

## SAINT THYAGARAJA (1767 – 1747)

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Indian music had developed over the millinea as a single system of music until about the thirteenth century after which it split into two similar but distinct systems the Hindustani music of North India and the Carnatic system of the South. Purandra Dasa (1484 - 1564) can be said to be the principal founder of the Carnatic system as we know it today. He codified the teaching have survived over the centuries and are in vogue even today. The next signif icant development in Dikshithar. Syama Sastry and Swat hi Thirunal.

Another great composer who has made important contributions to Carnatic music is Papanasam Sivan whose compositions in Tamil have added considerably to the scope and range of Carnatic music.

Of these five great composers, the pride o f place must indeed go to Thyagaraja who must be considered first among equals. He was a born genius and a gifted composer. He was a scholar in Sanskri t and Telegu was also proficient in Jyothishsa, Ganitha and the Manthra Sasthras. His He was not only a genius at composing but was also, contribution in the field of art music/ and operative music has been prolific and profound and to this day remained unsurpassed in terms of their poetic and melodic excellence. In many case he composed a large number of songs in a single raga and still manage to maintain the distinct individuality of every composition b y bringing out a different facet of the raga in each case. Thus for example, he has composed 26 pieces in Thodi, 20 in Kalyani, 20 in Saurashtram, 19 in Saveri, 18 in Bhairavi, 11 each in Kederagaula, Punnagavarali and Mohanam, and 15 in Arabhi and Madhyamavathi. He is reputed to have composed in all the 72 melakartha ragas, but many of thee compositions have been lost ti posterity. Analysis shows that he has employed nearly 250 ragas in his compositions, of which atleast 60 were his own creations. Thus ragas such as Bahudari, Devamrudhavarshini, Garudadhwan, Janaranjni, Mayuradhwani, Nabhomani, Nagasvaravali, Navarasakannada, Saramathi, Umabaranam and Vijayashri owe their existence to his genius.

Thyagaraja composed mainly in Telegu although a number of his songs are also in Sanskrit. His main contribution to Carnatic music was the perfection of the composition form which goes by the name of krithi or kirthana today. One set of compositions numbering about 30 are the UthsavaSampradaya - kirthanas which are used in the Bhajana Paddhathi and which are simple in musical setting to enable them to be sung congregationally by devotees who may not be well versed in music. Another group of similar simple compositions are the Divya - nama - sankirtanas which number about 80. Thyagaraja produced two story compositions presented in the form of dramas – Prahlada Bhakhi Vijayam and Nauka Charithram. Another group of compositions which deserve special mention are the 5 Panchranthana Krithis in the 5 Traditional Ghana ragas - Naattai/Gowlai, Arabi, Sri and Varali. They have a distinct and unique structure - part swarajathi and part varnam.

Thyagaraja was born in 176 7 at Thiravarur. He w as married twice, his first wife having died issueless. To the second wife a daughter was born. She had a son who died childless at the age of about thirty. Thus the main family line of Thyagaraja ended. Thyagrja led a life of voluntary poverty. He adopted Unchivritti for his livelihood, going out every day singing the praise of the lord and receiving small



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quantities of rice from those in the neighbouring houses. He spurned riches and refused to sing in praise of mere mortals in return for pecuniary benefits. He had a large number of disciples. He was not only a genius at composing but was also an extraordinarily gifted singer. He thus created a body of compositions along with a distinctive style of rendering them which have survived to this day through at least three distinctive shishya paramparas or disciple streams. He passed away on Pushya Bahula Panchami day, the 6th of January 1847. This day has been celebrated ever since by the Carnatic music fraternity not only all over India but also every country in the world in which a body of Carnatic music enthusiasts exist. In that sense he has become an international figure revered all over the world. In fact in India, he has been elevated to more than sainthood. A temple has been built for him where regular pujas on the occasion of the annual observance of his passing away.

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