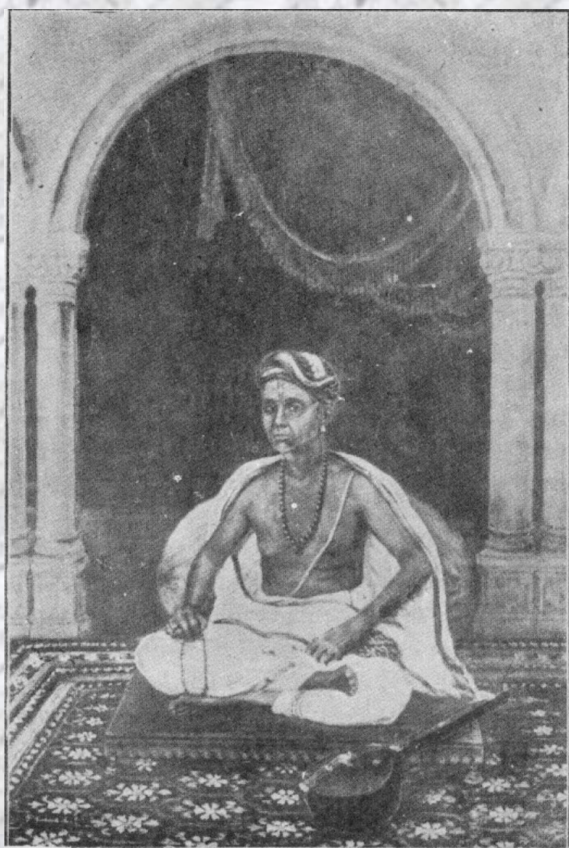




Sruti

The India Music
& Dance Society,
Philadelphia



Thyagaraja Aradhana

March 17, 2012

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SRUTI - The India Music and Dance Society is a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization based in the Philadelphia region and founded in 1986. Sruti's principal mission is to promote and present Indian classical music and dance. In addition, SRUTI seeks to educate the Philadelphia community at-large about Indian arts. SRUTI is a volunteer-run organization. Its leadership comprises an elected Board of Directors and several committees.

Every year, around 10 or more world class music and dance recitals are presented during the Spring and Fall seasons by SRUTI in the Greater Philadelphia area. SRUTI also collaborates with other presenting organizations like the Painted Bride Arts Center, Kimmel Center for Performing Arts, Annenberg Center at the University of Pennsylvania, Drexel University, and Montgomery County Community College.

SRUTI has received generous grants from private foundations and public organizations including the Pennsylvania Council on the Arts, Dance Advance and Philadelphia Music Project (funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts) and the Sam Fels Foundation in addition to a loyal and appreciative audience.

The opinions expressed by the contributors of articles and reviews are published in a spirit of openness of communication and freedom of expression. They do not necessarily reflect the views of Sruti's Board or its members.

From the Publications & Outreach Committee

Dear Sruti Supporters & Music Enthusiasts,

SRUTI is honored to welcome you and your family to the 26th Annual Thyagaraja Aradhana celebrations. This day-long event traditionally marks the beginning of Sruti's spring concert series and is a showcase for our local Carnatic music artists and students. This year's featured artist is Shri Ashvin Bhogendra from New Jersey, who will be accompanied by Shri L. Ramakrishnan on the violin and Shri Akshay Anantapadmanabhan on the mridangam. We also had an overwhelming interest in the individual and group-singing category and have more than 60 participants today.

In this souvenir, the Publications and Outreach Committee is very pleased to publish the thoughtful contributions from music aficionados including many local young musicians. My heartfelt thanks and appreciation to all the authors.

We hope you find the collection of articles in this commemorative souvenir informative, interesting, intriguing and insightful.

So, sit back, relax and enjoy the cornucopia of music being offered today in homage to the great Saint Composer Thyagaraja.

With best wishes,
Lakshmi Radhakrishnan

On behalf of the Publications and Outreach Committee

**Please accept our apologies for any errors or omissions you may find.*

The cover picture of Thyagaraja is taken from the book. "Thiagaraja, A Great Musician Saint (with Sargam Notation)" by M.S. Ramaswami Aiyar, First Published in 1927 by Asian Educational Services, New Delhi, India & reprinted in 1986. The picture in the book was taken with permission from Jaganmohan Palace, Mysore, India.

Program

March 17, 2012

08:00 AM - Pooja
08:15 AM - Utsava Sampradaya & Pancharatna Kritis
10:45 AM - Individual Participation
12:45 PM - Lunch (Included as part of entrance donation)
01:30 PM - Vocal Concert by **Shri Ashvin Bhogendra**
Violin: **Shri L. Ramakrishnan**
Mridangam: **Shri Akshay Anantapadmanabhan**
04:00 PM - Individual Participation (Continued)
07:00 PM - Dinner (Available for purchase from Temple Kitchen)



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Ghana Raga Pancharatnams The Spiritual Journey of Sri Tyagaraja Shivram Viswanathan

Throughout history, people constantly ask the question, “Who are those great men who walked the earth?” After this question, names such as Aristotle, Plato, Da Vinci will follow invariably. But rarely do we ask the question that should logically follow: “Why are they great?”

This is the question I asked silently to myself in my naiveté as I began to learn more and more of Sri Tyagaraja's compositions. Afraid of criticism, I kept quiet with my doubts, and continued singing and enjoying the beautiful *krithis*. The question grew and festered in my mind, and I could not bear the ignorance any longer. After slight prompting from my parents and a largely self-motivated inquiry, I began to research the meaning of Sri Tyagaraja's famous Pancharatnams, hoping to find not only an answer to my question, but something more.

We begin with *Jagadananda karaka*, where the glory of Rama is extolled in scholarly Sanskrit and detail. In fact, the *keerthana* is structured such that the *saahithyams* form one hundred and eight names of Rama. The general theme of adoration of Rama is prevalent in each of Tyagaraja Swami's compositions.

