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# Sruti

The India Music  
& Dance Society,  
Philadelphia



## Thyagaraja Aradhana Souvenir

### March 26, 2022

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## From the President's Desk

*"Music gives a soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination and life to everything." -Plato*

Dear Rasikas:

For the past two years, we have all been longing for live music and dance performances to begin again. Finally, that day is here! I am delighted to welcome you all back to the Hindu Temple of Delaware for Sruti's Thyagaraja Aradhana. Sruti is proud to be among the few Indian arts organizations to spearhead the return to live programming. We can't wait to come together once again as a community to enjoy music and dance! Given the disruption caused by the pandemic, the Sruti Board is working hard to organize spectacular concerts in 2022 and bring back live programming with a bang!

I would like to first congratulate the 2021 Board on coordinating top-notch digital programming in a year of uncertainty. Under the strong leadership of Sundar Arunapuram, the Board kept the Sruti audience actively engaged and established streaming modalities to broaden the reach of Sruti programs. From the comfort of their homes our Sruti audience was able to enjoy many varied programs meticulously curated by the Board and professionally recorded at studios in India.

I am thankful to work with the highly accomplished, resourceful, and dedicated members of the Sruti Board this year. Most of them have served on the Sruti Board for many years in various capacities. Dr. P. Sivakumar, who was Resources Director last year, is President-Elect this year. Sivakumar has helped Sruti procure several grants enabling quality programming. Raji Venkatesan continues as Secretary, bringing a wealth of experience on the Board (including serving as President in 2012). Our Treasurer Venkat Kilambi gives us valuable advice on accounting and legal matters. Balaji Raghothaman, who served as President in 2016, is our new Resources Director. Lata Suresh continues in the important role of Publications Director. Nari Narayanan, our Marketing Director, tirelessly manages the promotion of Sruti events. Lavanya Sambasivan (a wonderful new addition to our team) and Rajee Padmanabhan serve as Directors 1 and 2. They have been actively involved in the technology committee, which has become vital for digital programming.

Sruti sponsors for 2022 (as of December) received six outstanding digital concerts from Music Academy, Chennai. These included Sriranjani Santhanagopalan, Jayanthi Kumaresh, Trichur Brothers, Malladi Brothers, and the world-renowned Bharatanatyam dancers Alarmel Valli and Priyadarshini Govind. Sruti also offered its sponsors the Blue Planet concert series for a small token payment and fifty sponsors availed of this. This high-quality series of 21 digital concerts, produced by First Edition Arts, featured renowned artists like T.M. Krishna, Malladi Brothers, Ramakrishnan Murthy, and Aishwarya Vidya Raghunath and Brindha Manicavasakan, just to name a few. The artists performed at various endangered biodiversity zones in India to raise awareness of sustainability issues and climate change. The Blue Planet series received global recognition and Sruti was one of the leading sabhas in the US to support this initiative.

Sruti's 2022 Thyagaraja Aradhana kicked off digitally on January 29 in the auspicious week of Bahulapanchami. The talented flautist J.B. Shruthi Sagar started the day with a mellifluous rendition of Utsava Sampradaya krithis, accompanied by Sayee Rakshith on violin and Ganapathiram on mridangam. Vidushis Amritha Murali, Nisha Rajagopal and K. Gayathri then performed the majestic Pancharatna krithis. They were ably supported by Vidwan R.K. Shriramkumar on violin, Kalaimamani J. Vaidyanathan on mridangam, and Kalaimamani Dr. S. Karthick on ghatam. The Aradhana had a record attendance of over 200 viewers! It has since received over 3000 views on YouTube. Continuing with the Thyagaraja theme, Sruti featured an illuminating lec-dem by Dr. Sriram Parasuram

on February 26, about the concept of *naada* in Saint Thyagaraja's compositions. A lively Q&A moderated by Balaji and Lata followed. These programs were professionally recorded at the ARTery studio in Chennai with excellent audio and video quality.

Sruti's in-person Aradhana today, March 26, features individual participation by our community, a cherished Sruti tradition. A special thanks to all the teachers in the area who are training the next generation of Carnatic musicians and rasikas! While we miss the time-honored Sruti tradition of starting the day off with group rendition of Utsava sampradaya krithis and Pancharatna krithis, we are grateful to be able to hold the Aradhana in person! We hope to get back to this tradition in the future. Today's concert features the young and talented Vani Ramamurthy from Los Angeles, a student of Ranjani and Gayathri. Vani spent several years living in Chennai training under her Gurus. Vani will be accompanied by Rajeev Mukundan on the violin and Keerthi Venkataramani on the mridangam.

As the pandemic situation improves, Sruti plans to return to live programming for our spring and fall seasons. We have two fantastic programs already on the calendar for the spring. On April 23, we are excited to feature legendary flautist Shashank Subramanyam accompanied by Srikant Venkataraman on the violin and Patri Satish Kumar on the mridangam. And on May 21, we have a concert by Vidwan Ramakrishnan Murthy, who is hailed as one of the most talented Carnatic vocalists of his generation. He will be accompanied by the young and vibrant violin virtuoso Charumathi Raghuraman and the gifted Anantha R. Krishnan (the grandson and disciple of the great mridangam maestro Sri. Palghat R. Raghu). Don't miss either of these amazing concerts! Our fall calendar looks equally promising with many top-ranking musicians starting to tour the US. We hope to feature a good set of concerts for your enjoyment, so please stay tuned.

The year of programming has barely begun and Sruti has already offered sponsors many high-value programs. We will offer even more concerts later this fall. Sruti has dropped its sponsorship rates this year (\$249 for a Dual sponsorship compared to \$399 in years past). We urge all our annual and life members who have not purchased sponsorships to do so and support the organization. We have a premium Concert Patron category of \$2000, which the patron can designate to the concert of their choice. Sruti will recognize the patron(s) on stage and in our publicity material. If you are interested in this category, please contact me directly.

We are fortunate to have a such a wonderful close-knit musical community. Over the years we have seen more children and youth actively engaged in Carnatic music. We have over sixty participants today paying homage to Saint Thyagaraja. The Aradhana Souvenir features many scholarly articles by well known musicians and knowledgeable members of our community. Please be sure to browse through it.

I look forward to greeting you all personally at today's Thyagaraja Aradhana and at future Sruti events. I hope you enjoy the programs this year and thank you all for your continued support!

Musically Yours,  
Revathi Subramony  
President-SRUTI



## Board of Directors



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## From the Publications and Outreach Committee

Dear SRUTI Supporters and Rasikas,

Welcome to the 2022 Thyagaraja Aradhana Part 2, held at the Hindu Temple of Delaware!

We are taking measures to maintain a safe environment under the current circumstances and are delighted to resume live programming!

We are glad to have resumed publishing the printed copy of the 2022 Thyagaraja Souvenir! This finished product that you are holding in your hands is striking in a few ways as it highlights contributions from established musicians as well as from music enthusiasts from the USA community and from India.

The impressive cover for the souvenir has been designed and created exclusively for SRUTI by Aishwarya Vidya Raghunath, the popular emerging artist who has also performed for us in the recent past.

We thank the authors sincerely for readily accepting our request to contribute and for having taken a concerted effort in providing solid and thoroughly researched articles.

We continue to work on SRUTI-Fan Mobile Experience in 2022.

SRUTI Radio is also continuing to be explored with a small foot-print. This streamed music is from the ongoing Artifacts Project repository, initiated by the previous POC, led by Dinakar Subramanian. We will continue to move the needle on this initiative in the coming year as well.

Additionally, Dinkum Interactive (website developers) helped giving a face-lift to the infrastructure of SRUTI web page. This enabled us to lucidly surface member-facing information. To a considerable extent, we were also able to house programming data in a more structured manner. We will continue to improve the data management and user experience this year in case we stream the events real-time.

SRUTI is thankful to The Presser Foundation for a capital grant that helped with some of the website enhancements and mobile app development.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the committee members for their continued support and dedication. As a team we had successfully released a soft copy of the Thyagaraja Aradhana Souvenir and the SRUTI Ranjani Publication for 2021.

Your articles and contributions to our periodicals are always welcome. We encourage you to explore thought-provoking topics and arts-related questions that have piqued your interest. Do not hesitate to take your ideas to your keyboard and send it to us. We will be happy to include your expressions in our publications.

Please visit <https://www.sruti.org/publications/> for more information.


Feel free to reach us at [publications@sruti.org](mailto:publications@sruti.org) for any question or suggestion that you may have about SRUTI publications or our website.

We once again thank all the contributors and reviewers who helped with the successful rollout of this periodical.

Lata Suresh

On behalf of the SRUTI Publications and Outreach Committee



*Please Note: Some articles contain [links](#) to websites / YouTube and/or QR Codes . While the [links](#) are active on the virtual version of the souvenir in [sruti.org](https://www.sruti.org) website, the QR Codes could help you navigate directly by using your smart phone camera.*

## About the cover

### *Aishwarya Vidhya Raghunath*

Remembering the trailblazing vaggeyakara, Shri Thyagaraja on this day of Bahula Panchami with this illustration depicting one of the very last songs he composed - Paritapamu in the raga Manohari. He asks of Lord Rama : "Have you forgotten your promise of salvation to me, while you were sailing on a golden boat along the river Sarayu with Sita, that you would show me your grace after ten days?"



*Aishwarya Vidhya Raghunath is an accomplished Carnatic music vocalist. She is among the foremost and popular young performing classical musicians in India. Hailing from a family of music connoisseurs, Aishwarya was initiated into the world of music at the age of three. She is an "A" grade artiste of All India Radio and Doordarshan.*

*We profusely thank Aishwarya for having graciously consented to paint the thematic cover page for our SRUTI 2022 Thyagaraja Aradhana Souvenir.*





## Relevance of Sruti's ThyagarAja ArAdhana 2022 (Part-1)

*Prabhakar Chitrapu*

The 2022 Sruti *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* was like none other in the history of Sruti, the difference being necessitated by the pandemic. Sruti adapted itself to a completely online programming format during the past two years implemented most professionally. And this event is another stellar example of how the Sruti board innovated in this new dimension.

Perhaps the most important aspect of this change from a *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* point of view is the ability to conduct the *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* on/near the “actual day of the *ArAdhana*” itself. As most of you know, *ThyagarAja* left this world physically on *pushya bahuLa pancami* (the 5<sup>th</sup> day of the waning moon in the *vEdic* lunar month of *pushya*), Wednesday 6 January 1847. This day comes during the peak of winter in our part of the world, making it logistically risky and difficult to conduct *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* on that particular day. The difficulties include not only those for the Sruti Board in arranging the event itself, but also the challenges for people to attend the event due to potential inclement weather. Thanks to the online-programing that was made possible technologically due to the pandemic, Sruti was able to conduct the *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* near the actual *ArAdhana* day, specifically Sat 22 Jan 2022. That in itself is special and we hope that this practice will be continued in the years to come. So, in this sense, this *ThyagarAja ArAdhanam* marks a turning point in the history of conducting *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* by Sruti.

