation mirrors the cosmic ordering implicit in Dīkṣitar's compositions (Subrahmanyam, 2024).

##### 4.2.1 Linear Arrangements (North Indian and Early Medieval Tradition)

In early medieval North India and Odisha, the Navagrahas were most often carved as a single continuous, forward-facing panel, as seen in the Jaganmohana doorway of the Konārka Sun Temple and in the panel from the Rāmacaṇḍī temple. This linear format emphasises chronological or astronomical sequence — Sunday through Saturday — over any singular cosmic hierarchy. Dīkṣitar arguably echoes this same linear logic in the structure of his vāra kṛtis, which are composed to correspond, in sequence, to the days of the week.

The Konārka lintel panel is a particularly instructive example of this linear idiom, since it was conceived not as an independent shrine but as an architectural threshold: the nine deities were carved directly above the Jaganmohana doorway, so that a visitor entering the hall of audience passed physically beneath the entire planetary order before proceeding toward the sanctum. This placement, distinct from the discrete, freestanding Navagraha maṇḍapa characteristic of South Indian practice, positions the Navagraha not as an object of separate worship but as a protective and cosmologically ordering threshold — a function that finds no direct equivalent in Dīkṣitar's own devotional framing of the nine grahas as objects of individual, sustained address (Kramrisch, 1946).

##### 4.2.2 Āgama Pratiṣṭhā versus Vaidika Pratiṣṭhā (South Indian Square Layouts)

The shift toward a raised, enclosed square maṇḍapa in the north-eastern (īśānya) quadrant of the temple courtyard is characteristic of Drāviḍa architecture. Within this square, two doctrinal schemes compete. Under Āgama Pratiṣṭhā, Sūrya sits at the absolute centre facing east, flanked by the cardinal planets Candra (east), Budha (south), Bṛhaspati (west) and Śukra (north), with the diagonal points reserved for the malefic and shadow planets — Aṅgāraka (south-east), Śani (south-west), Rāhu (north-west) and Kētu (north-east) — producing a self-contained, balanced universe centred on solar energy. Under Vaidika Pratiṣṭhā, Sūrya remains central, but the surrounding planets shift to align with Vedic astrological

convention: Śukra to the east, Aṅgāraka to the south, Śani to the west and Br̥haspati to the north, altering the directional emphasis of pradakṣiṇā (ritual circumambulation) accordingly.

It is worth noting that the two doctrinal schemes are not evenly distributed across the temples surveyed for this study, nor do they map neatly onto a simple north–south or early–late chronological divide. Sūryanār Kōvil, Tiruviṭaimarudūr and Tiruchirāpalli, all firmly South Indian and all of substantial antiquity, nonetheless follow Āgama Pratiṣṭhā rather than the ostensibly more archaic Vaidika scheme, suggesting that the choice of consecration doctrine at a given site reflects the specific lineage of Āgamic or Vedic ritual specialists historically attached to that temple rather than any straightforward regional or temporal pattern (Rajagopal, 2009).

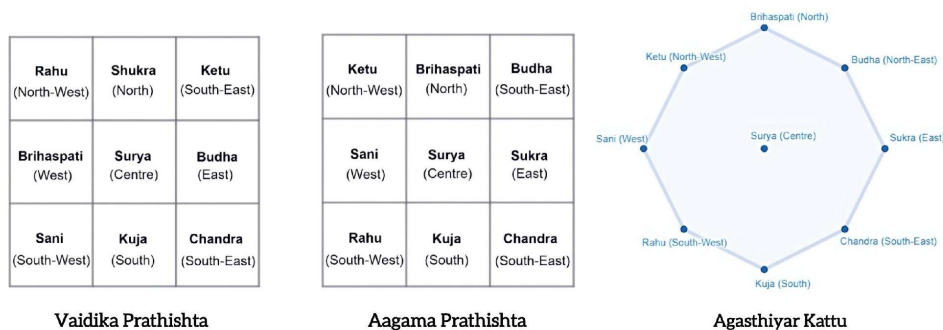
#### 4.2.3 The Linear Deviation (Tiruvārūr Style)

