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# Sruti

The India Music  
& Dance Society,  
Philadelphia



Thyagaraja Aradhana  
Souvenir 2020

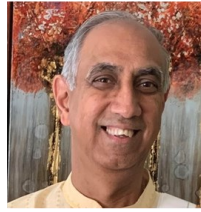
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# Thyagaraja Aradhana Souvenir

## Spring 2020

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*The content in this magazine is published with a spirit of openness of communication and freedom of expression. The opinions contained herein do not necessarily reflect the views of SRUTI, its board or its members. The articles have been published as is with some minimal corrections for clarity.*

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## From the President

Dear SRUTI Family,

Greetings! First, I hope you, your families and loved ones are staying well and safe during these unprecedented and challenging times. I am sure that we were all looking forward to a festive spring full of wonderful concerts rejoicing in the musical company of our extended SRUTI family. Little did I expect that I will be writing this letter hunkered indoors and conversing with you virtually. It does hurt deeply when months of planning and efforts do not bear fruition and we are forced to watch helplessly as the power of nature unfolds. But, every beginning has an end and we need to stay confident and wait for the cloud to pass.

It is my pleasure to introduce our board of directors for this year, who have graciously agreed to guide me to bring the finest of Indian arts to our community:

**President Elect – Sundar Arunapuram**, who has served on the SRUTI board for several years in the past, was unanimously voted as President-elect during the 2019 General Body Meeting (GBM)

**Secretary – Srinivasan Raghavan** will be continuing his portfolio from last year

**Treasurer – Venkat Kilambi**, a familiar and experienced member from the legacy SRUTI organization comes back to handle our finances

**Director of Resources – Uma Prabhakar**, another seasoned veteran who has a long history of leading the SRUTI organization in the past is back to provide her wisdom and guidance to navigate the changing landscape of grants and funding

**Director of Publications – Dinakar Subramanian**, another long time SRUTI patron, will continue to engage our community through publications with insightful content, web solutions and outreach activities

**Director of Marketing – Nari Narayanan** who has played a tremendous role in spreading, popularizing and growing our brand for the last several years will continue to lead our Marketing strategy and activities

**Directors 1 and 2 – Revathi Subramony and Chitra Kannan** will also continue their services to our organization as directors on the board.

The customary Thyagaraja Aradhana (TA) was supposed to have been our first event in late March before the pandemic struck. We received overwhelming response from our community for the individual participation and the Utsava Krithi/Pancharatna group were ready and raring to go. Despite this setback, our board is working hard to engage the community through virtual presentations by community members as well as a virtual concert by Shertallay Ranganatha Sharma in place of his originally scheduled live concert for TA. This has been challenging with the lockdowns in place, but we expect to come up with a solution very soon.

The much anticipated “Trinity Musical Play” was scheduled for April 4 and poised to bring together several frontline musicians and dramatists. This promised to be a one-of-a-kind experience for the SRUTI community and the Indian diaspora in our region. The board worked tirelessly to coordinate the logistics of bringing in a 14-member crew from India, arranging their transportation, housing, food etc., and were looking forward to a grand event with all your support. The “Trinity” team rehearsed together with the local talents leading up to the program and were devastated that they had to go back after one performance in Canada without being able to do a single show in the US even after landing on our soil. However, the SRUTI board has vowed to bring them back at a more opportune time to showcase their incredible production.

Rest of our Spring concerts by Malladi Brothers and recent Sangeetha Kalanidhi awardee Dr. S.Sowmya as well as the National Endowment of the Arts -funded Kuchipudi recital by the renowned duo of Jaikishore and Padmavani Mosalikanti also had to be canceled due to the worsening Covid situation.

It is too early to speculate what the “fall” season holds. If things settle and normalcy resumes (which is our fervent hope), the board will work diligently to present several planned and new events. Below is a summary of what is currently in the works:

A Bharatanatyam Dance Recital by Shijith and Parvathy Nambiar. This program is a collaboration with the Goodhart Theater at Bryn Mawr College. A Carnatic vocal concert with the dynamic and versatile “Trichur Brothers” scheduled for September 26<sup>th</sup>. The brothers are rapidly gaining popularity across the globe for their powerful voice, sync, repertoire and depth. Vignesh Ishwar, another rising star, will be featured in a concert on October 10 in partnership with the Community Music School in Trappe. Reputed Violin maestro Delhi Sunderrajan will present a violin solo concert on November 7. More programs are also being planned, with earnest efforts to celebrate Composers day along with one of the fall events.

We recognize the patience, flexibility and understanding of all our funders (Paul Angell Foundation, National Endowment for the Arts), patrons, sponsors and members during these testing times. Our funders have been considerate and have worked with us to help manage the current situation in the most amicable way. We are committed to ensure that all our members realize and enjoy the full value of your sponsorship/membership and have therefore extended the validity until June of 2021. The board has also been exploring additional virtual concerts by artists from India and the USA, and the planning for such concerts is currently underway.

At this time when the human race across the world is being continuously challenged by new pandemics and social and environmental changes, we march on with a strong belief and resolve that music and arts will help mitigate the negative energies that surround us, and bring us peace and harmony. Wish you all again a happy, healthy and safe 2020!

Musically Yours  
Uma Nagarajan  
President



## From the Publications Committee

*Update (6/2020) – SRUTI president Uma has provided details on how the pandemic has influenced this year’s programming. We present here a slightly updated souvenir with the content as originally planned to be released.*

Dear friends and art aficionados,

Welcome to the **Hindu Temple of Delaware** for our Aradhana. It gives us great pleasure to bring you the 2020 edition of the Thyagaraja Aradhana souvenir.

SRUTI has been in existence for more than 33 years and we have access to many of the periodicals that we have published - Aradhana souvenirs, SRUTI Ranjani and SRUTI notes. Looking back, the articles presented in the late 1990’s and early 2000’s are now over 20 years old – enough to warrant a revisit and re-

presenting them to the current membership. As someone said – “A good life is a collection of happy memories.” With that in mind, we present to you an eclectic mix of old and new.

We present articles from Venkat Swaminathan who presents similarities between Saint Thyagaraja’s kritis and the Upanishads, and from Mani and Prabha Subramaniam on history of SRUTI’s TA celebrations and the evolution of the renditions. T. Sarada has written a short article on how the ‘Mother’ has been presented by the Trinity. Articles by the Late Ms. Uma Roy (former CMANA President and SRUTI well-wisher) and Pratima Adipudi from decades ago will make you wander into the past. Read it the first time or relive the article and reminisce the event when that article was published. At the end of this, we hope you looked back on how things have changed in our lives, in SRUTI’s progress and a happy recognition we are all looking forward to SRUTI’s bright future.

An extremely special addition to this issue is a handwritten article by Sangita Kalanidhi Shri R. K. Srikantan, written expressly for SRUTI for an early 2000’s SRUTI publication. Since 2020 is the centenary year of Shri R. K. Srikantan’s birth, we found it happily coincidental and apt to publish his article in this periodical.

To bring SRUTI into a newer phase, we are happy to announce an update to our website. During the SRUTI Day in 2019, we expressed an intent and interest in updating the aesthetic presence of our website. To execute this vision, we obtained a grant from the Citizens for the Arts in PA and engaged a provider immediately after and since then have been working at converting and upgrading our website, while engaging a committee of our members throughout this process.

As a long-term goal, we plan to continue improving the site with even more content, make it a living repository of all SRUTI artifacts and present these as a searchable library categorizing them by articles, reviews, author etc. This will provide our membership with even better access to the wealth of knowledge we have created in the past 30+ years.

No souvenir will be complete without a contribution from our youth – Shraddha and Dhatri have a fact-laden article on Thyagaraja to wrap up this periodical. As always, any questions/comments, please email [publications@sruti.org](mailto:publications@sruti.org)

On behalf of the Publications Committee  
Dinakar Subramanian



### About the cover

The cover is a painting done by N. Jayakrishnan and is a comparison of two Tyagaraja kritis - *evvaricirirā* (Madhyamavathy, Adi) and *nādasudhārasambilanu* (Arabhi, Rupaka).

