Chapter - 2

Brief Biography of Saint Thyagaraja and His Highness Swati Thirunal
Saint Thyagaraja
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BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SAINT THYAGARAJA AND HIS HIGHNESS SWATI THIRUNAL

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SAINT THYAGARAJA

“The poets, singers and saints with their passionate devotion to the ideals of beauty, harmony, freedom and aspiration have had the strongest impact on society. We have had a few great spirits in the last century who emphasized the ideals of the race and demonstrated their vitality and power of survival and one of the most notable of these saint singers was Tyaga-raja”.¹

Dr. S. Radhakrishnan

Saint Thyagaraja, the great Nadopasaka, Utthama Vaggeyakara, the poet, an ardent devotee of Lord Sri Rama and a sacrificer, is the greatest name in the history of not only Karnatic Music but also Indian music. He was one of the integrated Saint singers of God and a born composer-Sahaja Vaggeyakara - who came to this world to elevate mankind through his most soulful music of enduring value. His melodious compositions, full of life, lead to the attainment of high spiritual bliss. ‘Saint Thyagaraja is believed to be the combined incarnation of Valmiki, Vyasa and Narada and his Kritis comprise a triveni of Sangita, Sahitya and Vedanta.”²
An authentic account of the full details of Thyagaraja’s life is not available to us. Some particulars have been handed down by tradition in the families of his pupils and some details have been collected from the references found in his own songs. The widely accepted version of the life history of Thyagaraja is based on two sources, the palm leaf manuscripts of his direct disciple Sri. Valajapet Venkataramana Bhagavatamar and a notebook kept by the latter’s son Sri. Krishnaswamy Bhagavatamar. Reading the biography of Saint Thyagaraja is a source of inspiration to all the music lovers of the world.

Thyagaraja was born on 4th May 1767 in Tiruvarur, a village near Tanjore District, in Tamil Nadu. This day corresponds to the 27th day in Chaitra masa, Sukla Paksha, Sapthami Tithi, Soma Vara i.e., Monday, an auspicious day of Moon. He was the third son of Ramabrahmam and Sitamma and he belonged to the famous Kakarla Vamsa, Bharadwaja gotra, Apastamba Sutra and Telugu Brahmin Community. His eldest brother was Jalpesan and another brother named Ramanathan died when he was very young. Thyagaraja’s maternal grandfather Girirajakavi was a famous poet-composer in Telugu, who was attached to the Tanjore court. References to Thyagaraja’s parentage can be found in his kritis ‘Sitamma maayamma Sri Raamudu maa tandri’ in Vasanta raga, ‘Girirajasuthata- tanaya’ in his Ganesa song in Bangala raga and in the Bilahari piece ‘Dorakunaa ituvanti seva’ he says ‘Ramabrahma- tanayudanu Thyagaraja’ i.e., ‘Thyagaraja, son of Ramabrahmam.’

Tiruvarur, his birthplace was famous for its traditions, saints, devotees and musicians and Thyagaraja sings of this place as the beautiful
The house in Tiruvarur where Thyagaraja was born, New Street
land in the world. According to him that place was not only a granary of grains but also a granary of brains mainly because the other two of the musical Trinity - Syama Sastri and Mutuswami Dikshitar - also were born in Tiruvarur. He was named Thyagaraja after the presiding deity at the great Thyagaraja Shrine at Tiruvarur and the name suited him as he lived like tyagi and was the king of sacrifices.

Thyagaraja showed early signs of greatness and was brought up with great care and affection by his parents and he was initiated into the path of music by them even from early childhood. He had the initial training in music under his father Ramabrahmam who was a singer, Harikatha performer, a scholar and a person of high spiritual attainments. He learned a number of songs of Purandaradasa, Vijaya Gopala and other composers from his mother, who was also a musician. Later he learned Karnatic Music from his Guru Sri Sonti Venkataramana, who was the Samsthana Vidvan of Tanjore. Along with school education he also mastered Vina playing, became proficient in the languages like Sanskrit, Telugu and subjects like Astrology and Mathematics. He was fast in learning and after mastering all these in a short time, he had started composing at an early age.