A significant regional departure occurs at a handful of Tamil Nadu temples, most notably the Tyāgarāja temple at Tiruvārūr — Dīkṣitar's own birthplace. Here the customary square grid is abandoned altogether: all nine planets stand side by side in a single straight line, facing south toward Tyāgarāja. This distinctive local arrangement plausibly shaped Dīkṣitar's own artistic outlook, since a home temple in which the planets face a single direction would naturally suggest treating them not as independent, fearsome cosmic forces but as continuous currents of divine energy in service of a single supreme reality.

The epigraphical record at Tiruvārūr, surveyed in detail by Subrahmanyam (2024), indicates that this linear arrangement is of considerable antiquity at the site and predates Dīkṣitar's own lifetime by several centuries, which strengthens rather than weakens the biographical argument advanced here: the composer would have grown up with this particular spatial configuration as his most familiar point of reference for the Navagraha, well before he began to compose devotional music of his own. The same epigraphical survey notes that Tirukkuṇai, the second Tamil Nadu temple to preserve a linear arrangement, lies within the same cultural and ritual catchment as Tiruvārūr, suggesting that the linear format may reflect a shared local school of temple planning rather than two independent departures from the square Āgamic norm.

#### 4.2.4 Agastyar Kaṭṭu (The Octagonal System)

At specialised shrines such as the Agastyar temple in Chennai, the eight surrounding planets are arranged in an outward-facing octagon around a raised, central Sūrya pedestal (Image 2). This geometry suggests a form of radial cosmic expansion in which no two planetary images ever meet each other's gaze — nirguṇa manifesting outward into a multidirectional saṁgṇa.



**Image 6: Navagraha layouts according to various spiritual schools — Vaidika Pratiṣṭhā, Āgama Pratiṣṭhā and Agastyar Kaṭṭu.**

#### 4.3 Correlation with the Kumbakonam Navagraha Sthalam Cluster

Beyond the composite Navagraha maṇḍapa found within an individual temple compound, the Kāvēri delta region around Kumbakonam preserves a distinct and older tradition in which each of the nine grahas is assigned an entire temple of its own, the group together forming a pilgrimage circuit known as the Navagraha Sthalam. Because Dīkṣitar's own travels are known to have taken him repeatedly through this

region, the Sthalam cluster offers a particularly direct test of the correlation this study proposes between sāhitya and sculpture (Rajagopal, 2009; Subrahmanyam, 2024).

| Graha     | Sthalam (Temple)        | Location                        | Presiding Śiva Form |
|-----------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------|
| Sūrya     | Sūryanār Kōvil          | Sūryanār Kōvil, near Kumbakonam | Maṅgala Nāthar      |
| Candra    | Kailāsanāthar Temple    | Tingaḷ ūr                       | Kailāsanāthar       |
| Aṅgāraka  | Vaitīśvaran Kōil        | Vaitīśvaran Kōil                | Vaitīśvaran         |
| Budha     | Svetāraṇyeśvarar Temple | Tiruvenkāḍu                     | Svetāraṇyeśvarar    |
| Bṛhaspati | Āpatsahāyeśvarar Temple | Āḷ aṅkuḍi                       | Āpatsahāyeśvarar    |
| Śukra     | Agnīśvarar Temple       | Kaṇṇanūr                        | Agnīśvarar          |
| Śani      | Śanaīscarar Temple      | Tirunaḷ ḷ ār                    | Dharbāraṇyeśvarar   |
| Rāhu      | Nāganāthasvāmi Temple   | Tirunāgeśvaram                  | Nāganāthasvāmi      |
| Kētu      | Nāganāthasvāmi Temple   | Kīḷ apperumpaḷ ḷ am             | Nāganāthasvāmi      |

