

## *Glory of Tyagaraja portrayed in the compositions of modern women composer-KM Soundaryavalli*

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**Abstract:** Carnatic music continues to grow due to the contribution of our great Vaggeyakaras who have sown seeds for the development of more new composers over the period of time. Right from the time of Aandaal who is credited to be the first women composer till today's modern and contemporary composers, there have been many women musicians who have contributed immensely to the growth and spread of music. One such composer who is lesser known to the field of Carnatic music is KM Soundaryavalli. This paper will focus on a few of her musical works that she has composed in praise of Tyagaraja.

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**Introduction:** Time and again Indian music has spread its wings to many places all around the world creating a wave of composers across the continents. When the term Carnatic music is heard the first thing that comes to most of our mind is Tyagaraja. He has been a strong pillar by giving us an elixir of music and at the same time he has also inspired many to become composers. He continues to be a manaseega guru for many musicians till also today. His life story has been an important lesson for many of us. His music has created a divine aura and every time one listens to his compositions we are always taken to an unexplainable state of bliss. It is his musical charm and divinity that has created an urge in many musicians to sing in praise of the great Vaggeyakara himself. Amongst the wave of composers that our country has witnessed, one composer who has silently paid her respects to Tyagaraja is KM Soundaryavalli. She has to her credit many number of compositions. Her boundless love and respect for Tyagaraja made her compose not one or two but 31 songs on Tyagaraja. This could be the highest set of songs composed by an individual musician specifically on Tyagaraja. This is a humble attempt to celebrate the glory of Tyagaraja and also bring to light the contribution of KM Soundaryavalli to the music fraternity.

## **Biography of KM Soundaryavalli:<sup>1</sup>**

She was born on July 22, 1914 as the eldest child to Sriman Nadadoor Ammal Narasimhacharya. Sriman Narasimhacharya served as teacher, principal and inspector of schools. He was an eminent scholar and was highly knowledgeable in Telugu and Sanskrit. His pastime was to compose poetry and he used to do exhaustive translating work of different Sanskrit works into Telugu. Being brought up in such a divine atmosphere, KM Soundaryavalli imbibed many spiritual qualities with the support extended by her illustrious father. Since she spent her childhood in Andhra, she was fluent in Telugu. She had minimal formal education and musical training. She was initiated into music by a naadaswara vidwan, Sri. Murugula Seetharamayya. She got married at an early age and shifted to Tamilnadu. Here she became familiar with Tamil and started learning the scriptures Divya Prabandhams and Kamba Ramayanam.<sup>2</sup>

## **The birth of a composer in KM Soundaryavalli:**

Having a troublesome family life, she was more drawn towards spirituality. After many miscarriages when she was blessed again to have a progeny she proceeded to the temple of Lord Nrisimha at a place called Chola Simhapuram(Also called as Ghatikadri or Sholingar)<sup>3</sup>. She worshipped the deity there and immediately the Lord appeared in her vision and assured her that she will be blessed with many issues in the future. This became a reality and Lord's words came true. One day in her dream she was questioning herself as to why she shouldn't compose a song on the lord who blessed her with children/. to which she heard an answer which was nothing but the voice of the Lord saying" Sing, I will listen". She was startled and woke up in shock. She recounted this dream to everyone and this itself became the five verses of her song. Yoga Narasimha Sevai. She followed this up with a twelve-stanza verse, Dasavathaaram, and sung it as a ragamaalika. This was the beginning of the birth of the composer. Having the genes of her father composing and poetry came naturally to her. She was constantly writing and singing songs while doing her daily chores.



