

Tyagaraja - "the supreme vaggeyakara of the emotions"

G. SESHACHALAM, M.A.

Sri Tyagaraja amongst the galaxy of genius-composers, in addition to achieving pure intellectual perfection and satisfying the most exacting demands of aesthetics, stands out alone — outstandingly and unquestionably so — as the supreme vaggeyakara of the emotions par excellence. He succeeds, as no one else, in expressing emotion plus conveying and transmitting vibrations as much to the singer as to the listener. He bathes consciousness with emotional nectar. His pieces shake you to the very foundations. He invites you to become an active sharer of his experiences and innermost feelings. He lights up your face with inner smiles of suffused delight and contentment. He brings unshed tears to your eyes when, in his compositions, he seems to raise figurative hands in helplessness and even despair. His pieces are powerful mirrors which fully and faithfully reflect the mood of the moment. And many are the moments of his memorable and mighty encounters with Almighty and with divine forces.

Pulls and counter-pulls tug at one another during one such "encounter" at the very moment of the parting of the ways, when Tyagaraja has to opt for the proffered, dazzling "nidhi", wealth and worldly goods, name and fame or for the far higher merit of "seva" in Ramuni sannidhi. In his Kalyani masterpiece Tyagaraja persuades you to glimpse into the secret recesses of the chamber of his heart, while grappling with the horns of the dilemma. Indeed a moving and deeply convincing piece of the highest order, combining the aptest raga, appropriate time-measure and tempo most suited to the theme of the encounter of the moment!

Tyagaraja calms you down to quiescence in Syama with his Santamuleka; quickens your pulse in life-reviving Bilahari with his Najeevadhara; almost makes you gasp out of helplessness in Harikambhoji (?) with his Nenendivedakudura! Lament is loud and high-pitched in Devaganidhari Ksheerasagara; even startling though tempered with an element of petulance in his Namoralakimpa. We should deem it great good fortune to share with Tyagaraja the glow of obvious but unuttered pride with which the Rajarishi swells at the sight of his divine wards and adolescent Sri Rama's promise of prowess, most charmingly brought out in Alakalella in Sri raga. This ebullience is continued in Rudrapriya with the piece Lavanya Rama overflowing with sringara. Of all the incarnations, that of Chakravarti Tirumagan is outstanding as a beacon light emphasising 'saranagati' as the one infallible means to salvation. Valmiki's classic reaches intellectual and poetic heights of incomparable grandeur. Tyagaraja takes up Valmiki's adi-kavya theme by theme, brightens and polishes it like a jeweller, gives it a context and creates a tonal atmosphere of emotional depth, achieving at the same time an extremely apt setting. Even those mighty minds which can encompass Valmiki in his entirety admire Tyagaraja's interpretation of well known events and situations in the Ramayana like connoisseurs who admire individual pieces of sculpture ensconced in an ancient temple. It is to Tyagaraja that we must turn in order to drink deep and enjoy

THE MUSIC ACADEMY, MADRAS - FORTYFIRST CONFERENCE, 1967

each episode in integrated perspective detail, clothed in the beauty and completeness of comparison and contrast.

You swing and sway to the soothing strains of Tyagaraja's Yadukula Kambhoji and Neelambari pieces. You almost rise and descend following the phrases of his Uyyala Oogaviah. Tyagaraja pulls at your heart-strings. En rapport, you gladden or sadden as your intimacy with his compositions thickens, as if he was here and now. Tyagaraja's life reaches towering heavenly heights but also plunges into unfathomable depths such as only jeevanmuktas, God-intoxicated mystics, saints and Alvars are blessed with. Shorn of material wealth or even possessions and attendant problems Tyagaraja's life is enriched by the divine grace of the poetry of music and the music of poetry of the highest order. "Seeing God and speaking with God" Tyagaraja is ever aglow with the effulgence of nadopasana which constantly kindles in him sparks of musical brilliance lighting up into incomparably mellifluous and elegant compositions. To the initiated, "Tyagopanishad" goes as deep as Devarams and Pastrams, often deeper, because Tyagaraja endows each piece of his with clear, pronounced distinctiveness, with a "personality and individuality" as it were.

Legend has it that the sage Narada, nadopasaka with tambura always in hand, was once granted the 'vision' of ragas in their fullness and roundness, each with a divine and distinct personality and individuality. The symbolism and disquieting details apart, the significance of the narration appears to me to be the emphasis on the personality and individuality of the raga "forms". The projected imagery which the mind conjures up on listening to a raga should correspond to it, or very nearly so. A correct rendering should evoke the appropriate mood, delineate the true character, even suggest the matching "gait" and movements. Only then does it serve its ends.

Tyagaraja clothes hundreds of his pieces with similar "personality and individuality" by means which his genius renders subtle and even sometimes obscure and which baffle analysis. But the results are magical. He innovates the "kriti" form, improving upon the then prevailing "kirtana" format, thus freeing the "feet" of his compositions from the bondage of rigid repetitive monotony and furnishing them with greater sweep in a wider area. Of each raga, Tyagaraja makes selective use of swaras, swara-phrases and sthayi positions so as to emphasise the emotion, content and produce emotional reaction. He uses simple Telugu, telling idiom and familiar phraseology. Not content with these, he invents his unique system of "sangatis". He harnesses one of the most wellknown and powerful art devices, viz. repetition, but combines it with progressive variation, permutation and combination. He then brings out into focus different facets and emotional aspects inherent in even a single raga. He uses different time measures according to psychological settings. He adopts the most appropriate tempo which the content, the context and background demand and dictate. He weaves the consonants of his sahitya so as to ensure adherence to the intended kala. Numerous pieces are "contextual" and a complete biography has been built up entirely out of his compositions. His lakshya has rich imagery, telling parables, interesting anecdotes, convincing arguments, and apt examples which support and emphasise the principal theme of the song.*