Several correspondences follow directly from this pairing. Vaitīśvaran Kōil, the shrine of Aṅgāraka, is also the temple at which Dikṣitar's own parents are said to have prayed for a child, and after whose deity the composer himself was named; the unusually detailed physical description given to Aṅgāraka in 'Aṅgarakamāśrayāmyaham', discussed in Section 4.1.3, may plausibly owe something to Dikṣitar's personal familiarity with this particular shrine, though the point cannot be established with certainty on the evidence of the sāhitya alone. Tirunaḷ ḷ ār, seat of Śani, remains among the most visited of the nine sthalams, and the emphasis Dikṣitar places on Śani's crow vehicle and blue ornamentation in 'Divākaratanujam' corresponds closely to the iconographic programme still visible in the temple's own Navagraha shrine (Rajagopal, 2009).

The Rāhu and Kētu sthalams, Tirunāgeśvaram and Kīḷ apperumpaḷ ḷ am, are worth particular attention given the disputed authorship of the corresponding kṛtis. Both temples belong to a distinctly Nāga-associated iconographic tradition — the presiding deity at each is named Nāganāthasvāmi — that sits somewhat apart from the planetary iconography derived from the Āgamas discussed elsewhere in this paper. The description of Kētu as nara pīṭhaśthitasukhaṁ 'seated comfortably upon a human being,' in the kṛti examined in Section 4.1.9 is, on this reading, more readily explained by local Sthalam-specific tradition than by the pan-Indian Śilpa Śāstra prescriptions that govern the composite Navagraha maṇḍapa, lending some independent support to the argument that the Rāhu and Kētu compositions may draw on a different, and later, layer of iconographic reference (Ranganathan, 2020).

#### 4.4 Summary of Correlation Strength Across the Nine Grahas

The deity-by-deity analysis in Sections 4.1 and 4.3 yields correlations of varying strength and character. Table 4 summarises this variation, classifying the correlation for each graha as strong (multiple independently verifiable attributes matched), moderate (one or two clear attributes matched, alongside divergence or silence on others), or locally mediated (the closest correspondence traced to a specific Sthalam tradition rather than to the pan-Indian Āgamic corpus).

| Graha     | Key Matched Attribute(s)                                 | Correlation Type |
|-----------|----------------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Sūrya     | Seven-horse chariot; lotus in hand                       | Strong           |
| Candra    | Four arms; water-lily; ornamentation                     | Strong           |
| Aṅgāraka  | Goat mount; red hue; weapons; extended physical portrait | Strong           |
| Budha     | Saffron hue; ornaments; book attribute                   | Moderate         |
| Bṛhaspati | Thunderbolt epithet only                                 | Moderate         |
| Śukra     | White hue; crown (two-armed tradition)                   | Moderate         |
| Śani      | Black hue; crow vehicle; blue ornamentation              | Strong           |

|      |                                                 |                  |
|------|-------------------------------------------------|------------------|
| Rāhu | Trident and shield; skin garment; gomedhaka gem | Locally mediated |
| Kētu | Unusual crown; human vāhana                     | Locally mediated |

Read across the full set, the pattern suggests that Dīkṣitar's descriptive density is not evenly distributed: the more visually distinctive or narratively charged deities — Sūrya with his chariot, Aṅgāraka with his goat and weapons, Śani with his crow and lameness — receive the fullest iconographic treatment, while the more abstractly benefic deities, Bṛhaspati and Śukra in particular, are treated primarily through epithet and praise rather than physical inventory. Rāhu and Kētu, finally, are best understood through the lens of their own Sthalam traditions rather than through the composite Āgamic Navagraha maṇḍapa that structures the bulk of this analysis, a finding consistent with the disputed authorship of their kṛtis discussed throughout this paper (Ranganathan, 2020).