Dudugu gala is the epiphany of Sri Tyagaraja, transcending the mundane. With utmost humility he recounts the mistakes he has made in the past as a spiritual aspirant to Rama, and asks for forgiveness. His realization that material, earthly pleasures are ephemeral is repeated throughout the *keerthana*.

The third Pancharatnam, *Saadinchane*, is set to Arabhi, through which Tyagaraja Swami presents the teasing and playful *saahithyam*. This composition brings the Lord to the level of a friend and goes as far as teasing Krishna for not being true to his word and for “deceiving” Yashoda and other Gopikas.

Kanakanaruchira focuses on the beauty of the physical form of Rama, and how his image is entrancing in nature. Tyagaraja Swami also mentions great *bhaktas* of Rama such as Dhruva and Hanuman and pleads the Lord to include him with those great individuals.

The origins of the final Pancharatna *krithi* began at the abode of Tyagaraja Swami's guru, Sri Sonti Venkataramanayya. At this place, many great men were present including the renowned composer and king Swati Tirunal. In the presence of these venerable individuals,

Tyagaraja salutes and pays homage to all these spiritual aspirants by singing *Endaro mahanubhavulu*.

Through these Pancharatna Krithis, we are able to see not only the masterful combination of poetic *saahithyams* and the *ghana raagams*, but the progression of Tyagaraja Swami's love for the Lord. Sri Tyagaraja dedicated his music to the divine, and when he began his musical training, a spiritual journey that was made inseparable. From discussing his own sins of egoism and pretentious behavior, he moves to praise others in their musical and spiritual pursuits. From his fixation on the physical beauty and worldly accolades of the Rama Avatar, he begins to discuss inward spirituality and the "divine spark" of Paramatma in all. Tyagaraja Swami's journey transcends the great legacy of his music, because it can be said that the music was only a means to the ultimate goal. Nobody can compare to the *bhava* with which he sang these *krithis* because they were not set compositions as we sing now, but his own expressions and feelings. Despite this fact, this discovery has motivated me to embark on my own journey, implicating Carnatic music and the spiritual motives upon which the former was established. In fact, we are all on this journey – whether we acknowledge it or not.

Shivram Viswanathan is a sophomore at West Windsor-Plainsboro High School South near Princeton, NJ. He enjoys all forms of music, basketball, running, and spending time with his friends and family. He is learning Carnatic vocal from Mrs. Uma Sivakumar.



Music Collection from Sruti Performers at Amazon.com

New in 2012, Sruti has launched a music download page making it easy for patrons to browse and buy music by all professional artistes who have performed in Sruti events in recent years.

<http://www.sruti.org/sruti/inc-newsAmazon.asp>

***bhaktuD*u – *muktuD*u**

Prabhakar Chitrapu

Transliteration–Telugu

(Transliteration as per Modified Harvard-Kyoto (HK) Convention)
(including Telugu letters – Short e, Short o) -

a A (aa) i I(ii) u U (uu)
R RR IR IRR
e E ai o O au M (H or :)

(e – short | E – Long | o – short | O – Long)

k kh g gh n/G
c ch j jh n/J (jn – as in jnAna)
T Th D Dh N
t th d dh n
p ph b bh m
y r l L v
S sh s h

Transliterated text is *italicized*.

Krishna Sastry garu was an aging music teacher. His students dwindled to a handful in numbers during recent years, as his energy and voice decayed, though not his enthusiasm. Sansaya was one his former students, who now has a comfortable IT job, but visited his former teacher on occasion.

An occasion indeed it was that Saturday, as the famous MS Venkateswarlu garu, fondly referred to as MSV, was giving a Carnatic vocal concert at the *vara vINa - gAna mandiram* in the western part of the town. It was the home town of MSV garu and his performing there was special to all music lovers in town as well as to MSV garu himself. Sansaya picked up his *guruvu* garu in his new Hyundai car and drove carefully to the concert hall, dodging the people, vehicles and occasional animals on the road.

MSV garu was of a huge build. Seated on the stage in simple cotton garments, he seemed like a small mountain. As he began to sing, with his eyes closed most of the time, music flew like a river – his *AIAPana* gently like the river in the plains and his *kalpana swaras* rushing like impatient waters on rocks and in steep falls. As his audience listened with rapt attention, the meaning and the feeling of the song ebbed and fell in their hearts like youthful passion.

That day, MSV sang Thyagaraja's kriti *bhaktuni caritramu* in Raga *bEgaDa* with great elaboration and feeling.

Sastry garu and Sansaya were discussing it as they drove back in the dark night, with stars distantly twinkling and the moon playing hide and seek with the clouds.

"You know, Sansaya, they say "*bEgaDa* is like *mlgaDa*", Sastry garu started.

"*mlgaDa* is the cream of boiled milk, right, *mAshTArU*? Why do they make that comparison?", enquired the student – and went on reflectively without waiting for an answer.

"...I do know that *bEgaDa* is not a *sampUrNa* Raga. It has only 6 notes in the *ArOhaNa*, and all the 7 in the *avarOhaNa*. I also know that the ascension is not straight, so it is called a *vakra* Raga. Let me think: yes, it is "sa ga ri ga ma pa da pa sa" in the *ArOhaNa*, with ni missing. And 'sa ni da pa ma ga ri sa' in the *avarOhaNa*...."

Sastry garu continued, "Actually, the Raga is supposed to be a *janya* of *dhlra SankarAbharaNam*. However, some think that it should be thought of as a *janya* of *harikaambhOji*, since there is much more predominant usage of the lower *nishaadam* in many of its characteristic phrases.

The *madhyamam* in *bEgDa* is special, because it is a little higher in *swara-sthaana* than the regular *Suddha* ma. In fact, it is sometimes called '*bEgaDa madhyamam*'.

You know, some of the characteristic phrases in *bEgaDa* are pa-da-ni-da-pa, pa-ni-da-ni-pa-sa.... – they sound so pleading and give the raga so much of its color....as also the unique *prayOgam* pa-ga-pa-ma-pa-ga..."

The flow was interrupted as they reached Krishna Sastry garu's home.