<sup>1</sup> <https://www.karnatik.com/article015.shtml>

<sup>2</sup> Divya Prabandham and Kamba Ramayanam-Holy verses sung in praise Lord Vishnu and Lord Rama

<sup>3</sup> Chola Simhapuram-A hill temple of Lord Nrisimha also known as Sholingar

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She used to write on small pieces of paper whenever some song struck her. Her prayers were not mere prosaic words but were beautifully interpreted by her as keertanas, padyams and pasuram like compositions. The compositions were filled with rhetorical and prosodic beauties. Having knowledge in music she set to tune the compositions on her own in chaste Carnatic music ragas. Unlike her father who composed primarily in Telugu, she composed in Telugu and Tamil and Sanskrit as well. She used the mudra “Sunadara” in her krithis. She participated regularly in Padya Pathana<sup>4</sup> programme of AIR Chennai, till she had to give up because of her growing responsibilities. Few of her compositions on various deities are listed below:<sup>5</sup>

S. No	Name of the song	Ragam	Talam	Deity
1	Gananayakane	Hamsanandi	Adi	Uchishta Ganapathy
2	Vandan Vandan	Sunadaranjani	Adi	Krishna
3	Kalittodi Vandayo	Khamas	Adi	Krishna
4	Karunannidhiyallavo	Sindhubhairavi	Adi	Narasimha of Sholingar
5	Muruga ena	Sahana	Rupakam	Tirupporur Muruga
6	Ghatikainadan	Hemavathi	Rupakam	Nrisimha of Sholingar
7	Sriminchu	Ragamalika	Adi	Simhachalam Simhanayaki
8	Aadipuram	Ragamalika	Adi	Aandal

### The blessings of Tyagaraja and the birth of Sri Tyagaguru Stuthi keertanas:

In 1950, when she visited Thiruvayyaru, She visualised the Saint as her Guru and composed a set of thirty keertanas in Telugu on the Saint and christened the set as Sri Tyaga Guru Stuthi<sup>6</sup> Keertanas. These krithis won the appreciation of Prof. P. Sambamurthy and of Srimathi Bangalore Nagarathnamma. In 1955, the periodical Andhra Mahila serialised these keertanas with notation. These keertanas were reviewed in The Hindu dated April 21, 1957, by no less a person than Sangeeth Kala Acharya Sri. T. S. Parthasarathy. A noteworthy feature of these keertanas is that, As she considered Saint Tyagaraja as her Guru, she did not use her own mudra “sunadara” in any of the krithis. Instead she used the synonymous names of her two eldest daughters “Amrutha” and “Sudha” in these compositions.

<sup>4</sup> Padya Pathana-Program conducted by All India Radio, Chennai to

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpHcRjdUbHweD0cQVr2Ah\\_xkaXqD6UvbV](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpHcRjdUbHweD0cQVr2Ah_xkaXqD6UvbV)

<sup>6</sup> Thyaga Guru Stuti=Set of compositions on Saint Tyagaraja written by KM Soundaryavalli

### **The title of “Kavithamani”:**

She had the good fortune of visiting Kanchi Paramacharya in front of whom she presented her composition which was in Tamil set to Raagamalika on the life of Adishankaracharya. Impressed with her musical prowess and her devotion, Paramacharya conferred the title “Kavithamani”<sup>7</sup> on her.

### **Recognitions:<sup>8</sup>**

- In 1962, the Vijayawada station of AIR accepted her compositions. Some of her keerthanas have been rendered on AIR and in public concerts by the late Sri. Susarla Sivaram, Sri. Raghavachari, her daughter Amruthavalli and others.
- In 1964, discovering her knowledge of Sanskrit and her talent to set Sanskrit verses to music, the Desika Sabha, Chennai, got her to cut five gramophone discs (two 75 RPM and three LPs) of some of the stotras of Sri Vedantha Desikan. The discs were (GE 22806 & 22807 and SEDE 3606, 3607 & 3608 of Columbia)
- When she shifted to Delhi from 1965 to 1985, she set to music Sanskrit verses of Sri Vedanta Desikan, Aadi Sankaracharya and other great saints and taught them to many.
- Efforts were made by the great musician and Scholar Shri TR. Subramanian to bring out her compositions which were of great help and her compositions were recognized by others in the music fraternity.
- Sri Balantrapu Rajanikantha Rao, included Srimathi Soundaryavalli in his monumental work Andhra Vaaggeyakaara Charitramu.
- In 1991, AIR, Bangalore, chose to interview her. The broadcast had a good response.
- In his six-volume compendium of music, musicians and composers (the “GARLAND” series), Sri. N. Rajagopalan, I. A. S (Retd. ) has included the name of Soundaryavalli also, with encomiums and praise.