The other innovative aspect of this *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* was to conduct the *ArAdhana* in two parts. One was an online-event, conducted on/near the *pushya bahuLa pancami* day, followed by a second part which would happen after the winter in the US has passed. Thanks to the easing of the global onslaught of the pandemic, Sruti is planning to conduct the second part in person this year on 26 March 2022. So, once again, the *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* will be conducted as a truly community event, with all the music *rasika*-s, and musical-devotees of *ThyagarAja* showing their respects to this enormously legendary figure, who is titled as none other than *sangIta brahma* (the creator of music!). So, this two-part format of *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* allows Sruti to adhere to the strict tradition of the performing the *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* on the *pushya bahuLa pancami* day itself, while also preserving the communal aspect of the event aspect.

The two-part format also introduces another element of flexibility to the Sruti board, because, as most of us who have been with Sruti for a while know, a single day event packed with programming to capacity always proved to be a logistical challenge. The essential components of the Sruti *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* consist of (1) group rendition of *utsava sampradAya kiirtana*-s, (2) group rendition of the *ghana rAga panca-ratna kriti*-s, (3) individual participation by Sruti members and friends alike and (4) a concert by an invited artist. Clearly, fitting all these in a single day poses a lot of challenges, especially in being able to accommodate all the enthusiasts who would like to perform and show their prowess as well as respects to *ThyagarAja*. The two-day format will allow a more leisurely way of planning the entire collective event and we hope that this will become a new tradition for Sruti for the years to come.

This review is about the *ArAdhana* Part-1, which took place on Saturday 29 Jan 2022. The event consisted of renditions of the *ThyagarAja*'s *utsava sampradAya kiirtana*-s, and the *ghanara-rAga panca-ratna kriti*-s. The *utsava sampradAya kiirtana*-s were performed by an upcoming and already well-known flautist, J.B. Sruthi Sagar, whereas the *panca-ratna kriti*-s were rendered by a trio of well-established Carnatic artists, VidUshi-s Amritha Murali, Nisha Rajagopalan and K. Gayatri. Traditionally, Sruti has always displayed on the performing stage, a decorated alter with a large photo of *ThyagarAja* and an idol of Srii rAma. This year, the *utsava sampradAya kiirtana*-s part of the program only displayed a picture of *ThyagarAja* and the *panca-ratna kriti*-s segment lacked even that deviating from the Sruti tradition.

**utsava sampradAya kiirtana rendition:** As we all know, *ThyagarAja*'s compositions, in fact any other typical composition of Carnatic music, is a combination of two important dimensions, mainly *sAhitya* (lyrics) and *sangiita* (music). Depending upon the nature of the composition, the mix/proportion of these components changes. There are compositions where the lyrics are very sparse and may not even carry a rich semantic content, but musically they are massive sound-sculptures. In contrast, there are other compositions, which are lyrically rich, with the musical component being simpler. (Broadly speaking, the former are what people refer to as *kriti*-s and the latter as *kiirtana*-s). And, there is a huge volume of compositions, mostly in the *kriti* format, which have almost perfect balance of the *sangiita* and *sAhitya*.

Coming to *utsava sampradAya kiirtana*-s, in my opinion, the lyrical content is richer than the musical content. That being so, an instrumental rendition poses an interesting variation or a challenge. For those who do not understand the Telugu language, the lyrical beauty is lost unfortunately. On the other hand, an instrumental rendition, being devoid of the lyrics, exposes and brings into spotlight the musical aspects much more clearly, which indeed is what *ThyagarAja* is revered for as *sangiita brahma*.

In the somewhat loosely defined classification of *utsava sampradAya kiirtana*-s, there is a total of some 25-28 *kiirtana*-s. Some anecdotes suggest that when *ThyagarAja* went on *uncha-vrutti* (a practice of a spiritual seeker seeking alms for daily sustenance), he would be singing these songs, along with a group of his followers. The songs are relatively easy to sing and are suitable for group singing, which is also the reason for referring to them as *bhajana-sampradAya-kiirtana*-s.

The *utsava-sampradAya kiirtana*-s are organized in a certain order, which consists of some 13 steps: The sequence starts in an imaginary evening, spans across the night and ends with the next morning. (Specifically, the steps include: invocation/*heccarika*, wedding/*kaLyANa*, ritual-bath/*nalugu*, *hArati*, *SObhana*, drinking-milk/*Aragimpu*, good-night/*pavvalimpu*, *Ala*, *jOla*, good-morning/*mElukolupu*, protection/*Raksha*, prayer-for -general-well-being/*mangaLam*). This is indeed a very interesting order, because one would have thought that one would start the sequence in the morning with wakeup songs and bring it to the end of the day. Perhaps *ThyagarAja* did not want that the last song be one where the Lord sleeps, but rather one when He is awake to protect the world! So, *ThyagarAja* may have, in a clever manner, introduced this order. (Of course, it is possible that this was the prevalent traditional order during those days, but in any case, we find it to be a very interesting sequence.)

Since singing all the *utsava-sampradAya kiirtana*-s would take too long, Sruti developed a tradition of singing a select few, (about 9), in the same original order. Sruthi Sagar has taken his own selection of 7 *kiirtana*-s, ending with a standard *mangaLam*. So, in a sense, his rendition was similar to and yet different from the Sruti tradition. Here is the list of songs he played: *heccarikagA rAra* (*yadukula kAmbhOji*), *siitA-kaLyANa* (*kurunji*), *nagumOmu* (*madhyamAvati*), *nApAli* (*navrOj*), *patiki hAratiirE* (*suruTi*), *SObhAnE* (*pantuvArALi*), *pUlapAnpu miida* (*Ahiri*), *nii nAma rUpamulanu* – *mangaLam* (*sourAshTra*).

Another interesting aspect in Sruthi Sagar's rendition was that the *rAga*-s he played a couple of songs in were not universally the same in all sources. For example, the song *siita kaLyANa vaibhOgame* was declared to being played in *rAga kurunji*, whereas several sources/books mention this as *sankarabharanam* or *navrOj*. Similarly, the song *nApAli Srii rAma* is stated to have been played in the *rAga navrOj*, which several sources mention as *SankarAbharaNam*. Some of my learned friends tried to explain the possible reasons behind this apparent discrepancy, but these were too technical for me to grasp and summarize here. We will only add that the listening experience of *nApAli Srii rAma* as played by Sruthi Sagar was quite different from my past experiences.

All in all, it was a delightful rendition of the *utsava-sampradAya kiirtana*-s subset and the mastery of the artist clearly showed in the renditions making it thoroughly enjoyable. And of course, the accompanying artists, namely Sayee Rakshith on violin and B. Ganapathyraman on mridangam, did an excellent job and provided an exceptionally enjoyable listening experience.

**panca-ratna kriti rendition:** Now we move on to the next phase of the *ThyagarAja ArAdhana*, which is the rendition of the *ghana-rAga panca-ratna kriti-s*. Traditionally, this is preceded by the rendition of the *kriti “cEtulAra”* in *rAga bhairavi*, which was played by the flautist Sruthi Sagar, leading the way to the rendition of the *panca-ratna kriti-s*.

The *panca-ratna kriti-s* are, of course, universally well known within the Carnatic music world and therefore, I feel that they need little additional commentary here. Much has been written not only in the general literature, but also in previous Sruti publications. So, I will refrain from elaborating too much on them in this write up. Except that I will re-visit some of the questions that still linger in my mind about these and about which we still do not have clear-cut, complete and completely convincing answers.

The first question is about the name *ghana-rAga-s*. Were these 5 ragas classified as a set in some musical tradition or treatise? Secondly, why are these *rAga-s* given such an elevated status, as being *ghana* or “great” in some sense, especially when there are so many other ragas like *tODi*, *kaLyANi*, *SankarAbharaNam* etc, which command a much greater “musical respect” compared to, say for example, *gouLa* and *Arabhi*? One of the explanations given by learned friends suggested that *ghanam* actually refers to *thAnam*, and that these 5 ragas lend themselves to good playing of *thAnam*.

Secondly, another somewhat more popular open question is whether these 5 compositions were composed as a set or whether they were put together as a set by some of the groups that started the *ArAdhana* tradition early in 20<sup>th</sup> century. We have heard arguments on both sides, but to me, it is somewhat difficult to logically accept that these would not have been composed as a set. The probability of finding 5 pieces of work that exactly match the set of 5 *rAga-s* and that they have exactly the lyrical/musical structure, seems low to me.

The 5 *panca-ratna kriti-s* are musical and lyrical gems and stand out in many ways, not only within the overall corpus of Carnatic music but also within the collective works of *ThyagarAja* himself! Within the first category, I may not be risking much controversy if I say that these compositions stand towering high above most, if not all other, Carnatic compositions. Especially, the *Srii rAga* composition *endarO mahAnubhavulu* is treated by many as being the aesthetic, musical, devotional & humble Mount Everest within the Himalayan range of Carnatic peaks.

They also stand out within the complete works of *ThyagarAja* because of several reasons. Firstly, these are structurally neither in the *kriti* or *kiirtana* style, but rather that they appear to be in *varNam* style (although there seems to be some opinions that the style may be considered to be that of a *svara-jatis*).

Next, they have the *svara* and *sAhityam* pattern for *caraNam*, which you do not find that in any other works of *ThyagarAja*.

Finally, another interesting feature in these 5 *panca-ratna kriti-s* is about the *mudra caraNam-s*. 3 of the 5 *kriti-s* have multiple *mudra caraNam-s* (namely *jagadAnanda-kArakA*, *sAdhincenE* & *endarO mahAnubhavulu*). To the best of my knowledge, none of his other compositions have multiple *mudra caraNam-s*. This may also suggest that he actively worked on these pieces of work continually. He did not compose them at one time and closed it completely. It is more than possible that he refined his other compositions as well compared to his original version, but these examples are a very explicit and obvious enhancement or addition to the original work. Is this because, he composed them as a special set and kept coming back to enhancing them?

The only other non-trivial or non-obvious aspect in the *panca-ratna kriti-s* is that there seems to be a complete lack of agreement in the rendition of the *sAdhincanE kriti*, as there seems to be two different traditions of singing.

Coming to the rendition of the *panca-ratna kriti-s* now, it was a very satisfying listening experience provided by the 3 highly talented artists, Amritha Murali, Nisha Rajagopalan and K. Gayatri, whose voices were melodious and in perfect harmony. The stage was also filled with stellar accompanists, namely Vidwan R.K. Shriramkumar on violin, Vidwan J. Vaidyanathan on mridangam and Vidwan Dr. S. Karthick on ghatam making it an enviable group of artists on the stage performing these majestic pieces with the finesse and expertise these *kriti-s* richly deserve.

They ended the *panca-ratna kriti* rendering with a *mangaLam* to *ThyagarAja*, which was a set of Sanskrit *SIOka*-s written by one of the most famous and possibly favorite students of *ThyagarAja*, namely Walajpet Venkatramana Bhagavatar. He was such a devoted student of *ThyagarAja*, that meticulously documented most of *ThyagarAja*'s compositions as well as his biographical events. His works on *ThyagarAja* include: *Srii guru mangaLAshTakam* (in Telugu); *Srii guru ashTakam* (in Sanskrit); *Srii kAkarlAnvaya ratnasAra* (manipravALam in Sanskrit, Telugu and Sourashtram languages); *Adi guru ashTOttara panchAngam* (in Telugu); *gurucaraNam bhajarE* (in *SankarAbharaNam rAga*); *Srii rAmabramhamu* (in *bEgada rAga*) and many more! It may be of some interest to the readers to see a painting showing *ThyagarAja* with Walajpet Venkataramana Bhagavatar.



