



Nada yoga and saint Tyagaraja



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Abstract

Nāda Yōga, the ancient practice of harnessing the power of sound vibrations for spiritual awakening, finds profound expression in the compositions of Tyāgarāja, the celebrated Carnatic music composer and devotee of Lord Rāma. In some of his compositions, Tyāgarāja expounds the theme of Nāda Yōga, covering several aspects of music such as elucidation of musical concepts, best way to practice music, musical criticism, music as a help to spiritual effort and above all, music itself as a Yōga and a Siddhi, a path and realisation. This paper aims to explore the profound spiritual connection between Nāda Yōga and compositions of Tyāgarāja. Through this paper, I will examine the themes, musical elements, and spiritual insights embedded in Tyāgarāja's compositions. By analysing the interplay of Nāda Yōga and the musical, lyrical revelations in his compositions, this paper seeks to shed light on the transformative potential of sound and music in spiritual practices. It aims to deepen our understanding of the spiritual dimensions of music, offering insights into ways in which Nāda Yōga and compositions of Tyāgarāja can facilitate self-realization and a deeper understanding of the principles of Nāda Yōga, serving as a pathway to connect with the divine and achieve spiritual growth.

Keywords : Nada Yoga, Nadopasana, Tyagaraja, Spiritual Awakening, Self-realisation, Music Meditation

Research Paper

Nāda Yōga

Yōga in general, refers to the practice of physical and mental well-being as well as spiritual growth. Yōga can be traced back to the pre-Vedic period in our country. The practice of Yōga is said to have originated from ancient Indian traditions. There are many varieties of Yōga of which Nāda Yōga is one among the ancient and highly rewarding practices that were practiced through Sāma Veda, the source of music, and through Maitrī upaniṣad of ancient times (Rao).

Nāda Yōga literally refers to Yōga of Sound or quest to explore inner consciousness through sound. (Brain and M.S.H.S.T). The practice of Nāda Yōga is rooted in the belief that the universe and living and non-living organisms/things constitute sound vibration from within. Nāda Yōga is a medium to achieve a state of inner harmony and spiritual awakening through the conscious endurance of sound. The universe, energies, sounds, and all motions trace their origin through the vibration of the magnificent sound of Anāhata Nāda

or the sound of the universe. (Kumar and Naudiyal; Kumar. K 31-34). There are many references on the medical and therapeutic benefits of music in the ancient text like Rāga Chikitsa, Sangīta sudhā and the ancient manuscript works collected by King Śāhajī [1] which are archived in the Saraswati Mahāl Library of Tanjāvur (Sanivarapu 210-13).

The Word Nāda is beautifully interpreted in a scientific context in Sanskrit where 'Nā' refers to the Prāṇa Vāyu - the bed of consciousness, and 'Da' represents Analam/ Agni – the force applied, which thus defines that the Nāda is produced by the combination of Prāṇa Vāyu and Agni. (Poddar; Sunder). This concept can also be traced in many of the primary sources, of which one of the very old references in the musical text is BrhadDēshi, which explains the concept in the sloka:

*nakāraḥ prāṇa ityāhurdaḥkāścānalo mataḥ |
nādasya dvipadārtho'yaṁ samīcīno mayoditaḥ |
nādo'yaṁ nadaterdhātoḥ sa ca pañcavidho bhavet |
sūkṣmaścaivātisūkṣmaśca vyakto'vyaktaśca kṛtrimaḥ|| [2]*

The same concept was again referred to in a later musical text named Sangīta Ratnakara. The original reference to the concept and definition of Nāda can be traced back to the Rig Veda, where a separate Upaniṣad has been given just for Nāda called “Nāda Bindu Upaniṣad”^[3] where the definition of Nāda and the practice of Nāda syllables along with its scientific explanation has been given.

There are several methods of Nāda Yōga Practices which are practiced widely all over the world, but the simplest and most effective methods, as mentioned right from the Vedic/ancient texts like Chāndogya Upaniṣad,^[4] Vijñāna-bhairava-tantra,^[5] Sūta saṃhita,^[6] Śiva Yōga,^[7] Muṇḍakopaniṣad,^[8] Yājñavalkya smṛti,^[9] Sangīta Ratnākara^[10] is the Meditation on Praṇava Nāda-AUM, repetitive recitation of mantras, and the practice/meditation on svarās of Indian Classical music. Nāda Yōga works with the science and technology of sound and the effect of its vibrations. Nāda Yōga practice which when followed regularly, will help the energy flow upwards, whereas the normal energy flow would be downwards. This in turn activates the Chakras of the human body right from Mūlādhāra which leads us to attain the highest state of consciousness. (Poddar)

Tyāgarāja

Saint Tyāgarāja^[11] was a prolific composer and well-known figure in Carnatic music. He devoted his life to music and spirituality, producing over 24,000 devotional songs dedicated to his adored god, Lord Rāma, and he was born in Thiruvārur, Tamil Nadu. Tyāgarāja's work, deeply rooted in the Bhakti tradition, emphasized a personal connection with the divine. His works/compositions on music itself and on the process of spirituality/liberation mark his specialization in the understanding of the science of music. Tyāgarāja was himself a practitioner of Nāda Yōga also known as Nādōpāsakā. He used Nāda/music as a path of spiritual growth and attained salvation through it. It is also said that he always had the experience of listening to the Anāhata Nāda produced from Mūlādhāra Chakra and during his last moments, people surrounding him also heard the mysterious sound emanating from Tyāgarāja's head. The Nāda from within him rose from the Mūlādhāra chakra and merged with the atmosphere through the natural opening of the skull. (Sambamoorthy)