### **Her last days:**

In search of inner peace she joined the Sahaj Marg<sup>9</sup> mission. She composed 27 krithis in Telugu and 34 in Tamil on the method, mission and the Master which was widely appreciated.

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<sup>7</sup> Paramacharya-Acharya of Kanchi Kamakoti Peetam, Kavithamani-Title conferred upon KM Soundaryavalli

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.karnatik.com/article015.shtml>

<sup>9</sup> Sahaj Marg-A spiritual organization founded by Shri Ram Chandra of Shahajanpur

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An extraordinary feature of these krithis is that, when on the path to salvation by renunciation, she was utterly reluctant to use her signature by any means. Collections of these outpourings in Tamil are in a book “AMARA SOUNDARIYAM”<sup>10</sup>. Her lyrical compositions in Telugu are in a companion volume “SOUNDARYAVALLARI”<sup>11</sup>. Her compositions on Sahaj Marg are in another volume “SAHAJA SOUNDARYAM”<sup>12</sup>. She died on Oct 8, 1994.

### List of compositions in Sri Tyaga Guru Sthuthi Keerthanas:<sup>13</sup>

List has been obtained from handwritten manuscript given by Ms. Bhargavi Mani (Grand daughter of KM Soundaryavalli)

One of her greatest works in the field of Carnatic music is her compositions on the great Vaggeyakara Tyagaraja. She has poured her heart out and has sung his glory in not one but a total of 31 compositions and named the set of krithis as “Sri Tyagaguru Stuti keerthanas”. The list of the krithis are given below:

S. No	Name of the song	Ragam	Talam
1	Swaami paada pooja	Kedaaram	Rupakam
2	Ambujanaabhuni	Mohanam	Adi
3	Arthamune narulu	Hindolam	Adi
4	Athade dhanyudura	Valaji	Adi
5	Dinakara vamsa	Hamsadhvani	Adi
6	Gaanaamruthamunu	Kedaragoula	Adi
7	Gaanasudhaa rasa	Bhairavi	Adi
8	Geetha saastra tatwa	Thodi	Thriputa
9	GurupadasmaranamayJeevanamu	Shankarabharanam	Adi
10	Kalinarulanu gaava	Vasantha	Adi
11	Krithini chesenay	Begada	Rupakam
12	Navarasayutha bhaavamutho	Saraswathi	Rupakam
13	Paamara hithamugaa	Kambhoji	Adi

<sup>10</sup> Amara soundariyam-A collection of songs written by KM Soundaryavalli on Sahaj Marg mission’s guru in Tamil

<sup>11</sup> Soundaryavallari- A collection of songs written by KM Soundaryavalli on Sahaj Marg mission’s guru in Telugu

<sup>12</sup> Sahaja Soundaryam- A collection of songs written by KM Soundaryavalli on Sahaj Marg mission

<sup>13</sup> List has been obtained from handwritten manuscript given by Ms. Bhargavi Mani (Grand daughter of KM Soundaryavalli)

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14	Paluvidha keerthana	Malyamaarutham	Adi
15	Pancharathnamula	Simhendramadhyamam	Misra Jhampa
16	Pedalalo kucheludau	Kalyani	Rupakam
17	Sadguru sree thyagavibhuni	Kaanada	Rupakam
18	Samaanulu evarayya	Panthuvaraali	Adi
19	Thyagagurni saati evvaray	Nadanamakriya	Rupakam
20	Yemaatalaadina	Karaharapriya	Adi
21	Padambujamule	Sriranjani	Rupakam
22	Varakavi	Kalyani	Rupakam
23	Gurupada sevanamey	Karaharapriya	Adi
24	Namasudharasapanamuseyaga	atana	Adi
25	Nammi vachina	Anandabhairavi	Adi
26	Bhajana seyave	Jaganmohini	Rupakam
27	Naadhasudha rasapanamu jesina	Arabhi	Adi
28	Ragaratnamalikachey	Bilahari	Rupakam
29	Needaya naapai	Dhanyasi	Adi
30	Ramabhakti samrajya	Sriranjani	Rupakam
31	Srityagarajaswamini	Madhyamavati	Rupakam