## 5. Discussion

Sūrya, Candra, Bhauma, Budha, Śukra, Bṛhaspati, Śani, Rāhu and Kētu are worshipped throughout the Hindu world, and their images occur in nearly every significant Śaiva temple of South India, typically housed within a dedicated maṇḍapa raised on a plinth roughly three feet high, with no two images made to face one another. Some scholars have proposed that the sequence in which the planetary images were installed reflects their position in the zodiacal circle at the time of the temple's construction — if correct, this would give the Navagraha images a secondary use as a rough chronological marker for dating the surrounding structure.

### 5.1 The Concept of the "Verbal Icon" and Cultural Preservation

Read against their sculptural counterparts, Dīkṣitar's compositions function as precise auditory blueprints of temple iconography — what might be termed a 'verbal icon' (Jackson, 1992). Stone monuments across the subcontinent remain vulnerable to erosion, iconoclasm and, not infrequently, well-meaning but destructive renovation. By encoding the exact lakṣaṇas prescribed in the Aṅgumadbhedāgama and the Śilpa Śāstras within the fixed matrix of Carnatic sāhitya, Dīkṣitar preserved these visual conventions in a form largely immune to physical decay: even where a temple's Navagraha maṇḍapa has suffered structural loss, its geometric, weapon-related and vestimentary detail survives intact through performance. The oral transmission of the kṛtis thereby functions as a decentralised archive, keeping the visual grammar of eighteenth-century South Indian sculpture accessible and verifiable across generations.

This preservational function should not be overstated as a conscious programme on Dīkṣitar's part; there is no direct evidence that he intended his Navagraha Kṛtis to serve as a substitute archive for temple sculpture. It is nonetheless a defensible reading of the finished compositions, and one supported independently by musicological scholarship emphasising Dīkṣitar's habitual attentiveness to sthala purāṇam and local ritual detail elsewhere in his output (Jackson, 1992; Seetha, 1981). Whether by design or by the incidental consequence of a deeply learned composer working within a devotional idiom, the effect on the historical record is the same: a body of iconographic information that would otherwise depend entirely on the survival of perishable stone has been given a second, durable vehicle of transmission.

### 5.2 Theological and Social Implications: Democratisation of Ritual

The shift from priestly, temple-bound ritual toward the internalised vocalisation of a kṛti marks a significant theological development within medieval Hinduism. Navagraha doṣa, the affliction attributed to adverse planetary influence, was traditionally addressed through elaborate and costly tantric śānti or homa rites, access to which was frequently restricted by caste, gender and economic standing (Rajagopal, 2009). By composing his Navagraha Kṛtis in Sanskrit — the language of ritual — while setting them within accessible rāga structures, Dīkṣitar effectively repackaged temple liturgy as a portable devotional resource, available to any listener regardless of social position or physical proximity to a particular shrine; the act of singing or hearing the kṛti substituted, in effect, for the requirement of entering the garbhagṛha itself.

The Tambiappan episode recounted in Section 1.2 is instructive in this regard, since it presents the kṛti explicitly as a functional alternative to elaborate temple ritual rather than merely as a devotional supplement to it. Whatever the episode's precise historical accuracy, its persistence within the oral tradition surrounding Dīkṣitar suggests that later generations of musicians and listeners themselves understood the Navagraha Kṛtis in these democratising terms — as a musical technology, so to speak, for the alleviation of planetary affliction, available in principle to anyone capable of singing or attending a performance (Bhagyalekshmy, 2009).

### 5.3 Rāga-Tāla Symbolism and the Musical Encoding of Planetary Character

A further dimension of correlation, less visual than the iconographic parallels traced above but no less deliberate, concerns Dīkṣitar's choice of rāga and tāla for each of the nine compositions. Rāga Aṭhāṇa, chosen for Bṛhaspati, is traditionally associated with grandeur and expansiveness, qualities directly consonant with Bṛhaspati's own position within Hindu astrology as the most benefic and magisterial of the grahas; the tradition surrounding the kṛti's composition, discussed in Section 1.2, explicitly credits the rāga's own presiding spirit with supplying this majesty (Rao, A. N., 2020). Rāga Saurāṣṭram, associated with Sūrya, and the weighty Dhruva tāla in which the Sūrya kṛti is set, likewise suggest a deliberate pairing of musical gravity with the Sun's position at the centre of the Navagraha maṇḍala.