The slokas from the epic Ramayana were sung by him along with his father which made him thoroughly familiar with the Ramayana at the young age and thus Ramabhakti rooted in him from his childhood. Thyagaraja believed that Ramabhakti is the most supreme devotion, and Salvation can be attained only through the path of Sangita and Bhakti. He adopted Sri Rama as his Ishtadevata, composed many Kritis in praise of the
Thyagara’s house in Tiruva rur
Lord and considered Him as Parabrahma, the first God and Source of everything. On the advice of the great sage Kanchi Brahmendra, he recited Ramanama ninety six crores times, lasting for nineteen years and after completion, he had the Darsan of Lord Sri Rama on many occasions. In his Kritis ‘Kanukontini’ in Bilahari, ‘Bhavanutha’ in Mohana, ‘Kanugonu’ in Nayaki and ‘Yela nee dayaradu’ in Atana, he refers to his darsan of Sri Rama.

“It is recorded that Thyagaraja, after adopting Bhakti marga, had come under the influence of Saint Narada about whom he acquired a wide knowledge from the palm leaf manuscripts preserved by his grandfather and later, from a treatise called ‘Svaraarnava’. The magnitude and the quality of Thyagarajas’s later achievements reveal that such an effort is possible only with the blessings of saints like Sri Narada. Hence his compositions ‘Narada guru Sami’ in Darbar, ‘Sri Narada’ in Kanada and ‘Vara Narada’ in Vijayasri, extolling Narada are seen as acknowledgement of his gratitude”. The intricacies of the theory and practice of Karnatic music were mastered by him from the treatises ‘Svaraarnava’ and ‘Naradeeya’. Reference to this is evident from the Sankarabharana kriti ‘Svararaga sudha’. He learned Svaras, srutis, 72 melakartha ragas etc. and started composing mainly in Telugu and rarely in Sanskrit.

Thyagaraja is believed to have married Parvati in 1784, who died early and issueless. Afterwards he married Parvathi’s sister Kanakambal and begot a daughter named Sitalakshmi. She was married to Kuppuswami and a son named Thyagaraja was born to them who married Guruvammal and died issueless. Thyagaraja’s elder brother Jalpesan was anxious to
Thyagaraja in unchavritti costume
make money out of his brother’s music. During his lifetime he had suffered much from different people including his brother. His personal difficulties and sufferings are explained in the songs like: ‘Anyayamu Seyakuru’ in Kapi, ‘Etulakapaduduvo’ in Ahiri, ‘Toline jesina’ in Suddha Bangala etc.

Following ‘Bhagavata’ and Philosophy of Saint Narada, Thyagaraja has composed Kritis based on ‘Navavidha Bhakti’, the nine forms of Bhakti, namely Sravana, Kirtana, Smarana, Padasevan, Archana, Vandana, Dasya, Sakhya and Atmanivedana. He says “Blessed is the person who is imbued with fortunes of Rama bhakti; the darsana of such a person is an indescribable brahmananda (Supreme bliss).”

Songs of Thyagaraja are written in Telugu and Sanskrit and are known as Tyagopanishad, the essence of which is devotion or Bhakti. He says in his song ‘Sangita Jnanamu bhaktivina’ in Dhanyasi that mere knowledge of music without devotion can never lead to the right path. His Kritis composed in simple language, homely metaphors, delicate rhythm with full of meaning and great ideas, have a gripping intensity that lingers long in memory. His compositions ‘Manasu Svadhina Maina’ in Sankarabharana and “Manasu nilpa sakti leka’ in Abhogi are best examples.

At the age of 13, Thyagaraja has composed his first Sanskrit Song ‘Namo namo raghavaya’ in Suddha Todi and his first Telugu song is said to be ‘Tavadasoham’ in Punnagavarali raga. He has achieved the task of composing thousands of kirtanas, most of which are of devotional type. He
is the pride of South Indian music who has achieved success in teaching the highest philosophical truths through the medium of simple and melodious music. Besides Kritis, he has also composed the glorious Ghanaraga Pancharatna, other kshetra pancharatna kirtanas, the alluring Divyanama Kirtanas, Utsava Sampradaya Kirtanas, the Sataragaratna malika, three operas - Prahlada Bhakti Vijayam, Nowka charitram, Sitarama Vijayam etc. Unfortunately, out of these only less than one thousand compositions are available to us so far from various sources.