Above all, Tyagaraja integrates each and every one of the above factors into the consonant harmonious entity of a composition with effortless ease and with inborn grace. Each factor amalgamates with cumulative effect into the others to support, strengthen and

*Those interested may go through the book "Spiritual Heritage of Tyagaraja", R. K. Math, Madras-4.

multiply the underlying emotional element. He thus endows each piece with an individuality and personality of unmistakable identity, easily recognisable and markedly different from the others. It would be an impossible exercise to attempt to transpose or interchange without destroying the unique individuality. It should be the aim of the exponent to so reproduce Tyagaraja's compositions as to represent and recreate the personality, to help the listeners to form in their own minds' eyes the self same mood, similar form, cognate atmosphere and common background as will evoke the same emotional reaction.

By far the most convincing illustration for this thesis is the solitary pair of pieces, composed at one place and almost at the same time. They are closely juxtaposed but vastly different from each other. The first is "Tera teeyaga rada" in Gaulipantu and the second of the pair is its sequel "Venkatesa ninu" in Madhyamavati. After an arduous journey and strenuous climb up the sacred seven hills Tyagaraja with eagerness and passionate yearning hastens to the sannidhi at Tirumala. There what confronts him however is a temple "tera". Tera - the word goes bandying round. Tyagaraja with closed eyes yields to a feeling of impatient disappointment and frustration in haste. He drops into silent contemplation, but "tera" reverberates in his mind. It persists. To Tyagaraja, running brooks are books and stones speak eloquent sermons: in a trice the physical "tera" transforms itself into the symbolic "veil" — matsarya, the ego in him. Thereby hangs the song, his humbled, devoted, heart-felt outpouring encounter, praying for grace and the removal of the veil-impediments to salvation. His spirit wants to soar, but the passions, mada and matsarya, intervene, retard and frustrate. The song is born of fervent introspection, reflects utter helplessness and pours forth plaintive pleading to the Almighty to crush the last vestiges of vanity and the ego. The charanams give inauspicious examples, luckless fish swallowing hooked bait, a famished person choking with a fly in his throat, irritating distractions disturbing a worshipper. To express and convey this thought content and its major introvert emotional chord what raga could be better than Gaulipantu? You cannot trifle with Gaulipantu, nor skip or hasten along its svara series. Tyagaraja's opening pallavi is deliberately made to dwell and meander around the mandra sthayi. Its audible intonation compels the singer to do so with bowed and lowered head and flexed neck, demands the slow and precise handling of the heavy syllables in studied, calculated, unhurried tempo, encouraging introspection and unravelling the double meaning. Tyagaraja significantly uses the upper tetrachord only when calling aloud the name of Tirupati Venkataramana in clear shrill sambodhana notes of exclamation.

Apocryphal as it might sound, it seems that the physical "tera" dropped! May be it was coincidence. May be the vibrations of the closely spaced sequence of Gaulipantu swaras set up sympathetic vibrations in the frail and perhaps frayed cord which might have snapped. Why not? The rhythmic footfalls of Napoleon's army sufficed to bring a bridge crashing down. Chandeliers have been smashed to smithereens by violin play. And of course there are still those who believe that the age of miracles is not past. Be that as it may, Tyagaraja was blessed with the beatific vision of the resplendant vighraha. Here comes the contrast. It is classic.

Overwhelmed, Tyagaraja burst forth into the vibrant piece in raga Madhyamavati: "Venkatesa ninu sevimpā padi vela kamulu kavalanayya" to express the exuberance of exaltation, reflecting the paramananda of His grace, the vivid awareness and the grateful acknowledgement of the disappearance of the veils of matsarya.

THE MUSIC ACADEMY, MADRAS - FORTYFIRST CONFERENCE, 1967

The full appreciation of emotional contrast secured by musical expression might be easy if juxtaposed.

The first song
 Serious mood of frustration, downcast dejection — disappointment — irritation, infuriating restlessness, ego-prompted inward pressures

Introvert
 Raga Gaulipantu — janya of Mayamalavagaula
 (All five pieces of Tyagaraja in this raga are heavy and introspective.)

Has a dirge-like drawl. Deep and heavy-sounding.
 Sahitya bristles with inauspicious sorrowful examples, veils and obstacles.
 Sambhodhana is hesitant and occurs only in the plaintive second half of pallavi.

Separated by "tera"
 Imagery is complicated and clouded.

The sequel
 Joyous, bright and buoyant. Happiness of fulfilment. Verve of good cheer. Vibrant thanks-giving for His grace and kataksham.

Extrovert
 Raga Madhyamayati — janya of Kharaharapriya
 (All the fifteen pieces of Tyagaraja in this raga are brisk, bright narratives and auspicious.)

Crisp, straightforward "audava" Clear as a silver bell.
 Sahitya is transparently clear. Single theme has no extraneous distractions or unwholesome references or undertones.
 Plunges directly. Sambhodhana opens the song "Venkatesa ninu" to the exclusion of extraneous ideas.

"Tera" has dropped!
 Imagery is of glory and joyful effulgence en rapport with Sahasra - seersha Purusha!

This pair of songs should be sung one after the other in the same way as they were composed by Tyagaraja. Only then the full impact will be felt. Each is the emotional foil for the other.