#### **evvaricirirā, ‘sangita’ śara cāpamu niku?**

In *evvaricirirā*, Thyagaraja extols the qualities of Rama’s bow and asks him from where did he acquire his *śara cāpamu* – A bow so legendary that one arrow shot from it multiplies into tens, hundreds and thousands of arrows (*okatésina badi nuRai vayyai*). Did he acquire it after taking his human avatāra or had he been in possession of it even as he was born?

Incidentally, Tyagaraja describes music in *nādasudhārasambilanu* (Arabhi) as follows:



From the bow (kōdanDamu) called the raga (vara rāgamu) which has the seven swaras (swaramulu ārunnu okaTi) tied as bells (ghaṇṭalu); a bow that has the triguṇās or dura, naya and deśya as its three stings, music flows like arrows shot in steady tempo (nirata gaTi śāramurā).



The sangatis, which can be compared to the arrows are released in varied varieties, according to the situation (sandarbhamugala). This painting juxtaposes these two kritis and looks at Tyagaraja as one whose śāstra (weapon/instrument) is sangIta śāstra. This, it resonates through the pose of Tyagaraja, a pose that reinforces that of Rāma in the kōdandarāma picture hanging on the wall. His music soaked in bhakthi can be compared to musical arrows (like nāgastra) - that can bind the listeners by its nectar-like quality - shot from the śruthi laden bow or the tamburā.

Oh Tyagaraja, from where did you acquire your musical śāstra and śāstra vidya? Were you born with it or did you acquire it after you were born?

We are thankful to Sri N. Jayakrishnan for painting this scene for us.

*N. Jayakrishnan Unni is a popular upcoming carnatic musician. He is a disciple of Sri. Neyveli Santhanagopalan and is a B high graded artist of All India Radio, Chennai. Currently pursuing a Ph.D in Semiotics at the Indian Institute of Technology(IIT), Madras, he is also adept at painting, designing and playing the veena.*



## Tyagaraja Aradhana at SRUTI – a historical perspective

M.M. Subramaniam and Prabha Subramaniam

It is well known that wherever Carnatic music (CM) aficionados gather, we invariably perform Thyagaraja Aradhana (TA). It is how we pay homage to Thyagaraja swami, arguably the greatest composer of CM who revolutionized CM, as we know it today.

SRUTI has been celebrating TA from its inception. In fact, the seeds for the organization itself were sown at a TA celebration in March 1986 at a community hall in Havertown, PA, by an informal group of CM lovers.

The first concert organized by SRUTI took place on 14 September 1986. As such that date is usually reckoned as the start date of the organization. The first opportunity to celebrate TA, therefore, was in 1987. In Tiruvaiyaru, Tamil Nadu, where Thyagaraja spent most of his life, Aradhana takes place on Bagula Panchami, the death anniversary of Thyagaraja. This day usually falls in the middle of January. Given that the weather in our neighborhoods during that part of the year is often the coldest part – to wit, the bitter cold not to mention the likelihood of unpredictable sudden snowstorms or even blizzards, the committee\* decided to celebrate TA as early as possible *after* a little break from the winter.

[\*In this article, by “committee,” we refer to the then Managing Committee (MC) or the current Board of Directors (BoD)].

The committee needed to identify a suitable venue that would provide:

- (a) concert location
- (b) good ambience,
- (c) lounge for people to come together, and
- (d) space for food and beverages

A Hindu temple would have been ideal but in those days, there was no Hindu temple in the Greater Philadelphia area. The closest temple was in Berlin, New Jersey, where a group of Indians had converted a church into a temple. This temple met SRUTI's needs: the pews were removed to create sitting space and the basement provided enough space for food and beverages. So, the committee decided to use this venue despite it being quite a distance for many SRUTI patrons. SRUTI continued to organize TA at Berlin for over a decade. The venue shifted starting in 1999, to Pennfield Middle school Hatfield, PA, then for several years to St. Mary's Hall of Villanova University, Villanova, PA, back to Berlin in 2005, and then back again to Villanova. In 2007, it was held at the Bharatiya temple in Montgomeryville, PA. Finally, in 2008 TA found a home in the Hindu Temple in Hockessin, DE, ["the Delaware temple"].

The Aradhana would generally include the rendition of the five gems popularly known as Thyagaraja's Pancharatna kritis. This would be followed by individual participation.

From the beginning, the committee decided that a group rendering of Utsava sampradaya keertanas (USKs) should precede the Pancharatnas. This was an attempt to partially follow the tradition in Tiruvaiyaru: on the day of the Aradhana, musicians would go to Thyagaraja's residence. After paying their respects to the saint, they would walk in a procession carrying his picture, singing the USKs, arriving at the pandal where the rest of the Aradhana including the rendering of the pancharatnas, would take place.

SRUTI has followed this protocol every year except 2002. That year the committee decided to present the USKs in the middle of the morning session for the following reasons:

- a. Shri T.N. Bala, a resident of Havertown and an accomplished musician had trained a group of youngsters on these USKs,
- b. the youngsters had worked very hard, and
- c. the youngsters should be given an opportunity to sing in front of a larger audience than would typically be present at the beginning of the morning session.

However, this protocol, not gathering much traction among the members, reverted to the earlier sequence.

In 2004, SRUTI tried to imitate the Tiruvaiyaru procession of musicians mentioned earlier. Shri Pattabhi Kanumalla, dressed up as - "Thyagaraja" - with turban and all, led a procession carrying a picture of Thyagaraja around the hall followed by musicians singing the USKs and ending up on the dais for Pancharatna kritis. This was again a one-off practice.

In the early years, USKs were rendered by a group that included Prabha, Sumathi Sarangan, Susheela Varadarajan, and Indira Rajan. Over the years, others joined the group including Amba Balakrishnan on the veena. Now, of course, the group has grown considerably large and includes many youngsters, a very welcome development. Dinakar Subramanian has been leading the group since 2013.

In the early years, there were not many who knew all the five Pancharatna kritis. Shakuntala Srinivasan and her sister Vasantha, who had formally learned these kritis, would lead the presentation. They would be joined by a few others who knew one or more of these kritis.

But, after a few years the Srinivasan family left America and settled back in India. That left the committee in a quandary. They did not want to organize the Aradhana without the Pancharatna kritis. So, the next year, they played a cassette tape of a professional group singing the kritis while a few locals who knew some or all the kritis joined in.

This was not a suitable solution. Luckily, Prabha and her group were able to get hold of an AIR recording of a group rendering of the kritis sung by some senior disciples of Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer. This gave a



degree of authenticity to the rendering, since it was close to the version rendered in Tiruvaiyaru. The group met often, assiduously learning and practicing these kritis. Over time, the group expanded. Since 2007, the accomplished musician Smt. Kiranavali Vidyasankar has been leading the group singing.

A significant change from the early days is that well-trained violin, flute, veena, mridangam, and kanjira artists also participate with both the USK and Pancharatna groups.

In keeping with the tradition in Tiruvaiyaru, the committee from the beginning decided to provide lunch to all attendees. At this time, we would like to pause to pay tribute to the wonderful women who generously prepared food for serving at the Aradhana. They would wake up very early in the morning, cook delicious South Indian delicacies, and bring them to the site. Many of them would drive for nearly an hour! What is more, some of them would also participate in the opening ceremonies and sing in the group renderings. And, since a few of these women were either committee members themselves, or spouses of committee members, they would stay till the closing ceremonies. Very long days for them and yet they would participate with smiles and nary a complaint.

Carnatic music is common to all South Indian linguistic groups. So, during the early years, TA was cosponsored by the Tamil, Telugu and Kannada (Triveni) associations.