"*nAyanA*, Sansaya, come in, sit for some time and have some salted-buttermilk before leaving", affection seeped from every word.

"*mAshTArU*, could we talk a little about the *kriti* and its meaning? I understood some, but it seemed like there was more to it", asked Sansaya, with reverence in his eyes, as he respected the vast knowledge and wisdom of his *guru* garu.

After a prolonged pause, half-closing his eyes, Sastry garu began – "You know, I find this song really interesting because, when I first

heard it and understood its meaning, it dispelled my then-notion of a *bhakta*. I used to think of a *bhakta* as a blindly believing, un-inquiring individual. This song, however, paints a *bhakta* as an intellectual - almost a philosopher.

See, this is how the *pallavi* goes: “*bhaktuni cAritramu vinavE, manasA sItA rAma (bhaktuni)*”

As is typical of Thyagaraja’s *kritis*, the *pallavi* is very simple and almost just the title of the song that is to sprout and evolve – literally. Here he is reflecting in himself (*manasA*) – listen to the account of a *bhakta*, a *bhakta* of Sita and Rama.

The *anupallavi* sketches his premise and the essence of the intended purport of the song. This part of the *kriti* also tends to be brief, so that the composer has to work within a tight constraint of the two lines and has to be parsimonious in the choice and use of words.

Here he says “*Asakti IEka tA kOrucu jIvanmuktuDai Anandamu nondu (bhaktuni)*”

“*Asakti IEka*” is being dispassionate! “*tA kOrucu*” is seeking one’s own self – “*jIvan muktuDai*” is being liberated-in-life and “*Anandamu nondu*” is acquiring bliss.

So, Thyagaraja is saying in the *anupallavi* “(Listen to the account of the *bhakta*, who is dispassionate, who seeks self-knowledge, who leads his/her daily life liberated and one who is naturally in a state of bliss”.

These are ideas almost directly referenceable to the Bhagavad Gita and purely philosophical! There is nothing here about belief and the common notion of devotion! Would you call such a person a *bhakta* or a *jnAni*, really?” paused Krishna Sastry.

Suddenly curious, Sansaya returned a question “Do you think *bhakti* and *jnAna* are orthogonal and incompatible with each other, *guruvu garu?*”

“Don’t know for sure – somehow one seems to be a complete surrender and the other choice-less inquiry. How can they be the same? Yet, several great people have claimed their synonymity – including Thyagaraja here, it seems! This bothers me and I just don’t know for sure”.

He got up, walked over to the bedroom and returned with a blanket as the night began to nip. Pregnant silence ruled for a while. The only thing one heard was one's own breathing and ringing in one's ears. It seemed rude to speak and break that pristine state of stillness.

“OK. Let me finish the rest of the *kriti*. Thyagaraja composed 3 beautiful *charanams* for this song. They are lovely ideas of how a true *bhatka* is supposed to be or naturally is – according to Thyagaraja.

“*japa tapamula tA jEsitinana rAdu*: He should not say that I did all these japas and tapas

adigAka mari: And still

kapaTAtmuDu manamai palka rAdu: He should not speak with a heart of deceit

upama tanaku IEka yuNDavalenani, Ura Ura tirugaga rAdu: He should not go place to place, desiring that no one equal him,

capala cittuDai, Alu sutulapai sAreku bhrama kArAdanE: He should not be fickle minded and develop false beliefs in familial bonds,

hari bhaktuni”

See how Thyagaraja uses the phrase “*adigAka mari*” – such a mundane phrase that no one could imagine using it in musical setting – into a magnificent musical structure!

The next *charanam* is:

bhava vibhavamu nijamani yencaga rAdu: He should not treat worldly grandiose as being real,

adigAka mari: And still,

Siva mAdhava bhEdamu jEyaga rAdu: He should not develop distinctions between Siva and Vishnu,

bhuvanamandu tAnE yOgyuDanani bonki poTTa sAkaga rAdu: He should not achieve a livelihood by deceiving others by saying that he is deserving,

pavanAtmaja dhRtamau sltA pati pAdamulanu yEmara rAdanu: He should not let go of the feet of Sri Rama, steadfastly held by *AnjanEya, hari (bhaktuni)*”.

Finally, Thyagaraja concludes like this in the third and last *charanam*:

rajasa tAmasa guNamulu kArAdu: He should not develop *rAjasa* and *tAmasa* qualities,

adigAkanu: further still

avyAjamunanu rA lEdanakArAdu: He should not worry that luck did not favor him,

rAja yOga mArgamu nl cittamu rA jUcuTa viDavaga rAdu: He should not stop trying to get his mind on *rajayOga* path,

rAja SikhA maNi aina tyAgarAja sakhuni marava rAdanE: He should not forget the jewel among kings, Thyagaraja's friend, Sri Rama, *hari bhaktuni*"

See how Thyagaraja views a true *bhakta* to be! Although there are a couple of references to traditional devotion to God, most of the qualities Thyagaraja describes are those of an even-minded, impartial, dispassionate, tranquil, spiritual person, seeking to find truth of oneself and who is trying hard to not get caught in the dualities.

In fact, it reminds me of the Gita sloka, in which Arjuna asks Krishna "*sthita-prajnasya kaa bhaashaa, samaadhi-sthasya kESava; sthita-dhih kim prabhaashEta, kim asiita vrajEta kim?*" - "How is the language of one whose intelligence is firmly fixed and one who is in the state of Transcendence? How does one whose wisdom is firmly fixed speak, sit and walk?". If I recollect correctly, it is the 54th sloka in the second chapter.

Krishna replies in the next sloka, "*prajahAti yadA kAmAn, sarvAn pArtha manO gatAn; AtmanyEvAtmanA tushta: sthita-prajnas tadOcyate*" (meaning "O *pArtha*, when a man gives up all varieties of sense desire which arise from mental processes, and when his mind finds satisfaction in the self alone, then he is said to be of unwavering wisdom"), where Krishna extols the qualities of one of fixed mind or is unwavering mind."