Sruti had also developed a tradition of singing some of these *SIOka*-s at the end of the *panca-ratna kriti*-s, so it was nice to see that that tradition was kept. However, it is interesting to point out that there were a few more *SIOka*-s included in this rendition compared to the Sruti selection. The *rAga*-s, different from Srutis, were *pUrnacandrika*, *sAma*, *nalinaKAnti* and *niilAmbari* and were set to tune by Vidwan R.K. Shriramkumar.

In conclusion the virtual *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* Part-1 conducted by Sruti was exemplary and executed flawlessly and a trend setter. I would like to thank and congratulate the Sruti Board – also on behalf of the Sruti audience, now global – for having conducted this *ThyagarAja ArAdhana* and made it accessible to rasikas around the world.

**Prabhakar Chitrapu** is a lover of music, language and philosophy. He often contributes to Sruti publications and has served the organization in various capacities. He maintains a website [www.Thyagaraja.org](http://www.Thyagaraja.org)



# Relevance of Thyagaraja kritis' sAhitya to contemporary times

Nalini Dinesh

Saint Thyagaraja's kritis are an important source of information about the life and times of the composer and the society he lived in, lifestyle, human emotions, spiritual practices and philosophical thought. The knowledge gained by studying his kritis are as relevant to life now as it was in the eighteenth century.

## Way of Life

His kritis chart out the ideal life path or mArga for people to follow. Following are the important points in the mArga prescribed by Thyagaraja:

### Pooja

Looking at the lyrics of kritis in which Thyagaraja gives detailed descriptions of the daily pooja that he performs, what strikes one is, the enormous joy and satisfaction that he derives out of every ritual.

The word "ritual" has itself become an unsavoury one in today's times, as something meaningless and superstitious. One realises how entirely meaningful every ritual becomes when the performer's heart is imbued with bhakti. Pooja and mantras are meant to manifest the perfection that is within the performer. The positive vibrations generated and the optimistic frame of mind that results out of performing the rituals are after all, the goals touted by every wellness workshop, meditation session and psychotherapy session that has ever been marketed.

In *callare rAmacandruni*, as Thyagaraja lists the fragrant flowers to be offered to Rama - champaka, lotus, jaaji (jathi malli in Tamil, the pinkish jasmine), lily, pArijAta, one is struck by his discernment and eye for beauty; could a modern man, accustomed as he may be to the orange marigolds and tuberoses bought from the market in an urban jungle, on listening to *callare*, be enthused to look up these flowers on the internet? Could he go out and locate these flowers in the nearest nursery? And just maybe, could he be enthused to grow one of these flowers in his balcony or his housing society's compound, to experience the unmatched satisfaction of offering jaaji or a champaka grown by himself to the Lord in his pooja altar? In the process, who knows, he may even start observing other trees and flowers in his locality and their little inhabitants therein - the birds, squirrels and insects.

In *Aragimpave* (Todi) Thyagaraja asks his Lord Rama to partake of delicious rice and dishes comprising the six different tastes. The six different tastes, or shadrasa, is an Ayurvedic concept that when followed, could prevent many lifestyle diseases; currently, most of us consume food of not more than 3 different tastes - sweet, sour, salty and pungent. The remaining tastes are bitterness and astringent taste.

In *koluvamarEgaDA* (Todi), Thyagaraja rejoices that he has the good fortune of worshipping the Lord by, lovingly bathing the Lord in rose water at midnight, feeding Him with sanctified food and offering sweet and fragrant betel leaves, rising early in the morning and offering milk to the satiate the thirst of Lord kOdaNDapANi. Just to follow this daily routine requires bhakti of the highest order, not to mention the preparation required to enable it (the cooking, cleaning etc). It certainly appears daunting to follow, but perhaps one could begin with small steps of just lighting a lamp and offering flowers.

Here, the question may arise, why perform these actions at all?

These are times when spirituality or the idea of a greater or universal consciousness has come back into the mainstream globally with a new age of gurus. The central concept of spirituality is giving up control to some higher power. This is nothing but what writers, artists, musicians, designers, athletes, and many others have experienced -

this state of flow, or “being in the zone”. According to neuroscientists, in the state opposite to this state of flow, i.e. in the state of stress, man tends to look for patterns where there are none and draw conclusions where they don’t exist<sup>1</sup>. For instance, if a software developer is racing against time to meet a deadline; in a stressed state, the developer might tend to think back on all the deadlines missed in the past, and conclude self-incapability, or blame may be laid on the insensitive project manager who draws up impossible project plans to keep the client manager happy, or shortcuts might be employed by the developer to complete the work for the time being, though it may not meet all the client requirements in the long run.

In contrast, when the developer gives up power and relaxes into the aptitude of “another”, call it God or a higher power or a universal consciousness, there is a higher chance of meeting the deadline with a higher quality of work.

Man needs to relinquish control in order to free himself. Now, for the atheists or agnostic, spirituality may just be a psychological tool that man uses, to relinquish control and get into the state of flow, or it may be a natural or wired-in response of a human being who was, after all, born into this world completely helpless. But in Vedic culture, this concept of relinquishing control is celebrated and given pride of place in the pooja altar of every home and hence the rituals of lighting of the lamp and offering of flowers to that Supreme being, to whom one relinquishes control.

In pUlapAnpu mIda (Ahiri), Thyagaraja tells Lord Rama *“Please have honey, sugar, boiled milk, delicious tambUlam (paan), spread fragrant sandal paste on yourself, wearing a plethora of garlands, lie down on the bed of jasmine flowers I have laid out for you and go to sleep listening to the lullaby from the Vedas that I sing for you”*. This strikes one, as the ultimate natural and healthy luxury. It does seem that modern man has added many complications to a simple life filled with goodness.

### Keeping away from vices

There are many Thyagaraja kritis that list out and describe the six vices of human life and their dangers, namely, kAma (lust), krOdha (anger), lObha (greed), mOha (attachment), mada (pride), and mAtsarya (jealousy). Vices are as relevant in the twenty first century as they were in the fifteenth century and would be, as long as human beings exist.

In Srl rAmadAsa dAsOham (DhanyAsi), Thyagaraja calls passion, anger and avarice, crocodiles infesting the mind-lake.

One can see a progression in Thyagaraja’s handling of the concept of the six vices over many kritis.

In kritis like dudukUgala (Gowla) and etula kApAduthuvo (Ahiri), Thyagaraja lays out a litany of his own transgressions involving the six vices. In dudukUgala, he laments as to who would ever redeem him. In etula kApAduthuvo, he wonders how Rama proposes to lift him out of this world which is a quagmire of delusion.

In tappi bratiki (TOdi), he asks: *“O rAma, in this Kaliyuga, is it possible to escape from the ills of flesh, and from being drowned in the pond of carnal pleasures? Is it possible to withdraw the mind from being enslaved by wealth and gold and to treat them as mere chaff, as poison? Is it possible not to be carried away by the voluptuous dalliances and charmingly fascinating tresses of cunning damsels without a trace of carnal attachment?”* He finally concludes saying *“It is impossible except by the royal mode of worshipping the Lord with flowers and singing His glory in the manner of Thyagaraja”*; whereas In sanglta gnAnamu (Dhanyasi) he is more confident of the solution:

kAyajAthi shadripula jayinche

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alicegwaltton/2017/08/22/the-science-of-spirituality-a-psychologist-and-a-neuroscientist-explain-being-in-the-flow/#125d0ab4e0bf>



kAryamu Delusunu ThyAgarAju nutha

*“Thyagaraja has found the way to conquer the six inward enemies (shadripu) starting from the one arising from the body (lust, attachment, anger etc). ”*

Thyagaraja states the solution in an indirect way, he states that music without bhakti will never lead to the right path and hence he means that music with devotion would lead to the right path (and is the solution to conquer the shadripu).

Thyagaraja's mOsabOku vinavE sums up the world-weariness of participants in the rat-race even in the current day - *“Desiring wealth, women etc. will result only in weariness of the body”*.

One can discern a constant and continuous striving for self-improvement in many of these kritis.

## Music

Thyagaraja links his spiritual sadhana with his musical sadhana.

In kaddanuvAriki (Todi), he says Rama protects those bhaktas who, *“abandon sleep, hold nicely the tambura to maintain Sruti and with a pure mind sing Your praises melodiously”*.

In rAga sudhArasa (AndOlika), he says *“O Mind! Do drink the nectar of rAga, which gives the beneficial result of yAga (rites), yOga (meditation), Thyaga ( austerities) and bhOga (pleasure). Those who have knowledge of nAda, OmkAra and swara are the realised souls”*.

In gItArthamu (Surutti) he says *“O Mind! To understand the significance (arthamu) of the (Bhagavad) Gita and the bliss (ananda) of music, you have only to delve deep into your heart and behold them in their Supreme grandeur”*.

For Thyagaraja, musical sadhana was a means to reach God and Thyagaraja does not stop at nAma sankeertanam, he delves into the technicalities and nuances of music which are relevant to practitioners of music to this day.

In sogasogA mridanga tAlamu, he addresses Rama thus, *“Who is that stalwart, that great man of courage and conviction, who overwhelms you by singing songs pregnant with sublime thoughts of the Upanishads, with total purity and charming rhythms, to the accompaniment of the mridanga? Does Thyagaraja have the competence for such an exalted task, employing the rules of prosody, proper intervals, with sublime devotion and woven around the Navarasas appropriately?”*. Thyagaraja thus reveals the depth of his musical sAdhana and continuing self-development to reach the musical goals listed here.

In koluva marEgada he describes the dIpArAdhana ritual thus:

bhAgavatulu kUDi bAguga ghana naya  
rAgamulacE dIpArAdhanamonarinci  
vEgamE Srl hari virulapai pavvaLinca  
jOgoTTi ThyagarAju sumukhuni lEpEdu

*“Great devotees joining together, singing in ghana and naya rAgas, performing dIpArAdhana, then singing lullaby as He quickly lies down to sleep on the flower bed and then woken up by Thyagaraja...”*.

ghana rAgas are those whose essence can be brought out by playing tAnam (ghanam) in it, examples: the traditional five ghana ragas (ghana panchaka) NAta, Gaula, Arabhi, SrIraga and VarAli. KedAram, NArayanagaula, RItigaula, SARanganAta and Bauli are another series of five ghana ragas (dwitiya ghana panchakam). A naya or

rakti raga's essence is brought out both by AlApanA in slow tempo and tAna, examples: TOdi, Bhairavi, KAmbhOji, SankarAbharanam and KalyAni.<sup>2</sup>

In sObhillu saptaswara, Thyagaraja praises the seven notes thus: *"glowing in the navel, heart, neck, tongue and nose of the human body, shining in the four Vedas and in the sublime gAyatri mantra as its essence which sparkle in the hearts of celestials and bhUstras (worthy Brahmins)"*.