In 1988, SRUTI published a TA souvenir for the first time. Since then SRUTI has brought out a souvenir every year to commemorate the Aradhana. Most of the articles are penned by scholars from the local community and from other states. The early souvenirs also included the lyrics for all the Pancharatna kritis. All the articles had reference to Thyagaraja, his biography, the beauty of his kritis etc. Internationally recognized scholars from India and the US also have contributed their expertise to these souvenirs. For instance, the 2018 souvenir contains articles from no less persons than Dr. S. Ramanathan of Chennai and Prof. William Jackson of Indiana University. That issue also included a well-researched article by M.M. Subramaniam and Prabhakar Chitrapu on the USKs, the logic behind these keertanas, various categories and the keertanas within each category.

From the beginning, the committee decided to recognize a “local” talented musician and give that person an extended length of time to perform. In the earlier days, this performance would be at the end of all the individual performances. Thus, it afforded a relaxed time for the audience to enjoy the concert after a long, full day of activities. The downside was that those who had come early tended to leave, sometimes even before the performance started, making the audience rather thin. To offset this, after some years, the committee decided to have the main concert in the middle of the day, usually after lunch. More recently the main artists have included musicians from India touring this country.

But for two exceptions, all the pieces rendered by individuals or the main artist were Thyagaraja kritis, in keeping with the spirit of the day. In 2000, the main artist, Sudharshan Padmanabhan, included works of other composers in his concert. In fact, he started the concert with “Nera nammithi”, the Kaanada, Ata tala varnam! In 2013, Ramakrishnan Murthy who was on a tour of the US presented Ragam, Tanam, Pallavi in Karaharapriya. As a saving grace he chose as pallavi, Rama nee samanam evvaru, a major piece of Thyagaraja in that ragam. Neither of these exceptions was well received by the membership.

In Tiruvaiyaru, before the pancharatna kritis, flutists usually render Chetulara (Bhairavi, Adi). Unfortunately, there were not many flutists in our midst, even if they knew the kriti. For a couple of years, Harish Bevinahally played the kriti. It is salutary to know that for the last few years, the committee has been successful in finding artists to play the kriti at the start of the morning session.

The format for rendering the pancharatna kritis has been pretty standard. It is always preceded by Sri Ganapathini (Sowrasthram, Adi). Recently, a Thyagaraja mangalam - Kakarla vamsa (Surutti, Chapu) - was

added as the concluding piece. This mangalam, a composition of Walajapet Venkataramana bhagavathar, a senior disciple of Thyagaraja, is in praise of Thyagaraja swami. It was Prabhakar Chitrapu who found this kriti in a CD of some rare kritis of Thyagaraja sung by Nedunuri Krishnamoorthy and his disciples. It is a fitting conclusion to the morning session.

While the rendering of Pancharatna kritis were standardized, that was not the case with USKs. The order of rendering the various keertanas was not uniform. In 2004, the committee decided to make it uniform for all future groups. After some research, the committee invited Prabha's group to record the version as of that date. It was uploaded to the SRUTI website and subsequent groups have followed that sequence.

As mentioned earlier, the 2018 TA souvenir had listed the various categories and all the USKs in each of them. Thyagaraja also had composed more than one charanam in many of these keertanas. While the template referred to earlier has been kept, there has been a very healthy trend in recent years of replacing the currently rendered keertana with another in the same category. For instance, in the wake-up segment, for a long time the keertana rendered was Melukovayya (Bowli, Khanda Chapu), to be replaced in 2015 by Meluko dayanidhi (Sowrashtra, Rupakam). Similarly, in 2017 the haarathi piece Pathiki haaratheere (Surutti, Adi) was replaced by Pathiki mangala haaratheere (Arabhi, Adi). Also, in 2019 one new piece was added to the laali segment – Laali yugave (Neelambari, Rupakam). Curiously, in 2015 the mangalam keertana, Jaya mangalam (Nadanamakriya, Adi) was replaced by a mangalam in Mohanam (Jaya Mangalam, Khanda Chapu). Many books list the latter mangalam as part of Thyagaraja's magnum opus – Prahalada Bhaktha Vijayam?

We hope that the trend of including more USKs continues. Thus, group(s) would eventually learn and present all the USKs. While this is in and of itself a laudable effort, a further, and important step would be to present EVERY charanam in every keertana. Learning the different charanams should not be a difficult task for these talented groups, since all the charanams have the same dhatus.

This effort would be significant on many fronts. It would:

- be a TRUE homage to the great composer
- preserve the integrity of Thyagaraja compositions
- allow future musicians/musicologists/historians to access ALL the USKs with all the charanams in all keertanas at one site
- be a major contribution to preserving one part of the legacy of the great(est) composer in Carnatic music.

Of course, this effort will entail years of hard work. But who is to say that SRUTI won't last another 10, 20, 30 years or more!

We wish the very best to SRUTI, its patrons, contributors, musicians, participants and all those who have made it such a wonderful organization to be part of.

### **ENDARO MAHANUBHAVULU, ANDARIKI VANDANAMULU**

*Note: Information about various dates was culled from SRUTI publications for those years and with help from Dr. Dinakar Subramanian and Dr. Prabhakar Chitrapu.*



*Prabha and Mani Subramaniam are founding members of SRUTI, long time supporters and have served the organization in various capacities.*



## Three Compositions on Devi

T. Sarada

While listening to Sri Thyagaraja's songs, sometimes, the thought process takes one to the songs of the other two contemporary composers. It is not for comparison or contrast or critical evaluation. It is to see how their minds worked while creating similar songs. This article is on three compositions which have significance but are not similar nor on the same idea.

The three great composers, Sri Thyagaraja, Sri Muthuswami Dikshitar and Sri Syama Sastri lived during the same period, shared the place of birth and were all inspired Composers whose music still amazes millions across the world. They had superior powers to express their thoughts, feelings, ideas and moods in proper lyrics. They also set them to appropriate music to make lasting impressions. Some of them had contexts; although not always are these real or historically true but some were.

Each one of them had his own *Ishta Devata* or a family tradition which was a guiding factor. Dikshitar was initiated into SriVidya worship by his guru who also taught him Tantric rituals. But Dikshitar did compose on other Gods with equal enthusiasm. Syama Sastri came from an Archaka family that worshiped Bangaru Kamakshi. His works were mostly on Kamakshi but not exclusively. Sri Thyagaraja's devotion to Sri Rama does not need explanation. He also composed on many Deities and showed the same feelings and devotion.

All three of them had a special attraction when it came to Devi, the Universal Mother. They would use numerous references to the Mother concept in their lyrics often, not standing out but as part of the verse either in Anupallavi or Charanam. Dikshitar would say, "Guru Guha Janani," and Syama satri would say, "kanna Talli". Sri Thyagaraja was the only one who used the expression, "kanna Talli" in Pallavi and not buried in a vast write up.

Dikshtar's song, "Meenakshi Me Mudam" in Raga "Gamakakriya", is mentioned in this writing since it has a poignant story well recorded for this song. It was the song he wanted to hear when he was ready to leave his mortal body. He asked his disciples to sing the Anupallavi, "Meena Lochani Pasa Mochani" a couple of times before he gave up his body.

The mention of Syama satri's, "Devi Brova Samaya Mede", in Chintamani raga has a great story behind it. A palace order to appear to defend the honor of Tanjore Vidwans against the very famous Bobbili Kesavayya, fell on Syama satri. Desperate and in panic he goes to the only source he knows will help him. He pleads to Devi and says. "Don't postpone your blessing to tomorrow. I cannot wait that long." How he proved his expertise in complicated rhythm patterns, conquered the dual and made the visitor his admirer is another story.

Now comes the third selection, Sri Thyagaraja's composition, "Nannu Kanna Talli Na Bhagyama". Set in a simple Raga, Kesari also known as Sindhu kannada the Pallavi declares loud and clear, "Nannu kanna talli naa Bhagyama". Telling everyone that the universal mother is his own mother. Kanna talli is an intimate expression which is used by poets and the common person to refer to a birth mother. I was born of you and you are my natural mother is what it means. It is the same as, "Petra Taa in Tamil or Hettha Thaayee in Kannada or Janana Datri in Marathi.