Sansaya was fascinated. "You know, *guruvu garu?* From the way you explained it, Thyagaraja should probably have composed the pallavi as "*prajnuni cAritramu vinavE, manasa, sthitha (prajnuni)*"! Or even better, "*muktuni cAritramu vinavE, manasa, jlvAn (muktuni)*" – it even keeps the original rhythm -J. What do you think, *mAshTARu?*" Sansaya seemed cheekily pleased with himself.

Restraining a smile, Sastry garu chided his student mildly: “nAyanA, Sansaya, great people have said that human hands cannot improve the works of the Saint. Do not touch them.”

A while later, Sansaya took leave of his teacher and the car raucously drove away into the night. A lone dog's cat-nap was disturbed and it let out a long wail, as if annoyed or angry.

The author would like to acknowledge the help of Vasant Nagulaapalli and Mani Subramaniam in reviewing and editing the article.

Prabhakar Chitrapu is a long time supporter of Sruti and is interested in music, language and philosophy. He maintains a website devoted to Saint Thyagaraja www.thyagaraja.org.



The Spirit of Thyagaraja Aradhana

Priyanka Dinakar

Thyagaraja Aradhana, an annual event held to honor Saint Thyagaraja, is an event that everyone in this community looks forward to; they get to meet their musically-inclined friends after a winter break and listen to people sing.

The day starts with a short *pooja*, conducted by a priest or someone that is familiar with the worship ritual. The Utsava Sampradaya group and the Pancharatna groups then perform, after putting in weeks of practice. But the most attended part of the program is the individual participation. This is where each student gets to showcase all of the hard work that they have put in for the past few months; therefore, everybody attending is obligated to be there, listen, and support the singers. Upcoming artists are sometimes invited to perform to get more experience with performing. But what do these series of events really symbolize?

The renditions should symbolize homage to Saint Thyagaraja and keep the wonderful tradition alive. The Aradhana is held every year in Thiruvaiyaru on the astrological day when Tyagaraja gave up his physical body. The Thiruvaiyaru celebrations are now well renowned with lots of media coverage. The Sruti Thyagaraja Aradhana got started in 1987, the year after Sruti was founded. Every year, music lovers eagerly await this event to sing themselves, or to watch others sing. The music teachers put some thought to pick a nice and if possible heavy composition of the composer to teach each

student or groups of students. The audiences wait to hear each of the students and discuss their progression in musical learning since the last Aradhana. If the participant delivers well, even more kudos to them! Everyone should definitely come to support these participants who have worked so hard to present the compositions. Students must stay back to listen to their peers sing, encourage and cheer for them. Because of the focus on individual participations, Aradhana has shown signs of becoming more of a “talent showcase day” than an *aradhana*, which is defined as “an act of glorifying God”.

Today, let us forget trying to showcase all of our talent and hard work and sing in remembrance of Thyagaraja, this great saint who spent his life composing hundreds of masterpieces that have brought so much joy and peace to the listeners and practitioners.

Priyanka Dinakar is a 9th grader at the Agnes Irwin School. She learns Carnatic Music from Kiranavali Vidyasankar.



Blog Impressions

<http://thyagaraja-vaibhavam.blogspot.com>

Harish Bevinahally

Sri V. Govindan of Chennai has done a great service to Carnatic music lovers through his blog. This is a content-rich, interactive resource dedicated to saint Thyagaraja's works. It is simple, well organized, and offers lyrics in several languages including English, Devanagari, Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam . For each Kriti in the blog, Sri Govindan has provided a gist as well as full translation. I like the word-by-word translation, which brings out the linguistic richness of the kritis, and can serve as a great teaching aid.

For example, Thyagaraja sings the importance of devotion in "sangeeta jAnamu bhakti vinA":

pallavi

*sanglta jnAnamu bhakti vinA
san-mArgamu kaladE manasA*

O My Mind (manasA)! Mere knowledge (jAnamu) of music (sanglta) bereft of (vinA) devotion (bhakti) will not lead (kaladE) to the right path (of God realization) (san-mArgamu).

anupallavi

*bhRngi naTESa samIraja ghaTaja
matanga nArada-Adulu-upAsincE (sangIta)*

O My Mind! Mere knowledge of music – worshipped (upAsincE) by bhRngi (a devotee of Siva), Lord naTarAja - Lord (ISa) of Dance (naTa) (naTESa), AnjanEya – son of Wind God (samIraja), sage agastya – born of pitcher (ghaTaja), matanga, nArada and others (Adulu) (nAradAdulupAsincE), bereft of bhakti will not lead to the right path (of God realization).

caraNam

*nyAya-anyAyamu telusunu jagamulu
mAyAmayamu-ani telusunu durguNa
kAyaja-Adi shaD-ripula jayincu
kAryamu telusunu tyAgarAjuniki (sangIta)*

Knowledge of music together with bhakti will lead to the right path of (God realization) through which what is right (nyAya) and what is not (right) (anyAyamu) (nyAyAnyAyamu) can be known (telusunu); the truth that (ani) this universe (jagamulu) is of the nature (mayamu) of illusion (mAyA) (mAyAmayamani) can be known (telusunu); the method (kAryamu) of gaining victory (jayincu) over evil-some (durguNa) six (shaD) (internal) enemies (ripula) - kAma (kAyaja) etc. (Adi) (kAyajAdi) (kAma, krOdha, IObha, mOha, mada and mAtsarya) can be known (telusunu);

O My Mind! To this tyAgarAja (tyAgarAjuniki) mere knowledge of music bereft of bhakti will not lead to the right path (of God realization).

Sri Govindan has provided alternative interpretations of lyrics where literal translation may often miss the true intent of the saint. Also posted on the blog are variations in practice, and appropriate usage. I found search feature on the blog a bit tricky, but works reasonably well.

As a personal journal on the Worldwide Web, this blog contains posts, making it interactive and interesting. You can read posts from others, post your questions for Sri Govindan, or connect with other Carnatic music enthusiasts. Sri Govindan is passionate about music, loves to write, and has done a great deal of research to compile this blog for the public to enjoy the great works of saint Thyagaraja.