In swara rAga sudhA, Thyagaraja again refers to the seven notes and their chakras: *"the subtle and mystic sources of the seven swaras of the musical scale in the body referred to as chakras is verily a yoga leading to salvation. If one bangs the mridanga wildly without being aware of the intricacies of the rhythmic art, can the result give joy? If one is equipped with the knowledge of rAga, he attains salvation, short-circuiting the endless cycle of birth and death"*. He thus imbues his spiritual sadhana with musical rigour.

In nada sudhArasa (Arabhi), Thyagaraja refers to Desya rAgas too in addition to ghana and naya rAgas. The essence of Desya rAgas can be brought out just by singing AlApanA , examples: kAnada, HamIrkalyAni. He also refers to sangatis as "sarasa sangati sandarbhamu" i.e. sangatis that are sweet and appropriate, thus giving a clear guideline to music practitioners.

### Minimalism

Thyagaraja espouses minimalism in rUkalu padivElunna (Desiya Todi) - *"You may possess tens of thousands of rupees but a handful of broken rice is enough to satisfy your appetite, a thousand clothes may be at your disposal but you can wear only one at a time, you may wield sway over an entire city but you need just three cubits of space to lie down and rest, hundreds of dishes may be temptingly spread before you, but you can just take a mouthful, rivers may be in spate, but you can collect only as much water as your vessel can hold, therefore in the mad pursuit of these, do not forget Hari, the essence of the Universe"*.

### Detachment in attachment

Thyagaraja espouses the principle of the Bhagavad Gita - detachment in attachment. To elaborate: one would have multiple horizontal relationships in life - with family members, friends, colleagues, neighbours - and one vertical relationship - with God. Because of the vertical relationship one has inner calmness, strength and maturity to deal with whatever ups and downs occur in the horizontal relationships. Bhakti, is the process through which one can get the experience of God, who is beyond the senses, who one cannot normally perceive. When a horizontal relationship faces road-blocks, the experience of God is so fulfilling, that one is no longer dependent solely on the relationship for one's sense of self-worth and self-identity<sup>3</sup>.

In samsArulaite (SAveri), Thyagaraja says that the path of bhakti can be followed along with family members - *"by meditating and chanting His name, dedicating fruits of one's action at His sacred feet, keeping cruel thoughts at bay, by playing the veena, singing His praise who is the embodiment of Vedas in 'SrirAga' and having absolute faith in Him"*.

This detachment from horizontal relationships and attachment to the vertical relationship has a lot to do with the relinquishing control or going with the flow that was earlier elaborated in the section Pooja.

### Greatness of Nama Smaranam

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<sup>2</sup> South Indian Music by Prof. P. Sambamoorthy

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.thespiritualscientist.com/2015/09/what-does-the-gita-say-about-attachment-detachment-and-rupture-in-relationships/>

Despite his descriptions of musical excellence, pooja vidhi with attendant paraphernalia of pooja sAmagri, naivedyam etc, Thyagaraja gives highest priority to just remembering the name of the Lord or nama smaranam. So in practical life, it is left up to the individual, as to how one develops bhakti or connection to God, according to individual proclivity and the simplest one is nAma smaraNam - it does not require any material or human resources (poojA sAmagri or a priest or wealth), it does not require any physical hardship like fasting or retiring to a cave in the Himalayas to do penance, it does not require leaving a family one loves and to whom one has a duty, it does not require prior knowledge of the Vedas or scriptures or a sharp, analytical mind with an understanding of Vedanta, it can be done even when the physical body is devoid of strength and ridden by illnesses.

Thyagaraja says in smaraNe sukhamu (Janaranjani), *"rAma nAma creates in the mind a characteristically divine form and fills it with devotion"*. In sukhi evvaro (kAnadA), he declares that *"he only is truly blessed who delights in chanting the rAma nAma, his countenance radiates divine joy, he is established in truth and serves humanity without bias"*.

Thyagaraja, with his poetic imagination, portrays an anxious Yama in chinTisTunnAde yamuDu - *"Yama is worried that people have taken to singing the name and glory of Rama which is capable of protecting them from the terrors of hell, he tells his messengers, armed with tridents and nooses, to curb their zeal and activities"*!

### Personal connection to God

Thyagaraja regards Rama variedly as his Lord, father, friend, child in different kritis, but definitely as one of his own. *"Do I not belong to you? Can I bear separation from you even for a minute?"*, Thyagaraja asks in nI vADa nE gAna (Saranga).

In atukArAdani (Manoranjani) Thyagaraja addresses Rama as a petulant teenager would a parent - *"You don't love me to even assure me that it won't happen again? (that He would not abandon Thyagaraja again)"*.

He scolds him as a family member would in atla palukudu itla palukudu (AthaNa), *"What can I do if you speak that way sometimes and speak this way sometimes? You punish people, you also make them long-lived"*

### Charity

Thyagaraja says in samayamu thelisi (asAveri) *"If a wealthy man does not earn spiritual merit by charity to discerning persons at appropriate occasions, it matters little if he lives or dies"*

To sum up the Way of Life set out by Thyagaraja:

Thyagaraja was a yogi, he had renounced the material world in order to follow the path to mOksha. But following the path set out by him in his compositions does not mean that everyone has to renounce life. The path recommended by him is as much about the path to mOksha as it is about how to live a good and fulfilling life, free of stress, how to be true to oneself and one's loved ones, while working to achieve material goals at the same time. Therein lies the relevance of Thyagaraja's sahitya.

Now, the question may arise, as to why study these songs? Why not just read the Bhagavad Gita or the Upanishads, if one wants to learn the art of living? The answer is, these songs are simple to understand even by people uninitiated into spirituality and in the language spoken by them day-to-day, they have many similes and examples from day-to-day life, they have tunes attractive to anyone with a ear for music, and importantly, the mArga prescribed itself is very simple. It does not call for rigorous fasting, meditation, study of scriptures etc, it merely prescribes remembering the Lord and chanting His name, keeping away from vices and keeping one's mind pure by not thinking ill of others.

### Socio-economic references

In Thyagaraja's kriti kAru vElpulu in Kalyani raga, in the line, "kAruku jilakara sambA kantara mainaTTu gAni", Thyagaraja says, just as there is no equivalent to the "jilakara sambA" or "jIraga sambA" rice variety, there is none equal to Lord Rama. This 18th century reference holds good even today, for not only is jEraga sambA a high quality variety - before the easy availability of basmati rice, it was the preferred variety in south India for making biryanis/pulaos - it is also environment-friendly, as it does not thrive with chemical fertilisers and pesticides. This makes it expensive and used in rural areas only for special occasions. But the relevant point is, this is an important socio-economic reference in Thyagaraja's bhakti-oriented work.

In Emi jESitEnEmi (TOdi), Thyagaraja refers to "lAnDar" lights. Before the advent of electricity, oil lanterns were used and they were called "lAnDar" in south India. He asks "mEDa gattitEnEmi? Yanduna lAndar jOdu gattitEnEmi?" - *"What if they built palatial houses? And fit them up with rows of lanterns? Of what avail is anything done by people who are not blessed with the grace of Sri RAma?"*

## Nature references

From the many references to the natural world in Thyagaraja's kritis, one can get insights into ancient Indian poetry and the similes and metaphors used therein.

In intakkanna delpa taramA (sAveri), he says *"I am panting for your grace as a CAkata bird which holds its beak open to the sky for rain water to fall"*. The poet Kalidasa has used it in his MEghadUta as a simile for deep yearning. Indian mythology represents CAkata as a bird with beak on its head held open to the rain. According to ornithologist Satya Chum Law the CAkata bird is the Common Lora, which is a passerine bird found across the tropical Indian subcontinent. He had observed a captive lora drink dew and water sprayed on leaves, which might have been the basis for the representation and the thought that the bird drinks rain water. According to Western orientalists, the CAkata is the Jacobine Cuckoo which is a bird that migrates to India from Africa or other parts of Asia around the period of onset of the monsoons. Whichever bird it is, it is certainly an interesting insight into the fauna of the land and its poetry.

In tulasi jagajjanani (Mayamalavagoula), Thyagaraja expounds on the greatness of the Tulasi plant: *"It is said that all holy rivers finally attain the blissful paradise of your sacred feet. You bear on your head all the Vedas"*. Indeed, according to epic and Puranic literature, the Tulsi plant is regarded as the holiest of all plants. The Tulsi plant is regarded as a threshold point between heaven and earth. A traditional prayer says that Brahma, the creator resides in its branches, all pilgrimage centres reside in its roots, the river Ganga flows through its roots, all deities are in its stem and its leaves and the Vedas are in the upper part of its branches.

In sAri vedalina (Asaveri) Thyagaraja gives a lovely description of river Cauvery: *"This young queen of rivers flows in varied gaits, now with extraordinary speed, now thundering down the valley and now softly and gently as if out of compassion. With the full-throated melodious cooing of the cuckoos in the background, she caresses the holy feet of Sri Ranganatha in obeisance, flows rendering fertile, extensive lands on either side and arrives at the shrine of PancanadISvara at TiruvayyAru, where assemblies of Vedic Brahmins worship her with jasmine flowers fondly addressing her as RAja RAJeSvari."*

In swara rAga sudhA (Shankarabharanam), Thyagaraja remarks on how incongruous it would be if a crane and a frog (with their cacophonous outpourings) sit on the lotus of Supreme Bliss.

## Anthropological references

Poets, it is said, are constantly observant and obsessed by details, and so one finds all kinds of nuggets about humankind in Thyagaraja's compositions. In the Ghanta raga kriti rAma rAma, Thyagaraja tells Rama that if he doesn't hold his hand, he, Thyagaraja, would experience the fear of an unmarried girl.

In another Ghanta raga kriti gAravimpa rAda, he asks, *“Will parents not be stirred by their child’s lisp? Will a virtuous man reject his chaste wife because of her plain looks? (In the same way, why do you disregard me?)”*

## Practical life skills and common adages

An interesting facet of Thyagaraja’s compositions are references to practical or mundane life. People can instantly relate to these references and hence the popularity and wide reach of his kritis.

In *Nee Chittamu* (Dhanyasi), Thyagaraja says:

nA chittamu vanchana chanchalamani nannu vidanAdakumi Sri rAma..  
guruvu chillaginja..  
guruvu neevanukonti

*“Please don’t abandon me because my mind is crafty and unsteady.  
The preceptor is the clearing nut (to cleanse evils of the disciple)...  
I have assumed You to be my preceptor.”*

The seeds of the clearing nut tree (*Strychnos Potatorum*) which is native to peninsular India and Srilanka are used to clarify foul and muddy water (among its other medicinal uses in Ayurveda as well as Unani systems of medicine).

In Sri RAma RAma RAma sritulamugAma (Saveri) Thyagaraja warns his fellow men of blindly following other men who may assert themselves and swear by their ways only. Instead of progressing, they go round and round to be ultimately where they were, like bullocks going round and round the oil-extracting mill. Traditionally, cooking oil was extracted using a wooden mill worked by bullocks. In modern times the wooden mill is making a comeback since cold-pressed oils using wooden mills are said to retain their nutrients better.