To announce it in Pallavi is to emphasize the relationship since the message can not be missed. It will be repeated till it is heard. And remembered as the name of the song, for example. Who but Sri Thyagaraja could do this kind of proclamation?

The song goes like this.



*pallavi*  
*nannu kanna talli nA bhAgyamA*  
*nArAyaNi dharmAmbikE*

*anupallavi*  
*kanak(A)ngi ramA pati sOdari*  
*kAvavE nanu kAtyAyani (nannu)*

*caraNam*  
*kAvu kAvum(a)ni nE mora peTTagA*  
*kamala lOcani karaguc(u)NDagA*  
*nIvu brOvak(u)NTE evaru brOturu*  
*sadA varamb(o)sagu tyAgarAja nutE (nannu)*

The gist is as follows.

Mother who brought me into this world, Nannu Kanna talli, Petra Thaye! My greatest good fortune, Narayane, Dharmamni (Dharma samvardini, Goddess residing in Thiruvayyaru)

She who is with a golden complexion, Sister of Lord Vishnu. Katyaayani. Please bestow your grace on me. I am pleading, please protect me. If your heart does not melt after hearing my pleading, whom can I ask for protection? You always bestow your blessings to all. You are always worshipped by Thyagaraja, please, bless me.

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Sarada is a longtime supporter and contributor of numerous articles throughout Sruti's existence.



## Tyāgarājōpaniṣad

Dr. V. Swaminathan

In the Bhagavad Gītā at the end of each chapter there is a refrain “*iti śrīmadbhagavadgītāsu upaniṣatsu brahmavidyāyām yōgaśāstrē śrīkṛṣṇārjuna saṁvādē*,”<sup>1</sup> followed by the title and the number of the chapter. This refrain is a reminder that the subject matter of the Gītā includes *brahmavidyā* or self-knowledge, and *yōga śāstra*, or a lifestyle, required for gaining the *brahmavidyā*. The refrain is also noteworthy for another reason. It refers to the verses of the Gītā as the Upaniṣad. In other words, every verse or a group of verses in the Gītā is considered as the Upaniṣad. This is because the Gītā verses reveal the one ontological reality of the individual, the world that the individual confronts, and the principle of causality, exactly as the Upaniṣads do. In other words, the message conveyed by the Gītā and the Upaniṣads is one and the same. In the same vein, the message revealed by the kriti of Saint Tyāgarāja is also the same upaniṣadic declaration of the reality of the individual, world, and causality. In this regard, the kriti of Saint Tyāgarāja can verily be called as Upaniṣad - Tyāgarājōpaniṣad.

In this article, I will present an analysis of the kriti *Sattalēni dinamulu vaccēnā* in the rāga Nāgānandini to illustrate the alignment of the kriti with the upaniṣadic doctrine, and also highlight the composer’s ingenuity in distilling that doctrine in the composition with brevity and simplicity. This kriti illustrates an idea conveyed by the *Chāndōgyōpaniṣad* of the *Sāma Veda*.

There is a dialog in the sixth chapter of the *Chāndōgyōpaniṣad* between a father by name Uddālaka, and his son, by name Śvētakētu. The son just returned home after twelve years from his *gurukula-vāsa*. The father poses a question to the son, “did you ask your teacher for that knowledge gaining which everything is as well known - *yēnavijñātaṁ sarvaṁ vijñātaṁ bhavati*?”<sup>2</sup> Śvētakētu was dumbfounded and did not answer. Then, Uddālaka proceeds to instruct his son that knowing the cause of everything, one as well knows all the effects, which are nothing but the modifications of the cause. He gives the example of gold, and the ornaments made of gold. Uddālaka tells Śvētakētu, “knowing gold, all the ornaments of gold are as well known, gold alone is existent - *lōhamāṇinā sarvaṁ lōhamayaṁ vijñādaṁ syādvācārambhaṇaṁ vikārō nāmadhēyaṁ lōhamityēva satyam*.”<sup>3</sup> All the gold ornaments depend entirely on gold alone. The weight of the ornament is the weight of gold, and that gold alone is *satyam*. Knowing the gold to be the reality of all the ornaments, which are only mere names and forms, *vācārambhaṇaṁ vikārō nāmadhēyaṁ*, all of them made of gold are as well known. Through this dialog the Upaniṣad unfolds the meaning of the ontological<sup>4</sup> word, *satyam*.

In our understanding of the reality of objects we use three words, *satyam*, *anṛtam*, and *tuccham*. That which is understood as *asti iti upalabhyate* – “the object is”, “the thought is”, etc., is *satyam*, or real. That which is falsely perceived to be real but later proven to be false in the wake of knowledge, such as our dreams, is *anṛtam*, or false. A totally nonexistent thing such as a ‘square circle’ is *tuccham*, or unreal. If we

<sup>1</sup> इति श्रीमद्भगवद्गीतासु उपनिषत्सु ब्रह्मविद्यायां योगशास्त्रे श्रीकृष्णार्जुन संवादे

<sup>2</sup> येनविज्ञातं सर्वं विज्ञातं भवति?

<sup>3</sup> लोहमणिना सर्वं लोहमयं विज्ञातं स्याद्वाचारम्भणं विकारो नामधेयं लोहमित्येव सत्यम्

<sup>4</sup> Ontology is a philosophical term that denotes the reality of being or the existence principle.

consider an object such as a bangle made of gold, we will generally apply the word *satyam* to the bangle. That is, the word 'bangle' which denotes an object, is *satyam*. Someone else could say that the object is not 'bangle' but gold only. Before the birth of the bangle, so to speak, the object was gold, and after the bangle (suppose the bangle is melted to be made into something else due to the change in fashion), the object is gold, and in between the genesis, and destruction of the bangle also, the object is gold only. That which was previously gold, later is gold, and now also (when the bangle is worn) is gold – that which is present at all times is gold alone, *lōhamityēva satyam*. When the bangle is, gold is, and even when bangle is not, gold is. In other words, the ontological term, *satyam*, can be used only for gold and not to the bangle. From this we get that *satyam* is that which is not negatable in all the three periods of times - past, present and future.<sup>5</sup> Then, how can we denote the existential reality of the bangle? One cannot obviously dismiss the bangle as *tuccham*, nonexistent. The bangle is not falsely imagined and cannot be dismissed. A false bangle cannot be worn. It is, therefore, not *anṛtam*. In the English language there is no ontological word to describe the reality of the bangle.

The Sanskrit word that is used to describe the ontological status of the bangle is *mithyā*. The gold is *satyam*, and the bangle is *mithyā*. The cause (gold), *kāraṇam*, is *satyam*, and the effect (bangle) *kārya* is *mithyā*. The gold, and bangle, *kāraṇam*, and *kārya*, have a unique relationship in that the bangle is gold but the gold is not bangle. If the gold were to be bangle, it cannot be necklace, ring etc. If the gold is known, then all the ornaments made of gold are as well-known because gold is the truth of all. When one sees the bangle, there are two buddhis or cognitions. One is the gold-cognition or gold-buddhi, and the other is bangle-cognition or bangle-buddhi. When the bangle-buddhi is there, there is gold-buddhi also, and when the bangle-buddhi goes away (as one shifts the focus from the bangle to the necklace) the gold-buddhi remains, and there is necklace-buddhi. While the cognitions of the effects are varying, the cognition of the cause remains invariable. It follows the effects-cognitions. If one's vision stays with the cause, then even as the effects come and go, there is only cause-cognition. Notwithstanding the appearance of the multitude of ornaments, gold alone is there. The one who is gold-wise, sees gold only or gold *mātram*.