Happy Blogging.

Please note that a printable version of Thyagaraja's kritis can be found at: <https://skydrive.live.com/?cid=bba7e1ca0356380&id=BBAF7E1CA0356380%21433>

Here is a schedule of events at the Cleveland Thyagaraja Aradhana: <http://www.aradhana.org/schedule.html>

Articles on Saint Thyagaraja I found interesting to share with Sruti members:

1. <http://www.deccanherald.com/content/217438/straight-heart.html>
2. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-india-16591093>
3. <http://www.karnatik.com/article007.shtml>

Harish Bevinahally learnt vocal music from his father late BVN Murthy and later from Prof. MA Narasimhachar in Bangalore. He learnt Carnatic flute from CM Madhuranath, disciple of TR Mahalingam. Harish performed in concerts and was a graded artist on AIR Bangalore before coming to the US. Harish has been a Sruti member for over 10 years and now resides in Exton, PA.



Common Courtesy at Concerts

Rasikan

(This article is being reprinted with the permission of the author, from a previous issue of the souvenir.)

Does audience behavior at music or dance programs depend on the type of concert, venue, city, or other factors? Perhaps. It varies from fairly casual to highly disciplined. Over the years, I have been troubled by the conduct of some patrons at SRUTI events. But before we discuss that, let us look at patterns of audience conduct in two different contexts: Carnatic music concerts in India and Western classical music concerts in this country.

Recent issues of *Sruti* magazine from Chennai, India have carried articles and letters to the editor regarding the lack of discipline exhibited by audiences at Carnatic music concerts in India, and particularly in Chennai. It is not unusual for patrons to walk in and out in the middle of performances, including an alapana or swaraprastharam. VIPs are wont to barge in as they please and jostle past other people to get to a seat in the front row. The artists are expected to acknowledge their presence even if it means disrupting a complicated swarakalpana. Perhaps the worst annoyance is the audience exodus when the thani avarthanam begins.

[As an aside, I recently saw a cartoon in a magazine that showed the mridanga vidwan carrying his instrument while the Secretary announced that for the benefit of the audience, "today's thani avartanam would be performed in the cafeteria"!]

Frequent chatter, these days especially on cell phones, is another common annoyance.

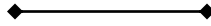
By contrast, those who attend Western classical music concerts in this country know that doors close when the conductor begins the performance, and late arrivals (even if only by a few minutes) may not enter the concert hall until the piece being played has concluded. There is typically also pin-drop silence in the auditorium. The silence does not mean that the audience is not appreciating the music being produced on stage; on the contrary, the pin-drop silence allows the audience to be fully immersed in the music. In my observations, the conduct of SRUTI audiences falls between the above two extremes. Most concertgoers sit patiently through a concert, showing their enjoyment and appreciation with frequent applause. But a few people do wander in and out. It is understandably difficult to sit still for almost three hours, but one would hope that those who need to leave would do so (a) only after the alapana/swaraprastharam or between pieces, and (b) not rush back to their seats, or even consider remaining in the back of the hall for the rest of the concert in order to minimize their disruption of others' enjoyment.

It is laudable that SRUTI audiences do not engage in mass exodus during thani avartanam. In fact, the audience does applaud delightful mohras. Many visiting artists have expressed their appreciation of this characteristic.

Unfortunately all this discipline seems to break down at other SRUTI (community oriented) programs like the annual Thyagaraja Aradhana and the SRUTI Day programs. These are events for which many youngsters prepare hard and give of their best. That is good. What is not good is that, almost immediately after some of them perform, their parents whisk them away and leave the auditorium en masse. I am sure the parents are proud to see their children perform to an appreciative audience but do not show a minimal courtesy of staying behind to hear other youngsters. This attitude can be observed among some adults also, so much so the later artists perform to a nearly empty hall except for the organizers and a few diehard patrons. In fact during the Thyagaraja Aradhana of 2009, there were less than about a dozen persons in the hall for the last singer and even less for the mangalam. This is indeed very unfair to the performers.

I would earnestly appeal to all patrons to stay on after they or their children perform and encourage others. This is the minimum that they can do in return for SRUTI giving them a forum to exhibit their talents.

An ardent admirer and lover of Carnatic Music, Rasikan has been a regular contributor and supporter of Sruti.



Where was Thyagaraja born?

Prabhakar Chitrapu

Most knowing people would immediately answer the above question, saying *tiruvaArUr* – a small village near Tanjavur in Tamil Nadu state. And most unknowing people would probably google and find the same answer. I was like that too – until I read an article by Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna. It was actually a preface he wrote to a book “Thyagaraju - Rama darSanamu” by bhAshApraviNa Dr.mulukutla brahmAnanda SAstri, which was published by nAgArjuna Printing & Binding Works, tenAli, AP, India in 1987 [1].

Normally, most books and websites say that Thyagaraja was born in *tiruvaArUr* and that his father moved to *tiruvayyAr*, when Thyagaraja was about 5 years of age. There seems to be no dispute that Thyagaraja lived the rest and most of his long life in *tiruvayyAr*.

Balamurali believes that Thyagaraja was born in *tiruvayyAr*, which apparently means a ‘village of 5 rivers’ and is referred to as *panchanada kshEtra/pura* in Sanskrit.

Balamurali says that the reason for his belief is nothing less than the fact that Thyagaraja himself states so in one of his compositions! The composition in reference is *nIku sari evvarE* in Raga *maNirangu*. In the beginning of the third and last charanam, Thyagaraja says “*pancanada puramuna janincina nA pApamula tIrcina praNatArthi haruDu*” – meaning “*praNatArthi haruDu* (Siva), who resolved the sins of me – one born in *pancanada puramu* (i.e. *tiruvayyAr*). Pretty hard to argue against this, seems to me!