It is believed that Thyagaraja has composed in many of the seventy two mela ragas and its janya ragas, in popular and in many rare ragas and there are multiple Kritis in one and the same raga. His compositions in rare ragas like Pratapa Varali, Dipakam, Gundakriya etc. are also equally outstanding.

The popularity and fame of Thyagaraja’s compositions brought him many disciples. The disciples and admirers took him on pilgrimage and visited many shrines like Tirupati, Kovur, Tiruvottiyur, Kanchipuram, Nagapatnam, Sri Rangam, Lalgudi etc., where he had composed Kritis praising the presiding deities, most of which are pancharatna kritis.

The Kritis of Thyagaraja are noted for their depth of feeling, intensity of devotion and beauty of lyrics. Most of them are in prose style with melodic and rhythmic beauty which are completely filled with raga bhava and laya. Rasas like joy, tenderness, pity, love, fear, humour, disgust etc. are portrayed well in his kritis in simple style and therefore his compositions are compared to the ‘draksha’ rasa, as draksha or the grapes
taste sweet the moment they are put in the mouth. He can be described as the King of melody or Melodic Emperor since he has reached the highest peak in the realm of musical creation. Variety of Svara combinations, excellent sangatis, perfect rendering are some of the characteristic features of his kritis.

The devotional songs of Thyagaraja melt one’s heart, elevate one’s soul as these Kritis are not only compositions but also devotional prayers for all humans. He himself rendered them spontaneously with bhavana or imagination in the old Bhajan tradition. Music and Poetry flowed from his soul spontaneously and the listeners are moved by the emotional appeal of the songs. To him the purpose of composing kritis was to stress the greatness of bhakti. He tried to encourage the people to adopt Bhakti marga as he himself adopted the same. He never cared for worldly pleasures, wealth, titles or honours. He lived a life of purity, simplicity, plain living, high thinking and performed service to humanity.

He was Siddhi Purusha and Punya Purusha and his compositions symbolise Nishkama bhakti. For him music was the language of communication with the Suprême Lord Sri Rama. The most Soulful music of India has been created by him and his aim was to raise music from the concept of entertainment to the vehicle for the attainment of the highest spiritual bliss. Compositions of enduring value sprang from the depth of his heart which has kindled a passionate desire for art music in the hearts of the people. His kritis became a universal possession of mankind by surpassing all limitations of race, language and country.
Sandals used by Thyagaraja
Thyagaraja took a vow as part of his sadhana, to lead the life of a Saint, go about singing the praise of Rama nama through Bhajanas. He calls himself the desireless Thyagaraja in the song ‘Kattujesinavu’ – “Nishkama Tyaga Rajuvedala” and “Mucchhata Brahmadulaku”. He was a Naadopasaka and preacher. He sought Rama through the beautiful language of music without desiring anything. In the life of Thyagaraja, undistracted devotion to God, resulted in the abandonment or tyaga - ‘anuraagaat viraagah’. By renunciation, he attained mental peace and freedom. He believed that devotion to the God leads to renunciation and concentration on the Divine. Salvation or Moksha is achieved more easily by bhakti than by other means. Incessant loving meditation of the Supreme is bhakti, ‘Sneha-purvam anu’dhayanam -bhaktir ityabhidhiyate’.5

Thyagaraja, a person of great humility, expresses the truths of the ‘Bhagavadgita’ and the ‘Upanishads’ in simple and appealing language. He considers the Supreme as Rama and that the Kingdom of God acquired through devotion is the greatest of all treasures - ‘Rama bhakti samrajyamu’. Thyagaraja says in his song in Asaveri, ‘Epaniko janminchitti’ that he was born with the mission of singing of Sri Rama; and with full knowledge, joy and carefulness he carried out the task which was bestowed on him. In his Ganavaridhi piece ‘Dayajuchutaku’ he expresses his supreme gratification of fulfilling a noble mission entrusted to him by the Lord.