By knowing the cause, all the effects are as well-known. This is what Uddālaka taught Śvētaketu. The Upaniṣads declare that *brahman* is the *jagat kāraṇam*, the cause of the world, and the *Taittirīyōpaniṣad* defines *brahman* as *satyam*, *jñānam*, *anantam*.<sup>6</sup> *Brahman*, the cause of the world is *satyam*. The world is an effect, and is *mithyā*. The substantive of all the names and forms in the world is the *satyam-brahman*. Stating differently, the existence principle of all the names and forms (all effects) is *satyam-brahman*. Elsewhere the *satyam*, *jñānam*, *anantam brahman* is said to be *sat*, *cit*, *ānanda* where *satyam* is *sat*, *jñānam* is *cit*, and *anantam* is *ānanda*. *Satyam*, *jñānam*, and *anantam* are the defining words for *brahman* as the existence principle, knowledge principle, and that which is limitless. *Satyam* is *jñānam*, and *anantam*. *Jñānam* is *satyam*, and *anantam*. Similarly, *anantam* is *satyam*, and *jñānam*. They are not mutually exclusive principles. The world, being an effect, is *mithyā*, and depends on *satyam brahman*, the cause. Its existence is that of *brahman* only. The one who has the knowledge of the *satyam brahman* sees the world as *sat-*

<sup>5</sup> *trikālē api abādhitam* (त्रिकाले अपि अबाधितम्)

<sup>6</sup> ब्रह्मविदाप्नोति परम् | तदेषाभ्युक्ता | सत्यं ज्ञानमनन्तं ब्रह्म | *brahavidāpnōti param | tadēṣābhyuktā | satyam jñānamanantam brahma* | (brahmānandavallī, 1)



*mātram* as *sat* alone and *cit-mātram* as *cit*-alone. The world is nothing but *sat*, *cit*, and *ānanda*. It is enough to say it is *sat-mātram* as the word *sat* will bring in the other two words, *cit*, and *ānanda*.

Now with this background, let us examine the kriti.

**(pa) *sattalēni dinamulu vaccēnā?***

**(a.pa) *sattamātramā ! saccittaśāyi !***

***sākētanilaya ! daiva***

**(ca) *kalilōna prathama pādamulō***

***talidaṁḍrigurubhaktiyu lēka***

***palumāru duṣkṛtyaṁbōnarpa***

***valēnā? tyāgarājanuta ! daiva***

In doing an inquiry of the Saint's compositions, it would be helpful to keep in mind certain general patterns. The kritis will invariably contain three segments. There will be a philosophical segment wherein the one ontological reality of the individual, the world that the individual confronts, and the principle of causality will be presented. This reality is *brahman*. When *brahman* is looked upon as the cause of the world, the reality gets the name *Īśvara*, and therefore, there will be a segment describing the attributes of *Īśvara* as all-knowing, all-power, all-pervading, and so forth. This segment is the description of the *Īśvara* with attributes (*saguṇa*) such as all-knowing etc. In the third segment, Ṭyāgarāja will extol the attributes of his favorite deity, *iṣṭa dēvatā*, namely Śrī Rāma, a *saguṇa Īśvara* with a form (*saguṇa sākāra*). *Brahman* is, of course, *nirguṇa-nirākāra*, free from attributes, and form. In the compositions one can discern the brilliant manner in which the three segments are seamlessly integrated by the composer.

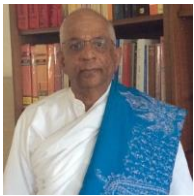
Ṭyāgarāja uses the vocative case in the anupallavi to address Śrī Rāma and in that process blends the *nirguṇa-nirākāra* and *saguṇa sākāra* aspects by the respective addresses, *sattamātramā* & *saccittaśāyi*, and *sākētanilaya*. The manifest world is nothing but names, and forms whose existence depends on *satyam-brahman*, the cause. So, what is there is only *sat*, *sattamātram*. It is like saying that in the world of golden ornaments there is gold *mātram*, gold being the *sat* of the ornaments. The address, *sākētanilaya*, obviously refers to the Śrī Rāma *avatāra* form of *Īśvara*. The phrase *saccittaśāyi* is particularly interesting since Ṭyāgarāja brings in the reality of the individual who as an awareful being objectifies the names, and forms of the world. To the individual the existence of the names, and forms becomes evident. The individual is the knower of the world, and would declare that "I am the knower of the world". The "I am" however, is, never objectified, and is self-existent (*sat*), and self-evident (*cit*). To this self-existent, and self-evident awareful being, everything becomes evident. The awareful being is the uninvolved *sākṣī*, the witness of the names, and forms. The one who recognizes this truth about oneself is a *sat-puruṣa* in whose buddhi the awareful *sākṣī* is recognized.<sup>7</sup>

The word *daiva* in the anupallavi must be connected with the pallavi line *sattalēni dinamulu vaccēnā*. In the waking hours as one interacts with the world, one keeps on objectifying the names, and

<sup>7</sup> *sat + citta* becomes *saccitta* due to sandhi rule. It refers to the *buddhi* or intellect of the *sat-puruṣa*, the one who understands the reality to be *sattamātram*. The awareful *sākṣī* that is recognized is mentioned as *saccittaśāyi*.

forms as ‘this is’, ‘this is’ and so on.<sup>8</sup> If in that mental transaction one misses to notice the “is-ness” that permeates every cognition, alas, what a tragedy it is. Ṭyāgarāja is unequivocal in declaring that such a day is “god-less” – “daiva sattalēni dinamulu”. The word “daiva” indicates the *jagat kāraṇam brahma*, the *saguṇa Īśvara*. The *jagat* being the *kāryam*, the effect, it derives its existence from the *saguṇa Īśvara*, the cause. The “sat” principle of brahman is the “is-ness” that makes every name, and form to be alive.

The “is-ness” is right in front of everyone and yet it is missed. In the *caraṇam* of the kriti Ṭyāgarāja spells out the reasons for “missing the obvious” due to inadvertence. He attributes the primary reason to the Kaliyuga albeit it is only in the first part. Kali means conflict arising from competition, distrust, and self-centeredness. The Saint laments that on account of the effects of Kali, people do not respect their parents, and teachers. He thinks aloud as to why people indulge in various kinds of wrong, and inappropriate actions repeatedly taking them further away from the reality. Indirectly, Ṭyāgarāja indicates that raising above these bad qualities, and cultivating trust, and devotion to parents and teachers, one will be able gain the *citta prasāda*, the equipoise of the mind, to recognize the ever present “is-ness”. Thus, with brevity and directness Ṭyāgarāja conveys the invariable reality expounded by the *Chāndōgyōpaniṣad* in this beautiful kriti. This kriti can easily be called *Sattamātrōpaniṣad*.



Dr. V. Swaminathan, a retired scientist, had the privilege of being a student of Pujya Swami Dayananda Saraswati for nearly 3 decades. He has a deep interest in Carnatic music particularly in enquiring into the spiritual and philosophical content of the kritis of the great vāggēyakāras of the tradition. Dr. Swaminathan conducts on-line classes on Bhagavad Gītā and the Upaniṣads.



## Kanugontini: A gem in Bilahari

Pratima Adipudi

This is one of Tyagaraja's compositions which I like very much. I like it because it is simple and sweet, the words are easy to pronounce, and it describes a beautiful scene. When my mother explained its meaning to me, it instantly became one of my favorite kritis.

In this composition, Tyagaraja is saying "Oh Lord Rama witnessed a great scene with you, (born in "Inakula"), husband of Sita, sitting on your throne while Anjaneya is respectfully massaging your feet. Seeing Bharata, Lakshmana, and Satrugna attending court with you and Sugreeva and other warriors singing songs in praise of you brings great pleasure to my eyes."

This kriti is in Bilahari raga, which is a rakti raga. It is a Janyaraga of Sankarabharanam, the 29th melakarta raga. Its arohana is SRG PDS with R2, G3, and D2. Its avarohana is SNDPMGRS with N3 and D2. When DNDP is sung, the N is N2, Kaisiki Nishadam. In the avarohana it is Kakali Nishadam.