Balamurali further claims that all the kritis of Thyagaraja’s students also makes the same mention that *tiruvayyAr* is the birthplace of the Saint. I have not researched this matter, but if any of the readers know any example, I would be grateful to be informed at chitrapu1955@gmail.com.

Faced with such clear evidence to claim that *tiruvayyAr* is the right answer, why does most literature claim the other thesis?

There is probably a good amount of supporting data for it. It would be good to collect such evidence for the claim that *tiruvaArUr* is the Saint's birthplace!

[1] "Thyagaraju - Rama *darSanamu*"

by *bhAshApraviNa* Dr. *mulukuTla brahmAnanda SAstri*, published by *nAgArjuna* Printing & Binding Works, *tenAli*, AP, India in 1987.



Tyagaraja's Confessional Songs as Epitomes of Repentance

Dr. William Jackson

In the sad notes of the *raga Chakravakam*, in a composition beginning with the words "*Etulabrotuvo teliya*," Tyagaraja expresses the mood of fear, or *Bhayanaka rasa*. The great singer-saint laments in these lyrics that he has a "despicable record of sins, detestable for the ear" to hear. He is afraid, and doubts that Rama will give him refuge and save him from his past deeds. Saying he has wandered like a stray bull, caring about nothing but eating, flattering misers to make a living, engaged in wicked acts while tagging along with other wicked people, he bemoans his state of self-caused misery.

Someone taking the words in a completely literal sense might well ask: "Why would a pious saint write a song in which he confesses to wasting his life in wickedness?" But in various religions we find statements of confession, as if to help listeners reflect on their faults. Isn't it like the words of Paul in an epistle he wrote: "The good I would do, I do not, but the evil I would not do, that I do." Why else would dedicated religious people sometimes talk about being sinners, seeming to divulge wrongdoing?

Could it be that songwriters and those giving voice to the human predicament at times dramatize the soul-searching which every human goes through at some time in his or her life? For example, Bob Dylan in his song "Lonesome Hobo" writes in the persona of a vagrant, "I have tried my hand at bribery, blackmail and deceit,/ And I've served time for everything except for begging on the street." Dylan himself did not do those things, but I think his lyrics confess those faults in order to tell a story that engages listeners—

to speak of the human condition is to speak of the soul in extreme states, of feeling happy, and feeling fearful, and feeling worried and feeling guilty. It is a way of reflecting on the position where misbehaving usually lands us.

Tyagaraja, in his songs of confession was bringing a deep therapeutic value to his music. There can be an unhealthy tension in carrying around the faults we humans hide. Examination of conscience in the individual and practicing ritual confession in a community, enumerating sins of one soul or considering the wrongs of humanity—this theme is found in songs both East and West. Certain faiths also have confession as a regular part of their tradition. The tradition of Vaishnavism includes public confession, and there is the Day of Atonement (Yom Kippur) in Judaism, and confession is found in Buddhism also. Monks in early Buddhism confessed their sins before the biweekly recitation of *Patimokkha*. Penance in Catholicism involves the individual private confession of sins to a priest, usually in a confessional booth. The catholic confession begins “Bless me father for I have sinned,” and ends with an act of contrition, asking forgiveness. Anglicanism and Eastern Orthodox Christians also have the sacrament of penance. These are a few examples.

Tyagaraja realized that to give voice to human failings, to elicit our own memories and regrets, to confess our shortcomings and thus transcend them is an understandable need. Harboring secrets can poison a person’s experience with feelings of guilt. In such a condition we feel a need to make a “clean breast” of things, to feel unstained, to get burdens off one’s chest. Not to dwell on one’s sins endlessly, but to admit them in order to go on, allows us to get on with life, unburdened. Great bhakti singers such as Tyagaraja who give voice to the predicaments of humanity serve to enliven our consciences. They shed a light on our common shadow and cast a light on the path to show the way. I will give a few examples of this.

In *Ennallu tirigedi in Malavashri raga* Tyagaraja speaks of the feelings of hypocrisy. In *Gattiganu nanu ceyi in Begada raga* Tyagaraja speaks of being troubled by ego and pride. In another song, *Toli Janmama in Bilahari raga*, he reflects on feeling alienated from God and says “Now I know my sins—and their results.” Other bhakti saints have also left such soul-searching lyrics. It is not that they have personally committed all the sins they enumerate, but that they make a deep musical art about human actions which are often kept hidden, denied, covered by trickery of many sorts. Someone so free creatively with spiritual imagination can eloquently dramatize the sins of mankind in order to call upon the consciences of forgetful listeners,

prodding us to examine our conscience and feel contrition.

Tyagaraja sang and asked for forgiveness in *Aparadhamula* in *Darbar raga*: “Infatuated with arrogance I have indulged in abusing good men, almost as a routine of life. Without true devotion to your holy feet, I have made a show to onlookers that I am a pious man doing *japa*. I have mingled with women and wasted my time in gossip with them but have not expatiated on stories of your glory which are beneficent to my life.” If we took this too literally we would have to say it was a lie—because his songs tell Rama’s stories. Perhaps such a writer blows up his smallest failings, saying as a human he is caught in webs of desires and guilt. But I think he is saying that all souls are likely to feel like hypocrites, with active lives come dramas of hopes and failings.

In *Pahi kalyana sundara* in *Punnagavarali raga*, Tyagaraja sings that he is not a learned person, not able to know what is wise, and that he hasn’t sung bhajans, but has wandered around vainly, lollygagging around by rich folks’ doors seeking support. Failing to love the Lord’s feet with devotion he sees he has squandered his feelings on his family instead. He says he regarded worldly pleasures as permanent, and failed to realize the worth of God’s name, that he ran after sense pleasures madly, confusedly committing incalculable wrongs, but still asking, as if it is not clear, what fault it is that prevents God from coming to him.

In the mood of feeling lonely and neglected, and sure that it is his fault, he voices feeling distraught as he lists the bad conduct that has disqualified him. Such songs also add an ethical dimension, depicting the misery and feeling of unworthiness that results from sin. They urge listeners to make a resolve to be better, more dedicated bhaktas in the future, and they unite us with the rest of humanity. As C.G. Jung wrote: “...with the help of confession I am able to throw myself into the arms of humanity, freed at last from the burden of moral exile.” To confess out loud in heartfelt tones can bring us release from guilty feelings, deliverance from troubling hard-to-bear burdens.