Saint Thyagaraja was a Sadachari with strict discipline and maintained a gurukula and he taught his disciples Music, Astrology, Mathematics etc. He adopted Sanyasa Ashrama and lived mainly on
Entrance to Thyagaraja Samadhi, Thiruvaiyaru
Unchavritti, ie., singing bhajans along the streets and taking alms from others. His name and songs spread far and wide during his own life time which brought him a large number of disciples who recorded those songs which flowed down the Saints mouth during moments of inspiration on Ekadasi and other sacred days. Three branches of his Sishya Parampara were Umayalpuram, Tillaisthanam and Walajapet. His direct disciples were Sundara Bhagavatar, Krishna Bhagavatar, Rama Iyengar, Valajapet – Venkataramana Bhagavatar, Vina Kuppayyar, Manambu Chavadi Venkata Subbier, Ayya Bhagavatar and others, who propagated his kritis. They tried their level best to preserve the most precious compositions of saint Thyagaraja for future generation.

Moved by the deep bhakti of this devotee Thyagaraja, Lord Sri Rama appeared before him few days before his samadhi and assured him of moksha within a few days. Saint Thyagaraja tells us about this in two of his last pieces “Giripai” in Sahana and “Paritapamu” in Manohari. “Giripai nelakonna Ramuni guri dappaka Kanti” – ‘Unerringly I have seen Sri Rama, who is installed on the hill......... My body was thrilled, tears of joy rolled down my cheecks and I merely mumbled unable to give expression to my thought’.

Saint Thyagaraja attained Samadhi on 6th January 1847 i.e., on the auspicious Pushya Bahula Panchami day in the month of Prabhava, at the age of 80 years. Some time before the Samadhi, the saint was taken to the orange robes and become a sanyasin. After the Siddhi, his body was carried with all the religious and musical honours to the banks of river
Pusya Bahula Panchami Celebrations at Thyagaraja’s Samadhi. Thiruvaiyar. Top-ranking musicians participating in singing the Pancharatnam
Kaveri and interred next to the samadhi of his Guru Sri. Venkataramanayya, as per the desire of Saint Thyagaraja.

The world wide homage offered on his death anniversary as Sangita Aradhana, especially in Thiruvaiyar, reveals the greatness of Saint Thyagaraja as a Saint composer. His innumerable Kritis which are combinations of Vedanta and devotion served as a proof of his literary greatness and musical genius.

The magnetic quality of his songs, their wonderous suggestiveness and the exuberance of his imagination have all earned for him undying fame as Acharya of Karnatic music. There is no wonder that he is described as the Beethoven of Karnatic Music and Tansen of South Indian Music. Saint Tyagarja’s name will remain immortal for ever, so long as music lasts.
His Highness Swati Thirunal Maharaja
BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF
HIS HIGHNESS SWATI THIRUNAL

"The life and work of Sri Swati Thirunal has been an enigma for everyone, whether politicians or art historians, musicians or librarians, astronomers or agriculturists, zoologists or communication experts revenue or census authority, administrators or musicians; each one in his own way is indebted to this scholar, poet, devotee, scientist, ruler of Travancore".7

Dr. (Mrs.) Kapila Vatsyayan

His Highness Swati Thirunal, a King among Vaggeyakaras, a poet, an able administrator, patron of arts and a musician was a bright star of musical scholarship and his reign is considered to be the ‘Golden Era’ in the history of Music and Dance in Kerala.

He was born on 16th April 1813 in Thiruvananthapuram as Rama Varma Maharaja to Rani Lakshmi Bai, the ruling queen of the dynasty of Travancore, Kerala and Raja Raja Varma Valiya Koil Thampuran of Changanassery palace. Padmanabhadasa Vanchibhupala Sree Rama Varma Kulasekhara Perumal was his real name. He had inherited the throne of his kingdom even while he was in the womb of his mother because at that time there was no male member senior to him in the Travancore royal family who enjoyed official recognition as a heir to the throne. Therefore he is often described as ‘Garbhasriman’ i.e., one who became illustrious even when he was in the womb of his mother.
The prince was proclaimed Maharaja of Travancore soon after his birth. He had an elder sister named princess Rukmini Bai Thampuratti and a younger brother Uthradam Thirunal Marthanda Varma. Rani Lakshmi Bai died when Uthradam Thirunal was two months old, leaving the Regency and the care of the children to her younger sister Rani Parvathi Bai.

