

Tyagaraja, An erudite musicologist

By

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Endaro Mahanubhavulu, Andariki vandanamu : My deepfelt reverence and obeisance to that great Saint who taught us so much through his music. During a recent visit to Tiruvaiyaru – a First time, unexpected, surreal, blessed moment for me made me realize everything is preplanned by The Supreme. It is a beautiful simple shrine and to the side of him is Lord Rama's vigraham that he adored and worshipped. The walls of his temple were plastered with his compositions. Composers like Tyagaraja, who are treasure houses of music, knowledge, and devotion, are truly divine gifts to humanity. When we think of Tyagaraja, our minds are immediately drawn to his unwavering devotion to Lord Rama. Rarely do we think about the work that has gone into all his compositions, his in-depth knowledge of the subject and his vast study of ragas, meters and his musical pedigree. He was surrounded by music, scriptures, discipline, and devotion right from a very early age. His research on earlier composers, his study of works like *Swararnavam*, *Naradeeyam*, and Sarangadeva's *Sangita Ratnakara*, his adherence to *Unchavritti* as practiced by Sri Purandaradasa, as well as his travels and compositions on various deities beyond Lord Rama, are all beautifully embedded in his works.

Let us delve into his lineage, his education and the spiritual practices he embraced—all of which laid the foundation for his extraordinary repertoire of musical compositions.

Lineage : Tyagaraja hailed from a lineage that was deeply rooted in the knowledge of the scriptures, music and devotion. His paternal grandfather was a poet, scholar, and musician, while his maternal grandfather was a noted Veena player. His father, Kakarla Ramabrahmam, served as a scholar and musician at the court of King Thuljaji of Thanjavur. His mother, Seethamma, was a devout woman whose soulful renditions of Purandaradasa's kritis left a lasting impression on the young Tyagaraja, sowing the seeds of devotion and music in his tender heart.

Education : From a very young age, Tyagaraja displayed an exceptional aptitude for learning. Under the guidance of his father, he became well-versed in Sanskrit, Telugu, and the great epics such as the Bhagavatam and Ramayanam. He learned music under Sri Sonti Venkataramanayya, the Asthana Vidwan at the court of King Thuljaji of Thanjavur. It is believed that Ramabrahmam, Tyagaraja's father, was invited by the king to deliver expositions on Valmiki Ramayanam, during which the young Tyagaraja would recite the shlokas. Thus, exposed from an early age to Valmiki Ramayanam, the compositions of Purandaradasa, Jayadeva, Bhadrachala Ramadasu, Narayana Tirtha and others as sung by his mother, attending discourses and bhajans conducted by Sri

Ramachandrendra Saraswathi later known as Upanishad Braharendra, with his father - his Bhakti for Lord Rama and his understanding of various compositional styles was probably strengthened, which is reflected in his compositions.

Acquisition of Swararnavam, Naradeeyam and Sangita ratnakara :

- **Story behind Swararnavam** : It is said that, one day, a sadhu visited Tyagaraja, and Tyagaraja offered him a sumptuous lunch. Before the meal, the sadhu left his belongings at Tyagaraja's house and went to bathe in the Cauvery river and did not return. That night Tyagaraja got a dream where the Sadhu said he was Sage Narada and the belongings that he had left behind were for Tyagaraja. When he opened them, he found Swararnavam – a broad palm leaf manuscript written in grantha characters.
- **Swararnavam** : *Svararnava contained concepts like the production of Ahata (sound produced by human effort) and anAhata (sound emanating from within; can be heard only by those who have attained a high state of the mind through sAdhanA) nAdams. In many of his compositions, Thyagaraja gives references to the 7 notes and to how different sounds are produced in different parts of the body. In a section called rAga vivEkA, one finds ragas like jayantashrI, kuntalavarALi, sArangakApi, mAlini makarandam etc. In addition to arOhaNa and avarOhaNa, brief sancArAs were given for many ragas. These ragas were presented in the order of the mELAs.*

<https://ramsabode.com/2008/05/09/thyagaraja-his-vinta-ragas/>

- The vinta ragas are Janyaragas either created by the Saint or found in Swararnavam. There are 82 such ragas. Tyagaraja also composed in many melakarta ragams, giving an inkling into the sancharas in the first few lines itself. He had the unique style of composing several sangathis starting with a simple sangathi and progressively making them complicated. Compositions like Darini Telusukonti have a lot of sangatis in Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charanam.
- He found Naradeeyam, a treatise on music, after the death of his maternal grandfather, Kalahasthi Iyer. This deals with the 72 Melakartas and the rules for creating new Ragas. Tyagaraja has created about 200 + ragas and about 80 Apoorva or rare ragas.