Like Gandhiji, Tyagaraja realized that to appeal to the conscience of others the pretention of perfection and superiority is not useful. Instead, freely admitting one is guilty, that one shares common failings, gives people hope that they too are akin to fellow strivers and seekers like Tyagaraja and Gandhiji. It is depressing to feel alien, excluded and unworthy, and it is refreshing and uplifting to feel one is like all others in needing to confess and be forgiven. It can be

cathartic to experience a burden being lifted from one's shoulders. Confession is one theme in the bhakta's repertoire, not to be wallowed in endlessly, but to be expressed as mood and necessity determine.

In *Noremi Sri Rama* in *Varali raga*, Tyagaraja says he is a constant sinner, unable to control the six inner foes, always grinning at females, lacking real devotion, so unjustified in blaming anyone else. The gist of his song *Ninnana valasina* in *Kalyani raga* can be stated as follows "Since I'm so blameworthy, why do I complain? Gossiping with the wicked, not hungering after a vision of the divine, not engaging in humble service, becoming attached to a wife with a dowry, not worshipping the Lord's feet but enamored of trivial worldly pursuits, not recognizing how ephemeral wealth is, not performing austerities, failing to hear divine stories which can dispel one's sins... Since I'm so blameworthy, what right do I have to complain?" Other than with such self-critical reflections how can a lyric get through to our basic human faults, touch our souls where we live?

Thus, such confessional songs have a therapeutic value beyond serving to caution us to avoid serious deeds which will ultimately put us in a horrible predicament. To admit one's faults may not be not easy, but in the long run it clears the air. It is humbling, and it brings us back down to earth. As a verse in a Bob Dylan song advises: "Swallow your pride—you will not die, it's not poison!" In fact, feeling sorry, genuinely swallowing one's pride, could be an antidote to the dangerous ills of hubris, blind ego-mania.

Our hidden, denied, chronically embarrassing shortcomings are a part of our lives. To pretend they don't exist or that they have no importance turns us into hollow cardboard phonies. Human life has a dark side which must be reckoned with if we are to be whole and authentic human beings. Tyagaraja wisely and soulfully sang of the dark side, prodded listeners to reflect on their mistakes and to repent. His songs served several purposes in doing so. Tyagaraja's songs of confession help us feel that we are not alone.

Dr. William Jackson is a Professor of Religious Studies at Indiana University. He is the author of several scholarly books on Tyagaraja, including 'Thyagaraja: Life & Lyrics'.



All About Carnatic

Kirena Manivannan

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Unscramble each of the clue words. Unscramble the letters that appear in the ☐ boxes for the final message.

Clues:

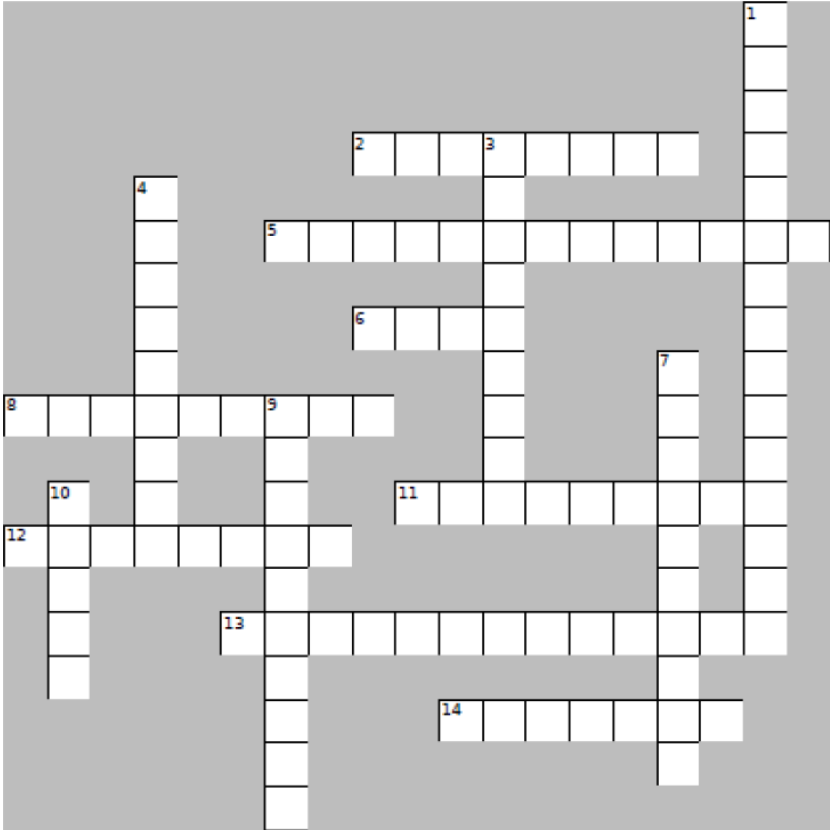
1. The five gems of Thyagaraja
2. Birth place of Thyagaraja
3. Ragam of the Jagadanandakaraka
4. Expression associated with a song
5. Part before Charanam in a song
6. Style of singing where the notes align with letters within the lyrics
7. A person who composes Music and Lyrics
8. Homage to Thyagaraja
9. Concluding part of a concert

Master Clue: The most elaborate center piece of a concert!

Kirena is a 9th grader studying at Holicong Middle School. She is learning carnatic music under the guidance of Mrs. Uma Sivakumar.