Maharaja Swati Thirunal had an inborn talent in music and his parents provided the facilities for its proper cultivation and training along with education. Colonel John Munro, the British Resident of the State also paid personal attention in this matter, particularly in the choice of the tutors. The mastery of different languages was considered an accomplishment in those days and Maharaja was a master of nearly fourteen languages like Sanskrit, Malayalam, Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, Marati, Kannada, Persian, Hindustani, English etc. It was Tanjore Subba Rao who introduced Swati Thirunal Maharaja to the rich tradition of Karnatic music and English. Meruswami, (Anantha Padmanabha Goswami), a Marata Saint singer from Tanjore, trained him in various forms of Indian music and taught him the intricacies of music in theory and practice, subtle nuances of various musical traditions, the secrets of higher and absolute music and made him a 'nadopasaka'.

Maharaja was contemplative in nature and he found great pleasure in philosophical pursuits. Sivarama Guru, also known as Ksheerabdi Sastri, a renowned scholar in Advaita Philosophy, was his guide in spiritual matters. Having undergone a systematic education, he became a poet, a composer, a man of learning, a devotee, a genius of art and the
Ayilyam Thirunal Rani Gouri Lakshmi Bayi – Mother of Swati Thirunal (Tanojor Painting in Fort Palace, Thiruvananthapuram)
ruler of the State of Travancore. His sister Princess Rukmini Bai Tampuratti was also such a genius in poetry that she started composing at the tender age of six. Though it is known that the Princess has to her credit more than hundred music compositions, unfortunately only a handful is available to the present generation. Her musical gems in praise of Lord Padmanabha present a splendid feast to one’s mind. The songs “Sreekantesa Pahi” in Mukhari, “Sarasijanayane Parimala gatri”, in Puranira, “Sri Vasudeva Mukunda” in Bilahari are examples.

His Highness Swati Thirunal Maharaja was gifted with insight, creativity, open mindedness and had experienced the richness of the Indian tradition at its deepest. As one of the illustrious monarchs of the royal family, he was an accomplished administrator and during his reign, he had introduced many reforms for the benefit of the people which gave them peace, prosperity, progress and confidence in the government. He had adopted several measures which formed the foundation for later development and progress of Travancore and Kerala State. His reforms include social, political, administrative reforms, pioneering work in establishing agricultural institutions, education, judiciary, public health, public works, Engineering department for the construction of palaces and temples, Zoo, Postal systems, Public Libraries, Observatories, Hospitals etc. in the State. Thus the several measures adopted by him made Travancore a ‘model state’, which proved that he was a distinguished statesman with dignified vision and progressive outlook.

The rulers of Travancore had continued the tradition of the ancient kings of Kerala who were noted for their righteous rule, progressive
His Highness Swati Thirunal with his father Raja Raja Varma
outlook and all of them were patrons of arts and letters. Swati Thirunal Maharaja’s reputation as a composer of music and the services rendered by him as a patron of arts is mainly by virtue of his personal talents and interests and also due to his family tradition.

When Rani Lakshmi Bai became the Queen, the British authorities tightened their control over the administration of the state and were interfering in the day-to-day administration through a representative called Resident, who had been stationed in the state. When H.H. Swati Thirunal realised what is happening around him, his mind was filled with resentment against the British power. Maharaja assumed direct charge of the administration of the state from Regent Parvati Bai in April 1829 at the age of sixteen and ruled efficiently till the arrival of General Cullen as Resident in 1840.

The new Resident began to interfere in the affairs of the state too much and too frequently which became intolerable to Maharaja. He had to suffer humiliation from the Resident Cullen, who stood in the way of the implementation of the policies initiated by the Maharaja. A chain of events took place during the course of his regime. Though frustrated, Maharaja tried to co-operate with the British Resident, but the relationship became more and more strained in the course of time. Maharaja found it extremely difficult to function as the ruler of the state under these circumstances.

When the situation became worse, complicated and unbearable, Swati Thirunal Maharaja tried to get peace of mind from his creative activities in the field of music, dance and from his patronisation of artists.
Uthrattathi Thirunal Rani Gouri Parvathi Bayi –
Aunt of Swati Thirunal Maharaja
Later on, when the policy and action of the British authorities became more humiliating, he withdrew from all responsibilities, official contacts and surrendered himself to the will of Lord Padmanabha. In the later part of his reign, he was deeply engaged in music composing and other arts along with ardent devotion to the Guardian Deity of his family, Lord Sri Padmanabha.