<https://pranavjournals.com/finearts/wp-content/uploads/40-Apoorva-Ragas-of-Saint-Thyagaraja.pdf>

- **Sangita Ratnakara** : Sangita Ratnakara, is a musical treatise written by Sarangadeva in the 13th century. Tyagaraja studied this extensively and used the rules of musicology and meters to compose 1000+ kritis. The text has seven chapters:^[19]

1. Svaragatādhyāya (sound system)
2. Rāgavivekādhya (raga)
3. Prakīrṇakādhyāya (performing practice)
4. Prabandhādhyāya (compositions, poetic meter)
5. Tālādhyāya (tala)
6. Vādyādhyāya (musical instruments)
7. Nartanādhyāya (dance)

Tyagaraja's works : Tyagaraja started to compose at the early age of 8, his first composition being "Namo Namo Raghavaya". Upanishad Brahmendra, a great devotee of Lord Rama, sang in the style of Divya nama sankeertanams and Bhajan Sampradaya. This tradition had a profound influence on Tyagaraja, inspiring him to compose the Utsava Sampradaya Kritis and Divya nama sankeertanams, which echo the spirit of collective devotion and worship. While Purandaradasa, known as the Pitamaha of Carnatic music started the tradition of swaravalis like Sarale varases, Jante varases etc and Geethams as the foundation of Carnatic music, Tyagaraja through his works illustrated the use of Melakartas, janya ragas, technicalities of creating new ragas in different meters. His use of words or a phrase to convey a story from the Bhagavatam or other mythological works was exemplary.

He used his musical knowledge skillfully to choose appropriate Raga and Tala to suit the mood of his compositions. Composing over 23+ kritis in raga Thodi in different meters itself is worth mentioning. His compositions are extensively used for Nadaswaram and instruments as well.

Here are some insights into his vast repertoire of compositions.

- Utsava sampradaya kritis -These are simple songs associated with Pooja Vidhana or rituals involved during worship. He has composed 26 Utsava Sampradaya kritis.
- Divya nama sankeertanams -These are simple bhajan type of songs, sung as an expression of Bhakti. He has composed 78 such sankeertanams.
- Prahlada Bhakta Vijayam - This Opera is in five acts with 45 kritis set in 28 ragas and 138 verses, in different meters in the Telugu language.
- Nauka charitram -The Nauka Charitram is a shorter Opera in one Act with 21 kritis set in 13 ragas and 43 verses in the Telugu language in different meters. The theme for Naukacharitram may have been influenced by a play called Naukanirupana in Marathi written by one Anandatanaya which was prevalent in Thanjavur.
- Pancharatnams :

GHANA RAGA PANCHARATNAMS		TIRUVOTTIYUR PANCHARATNAM		KOVUR PANCHARATNAMS	
Jagadanandakaraka	Ghana raga	Kanna talli	Tiruvottiyur	I Vasudha	Kovur
Dudukugala	Ghana raga	Sundari Ninnu	Tiruvottiyur	Kori Sevimp rare	Kovur
Sadinchene	Ghana raga	Sundari Nannindarilo	Tiruvottiyur	Shambho Mahadeva	Kovur
Kanakanaruchira	Ghana raga	Sundari Ni Divya rupamuu	Tiruvottiyur	Nammi Vaccchina	Kovur
Endaro Mahanubhavulu	Ghana raga	Dari ni Telusukonti	Tiruvottiyur	Sundareswarunu	Kovur
SRIRANGAM PANCHARATNAMS		LALGUDI PANCHARATNAMS			
Chuta Murare	Srirangam	Gati Neevani	Lalgudi		
O Rangashayi	Srirangam	Lalithe	Lalgudi		
Karuna joodavayya	Srirangam	Deva sri	Lalgudi		
Raju Vedale	Srirangam	Mahita Pravridha	Lalgudi		
Vinarada	Srirangam	Isha Pahimam	Lalgudi		

Composers that Inspired Tyagaraja : He was inspired by composers like Sri Purandaradasa, Annamacharya, Badrachala Ramadas, Jayadeva and the likes. During his times western music was becoming popular and his ragas Suposhini or Sara Sara Samarai could have been influenced by these tunes.

- Purandaradasa : There are several kritis composed by Tyagaraja that probably can be connected to Purandaradasa's compositions. Few examples listed below.

Kriti	Raga	Coinciding kriti	Composer
Grahabalamemi	Revagupti	Sakala graha bala	Purandaradasa
Manasu nilpa	Abhogi	Manava nilisuvudu	Purandaradasa
Sogasuga Mridanga	Sriranjani	Tala beku	Purandaradasa
Dhyaname Varamaina	Dhanyasi	Smarane onde salade	Purandaradasa
Nidhi chala sukhamā	Kalyani	Namma Bhagya doddado nimma bhagya doddado	Purandaradasa
Dwaitamu sukhamā	Rithigowla	Dwaitavu Sukhava	Purandaradasa

His love for Lord Rama connected him with Bhadrachala Ramadas, and Annamacharya compositions. He was inspired by Jayadeva's Gita Govinda, and Narayana Tirtha's Krishna Lila tarangini to bring out Nauka Charitra and 'Pralhada Bhakthi Vijaya' inspired by Merattur Venkatarama Bhagavathar's Prahalada Charitra.

Thirthayatra : Tyagaraja traveled with few of his disciples much later in life to Kanchipuram, Lalgudi, Srirangam, Madras, Tiruvottiyur, Kovur, Tirumala, Sholingur, Nagapattinam, and Shirkazhi thus composing several kritis on those deities.

Unchavritti : This is the practice of begging for alms as a way of life for one's day to day meals. The essence of this practice is to get only what is needed for that day. This is a dharma practiced by many saints to practice humility and detachment. Tyagaraja's practice of Uncha vritti is nothing short of making him a Saint. He could have gotten the king's patronage but refused to sing in praise of any human.

Thus Sri Tyagaraja, a saint from all aspects was also extremely well read, knowledgeable, intelligent and intuitive besides being a great devotee of Lord Rama, chanting his name until his last breath and wanting to get one glimpse of that great Mahanubhava.

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