Carnatic Crossword

Anshul Ramanathan & Aditya Peri



Across

- 2 Nadai with 4 mastras per beat
- 5 The Eldest of the Trinity of Carnatic music (2 Words)
- 6 Name of the Fourth Chakra
- 8 Ragas containing all seven swaras
- 11 Janya Raga with Anya (Foreign) Swaras
- 12 Concluding part of a Kriti
- 13 Extended Solo played by the percussionists in a concert (2 words)
- 14 Melodic improvisation of a raga

Down

- 1 29th Melakarta Raga
- 3 Composer of Pancharatna Krithis
- 4 Tyagaraja's birth place
- 7 Number of Aksharas for Sankeerna Jathi Dhuruva Talam (2 words)
- 9 Garland of Ragas
- 10 Hindustani Equivalent of Mohanam

Anshul is an 8th grader at Newtown Middle School. Aditya is a 9th grader at Council Rock High School North. They are both learning Carnatic music from Mrs. Uma Sivakumar.

The Indian Arts in America

Veena Kanumalla

Anyone can see that the atmosphere of India greatly differs than that of the United States. People born and brought up in India often have many advantages and opportunities that Indian American kids brought up here do not have. In India, people are constantly surrounded by the Indian culture. Whether it be music, food, language, or even clothing, aspects of Indian culture are apparent everywhere there. When it comes to Indian music or dance, some of the most complex art forms to appreciate, Indian American kids have a serious disadvantage. In Chennai, there are concerts and dance performances almost every single day. One can simply look in the newspaper and immediately fill their plans for the day with exciting cultural performances. I remember going to Chennai for a month in June of 2010 and attending a performance almost every evening. From Sikkil Gurucharan, to Sanjay Subrahmanyam, to Gayathri Venkatraghavan and many more, I experienced a wide range of Carnatic music within such a short span of time.

Although there is a great distance between the two countries, there has been a significant increase in the migration of Carnatic music from India to the United States. We even see Americans taking interest in Indian arts, and even sometimes seriously pursuing them. Organizations like SRUTI have sprung up all over the country in the past 30 years, allowing people to experience live performances of high caliber. Artists are now able to perform in almost every major city in the country, due to the interest and hard work of *rasikas* everywhere. This idea was almost unheard of during the mid-late 20th century; opportunities that used to be rare are now available to the public.

This widespread interest in Indian art forms has been a great benefit not only to music students like myself, but also to society in general. Music and dance students are now able to see the application of what they are studying on stage and better appreciate what they are learning. Dance productions and music concerts are easily made accessible to connoisseurs that have great depths of knowledge in these areas. Parents and children alike are able to experience ancient art forms,

further broadening their awareness of their own heritage.

Although it is impossible to create the same atmosphere that India has with regard to culture, SRUTI has done a wonderful job of exposing the tri-state area to the Indian arts. Hopefully, in the coming years, live programs will be even more frequent in the United States.

Veena Kanumalla is a 11th grader at Wissahickon High school and has been learning Carnatic vocal music for almost eleven years. She is currently under the tutelage of Smt. Kiranavali Vidyasankar.



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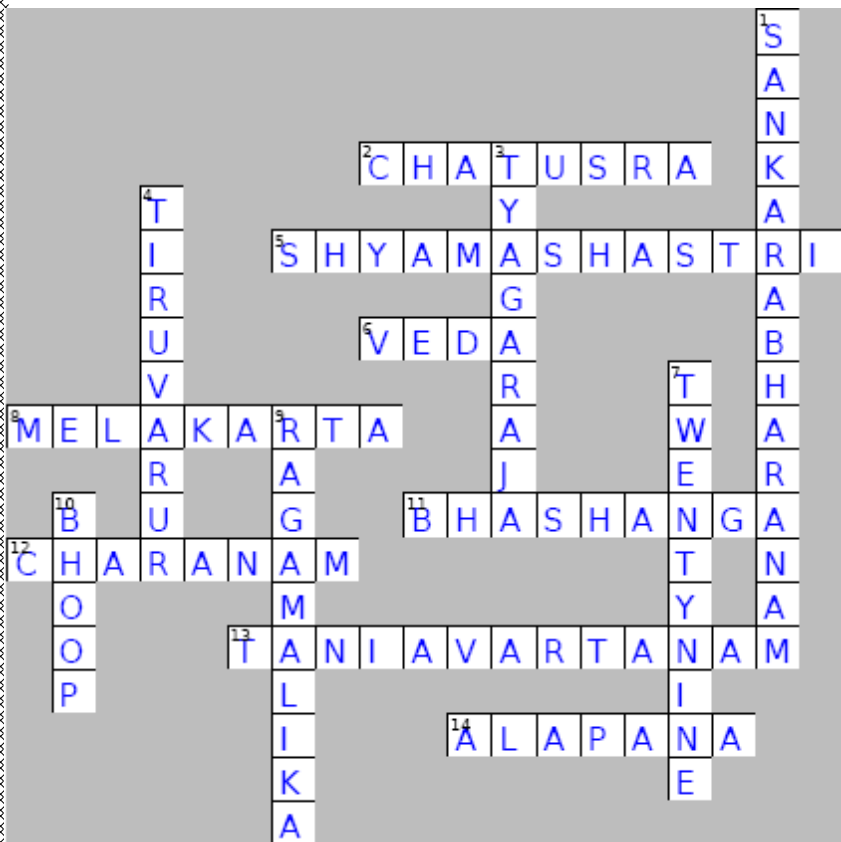


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Answers to Crossword



Answers to Jumble

1. Pancharatnam
2. Tiruvarur
3. Nattai
4. Bhava
5. Anupallavi
6. Swaraksharam
7. Vaggeyakara
8. Aradhana
9. Mangalam

Master: RAGAM THANAM PALLAVI

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Saturday April 28, 2012

**Bharatanatyam style Indian Classical Dance: featuring
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Saturday May 12, 2012

South Indian Classical Vocal Concert: Ranjani and Gayathri

Saturday June 2, 2012

**Classical Instrumental Concert "Strings Attached"-
Jayanthi (Veena) & Kumaresh (Violin)**

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and Vocal concert by B.Balasubrahmanian**

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Saturday September 29, 2012

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folk musicians from Rajasthan**

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Vaidyanathan accompanied by a live orchestra.**

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