As an efficient King and ruler, Maharaja was able to exercise an effective control over the working and progress of various departments. His progressive attitude and interest in innovations are reflected in his artistic activities also. He was a poet of extraordinary creative genius. Maharaja was responsible for making Thiruvananthapuram a great centre of music and other arts and the royal court welcomed the talented artists.

Swati Thirunal Maharaja’s monumental service to art and music has made his name unforgettable though he could well be honoured as an enlightened ruler. As a music composer he occupies an important place in the history of Indian music. He has concentrated his energies for promoting music and many other art forms and also for encouraging a large number of artists from all over India. He invited scholars from different places, provided them with facilities and monetary assistance. The artists of Kerala who have influenced Maharaja to a great extent are Irayimman Thampi, Shadkala Govinda Marar, Parameswara Bhagavatar and others.

The artists from Tanjore court were Meruswami, Devaraja Bhagavatar, Cintamani and the Vina experts Ramanuja Iyengar, Raghunatha Rao and Venkitadri. Vadivelu from Tanjore also came to the
The Golden Chariot
of Swati Thirunal Maharaja

Veena and Svarabat used by
Swati Thirunal Maharaja
court of Maharaja, who introduced the Western Instrument Violin in the performance of Karnatic Music in the Travancore court and he was also an expert in the techniques of Bharatanatyam dance. Kannayya Bhagavatar, one of the disciples of Saint Thyagaraja, also came to Travancore. Hindustani musicians such as Punjab Ramarjun, Kasi Govinda Das also received the King’s patronage. North Indian dance experts like Hyderabad Khansa, Vina Vidwans like Subbukkutti from Puthukkotta also received special recognition. Painters from Tanjore, South India and Europe were also associated with the royal court.

The great dance master and composer Vadivelu encouraged His Highness Swati Thirunal to devise Varnas, Padas etc. for dance. Thus Maharaja bestowed great interest in composing lyrics of dance styles like Bharata Natyam and Mohiniyattam and in choreographing dance items in both the styles. His court became one of the main centres of classical dances in South India and the artistic atmosphere of the palace court developed the talents of Maharaja more and more.

The compositions of Swati Thirunal Maharaja became the invaluable assets of South Indian music and dance because the ragas, talas, choreographic patterns and images were in his mind while he composed the songs. He concentrated on composing devotional songs and his deep interest in Bharata Natyam and Mohiniyattam persuaded him to compose different types of dance forms like Padavarnas, Padas, Tillanas etc.

It is recorded that Maharaja had married Narayani Pillai Thankachi of Tiruvattar in 1830 but we don’t come across much information
The signature of Swati Thirunal Maharaja

The House in Mudavanmugal where Swati Thirunal Maharaja stayed for practicing Music during his Youth
regarding his family life except that sixteen years later an Ammaveedu was constructed for her outside the West Fort in Trivandrum.

Even in the midst of his heavy administrative duties, Maharaja found time to compose songs, to listen to good music, sing and play on musical instruments like Svarabat. His life and work has attracted many scholars from many fields and he was a promoter of many arts.

Though Swati Thirunal Maharaja was born as the crown prince of the state of Travancore, he is remembered as a king among the composers in Indian music. He enriched the rich treasury of Karnatic Music and Mohiniyattam by his priceless compositions, which are vibrant with devotion or Bhakti. Maharaja was a devotee of his family deity Lord Padmanabha and adopted Him as his Ishtadevata. In his Kritis he adopted ‘Padmanabha’ and its synonyms like Sarasijanabha, Pankajanabha, Sarasanabha, Sarojanabha, Jalajanabha etc. as Vaggeyakara mudra.

Maharaja Swati Thirunal has to his credit nearly five hundred kritis most of which are filled with literary and musical excellences. Many of his kritis are in praise of his family deity Lord Padmanabha and there are Kritis praising other deities like Ganapati, Narasimha, Anjaneya, Siva, Parvati, Subramanya, Saraswati, Lakshmi, Sri Rama and Sri Krishna also. He has composed mainly in Sanskrit and there are kritis in Malayalam, Tamil, Kannada, Telugu, Manipravalam and Hindustani also. “His ragas range from popular ragas like Sankarabharanam, Kalyani, Pantuvarali, Bhairavi, Mohanam, Madhyamavati, Hamsadhwni etc. to apurva and complex ragas like Suuddhabhairavi, Poorvakamodari, Malavi, Lalithapanchamam,
Gopikavasantha, Kurinji and so on. He has also composed in Hindustani ragas like Brindavana Saranga, Darbari Kanada, Dvijavanthi, Sindhubhairavi, Gauri, which revealed his scholarship in Hindustani music as well”. 