Similar reasoning can be extended, more speculatively, to the remaining compositions: the comparatively sombre Yadukula Kāmbhōji chosen for Śani, a planet associated throughout Indian astrology with hardship and delay, and the restless Ramāmanōhari chosen for Rāhu, a body traditionally linked with disruption and concealment. While such correspondences resist the kind of systematic verification available for the iconographic material discussed elsewhere in this paper, they are consistent with the broader musicological consensus that Dīkṣitar rarely chose a rāga arbitrarily, and that his selections frequently carry interpretive weight beyond their purely musical function (Rao, A. N., 2020; Sankaranarayana, 2025).

### 5.4 Limitations and Methodological Challenges

Despite the evident strength of the correlation between Dīkṣitar's sāhitya and Āgamic prescription, this interdisciplinary approach carries several limitations.

- The interpolation problem: the authorship of the Rāhu and Kētu kṛtis remains disputed, since both show stylistic departures from the rest of the corpus and are absent from the earliest manuscript lineages, complicating any claim to a single, cohesive architectural design on Dīkṣitar's part (Ranganathan, 2020).
- The erosion of physical evidence: repeated kumbhābhiṣēkam renovations across the centuries have often replaced older idols with modern, non-canonical figures or overpainted distinguishing features, making it difficult to match present-day images reliably against eighteenth-century lyrics.
- Regional and dialectal variation: abstract lyrical descriptors — kuṅkumasama dyutim for Budha, for instance — are open to differing interpretation across regional schools of sculpture, and the correspondences proposed here should be read as indicative rather than exhaustive (Vasanthi, 2021).

## 6. Conclusion

This paper has traced a substantial, systemic relationship between the eighteenth-century Carnatic sāhitya of Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar and the canonical iconographic traditions of South Indian temple architecture. A systematic reading of the Navagraha Kṛtis against Āgamic texts such as the Anṣumadbhedāgama makes clear that Dīkṣitar was doing more than writing devotional poetry: he was, in effect, assembling a musical museum of Hindu iconography.

Precise lyrical designations — mēṣa turaṅgaṁ for Aṅgāraka, kāka vāhaṁ for Śani — correspond closely to the physical attributes, vehicles and weapons carved in temple stone, while the study of regional layout variation shows how far local geometry shaped musical structure, whether in response to the strict,

multidirectional plan of Āgama Pratiṣṭhā or the distinctive linear orientation of Dīkṣitar's own birthplace at Tiruvārūr. The correlation with the Kumbakonam Navagraha Sthalam cluster, considered in Section 4.3, further suggests that Dīkṣitar's iconographic vocabulary was shaped not only by the pan-Indian Āgamic tradition but also by his own first-hand experience of specific regional shrines, a dimension of his work that merits further site-by-site investigation beyond the scope of the present study.

These kṛtis, in short, form a bridge between static visual art and dynamic oral tradition — 'verbal icons' that preserve fragments of architectural heritage while democratising access to complex temple ritual. The structural questions and lyrical interpolations surrounding the Rāhu and Kētu kṛtis in particular warrant continued scholarly attention, ideally through comparative manuscript study of the kind that lies outside the present paper's descriptive and comparative remit. Future research might usefully extend the method applied here to Dīkṣitar's other iconographically dense compositions — his kṣetra kṛtis and Guruguha compositions among them — to test whether the correlation between sāhitya and sculpture documented in this paper for the Navagraha is a distinctive feature of that particular corpus or a broader characteristic of Dīkṣitar's compositional practice as a whole. For the present, the Navagraha Kṛtis stand as a lasting testament to the confluence of Indian musicology, sculpture and theology.

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