<sup>8</sup> *asti asti iti upalabhyate* – every name, and form are cognized as “is” such as ‘the book is’, ‘the mountain is’, ‘the flower is’, ‘the body is’, ‘the mind is’, and so on. No cognition is possible without the *sat-buddhi*.

Of the musical trinity, Tyagaraja's compositions are known to be in "DRAKSHARASA" which means easy to understand. One of the reasons I like this composition as I said before, is because it is simple in its language. You don't need to be a scholar to feel the bhavam, to be a part of, and to enjoy Tyagarajaswami's compositions. Tyagaraja had the great ability to create a living picture with his music - one can almost visualize Rama Pattabhishekam while singing or listening to this piece.

Tyagaraja composed this song when he recovered his lost panchayatana vigrahas (thrown into the river by his brother, Panchapakesan). In response to his prayers, Sri Rama appeared his dream, revealing that the vigrahas were in the Kaveri River. Tyagaraja immediately rushed to the river and found the vigrahas. In this state of happiness, he composed this kriti and "Raaraamaayintidaaka " in Asaveri.

So far, I have learnt a few of "Tyagabrahma", Sri Tyagarajaswami's compositions. His compositions are written with such bhakti, are full of bhavam and emotion, and are simple to understand with beautiful sangatis. He devoted his lifetime to music and Rama. While I hope to continue learning, singing and enjoying more and more of Sri Tyagaraja's compositions, "Kanugontini" will always be a special kriti for me.

*Pratima Adipudi wrote this article for the Aradhana souvenir in 1992 (28 years ago!). She and her siblings are musically trained and were actively involved with SRUTI's TA in the 1990's and later. Pratima lives in South Jersey. A photograph of her performing at TA is elsewhere in this souvenir.*



## Thyagaraja in a Nutshell

Uma Roy

Carnatic Music lovers all over the world commemorate annually the occasion of the passing away of Sri Saint Thyagaraja (Jan. 6, 1847) on Pushya Bahula Panchami Day or around that day, sometime in January by singing his compositions and in particular his Ghana Raga Pancharathna Kritis in Nata, Gowla, Aarabhi, Varali and Sri Ragas. In Thiruvayyar (Tanjore District in Tamil Nadu), where Thyagaraja lived for most of his life, an association called the THYAGABRAHMA ARADHANA MAHOTSAVA SABHA celebrates the festival annually when musicians of all caliber come to offer their songs and listen to the offerings of the other musicians.

Who was Thyagaraja? Was he a God? Was he a legend? No, to both the questions. He became one with God when he passed away (i.e. attained Siddhi, possible only for Saints). Because of this and his innumerable Kritis, we revere him like God. He was a real man, and not a legend, born in 1767 (or in 1759 according to some) and became famous due to his musical compositions. In India, in olden days, no biographies were written of great people; so legends grew around their lives. The same was true for Thyagaraja; many legends have grown around him also. In this article, only a historical description will be given.

How come we honor him more than any other composer? We do so because, he was not only a composer, but also a poet, a teacher, preacher, a musician, a vainika (a veena player), a saint, a great devotee of God Rama, a philosopher all rolled into one. There are not many composers who can match him in all these qualifications.



How about his family? He came from a very high class literary and musical Andhra Brahmin family, one of his grand-fathers was a famous poet-composer called GIRI RAJA KAVI who was an artist in Tanjore King Shahaji's court (1684-1710) (Samsthana Vidwan); his other grand-father was also a samsthana vidwan known as Veena KALAHASTI AYYAR. Thyagaraja's father RAMA BRAHMAM was a scholar, a devotee; read and explained Ramayana (which Thyagaraja listened to as a young boy) in King Tuljaji's court (1765-1787). Thyagaraja's mother SEETHAMMA was a singer herself, she knew and taught her son many kirtanas of Purandara Dasa, which impressed him very much. Is it any wonder then that with such parents and grandparents Thyagaraja took to composing songs on Rama since his childhood?

How was his early life and family life? He was born in Thiruvarur on May 4, 1767. He had two older brothers, one of whom died young and the other was Jalpesan; They lived in the same house together for a long time, though perhaps not in a friendly fashion. His father was given a house in Thiruvayyar by the king and they moved there in 1774. The other details of his life which are known are that he had his Upanayanam at the age of 8 and marriage at the age of 18 and that he was fairly tall (5' 7") and slim. He had only one daughter, who bore a son. This grandson was married, but had no children, died young and thus Thyagaraja's direct line became extinct.

How about Thyagaraja's education, career and lifestyle? He was a child prodigy, a genius, who showed intense interest in Ramayana from his childhood and composed simple songs, but of high quality even as a boy, "Namo Namo Raghava" and "Tavadasoham", both in Punnavarali raga, are said to be such early attempts. His Guru was SONTI VENKATARAMANAYYA who taught all he knew to Thyagaraja within one year! How much formal education he had no one is sure; his father taught him Telugu and Sanskrit.

He also must have studied Jyothishya (astrology), Ganitha (mathematics) and must have had access to some texts on musicology (which are unfortunately not available now) since he displays a thorough knowledge of all these in his compositions. He was a born composer and an avid one at that. Prof. Sambamoorthy describes the historic period in which Thyagaraja lived as a "period of intense musical activity and the brightest in the history of South Indian music and therefore most conducive to the development of his musical genius". His contemporaries were none other than the other two members of the TRIMURTHIs, i.e. Muthuswami Dikshitar and Syama Shastri; while he barely knew the former, he was a great personal friend of the latter.

Thyagaraja sought God through the medium of music; he extolled in his songs the virtues of both Rama and the knowledge of music combined with devotion as the path to Moksha (Salvation, i.e. freedom from pain, pleasures, desires, rebirth, etc.). He did not seek wealth and did not cash in his fame to get better positions, property or more jewelry; in fact, he refused offers of such wealth even when Sarabhoji, the king of Tanjore made them. He composed his famous Krithi in Kalyani "Nidhi Chala Sukhama" on this occasion saying that pursuit of God brings greater joy than pursuit of wealth. His brother was a man of the world, so he was aggravated by this unworldly behavior and threw away the idol of Rama that Thyagaraja used to worship into the Kaveri River. This caused an unimaginable amount of sorrow to Thyagaraja as though his God Rama forsook him. The songs composed during this period reflect his distress, as in kritis "Nenendu Vedakudura". He found the idol at a later date in the riverbed to his great joy. This idol that he so treasured has been preserved till today.

Thyagaraja led a life of meditation and prayers in the true Unchavritti style of going about the neighborhood singing his songs in praise of Rama and accepting whatever people offered him gladly. Such giving was an honorable deed to do and Thyagaraja fed his family, disciples and guests on whatever he got through such Unchavritti. This type of living meant a great deal of discipline and sacrifice on his part and it is for such reasons that Thyagaraja is referred to as a Saint. He was perhaps criticized and made fun of by his relatives for leading such a life when he could have lived comfortably by having accepted the king's

offers. He was also perhaps bothered to some extent by the comments of some lesser musicians who might have been jealous of his spreading fame; in many kritis he begs Rama, to save him from such misery.

How about Thyagaraja's disciples? Even if his bloodline did not continue, his works have come down to us today through a series of disciples and their disciples. His immediate students were Tanjore Rama Rao, Umayalapuram Sundara and Krishna Bhaghavathars, Tillaisthana Rama Iyengar and Walajapet Venkataramana Bhaghavathar, who have been most responsible for propagation and preservation of Thyagaraja's krithis. No one is even sure of how many were composed, since they were for the most part transmitted orally and not through books and cassettes like in the modern times. Some of even those which were written down might have been destroyed. Thyagaraja's other disciples were persons of fame such as Veena Kuppayyar, Subbaraya Shastri, etc. who were, or soon became great composers themselves. Thyagaraja was supposed to have grouped his disciples according to their voices, talents, and abilities and taught each group a different set of 200 krithis or so. Many dignitaries, philosophers and musicians of fame also sought him and visited him to pay their respect.