In kannathalli nIvu (Saveri), Thyagaraja addresses Devi Tripurasundari thus: *“Mother, why should I worry when you are by my side? When one has butter with him, why should he get worried for ghee”*, meaning, why should one worry about wealth and possessions when one has the Devi by one’s side.

He also says:

*“I understood that the wealth, horse and houses that one has is all false,  
And that the pleasure got by those people who have them is false,  
I understood these and kept in my mind that the words of the rich are also false, then why should one think that a rope is a snake and deceive oneself.”*

In many cultures of the world it is a common adage that having been bitten once by a snake, one tends to think of even a rope as a snake ever after.

In ChAlu chAlu nI yuktulu (Saveri) which is part of his opera Nauka Charitam, Thyagaraja uses the adage of pinching the child and rocking the cradle - the Gopis accuse Lord Krishna of doing this.

## PurAnic references

Thyagaraja’s kritis are replete with references to episodes in the Ramayana, in fact from every kAnDa. His Tulasi Jagajjanani refers to a number of stories of Tulasi from the Puranas.

## Poetic value

If not any of the points elaborated so far, the sahitya of Thyagaraja kritis is relevant to man in any age due to the sheer beauty of the poetry contained therein. Poetry is an invitation to stop, relax, observe and just feel - wonder, sorrow, joy, laughter or even boredom. Modern man is so accustomed to being on the move, physically or mentally, there is just no time to simply stop and feel. Yati, prAsa, similes and metaphors are the basic poetic qualities that can be found in all of them. An attempt is made herein to present beauties other than these.

In *endu dAginAdo* (Todi), Thyagaraja poetically worries that Rama has hidden himself somewhere, then reassures himself that of course, *“Rama would have hidden Himself to protect His devotees - just as He hid Himself in a pillar to issue forth and protect His beloved devotee PrahlAda from the wrath of his father HiraNyakaSipu. Did He not subsequently stay hidden behind a palm tree to destroy VAlI and protect SugrIva from his infernal might? Likewise He must have concealed himself somewhere to sally forth at the opportune moment to free His devotees like Thyagaraja from the consequences of their sins and to blow into smithereens the shadripu”*.

The kriti varamaina nEtrOtsavamunu (Paraju) of Thyagaraja, which is part of his opera Prahlada Bhakti Vijayam, is a description of a beautiful scene (Thyagaraja describes the scene as nEtrotsava or feast for the eyes) which achieves the effect of one picturing a relief sculpture or a painting. In it, *“Brahma, Indra and others are fanning the Lord standing respectfully on either side, as the celestials rain flowers from their celestial abode. His most beloved and cherished devotees are engaged in chanting the names of Hari - PrahlAda in particular, overwhelmed by emotion, ecstatically cries “Hari Hari”. The King of the oceans, sage NArada and Sanaka engage themselves in praising the Lord. The Lord, bestower of boons to Thyagaraja, protects all of them”*.

In balamu kulamuyEla (Saveri), Thyagaraja uses the unlikely and impossible to assert that no endeavour can be fruitful without devotion to Rama:

*Of what avail are mere brutal strength and superior lineage without the redeeming element of devotion to RAma which alone can lead to prosperity? Can the crow and the fish get the benefit of a holy bath? Can the mere steady posture of the crane with closed eyes constitute meditation? Can the mere eating of the leaf by a goat constitute upavAsa? Can a million glowing fireflies make the effulgence of the sun and the moon? Can mere living in a cave make a sage of a man? Can a monkey's life in the forest be interpreted as renunciation? Can jangamas (wandering Saivite monks) who don't speak be assumed to be on maun vrat? Can naked children be called Digambara ascetics? Only genuine devotion to Sri Rama who nurtures Tyagraja can be the valid currency.*

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# ThyagarAja and Srirangam

*Dr. K. Gayatri*

Shri ThyagarAja, one of the trinity composers of Carnatic music has several compositions to his credit. His compositions showcase the splendour of sAhitya and sangIta and cover a wide range of emotions. Like the other two trinity composers, ThyagarAja has also travelled to a few kshetrAs, one of which was to the temple town of Srirangam, the abode of Lord RanganAtha and Goddess RanganAyaki. It was at this kshetra that he dedicated a set of 5 kritis describing the grandeur of the Lord , collectively known as the Srirangam pancaratnam.



The 5 gems are listed as follows:

*-RAjuvedale-tOdi-rUpakam*

*-O RangasAyee- Kambhoji-Adi*

*-VinarAdanA manavi- DevagAndhAri-Adi*

*-Karuna jUdavaaiyyA- SARangA-Adi*

*-ChoothAmurArE- Arabhi-RUpakam*

These krithis were composed as part of his pilgrimage to Srirangam during the Cittirai Utsavam. It is the day when the Lord appears on his Kudirai VAhanam ( horse). ThyagarAja describes the process" *RAjuvedale JUtA murAre*". He says "*thejarillu navaratnapu divya bhooshanamulidi ranga*" wherein the Lord is bedecked with shining ornaments

which is made even more beautiful by the presence of the river Cauvery flowing by His side: “*kAveri theeramu nanu pAvana magu rangapurini*”, thus celebrating his *Vaibhogam* during the procession.

The rAgA takes a very brisk form in this composition. Set in rUpaka tAlA, it begins with the AdhAra shadja. Interestingly we have a ThyagarAja kriti beginning with each svara in the rAgA tOdi. This composition, being set in a *madhyamala kAla* gait, has immense scope for manOdharma and was much popularised on concert platforms by Vidwan Shri Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar.

In rAgA dEvagAndhAri “*vinarAda nA manavi*”, ThyagarAja pleads to the Lord to listen to his outpourings. The rAgA lakshana of dEvagAndhAri and the sAhitya complement each other so perfectly thus bringing out the sentiments of ThyagarAja’s mind. The *carana* where ThyagarAja addresses the Lord as “*bhAgadEya vaibhOga ranga sri*” brings out the emotion of intense devotion both musically and textually. This kriti is set to *dEsAdi* structure which was a patented forté of ThyagarAja.

The magnum opus kriti “*O Ranga sayee*” in kAmbhoji is a masterpiece.

He says “*O Ranga sayee pilicite O yanutsu rA rAdA?*” - when I call your name, why can’t you respond saying ‘O’?. It showcases the art of the usage of how sangatIs are beautifully woven into the kriti. The logical progression of the sangatIs build the beautiful essence of kAmbhoji. In the *carana*, the composer says “*bhoolOka vaikuntamu idiyani nilOna nIvE yuppongi*”--“You consider Srirangam as Your Supreme abode and You seem to enjoy with Your consort SrI dEvi”. This composition was immortalised by Vidushi Smt M S Subbulakshmi.



ThyagarAja pleads for the Lord’s grace and compassion at all times, in the composition “*karuNa jUdavaaiyya*” in rAgA SARanga. The rAgA’s essence is brought out so melodiously thus denoting a feeling of calmness throughout the composition. This kriti has been made popular by Alathur brothers & Vidwan Shri S. Ramanathan.

A brisk composition in Arabhi “*choothAmurArE*” has multiple *carana*-s which adds much grace to the composition. ThyagarAja’s several compositions in Arabhi ranging from *SAdincene* to *choothAmurArE* stands as a testimony. This kriti is synonymous with Vidwan Shri Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer and Maharajapuram Shri Santhanam.

The epitome of *Bhakti* is the real message in all the compositions of ThyagarAja. The fact that the Lord RanganAtha himself revels in the presence of his true devotees through ThyagarAja, is quite evident.

We are fortunate to have such beautiful compositions dedicated to this Kshetra. May we revel in the music of these exquisite kritis and thus feel blessed.



*K. Gayatri is a disciple of the legendary late Smt. Suguna Purushottaman (Musiri/ Semmangudi Parampara). She is presently under the tutelage of Vidushi Suguna Varadachari. She has presented concerts in all major sabhas in Chennai and all over India and abroad. She is an A grade artist of All India Radio, Chennai. She has received numerous awards including the Outstanding Senior Vocalist award from Music Academy in 2016. She received her doctorate in music from Madras University in 2021, thesis titled "The concept of Vaishnavism in Muthuswami Dikshitar's compositions".*





# What fascinates me about Sadguru Sri Thyagabrahmam

*Kalaimamani Mudikondan S. N. Ramesh*

Endaro Mahaanubhavulu Andhariki Vandanamu

One thing which fascinates me about Sadguru Sri Thyagabrahmam apart from his immortal krithis, Pancharatnams in the 5 Ghana ragas Naattai , Gowla , Aarabhi , Varali , and Sri or the Pancharatnams on the Kshetras Lalgudi , Srirangam, Thiruvotriyur, Kovur and the Divya Nama krithis , Prahlada Bhakthi Vijayam etc is the NAUKA Charitram.

Although Swamigal has composed majority of the compositions on his Upaasanaa Moorthy , Lord Sri Rama he has composed Nauka Charitram, on Lord Krishna , the story centering around a boat journey undertaken by Lord Krishna in the company of Gopis ( Cowherd women). In order to put down the pride of the Gopi s Sri Krishna causes a terrific storm and a hole in the boat. Faced with the disaster the Gopi s shed their pride and surrender to Lord Krishna

Coming to the composition part of the Nauka Saint Thyagaraja himself has indicated the ragas to be adopted which are found in the original manuscript copy of the Charitram written by Walajapet Venkataramana Bhagavathar , a direct disciple of the Saint Thyagaraja , putting a stamp of authenticity and correctness . This proves the excellence Thyagaraja Swami reveals in composing the Krithi s especially with respect to Forms and Ragas .

Surprising, yet happy to be a member of the 9-member artistes team to present the Nauka Charitram as Musical Opera led by Sangitha Kalanidhi , Padma Bhushan Trichur Sri Ramachandran and Smt Charumathi in different cities of Europe twice in the year 2003 and 2005 . Even though the sahithyams are in Indian language Telugu it was heartening to see the western audience following the lyrics of the compositions , translated printed and circulated among them with the meaning also in their local language be it French , German and Deutsche throughout the live performance.

Invoking the blessings of Sadguru Sri Thyagabrahmam and his Ishta Devatha Sri Ramachandra Moorthy.



***Mudikondan S.N.Ramesh*** was born in a family with a musical tradition. He commenced his training in Veena at the tender age of nine from his father Sri S. Narayanaswamy Iyer., a senior disciple of Sangeetha Kalanidhi Mudikondan Sri Venkatarama Iyer. He has received several awards and has also been honored as the Asthana Vidwan of Sri Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam and Sringeri Sri Sarada Peetam by their Holiness. He is an A Grade artiste of AIR CHENNAI. Mudikondan Ramesh is also a recipient of state award Kalaimamani from Tamil Nādu Government. He has been performing in Vaadhyalahari Instrumental ensemble with Sangitha Kalanidhi Kumari A Kanyakumari. Sri Ramesh has been giving stage performances for the past four decades, all over the world.