**Analysis of few selected compositions:**

Her compositions are filled with many decorative angas. Few of these are quoted below:

Song-1: Nammivachina;Ragam: Anandabhairavi

Pallavi: Nammi Vachina nannu nayamuga brovave  
Kommani Korkela Kolallu gaanidi

Anupallavi: Immahi Ramana Panamu  
Sammata Salipina Sadaya guru swami

Charanam: Antahshatrula natamonarinchi  
Santasamuna ramu satatmu pujinchi  
Vinta kritula vidhavidhanga rachinchi  
Chintana jesina sri Tyagaraja

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**Meaning:**In this krithi she states that she has come with full faith in Tyagaraja and requests his blessings to be bestowed upon her. She praises Tyagaraja as “guru swami”, the one on this earth who has constantly shared the nectar of Rama nama without any selfishness. He got rid of all the sins like greed, anger and diligently did Rama nama japa everyday. He was the one who has written various krithis with different perspectives. Such is the great guru Sri Tyagaraja.

The decorative angas used in this krithi are:

Dwiteeyakshara prasa:

Pallavi

Nammi-Komma

Anupallavi

Immahi-Sammati

Charanam

Antah-Santa-Vinta-Chinta

Antyakshara prasa: In the charanam the anyaksharaprasa occurs in the following words-

**Monarinchi-Pujinchi-Rachinchi**

Anuprasa: Beautiful patterns can be found in the Pallavi  
**Nammi Vachina nannu nayamuga brovave**  
**Kommani Korkela Kolallu gaanidi**

Swarakshara: Suchita swarakshara occurs at two places in the pallavi

**N P M, PM**

**Nannu Mu, ga**

Song-2: Samanulevarayya, Ragam:Panthuvarali

S. No	Name of the song	Ragam used by Tyagaraja <sup>14</sup>	Ragam used by KM Soundaryavalli
1	Nammi Vachina	Kalyani	Anandabhairavi
2	Kalinarulu	Kuntalavarali	Vasantha
3	Bhajanaseyave	Kalyani	Jaganmohini
4	Ragaratnamalikache	Ritigowlai	Bilahari
5	Ramabhakti Samrajya	Suddha Bangala	Sriranjani

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.karnatik.com/co1006.shtml>



**Conclusion:** The very root of existence and spread of Carnatic music is due to the selfless contribution of Vaggeyakaras. Many were fortunate to interact and learn from the great composers directly. Few other composers diligently considered them as their guru wholeheartedly and went on to spread their glory. One such exemplary composer is KM Soundaryavalli.

She has praised Tyagaraja in many ways for example: Varakavi-exponent of poetry, expert in sangeeta (music) shastra (rituals) tatva (concepts) veda (vedic rituals), the one who spread the nectar of Rama nama, the one who spreads positivity, the one with sadguna, so on and so forth. She went on to practice the principles of philosophy that Tyagaraja preached through his compositions.

Her open declaration of Tyagaraja as her guru is visibly clear in her compositions from the repetitive mention of the words “ Sri Tyaga guru”. In spite of such excellent contribution that too on the saint composer, it is very sad that her compositions have not been popular in the music and concert circle.

It would be highly appreciable if the music fraternity takes efforts in popularizing her compositions. Doing this will definitely be a fitting tribute to Kavithamani KM Soundaryavalli’s contribution to Carnatic music and at the same time all of us can soak in the divine thoughts about Tyagaraja through her compositions.

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