Did Thyagaraja ever travel? As his fame spread as far and wide as was possible in those days of slow communication, he was invited by many dignitaries: he accepted one such invitation and went to visit Upanishad Brahman of Kancheepuram, who was then 100 years old. From Kancheepuram Thyagaraja continued his pilgrimage to Walajapet, Thirupathi, Puttur, Sholinghur, Madras, Thiruvottiyur and Kovur, all the places being within a couple of hundred miles North of Thiruvayyar. He visited the local temples of these towns and composed kritis on the deities of those temples; thus, we have Thyagaraja's kritis on Lord Varadharaa, Venkateswara, Narasimha, Anjaneya, Vishnu, Parthasarathy, Tripurasundari and Sundareswara. His two other sets of Pancharathna kritis are on Tripurasundari and Sundareswara of Kovur. These probably were the few Kritis he ever composed on the deities other than his beloved Rama.

Greatness of Thyagaraja: Authorities have written volumes on this topic, analyzing his kritis for meaning, mood, poetic beauty, philosophic thought, etc.

Thyagaraja's greatness was in many directions. He himself had a beautiful high-pitched voice (Gandharva Sarira i.e. celestial voice) and used to play on the veena too. His compositions are known for their vastness, variety, quality, poetry, philosophical thoughts and sense of devotion they invoke in the singers and listeners. In sheer volume and quantity, he is like Kshetragna and Purandara Dasa; some believe that he composed 24,000 songs to match Valmiki's 24,000 Slokas of Ramayana; however, only less than a thousand are available today and they are in 210 Ragas. He is the first to have introduced the system of a Kriti with Sangathis. No two kritis in the same raga sound the same and no two sangathis are repeated. He composed simple songs to be sung during daily prayers and festive occasions called Divyanama-samkirthanas and Utsava-sampradaya Kirthanas.

Also, he composed three musical operas called Prahlada Bhakthi Vijaya, Nauka Charithra and Seetharama Vijaya (which has not been found.). His other Kritis range in complexity from simple ones like 'Sujana Jeevana' in Kamas to complex ones like 'Daree Nee Telusu Konti' in Suddha Saveri. All his Kritis are said to have a perfect balance of Raga, Laya and Bhava (roughly translated to melody, rhythm and feeling). In addition, his songs are said to be filled with three features, Sangeetha Bhava (music), Sahithya Bhava (lyric and poetic beauty) and Bhakthi Bhava (devotion). Before Thyagaraja's time, musicians and musicologists were concerned with the science of music devoid of devotion. Songs of devotion devoid of high musical quality seemed to be sung by Bhagavathars who were Bhakthas (devotees). Each class of people seemed to look down on the other for what was lacking. Thyagaraja goes down in history of music for having combined both the elements, i.e, the element of Bhakthi and the element of correct musical grammar and higher quality of music. His superb kritis, hence, have appeal to the poet, to the Bhaktha, and of course to the musician. In his storytelling ability of Ramayana, he stands in the same category Valmiki, Kambar and

Tulsidas with the additional excellence of setting the lyrics to classical music. His songs are so composed that even a youngster can sing them while a vidwan can expand them. His compositions can be classified into categories based on their contents: some deal with logic, some with ethics, some are salutations to God, some are in the praise of knowledge of music and some are those that address 'MANAS' i.e. his own mind or human mind in general, Mr. T.V. Subba Rao (founder of the Madras Music Academy in 1928) cannot say enough about Thyagaraja's greatness in his book "Studies in Indian Music"; he says: " The songs of Thyagaraja are like our scriptures in thought and word, impregnated with entrancing charm of melody and rhythm which captivate the mind and soul and the only way to know Thyagaraja is through his songs."

Did Thyagaraja realize God through music? and when? He waited all his life for Lord Rama he sung to Rama in various moods such as begging him, complaining to him, threatening him, etc. and one day finally, a few days before his death, he had a dream in which Lord Rama appeared and promised to take him back to his kingdom and release him from the miseries of life at a certain appointed time exactly ten days later. This made Thyagaraja very happy and contented and he composed on this occasion the famous GIRIPAINA in Sahana raga where he speaks of Rama's promise in his dream. One day prior to this awaited day, Thyagaraja became a SANYASI (monk, ascetic) officially, though he had always led the life of an ascetic and is said to have requested his disciples to sing continuously till 11 a.m. of the following day. On that final day he composed his last two kritis "PARAMATHMUDU" and "PARITHAPAMU" in ragas Vagadheeswari and Manohari respectively. It is said that at this anticipated hour the disciples who had been with him all along, heard an inexplicable sound and saw a beam of light lift up from his head and his mortal body breathed or sang no more. He attained SIDDHI. Though Thyagaraja's mortal and creative life came to an end after eighty years, his creative works will remain immortal for as long as humanity remains, and the human mind seeks something more than mere bread and butter. Ten thousand miles away from his homeland and some two hundred years after, we in this country are joyously singing his songs.

The sources for this article have been:

1. "Thyagaraja"- by Prof. P. Sambamoorthy (National Book Trust, New Delhi, 1967)
2. "Studies in Indian Music"- by T.V. Subba Rao (Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1965)
3. "The Spiritual Heritage of Thyagaraja"- by C. Ramanujachari and Dr. V. Raghavan (Sri Rama Krishna Muth, Madras, 1981).



Dr. Uma Roy was a former President and Honorary patron of CMANA and the editor of a musical magazine called 'Sangeetham'. She passed away in June of 2019.

POC note: This article was published in the TA issue of SRUTI Ranjani in March 1992.





## Appreciation of Mridangam Thani Avartanam

When mridangam artists accompany or perform a mridangam solo, what should one look for or appreciate? This article will attempt to give the reader some basic aspects of South Indian percussion drumming and hopefully convey how a thani Avartanam is played on the mridangam.

Rhythm is a basic attribute of any kind of music be it Indian or Western. Carnatic music consists of five basic rhythmic beats or talams namely,

1. Adi Talam (8 beat cycle)
2. Rupakam Talam (6 beat cycle)
3. Misra Chapu Talam (7 beat cycle)
4. Khanda Chapu Talam (5 beat cycle)
5. Sankeerna Chapu Talam (9 beat cycle)

Most thani Avartanam's are in Adi talam. For the music rasika this talam is easy to grasp, for the artist the boundaries for improvisation are plenty. This in no way means that an Avartanam in other talams are never performed. For a seasoned artist, it is little concern which talam the thani is in. For the mridangam student it is always an eye opener when the thani is in a different talam. Adi talam, also called Chatusra Jathi Triputa Talam, consists of 8 beats. The counting of the talam is as follows. A clap followed by the counting of the small, ring and the middle finger, followed by a clap, a wave, another clap, & another wave. Each beat is subdivided into four pulses giving us 32 pulses in one cycle. If we notate, it will look as follows.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Clap	small	ring	middle	clap	wave	clap	wave

The first clap is called samam (base beat), the 2nd clap is called Arai samam indicating that 1/2 the cycle is completed. The 3rd clap is called Mukkal samam indicating that 3/4 of the cycle is completed and then we are back to base. Further each beat is subdivided into four pulses. A pulse is normally notated by a comma. Each four pulses in mridangam solukattu is said as Tha Ka Dhi Mi (T K D M)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9

TKDM TKDM ... TKDM ..... TKDM

In a thani Avartanam the following things must be observed. Firstly, the Avartanam is split up into soukya kalam (slow/normal speed in which the main artist started the kirtanam), madhyama kAlam (in between speed) and mEl kAlam (fast speed, double the normal speed). Other interesting things to be noted are Farans (finger movements that are brisk and short), Mohara (special pattern that precedes the teermanam and an indicator that the thani is about to end) and finally the teermanam (a specific pattern that is played three times signifying the end of the thani) at which time the main artist picks up where he had left the kirtanam.