# Shivanubhava in Sri Thyagarajasvami's compositions

*R K Shriramkumar*

dhyAyan kRte yajan yajnaih tretAyAm dvAparercayan  
yadApnoti tadApnoti kalau sankIrtya keshavam - Padmapurana

The Bhakti movement was one of most impactful happenings in the history of the land of Bharata. As a strong unifying force, it advocated the idea of salvation solely by singing the praises of the Supreme. It was a movement that enriched the spheres of music, dance, painting, literature, sculpture and the like by the invaluable contributions of several saints, poets, artists and the royalty. To Carnatic music, in particular, the contribution of the illustrious Trinity - Shri Thyagarajasvami, Shri Shyama Shastri and Shri Muttusvami Dikshitar stands unparalleled. Their colossal compositions, that are an enjoyable amalgam of exquisite poetry and melliflous music, bestow the inexplicable bliss of sahitya and sangita laced with the sublime experience of Bhakti.

The formless and nameless Brahman, the Supreme Being, is celebrated and adored in myriad forms. Important amongst them are the six cardinal faiths - the Shanmata- Ganapatyam, Kaumaram , Shaivism, Shaktam, Vaishnavam and Sauram - that deal with the worship of Ganapati, Kumara ( Subrahmanya ), Shiva, Shakti, Vishnu and Surya respectively.

In the Carnatic tradition, we find a massive repository of compositions that is dedicated to all forms of the Supreme, in accordance with the Shanmata. While most of Shri Thyagarajasvami's compositions are dedicated to the Supreme as Rama, we do have a few of his compositions that are dedicated to the Supreme as Shiva. We shall try to experience Shri Thyagarajasvami's Shivanubhava through a study of a select few compositions of his dedicated to Lord Shiva.

Thyagaraja records that the nama 'Rama' is a confluence of the seed syllables 'ra' and 'ma' taken from the Vishnu and Shiva mantras respectively. In his krti, Evarani nirnayincirira, in the raga Devamrtavarshini, Thyagaraja mentions about this profound concept that showcases the non dual nature of shiva and vishnu.

It is considered a sin to discriminate between the forms of Shiva and Vishnu. Jagadguru Shri Bharati Tirtha Mahasvamigal, the Acharya of the Sringeri Sharada Peetham, once mentioned about an interesting anecdote in connection with the issue of Shiva Vishnu bheda. Once Shri Padmapadacharya, one of the prime disciples of Shri Adi Shankara, was asked to explain the term Rameshvara, the name of the Lord at the temple town of Rameshvaram. The very term Rameshvara can be interpreted, using the Tatpurusha samasa rule of Samskrtam grammar, as 'ramasya ishvarah' - meaning one who is the lord of Rama or using the Bahuvrihi samasa rule as 'ramah ishvarah yasya sah' which means the one, whose lord is Rama. In the first instance it indicates that as the lord of Rama, Shiva is greater than Vishnu. In the next interpretation it indicates that Vishnu is greater than Shiva. It is said that Shri Padmapadacharya, being an Advaitin, rejected both of these interpretations and instead explained the term using the karmadharaya samasa rule as - ' Ramashca asau Ishvarashca ' - Rameshvara is he who is Rama and he who is Ishvara, thereby professing the non dual nature of Shiva and Vishnu.

Shri Thyagaraja also indicates that both forms are no different from each other. He describes Lord Shiva as the embodiment of Nada in the krti Nadatanumanisham and describes Rama, in the krti Nadasudharasa, as the mortal form of Nada. The krti Nadatanumanisham is a gracious condensation of the mangala shloka of Sharngadeva's Sangita Ratnakara- Brahma granthija....Vande nada tanum ....mude shankaram.

Apart from a few general krtis dedicated to Lord Shiva, Thyagarajasvami dedicated a few compositions on the presiding deities at Tiruvaigyaru (Panchanadisha or Pranatartihara), Lalgudi (Saptarshisha) and Kovur (Sundaresha).

In the krti Ehi Trijagadisha, in the raga Saranga, on Panchanadisha at Tiruvaigyaru, Thyagaraja employs beautiful phrases that describe the grandeur of the Lord. Set in lilting samskrtam, this krti brings forth the poetic genius of

Thyagarajasvami. The prasa structure and the choice of rare compound words, seamlessly flowing with the Raga and Tala, leaves one spellbound.

From the plaintive tone of Ehi trijagadisha, he traverses to a sprightly Athana in the krti Ilalo Pranantartiharudu and asks the Lord of Tiruvaikyaru as to who named him Pranatartihara, the destroyer of his followers' sorrows? In the caranam of this composition, Thyagaraja lists the necessary elements of a sashtanga namaskara.

The Saptasthanam festival is a unique and interesting celebration performed in the Tamizh month of Chithirai. It marks the coming together of the main deities of seven Shiva kshetras situated very close to each other. These include Tiruvaikyaru, Tiruchotruthurai, Tiruvadhikudi, Tiruppazhanam, Tirukandiyur, Tiruneidhanam and Tiruppoonthuruthi. This festival marks the wedding of Nandikesha to Svayamprakashai. And the first 7 seven steps of the newly married couple, the Saptapadi, is celebrated with a procession of palanquins from Tiruvaikyaru going to each of these six other Shiva shrines, along the banks of the Kaveri. The festival ends in Tiruneidhanam (or Tillaisthanam) and all the palanquins with presiding deities and their consorts return to their respective shrines. The utsavam is accompanied by the chantings of vedas, nagasvara music and the rendition of bhajanas.

Thyagarajasvami, having witnessed this colorful festival in all its glory, documents the festivities in the krti Mucchata brahmadulaku in the raga Madhyamavati. He declares that even Brahma and all the Gods have not beheld such grandeur before! He refers to the practice of poochorithal, in which jasmine garlands are passed on to the deities in the palanquins. He extols the exquisite palanquins of the deities bedecked in precious gems (sakala navaratnapu pallakilO vEncEsi). He also describes bhagavatas performing nama sankirtana and beautifully elaborating exquisite ragas (bhAgavatulu harinAmakIrtanamu bAguga susvaramulatO vintarAgamulanAlApamusEyu).

In a sharp contrast to a vivid description of the joy of beholding the Saptasthana festival, Thyagarajasvami questions himself and his eligibility to have the darshanam of the Lord of Tiruvaikyaru. In the krti, Darshanamu seya na tarama, in the raga Narayanagaula he makes one realize the real purpose of going to a temple. He conveys that one should be immersed in the thoughts of the Lord and not just be a mere spectator of the paraphernalia associated with the temple.

Srimad Bhagavatam declares that one who sheds all inhibition and wholeheartedly seeks the Lord, will surely attain oneness with Him.

visRjja lajjAm yodhIte mannAmAni niranantaram  
kulakoTi samAyukto labhate mAmakam padam

The same sentiment is echoed in the krti Shiva shiva enarada in Pantuvarali where Thyagarajasvami says, 'Shed all your shyness or inhibition, place the Lord in the lotus of your heart and chant the name of Shiva!' (lajjAdula tolaginci tana hrjJalajamunanu sannutudainiyenci Shiva Shiva Shiva enarAda).

Amongst the krtis composed at the Lalgudi, the krti Isha pahimam in the raga Kalyani, composed on Saptarshisha once again uses rare adjectives such as bilesayabhusha (one who is adorned by that which lives in a hole, ie. One who wears serpents) and devayAnApajanaka (one who is the father of the Lord of Devayana, ie Shiva, the father of Subrahmanya). All three charanams are in madhyamakala and we are treated to a rich tapestry of Kalyani, sahitya embellishments such prasa.

The wordplay continues in Madhyamavati kriti Deva Sri tapastirthapura nivasa, yet another composition dedicated to Lord Saptarshisha at Lalg. Thyagaraja uses compound words which at first glance seem to convey a totally different meaning! For example, pAshahastaganesha haraNa almost reads as one who did away with Ganesha! But on further reflection, the compound word is split as one who destroyed the Lord of ganas who carry nooses in their hands, i.e., Shiva the destroyer of Yama, the god of death). Similarly, he employs the term palashanarinalesha which is actually broken down as pala+ashana+ari+nuta+Isha which means one who is worshipped by the enemy of flesh eaters, i.e. One extolled by Indra, the king of Gods who is the rival of Asuras or demons. He has used the same word to convey different meanings. E.g., naganuta means one propitiated by Sesha, the king of serpents. Here



nAga means snake or serpent. In nAgadanujahara, nAga means elephant and therefore nAgadanujahara refers to the slayer of Gajasura

Sahitya and Sangita, while always in tandem in his compositions, there are instances where one takes the pride of place, allowing the other to come along graciously. An instance where the sangita takes the foreground and the sahitya provides the canvas to paint the raga in all its grandeur is the krti Korisevimparare in the raga Kharaharapriya. Amongst the compositions dedicated to Sundareshvara at Kovur, this krti stands out in terms of its musicality and structure. The sahitya is extended over the course of multiple avartanas in a varnam like structure. We also see a similar treatment of the sahitya in the krti Koluvaivunnade in Bhairavi. The structural preference in such compositions is towards the trajectories of Kharaharapriya and Bhairavi

Shambho shiva shankara is a charming little divyanama kriti on Shiva, set in the raga Shankarabharanam. This caranams of this samskrta composition begin on the notes of the ragas in the arohana krama (ascending scale). The contours of Shankarabharanam and the artistry of Samskrutam in this composition is a sheer delight.

Thyagarajasvami's echoes the Sangita Ratnakara's definition of Nada in Mokshamugalada (Saramati). 'Na' is prana (vital force), 'da' is anala (fire/energy) and their union brings forth Nada. In the Caranam of this evergreen composition, Thyagarajasvami categorically states -

'Those who don't understand the blissful state of Shiva who plays the Vina, reveling in the nadanubhava of seven notes emanating from the cosmic sound, pranava, generated from the union of prana and anala, how can they ever hope to attain moksha?'

'Janati Rama tava nama rucim maheshah' - 'Who but Parameshvara or Shiva understands the joy of chanting the name of Rama? Also, did he not lovingly teach Parvati the importance of Rama nama?' asks Thyagarajasvami in the Pantuvarali composition Saramegani.

The Shivanubhava of Sri Thyagarajasvami continues in a few more compositions. This is a bird's eye view of the nectarous ocean of Shri Thyagarajasvami's musical genius. To revel in such precious sangita and sahitya is a blessed fortune that is truly enchanting and ennobling.



*R K Shriramkumar belongs to the Rudrapatnam family of musicians, a family with a glorious musical tradition. Having had his initial lessons in violin from Vidushi Smt Savitri Satyamurthy, Shriramkumar was trained in violin playing and vocal music by his grandfather Shri R K Venkatarama Shastri. He later received guidance in violin playing from Vidvan Shri V V Subrahmanyam and in vocal music from Sangita Kalanidhi Shri D K Jayaraman. His skills were further honed through the association and knowledge that he gained by accompanying the doyens of Carnatic music like Sangita Kalanidhis Shri Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer, Smt M S Subbulakshmi, Smt D K Pattammal, Shri D K Jayaraman, Shri Palghat K V Narayanaswamy, Smt T Brinda and others. A recipient of many awards, Shriramkumar has traveled far and wide on concert tours. His solo performances and lec-dems have also been greatly received and appreciated by audiences world-wide. He is also an excellent tunesmith and has set to music lyrics for many dance productions. R.K. Shriramkumar has beautifully tuned "Sri Sharada Stuti Manjari", a composition of the Jagadguru of Sringeri Sharada Peetam.*

# Painting Music with Thyagaraja Svami

*Sreevidhya Chandramouli*

From Bahula Panchami when Thyagaraja Svami attained Samadhi to the time when Easter is observed in the Western hemisphere, he has been the most celebrated composer in South Indian Music. As a teacher and a performer, I introduce a wide array of composers to my classroom. Among this musical wealth, Thyagaraja's compositions span a range of ragas that are accessible across a wide array of students.