Maharaja had composed in almost all categories and varieties of musical forms. His compositions include Svarajatis, Tana Varnas, Pada varnas, Kritis, Kirtanas, Ragamalikas, Padas, Javalis, Tillanas etc in the sphere of Karnatic music and the forms like Drupads, Khyals, Thappas and Bhajans in the field of Hindustani music.

Bhaktimanjari, which deals with various facets of Bhakti and Padmanabhasatakam, a devotional hymn of hundred slokas in praise of Lord Padmanabha are his contributions to the Bhakti literature. Kuchelopakhyanam, Ajamilopakhyanam, Utsava prabandhas, Geeyanatakas etc. are also composed by him. Most of his Kritis with high musical value and originality, are supreme from the linguistic, poetical and musical point of view. They are great for their musical excellences and melodic beauty. The four Group kritis of H.H. Swati Thirunal are Navaratnamalika, Ghanaragamalika, Navaratri Kirtanas and Utsavaprabandhas. As the name suggests, Navaratnamalika is a garland of nine gems offered to Lord Padmanabha expressing the nine types of Bhakti.

H.H. Swati Thirunal Maharaja was a great devotee with a meditative mood and he believed that the gift of poetry and music should be utilised in the service of God. So it was his aim to devote his talents as a poet and
composer to sing the greatness and glory of God and pray for the mercy of his favourite deity Vishnu, addressed as Ananthapuresa, the Supreme Lord. His daily visit to Padmanabha Swami temple to sing His praises and to pray for His mercy had developed a deep desire to cultivate the path of devotion and to attain the Lord ultimately. Thus his life was self surrender to Lord Padmanabha and the theme of all his literary and musical writings are praises of the Lord and Bhakti towards Him and he was a true Padmanabhadasa.

Nishkama Bhakti was the predominant feature of the Kritis of Swati Thirunal Maharaja and the four constituents of Bhava, Raga, Tala and Bhakti are present in his Kritis. Some of his compositions revealed a tinge of pathos which may be due to the reason that he was upset with many problems like the intervention of the British Resident Cullen, natural calamities etc. The enormous mental strain he had to suffer as a result of the hostile attitude adopted towards him by the Resident Cullen weighed him down. The untimely interference of the British in his day-to-day activities, at a time when Maharaja was blossoming into a great administrator made him disinterested in all worldly pleasures and he started living a life of ‘Yogi’, singing praises of the Lord.

Maharaja realised that devotion to God was the means for getting peace of mind even in the most tiring circumstances. He turned his mind more and more close to God, seeking closer communication with the Lord. He tried to get peace and solace from music, for which he poured out his mind and heart before the Lord. Maharaja had observed numerous vows and fasts and made enormous offerings of material and money to Lord
Padmanabha. He gradually weaned himself away from the things of the world and engaged his mind fully in the contemplation of the Divine. It is recorded that towards his last days, he adhered to fasting and liked to stay alone.

Swati Thirunal Maharaja passed away on 25th December, 1846 at the age of 33. During his short span of life, he accomplished full of varied activities and serious responsibilities. Perhaps no other composer has ever composed under such strain and stress and this definitely enriched his literary as well as musical works. He was so much of a bhakta that an element of super normal human power came to be associated with him and people began to consider him as an incarnation of Lord Narasimha. The discipline of Bhakti advocated by Maharaja is the one propounded in the Bhagavata.

His Highness Swati Thirunal can be ranked as equal to the Musical Trinities - Syama Sastri, Saint Thyagaraja and Muthuswami Dikshitar-on account of his vast bulk, wide variety and high quality compositions. He will be remembered by everyone as an ideal king among vaggeyakaras and uttama Vaggeyakara among kings and his name will remain immortal so long as sangita exists.
End Notes:


7. Dr. V. S. Sharma, Sri Swati Tirunal His life and works, Foreword by Dr. (Mrs.) Kapila Vatsyayan. Pub : The National Bookstall, Kottayam, 1985.