The above terms Faran, Mohara, Teermanam are technical terms used by mridangists. All of the above form the basic body of the thani avartanam (absolutely essential). Depending on the artist, his mood, the audience etc there may be one or more kannakku (mathematical permutation following some very strict guidelines) in the soukya kalam stage. These traditionally are signatures of specific artists.

The transition from soukya kalam to mEl kalam is madhyama kalam. The entry into madhyama kalam symbolizes that the first half of the thani is almost over. In the madhyama kalam the artist demonstrates his dexterity and control over the instrument by transitioning from Chatusram to Thisram (4 pulses to a beat to 3 pulses to a beat), from Thisram to Khandam (3 pulses to a beat to 5 pulses to a beat), from Khandam to Misram (5 pulses to a beat to 7 pulses to a beat), from Misram to Sankeernam (7 pulses to a beat to 9 pulses to a beat) and back to Chatusram. One thing to be noted though is that there is no hard and fast rule governing this transition. Once back to Chatusram he moves on to play various Farans and is now building up the speed for the grand mail kalam and plays anywhere from 6 to 10 different farans depending on his strength stamina etc. From here he moves on to play the Mohara, which is an indicator to the main artist to get ready. After the Mohara comes the teermanam played three times identically at the end of which the main artist picks up the kirtanam in the speed he had started and wraps up the song. This traditionally would be how a thani avartanam is played.

POC Note: This article has been taken from a post in [rec.music.indian.classical](http://rec.music.indian.classical)



## Music & Art

Vidwan Shri R.K. Srikantan

*POC Note: 2020 is the centenary year of Sangita Kalanidhi Vidwan Shri R. K. Srikantan(1920-2014) who was born on January 14, 1920 in Karnataka, India. This article was hand-written by him expressly for SRUTI in the early 2000s.*



*R. K. Srikantan (centre) in concert (circa 1970s) with his elder brother R. K. Venkatarama Shastri on violin, T.A.S. Mani on mridangam and his son R.S.Ramakanth on tambura. (Courtesy: R.K.Shriramkumar)*

primarily

↳ Music is an art to be listened to Carefully and not read about. Even the most expertly written book on music Cannot go beyond one-way Communication, i.e. it Cannot offer an interactive learning experience. Music most fully mirrors man in all his infinite Variety. A Music performance is an incarnation of a series of ideas implicit in the work art.

2. Listening is a rare talent like any other talent or gift. It varies in degree from person to person.

A work of art does not grow old; it is outside time and space. Art is a human experience. It excels life, enhances it and gives meaning to it. It is both personal and beyond the personal. And Art is essentially related to emotion and Synthetic in its outlook.

4. Music Education is a liberating force; and it is also a democratising force, Cutting across the barriers of Caste and Class, Smoothing out inequalities imposed by birth and other Circumstances.

5. Of late there is a tendency to lay greater stress on the manipulation side of music than on the aesthetic side.

5. The primary appeal of music as of any art is to the emotion. To make music mechanical is tantamount to killing it. That is why we lay greater ~~importance on~~ <sup>emphasis on</sup> Bhava. A Raga though based upon swaras and grouping of swaras is something very much more than these; the swaras are the form but the life of the Raga is its Bhava. To bring out the bhava of a Raga requires skill and inner sensitiveness. A Composition is the embodiment of Ragabhava and Sahitya bhava. The Structural excellence brings out the Raga swaroopa while renditional excellence brings out ~~the~~ both the Raga bhava and Sahitya bhava.

"When art, which ought to be a vital impulse Vibrant with life <sup>and</sup> scintillating with upswelling emotion, ~~descend~~ descends to formalism and conformity with rigid intellectual patterns and formulae, its death knell is sounded. Art in India has always been considered a sacred function; music and devotion went always hand in hand."

6. Rigid and disciplined practice, efficiency, transparency, uncompromising attitude in maintaining high classical and traditional values is a must for a student and a successful performer. In a performance the team should share interests, values and goals. There should not be upmanship between them. A performance should be rich, full and keep the audience anchored. Supreme confidence in oneself and innovative ability is the engine for good results and success.



## How Well Do You Know Saint Tyagaraja?

Dhatri Gandham and Shraddha Arvind

- Did you know that Tyagaraja wrote 24,000 songs in total but only about 700 are known?
  - Did you know that Tyagaraja composed songs on the sacred Kaveri River such as “sAri Vedalina” in raga asAveri and not just on Gods?
  - Did you know that Thyagaraja composed a krithi on Tulsi called “Devi Sri Thulasamma” in Mayamalavagowla?
  - Did you know that Tyagaraja composed about 150 Eka raga krithis (there is only one krithi in this raga) in rare ragas like Supradipam, Vijayavasantam, Dundubhi, Dipakam, Kaikavasi, to name a few?
  - Did you know that Tyagaraja composed his first song “Namo Namo Raghavaya” when he was just 13 years old?
  - Did you know that Tyagaraja is said to have invented 66 ragas in his time?
  - Did you know that there is a crater on Mercury named after Tyagaraja?
  - Did you know that the musical concept sangathi was actually invented by Tyagaraja?
  - Did you know that Tyagaraja’s guru was Sonti Venkataramanayya?
  - Did you know that Tyagaraja composed the Kovur Pancharatnam in Thiruvaiyaru which consists of 5 songs in praise of Lord Shiva?
  - Did you know that Tyagaraja was actually named Thyagabramam at birth in honor of Lord Shiva who was worshipped as Tyagaraja in the temple at Thiruvarur?
  - Did you know that the mudra of his compositions "Tyagaraja" refers not only to himself but, to Lord Shiva?
  - Did you know Saint Thyagaraja completed chanting of "Rama nama" 96 crore times in his thirty-eighth year and had a vision of Rama’s coronation?
- 



Arathi Narayan presented a Bharatanatyam performance during SRUTI Day 2019. She included pieces choreographed by Adyar Lakshman and Rama Vaidyanathan including one presented at Rama’s workshop for Sruti. She concluded with a Thillana in Poornachandrika.







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<sup>1</sup> College Board (Trends in Higher Education) 2018

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## Sruti 2020 Spring Lineup

(Artists and Dates subject to change)



### Saturday Mar 21

Thyagaraja Aradhana  
(Concert by Shertallay  
Renganatha Sharma)  
Delaware Temple  
Hockessin, DE



### Saturday Apr 4

"Trinity"  
Carnatic Musical Play  
in English  
Henderson High School  
West Chester PA



### Saturday Apr 18

Malladi Brothers  
Carnatic Vocal  
Upper Merion  
Middle School,  
King of Prussia PA



### Saturday Apr 25

Sangita Kalanidhi  
Dr.S. Sowmya  
Carnatic Vocal  
Temple University  
Ambler Campus



### Saturday May 16

Jaikishore and Padma  
Mosalikanti  
Kuchipudi Dance  
Fugett Middle School  
West Chester, PA

### Workshop—May 17



### Saturday May 30

Amritha Murali  
Carnatic Vocal  
Temple University  
Ambler Campus



Sruti sponsorships  
available at  
[www.sruti.org](http://www.sruti.org)

## Sruti 2020 Fall Lineup

(Artists and Dates subject to change)



### Saturday Sep 12

Shijith & Parvathy  
Bharatanatyam  
Goodhart Theater, Bryn Mawr  
Workshop—Sep 13



### Saturday Sep 26

Trichur Brothers Vocal  
and Composers Day  
Upper Merion Middle  
School, King of Prussia PA



### Saturday Oct 10

Vignesh Ishwar  
Carnatic Vocal  
Community Music School  
Trappe PA



### Saturday Nov 7

Delhi Sunderrajan  
Violin Concert  
Community Music School  
Trappe PA

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