Though Thyagaraja's chosen deity is Rama, and he often composed through the lens of the Ramayana and Mahabharata, there are compositions on other deities as well. It is also important to note that he lived through the cusp of British India yet has not explicitly referred to the political and social situations of his time in his compositions. Rather, they have resorted to the timeless values of the Puranas and Ithihasas. With this rich palette that defines his world of mythology, thoughts, lessons and advice, the vivid detail in his compositions provide inspiration for visual depiction through painting.

In the early 2000s, I was introduced to watercolor painting by Late Sri. S. Rajam, the great musician-painter-musicologist. During one of my summer visits to India, I remember a conversation with him as to his approach to depicting Carnatic composers like Thyagaraja. Our discussions would run for hours on the times and difficult lifestyles of uncha-vriti-bhagavatars (teachers who earned their daily sustenance of food through alms). Through these sessions, I also learned more about how he painted Svaras, which are the meditative practices centered around 'nAdA' (roughly translated as sound) in many compositions.

The understanding I developed from these discussions provide the basis for my paintings, practice and teaching of music. As a mark of respect and admiration of Thyagaraja, I hope the readers enjoy the paintings and recordings of a few of his compositions below. Two of the three compositions I have chosen, have chitta-svaras practiced in the Karaikudi Veena tradition.



Here is a representation of Sriganapatini in the raga Saurashtram by Thyagaraja. The dancing Ganesha is depicted for the lines 'gallu gallanu nunchi' where he thumps his feet adorned with ankle bells.



The composition [ŚObillu](#) in Jaganmohini is represented by the lines 'nAbhi hrt-kaṇṭha rasana' from where 'nAdA' (roughly, sound) emanates. This composition is practiced in Karaikudi Veena Tradition with a grand chitta-svara attributed to Karaikudi Sambasiva Iyer.

The painting of Thyagaraja with the vision of Rama, Sita and Lakshmana is befitting for many of his compositions. Here I have chosen '[kanugontini](#)' in the raga Bilahari where he has a vision of Rama. As I embarked on this painting, I imagined the living condition of the times and brought it out through the juxtaposition of cracked walls, a kerosene lantern and oil lamp. Again, this composition is practiced in Karaikudi Veena Tradition with a befitting chitta-svara attributed to Karaikudi Sambasiva Iyer (younger of the Karaikudi Veena Brothers).







([ŚObillu](#))



([kanugontini](#))



Chandramouli Narayanan (left) and Sreevidhya Chandramouli (right)

*Sreevidhya Chandramouli is a tenth generation descendent of the illustrious Karaikudi Veena Tradition of South India. She learnt the art form from her mother, Late Smt. Rajeswari Padmanabhan (grand-daughter of the legendary Karaikudi Subbarama Iyer). Sreevidhya later pursued advanced vocal training with Late Sri. Vairamangalam Lakshminarayanan and Smt. Suguna Varadachari. She is also a watercolor artist and a disciple of the legendary musician, musicologist and painter, Late Sri S. Rajam.*



# The concept of NĀDA in Thyagaraja's Compositions – Online Lecdem by Sriram Parasuram

## Kamakshi Mallikarjun

### The concept of NĀDA in Thyagaraja's Compositions – Online Lecdem by Sriram Parasuram

Nāda (*nadam*), the *timbre/resonance/reverberation/tonal quality* transforms the sounds we hear into beautiful music that we enjoy and can listen to for hours. It feels like a very familiar concept. Yet, the concept of Nāda can be esoteric and mystical, especially when we look at the number of different definitions of the same term across multiple centuries. As Sriram Parasuram mentioned at the outset of his wonderful lecdem, Nāda is indeed a very “vast topic”, spanning a multitude of realms from “metaphysical, spiritual to physics”. He aptly described Nāda as “a significant driving force behind Indian Classical Music” and “it is both bound and unbound”. In this lecdem, the topic was centered on “the concept of Nāda in Thyagaraja's compositions” since this online program was part of Sruti Philadelphia's Thyagaraja's Aradhana celebrations. Sriram Parasuram gave an earlier lecdem on a related topic, Raga Creations of Thyagaraja as part of Chennai Sruti Magazine's Lecdem Mela Series on the composer.

Sriram Parasuram's lecdems are not only informative and enjoyable, they broaden our musical horizons and understanding. One such example happened in this lecdem, related to a question on the pairing of Kanakanaruchiraa (sentiment in the lyrics are not melancholic) with the raga Varali (usually associated with sadness). Sriram's thought provoking response was that in his view “Every raga is neutral and emotions associated with a raga are a result of our subjective understanding”. He added that listeners may associate Varali with pathos in this current era but the raga itself, that may have originated from an ancient raga called Varati, continues to evolve and may not have been limited to this sentiment across centuries.

Given the vastness of the topic, Sriram Parasuram focused on sharing a bird's eye view of twelve Thyagaraja compositions that reference Nāda and/or related musical concepts. For each song, he first explained the scale of the raga and sang key phrases that identify the raga. He sang excerpts of each song and then explained the meaning of the song, highlighting the link back to the theme. As with all his presentations (*such as this one on raga Kalyani which he analyzed, adding one dimension after another*), this lecdem spurs us to explore this multi-faceted topic further. In that quest, I am enclosing some additional insights from multiple scholars, discovered in further reading and listening.

### Summary of the melodies highlighted

#### 1. Nādatanumanisam, raga Cittaranjani, tala Adi, [lyrics](#)

[Song in Raga Cittaranjani \(janya of Kharaharapriya\)](#)

[Song in Raga Cittaranjani \(janya of Jhankaradhwani\)](#)

In the very first line, Thyagaraja describes Shankara (Shiva) as the tangible manifestation of Nāda. Sriram Parasuram elaborated how Thyagaraja impresses upon the listener, “the centrality of the principle of nāda being the significant driving force in Indian Classical music”. Thyagaraja then links this fundamental concept to related musical facets of “raga, svaras, murchanas and vadya, melding in the spiritual and artistic traditions spanning “bhakti, sadhana and yoga.” Sriram Parasuram pointed out that Cittaranjani is a nishadantya raga (only goes up to Ni). He also demonstrated, by shifting the tonic on the 3 basic notes that are also found in Sama Veda, that the rest of the notes of the raga can be derived. This was Cittaranjani as a janya of Kharaharapriya.

- In [Features of the Kriti: A Song Form Developed by Tyāgarāja](#), William Jackson echoes this description stating that the musical notes of Sama Veda are invoked in this song and adds that “The opening sloka of the Sangita Ratnakara refers to Siva as Nadatanu, “he whose body is composed of sound.”

- This sloka was sung by Sumathi Krishnan in her lecdem on [Nada, theory and practice of music](#) and its last line is Vande nadatanum samuddara jagath gitam mude shankaram and this sloka ties the concept of nada to other musical aspects of sruti, grama, varna, alankara
- Music Research Library has a translation of the [first chapter of the Sangita Ratnakara](#)(written in 13<sup>th</sup> century) where its author, Sarangadeva describes Nāda as “sound”, “song is of the nature of Nāda”, “instruments are praiseworthy as manifesting nāda” and Nāda has two forms heard/unheard.
- This makes us curious about which was the earliest ancient text that described Nāda. Musicologists Hema Ramanathan and N Ramanathan answer that in their [Etymological Definitions and Technical Definitions of Musical Terms](#), where they explain that the term Nāda, is found in Brhaddesi written by Matanga and does not appear in the earlier work Nāṭyaśāstra. Their translation of the definition in Brhaddesi is “Nāda therefore stands for “expressive sound. In music it denotes sound which is articulated in the form of tone, i.e., the sound specific to music. It is described as emanating from the desire to create music, and is the stage before tonal articulation. Nāda is identified with the conception as well as the expression of musical sound”
- One more interesting dimension to Raga Cittaranjani: there are two ragas with the same name, one a janya of Kharaharapriya and another, a janyam of vivadi mela Jhankaradhwani! And as shared above, Sangita Kalanidhi R Vedavalli sings this song in the raga that is a janya of mela Jhankaradhwani.
  - The Journal of Music Academy documents the expert committee debates about this raga in [1937](#)(page 175) and [1950](#)(52) with no definite conclusions.
  - In her thesis on PATHANTARAS IN THE COMPOSITIONS OF “MUSICAL TRINITY, Ritha Rajan lists this song in List of Compositions found in the Umaiyaipuram Manuscripts, as “cittaranjani oru kalai (under 19th mela)” and calls it the earlier version.
  - I reached out to Ramji Janakiraman to ask which version of this song his father Sangita Kala Acharya S R Janakairaman sings and got the most amazing reply: that SRJ Mama(currently in his nineties) sings Nadatanumanisham in Cittaranjani (janya of Jhankaradhwani) and as a result of this question posed to him that day, he planned to teach this song (in this earlier version) to his students, the Toronto Brothers!

## 2. Nadopasana, raga Begada, tala Adi, [lyrics](#), [song](#)

This kriti which is in Vilamba kala (slower tempo) is set in the majestic rakti raga Begada. However, since Thyagaraja dedicates this as an “ode to Nāda”, the approach to the raga itself is very different: it is so mellifluous, pleasing and soft.” The central theme is meditation and worship through the vehicle of music and relentless pursuit of Nāda.

- This equivalence is highlighted by Thyagaraja in multiple songs including this rare kriti [Sripa priya sangitopasana\(raga Adana\)](#); William Jackson starts [Features of the Kriti: A Song Form Developed by Tyāgarāja](#) with a translation of this song

## 3. Sogasuga mridanga talamu, raga Sriranjani, tala Rupakam, [lyrics](#), [song](#)

This popular song is primarily about various aspects of Sangita(music) which is inherently linked to Nāda. It is set in raga Sriranjani, a symmetric raga, shadava(6 notes) in ascent and descent. Thyagaraja extends the concept of Nāda to tala (percussion and laya). He elaborates on additional “technical terms of yati(geometry in rhythmic patterns)”, “visrama (pauses)” and critical aspects of music such as adherence to sruti(pitch) with clarity of notes, “following the rules of prosody” and invoking the navarasas. And, it is all anchored on “the bedrock of bhakti.”

## 4. Nāda sudhaa rasam, raga Arabhi, tala Rupakam, [lyrics](#), [song](#)

This is set in the rakti raga Arabhi (audava-sampurna) that is also featured in the Pancharatna set of kritis. Using the bow as a metaphor for the raga itself, Thyagaraja weaves in constructs of additional musical elements, namely



svaras, bells of the bow, the type of ragas ghana, naya, desiya as the strings of the bow and tempo equivalent to the pace of arrows leaving the bow.

- In [\*Features of the Kriti: A Song Form Developed by Tyāgarāja\*](#), William Jackson links the concept of rasa(nectar) to the meaning of the word Pallavi ("sprout with a sap, juice")

5. Mokshamu galada(**pranava nadamu**), raga Saramathi, tala Adi, [lyrics](#)

- [Instrumental\(flute\)](#)
- [Vocal](#)

This lilting masterpiece is synonymous with the raga Saramathi which was a creation of Thyagaraja. Many such kritis of Thyagaraja are 'stamps, indelible entities of the underlying raga.' Saramathi is a sampurna-audava with the scale of Natabhairavi in ascent and Hindolam in descent and yet, with its own distinct identity. In this song, Nāda is equated with the primordial sound of the Omkara and again, the focus on seeking salvation via music and bhakti.

6. **Ragaratna malikache**, raga Reetigowla, tala Rupakam, [lyrics](#), [song](#)

Here the garland which usually consists of hundreds of flowers is a metaphor for hundreds of ragas with nadam.

7. **Raga sudhaa rasa(nāda omkara svara)**, raga Andolika, tala desadi, [lyrics](#), [song](#)

This distinctive song is set in the rare raga Andolika (janya of mela 22 kharaharapriya). Andolika has an asymmetric structure : "different audava in ascent and descent"(Arohanam: S R2 M1 P N2 S, Avarohanam: S N2 D2 M1 R2 S). After singing some key phrases of this uniquely, structured raga, Sriram Parasuram eloquently explained how we should approach learning and listening to these great compositions: "The kriti is a treasure house of sahitya, meaning and inspiration also contains the raga Andolika, a creation of Thyagaraja. Thyagaraja captures the personality of the raga in the kriti and that becomes the basis for our understanding of the raga; there is no enunciation of aroha, avoraha, murchanas; everything is contained in the composition. Thus, the kriti becomes the vehicle for the raga. That is what is so magical and fascinating about these compositions; we need to look at these with that significance, they are not just tunes, they contain the raga within them." As in Mokshamu galada, this kriti also connects Nāda to the primordial sound of the Omkara.

8. Svara **Raga** sudhaa rasa, raga Sankarabaranam, tala Adi, [lyrics](#), [song](#)

Sriram Parasuram called this iconic song as a treatise on Sankarabaranam. In the line where neraval is usually done, moolaadhaaraja nādamerugute, Thyagaraja brings in the facet of sound production as well. And there is the comparison again to nectar, "as you drink in the rasa of raga and svara, it is indeed heaven."

9. Samajavaragamana(**nādachala deepa**), raga Hindolam, tala Adi, [lyrics](#)

- [Song in Raga Suddha Hindolam](#)
- [Song in raga Hindolam](#)

Sriram Parasuram pointed out the svarakshara of Sa and Ma at the start of the song and that "they are also the jeeva svaras of Hindolam." And in this evergreen song, Thyagaraja again highlights the link between music and its underlying notes or svaras to the Sama Veda.

- *It is fascinating to discover that this song also has multiple versions with Sangita Kalanidhi Brinda & Mukta singing it in the raga Suddha Hindolam while the popular version is sung in Hindolam.*

10. Vara **raga laya**, raga Chenchu Kambhoji, tala Desadi, [lyrics](#), [song](#)

Sriram Parasuram highlighted how Thyagaraja was also a master of satire. In this composition he derides “people who go about prattling as if they know all about raga and laya” without grasping the technicalities of “svara, raga and murchanas”, Thyagaraja then reinforces the critical importance of internalizing that music is intertwined with Nāda which in turn links back to the primordial sound of creation.

11. Sobillu **Saptasvara**, raga Jaganmohini, tala Rupakam, [lyrics](#), [song](#)

This lilting song is set in Raga Jaganmohini (audava-shadava raga, janya of Mayamalavagowla, Arohanam: S G3 M1 P N3 S, Avarohanam: S N3 P M1 G3 R1 S) is a homage to the seven svaras that enable the creation of music. Additionally, it references the creation of sound in the human body.

12. **Nādaloludai**, raga Kalyanavasantam, tala Rupakam, [lyrics](#)

- [Song \(violin\)](#)
- [Song\(vocal\)](#)

Set in the evocative Kalyanavasantam with the scales of raga Chandrakauns in the ascent and Keeravani in the descent, and yet with its distinct identity. Sriram Parasuram concluded his presentation with this song which melodiously connects the dots between Nāda, music, and its foundational elements, the srutis, svaras and ragas.

- *Some additional songs of Thyagaraja that reference Nāda*
  - [Vidulaku](#) in raga Mayamalavagowla (nādatmaka sapta svara) in which Thyagaraja honors his predecessors in music, multiple authors of ancient treatises including Bharata and Sarangadeva
  - [Namakusuma in raga Shri](#) (nāda svaramane vara nava ratnapu)
  - [Enduku peddala](#) in raga Sankarabaranam, (nāda vidya marmambulanu telisi)
- [This article on Thyagaraja's compositions](#) by P P Narayanaswami includes a list of songs with reference to Sangita(music) which is intrinsically linked to Nāda

## Postscript

During the Q&A, the question about whether other composers referenced Nāda in their songs was raised multiple times. Here is a partial list of examples from various sites that feature lyrics of composers:

- Annamacharya(Itaramulanniyu nādamantramule),
- Vijayadasa(Nāda deivagala pujayenu),
- Arunagirinathar(Nāda Bindu kaladi),
- Muthuswami Dikshithar
  - Vatapi Ganapatm (pranava svarupa) in raga Hamsadhwani
  - Sri Gananatham (nāda layananda) in raga Esha Manohari
  - Abhayambikaayaah (nāda laya) in raga Kedaragaula
  - Shri Kamalambikayah param(nāda maya) in raga Bhairavi
  - Nottusvara Chintayeham sada (nādaantastham sundaram),
  - Sri Dakshinamurtim (nādanta veditam) in raga Adana
  - Jambupathe(nādadabindo) in raga Yamuna Kalyani,
- Syama Sastri
  - Sariyevaramma(nāda rupini) in raga Bhairavi
  - Santatam Ennai(nāda rupini) in raga Paras),
- Koteeshwara Iyer(Nāda Nilai in raga Gayakapriya), Sudhananda Bharathi (nāda rupavatiye in raga Rupavati), Papanasam Sivan(nāda pranava in raga Shuddha Saveri)

*And many more.*

*Kamakshi Mallikarjun, 30+ years in software, lifetime of music.*



## 2022 Completed Events

### Thyagaraja Aradhana Part 1 (Virtual event)

Saturday, January 29, 2022

#### Utsava Sampradaya Krithis



Flute: J.B. Sruthi Sagar   Violin: Sayee Rakshith   Mridangam: B. Ganapathyraman

#### Pancharatna Krithi rendition



Vocal: Vidushis Amritha Murali, Nisha Rajagopalan and K.Gayatri

Violin: Vidwan R.K. Shriramkumar, Mridangam: Vidwan J.Vaidyanathan, Ghatam: Vidwan Dr. S. Karthick



Saturday, February 26, 2022

**Lecture demonstration by Dr. Sriram Parasuram (Virtual event)**

Expounding of the concept of NAADA in St. Thyagaraja's Compositions





## 2022 Thyagaraja Aradhana – Part 2



**SRUTI THYAGARAJA ARADHANA PART 2**

**Saturday, March 26, 2022**  
**Hindu Temple of Delaware**





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- ❖ 9.00 AM – Individual performances by the children and adults of our community
- ❖ 1.30 PM – Main concert
  - Vocal – Vani Ramamurthi
  - Violin – Rajeev Mukundan
  - Mridangam – Keerthi Venkataramani
- ❖ 3:30 PM – Individual Participation continues

### Vani Ramamurthi

Vani Ramamurthi, an emerging Carnatic Musician is a disciple of renowned vocalists Ranjani-Gayatri. Born and brought up in the US, she started her initial vocal training at the age of five under the guidance of Smt. Padma Kutty, based in Irvine, California. Vani made annual trips to Chennai throughout her childhood for advanced training with her Gurus Smt. Ranjani and Smt. Gayatri. She is also under the guidance of Sri Delhi P Sunder Rajan.

She lived in Chennai from 2011-2019 to actively pursue Carnatic music. She has performed at several well known sabhas in India. Vani is the winner of Kalavanta 2015, a prestigious national youth music festival held in Bangalore. She won the “Rising Stars” award from Shanmukhananda Sabha, Mumbai in 2018. Vani is an ‘A’ grade artist of All India Radio, Chennai. She currently resides in Southern California and enjoys teaching Carnatic vocal music to many students within North America, Europe, and India.

### Rajeev Mukundan

Rajeev Mukundan was initiated into Carnatic Violin at a very young age. He initially learnt from Sri N.Govindarajan and currently, he is under the tutelage of the legendary Sangeeta Kalanidhi A.Kanyakumari for over a decade. He is an A-grade artiste of the All India Radio. Rajeev has travelled extensively on concerts, both in India and abroad. He has toured and accompanied almost all the leading carnatic musicians and has been part of many unique musical collaborations. Rajeev also works full time as a Video Game Engineer in Pittsburgh, PA.

### Keerthi Venkataramani

Keerthi Venkataramani has been learning mridangam since the age of 5, initially under Dr. Ramachandran Suresh of New Jersey. He has been receiving advanced training from his esteemed guru Vidwan Melakaveri Sri K. Balaji since 2009. He has been performing extensively in several locations across the United States and India. He has had the privilege of accompanying leading artistes such as Sri D Seshachary, Kunnakudi Sri Balamuralikrishna, Sri

Nagai Muralidharan, Sri Nagai Sriram, Sri Vittal Ramamurthy, Sri Sankaran Namboothiri, Chitravina Sri Ganesh, Sri Bharat Sundar, as well as his grandmother Professor R. Subbalekshmi, and mother, Kalyani Ramani, on several occasions. Thanks to the blessings of his Gurus and elders, Keerthi is sought after as a mridangist by multiple cultural organizations across the United States as well as by performing artists (local and from overseas). Keerthi currently works as a software development engineer at Capital One.

### **Aradhana subcommittee**

Revathi Subramony

Raji Venkatesan

Rajee Padmanabhan

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

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## 2022 Upcoming Events



**Sruti**  
The India Music  
& Dance Society,  
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*Sruti Proudly Presents*

### **Carnatic Flute Concert by Vid. Shashank Subramanyam**

When: Saturday, April 23, 2022 at 4:30 PM EST

Where: Fugett Middle School, West Chester, PA



Flute - Vid. Shashank Subramanyam

Violin - Vid. Mysore Srikanth

Mridangam - Vid. Patri Satish Kumar

For more details, tickets, and to sign  
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**Sruti**  
The India Music  
& Dance Society,  
Philadelphia

*Sruti Proudly Presents*

### **Carnatic Vocal Concert by Vid. Ramakrishnan Murthy**

When: Saturday, May 21, 2022 at 4:30 PM EST

Where: Fugett Middle School, West Chester, PA



Vocal - Vid. Ramakrishnan Murthy

Violin - Vid. Charumathi Raghuraman

Mridangam - Vid. Anantha R. Krishnan

For more details, tickets, and to sign  
up for Sruti Sponsorships that cover  
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