Tyāgarāja's compositions on greatness of music – a literature review

Tyāgarāja composed a good number of compositions explaining the greatness of music and the benefits of

practicing music elaborately through the lyrics of his compositions. These compositions of Tyāgarāja also mark the origin of music and God as a form of music. Compositions of Tyāgarāja on greatness of music and the power of music areas are as follows:

- Sangīta Jñānamu – Dhanyasi Rāga – Ādi tāḷam
- Sobillu Sapta Svāra – Jaganmohini Rāga – Rupaka tāḷam
- Mokṣamu Galadā – Sāramati Rāga – Ādi tāḷam
- Nāda Loludai – Kalyāna Vasantam Rāga – Rupaka tāḷam
- Sogasuga Mrdanga Tāḷamu – Sri Ranjani Rāga – Rupaka tāḷam
- Rāga Sudhārasa – Andhōlika Rāga – Dēsh Ādi tāḷam
- Sangīta Śāstra Jñānamu – Mukhāri Rāga – Ādi tāḷam
- Vara Rāga Layajnuḷu – Chenchu Kamboji – Dēsh Ādi tāḷam
- Nāda Sudhārasam – Ārabhi Rāga – Rūpaka tāḷam
- Nādōpāsana – Bēgada Rāga – Dēsh Ādi tāḷam
- Ānanda Sāgara – Garudadhwani Rāga – Dēsh Ādi tāḷam
- Svāra Rāga Sudhārasa – Shankarābaranam Rāga – Ādi tāḷam
- Sripāpriya – Athāna Rāga – Dēsh Ādi tāḷam (Sambamoorthy)

According to Tyāgarāja, among the different ways to realize God, Sangīta marga or the path of music is the easiest of all. (Sambamoorthy).

The kriti “Sangīta jñānamu” defines that the knowledge of music or the practice of music without due devotion towards it or without belief in it, is not the right path to proceed, and many sages and saints worship music as a medium to become one with the ultimate energy. (Rāmanujachari; Sunder).

The kriti “Sobhillu Sapta Svāra” explains the correct way of producing sound, which should originate from Nābhi and travel through hr̥t and kaṃṭha and ends in nasal cavity.

“Mokṣamu Galadā” a kriti which explains elaborately the origin of music from Praṇava Nada-AUM and affirms that music gives Jeevanmukti for the soul.

The kriti “Nāda Loludai” defines that one can attain brahmānanda through Nāda Upāsana and the celestial being such as Trimurthi-s, Indra, Ganesha, Subramanya and other notables also performed their Upasana through

the practice of Nāda. (Rāmanujachari; Nandakumar and Jayalakshmi; Sunder).

The kriti “Sogasuga Mrdanga Tāḷamu” describes that a quality Kriti should contain the true words of Upaniṣads marked with the appropriate placement of svāra and rhythm and should reflect true devotion dripping with nine rasā-s. (Rāmanujachari).

Another notable composition “Rāga Sudhārasa”, explains that the Nāda rasā provides the blessings of Yōga, Thyāga and Bhōga ie., clarity, sacred sacrifice and material pleasure; and Nāda, Svāra and Prāṇava are the fundamental form of Lord Śiva.

“Sangīta Śāstra Jñānamu”, a the kriti which explains the knowledge of musical wisdom that bestows one with wealth, fame, development, blessing of the Lord, devoutness, love, and above all, the blessing of oneness with the Lord. (Rāmanujachari).

The kriti “Vara Rāga Layajnu” defines that it is the Nāda which issues the divine oneness with divine Prāṇava. (Rāmanujachari).

Kriti- “Nāda Sudhārasa” defines Rāma as the incarnation of Prāṇava Nāda and different parts of Rāma as different musical concepts. (Rāmanujachari; Sunder; Rao. M).

Another notable kriti “Nādōpāsana” describes that the celestial trinity Śiva, Nārāyana and Brahma attained their divine state through the constant worship of Nāda. (Rāmanujachari).

The kriti “Ānanda Sāgara” says that divine soul worship and follow the path of Rāga and laya of music. (Nandakumar and Jayalakshmi).

The kriti “Svāra Rāga Sudhārasa” explains that perfection in svāra and Rāga of music with bhakthi, itself is a heaven on earth. When the Nāda is originated from the Mūlādhāra chakra which is being observed with the knowledge/realisation of Nāda paves the ultimate path to Salvation.

The kriti “Sripāpriya”, defines that the music that is very pleasing to the Lord with the beautiful combinations of svarās and creative formation of the Rāga-s and rhythmic excellence, Tyāgarāja worships and delights Lord Rāma. (Rāmanujachari). There are few other compositions of Tyāgarāja which marks the greatness of music.

Research Problem and Objective of the research

Nāda Yōga being the powerful and simple Yōgic practice which can take one on the path of salvation, has been addressed in the kritis of Saint Tyāgarāja, who practiced and explained the practice of Nāda Yōga in

some of his compositions, which has not been noted till date. The main objective of this research paper is to highlight the practice procedures of Nāda Yōga which was not only followed by Tyāgarāja but also led him to attain salvation through the path of Nādōpāsana.

Research Methodology

As for the qualitative research paper, primary and secondary data were collected from various online platforms such as Music Research Library and Google Scholar; journals such as Triveni and Bharatiya Pragna; offline sources such as Indra Gandhi Memorial Library, University of Hyderabad; and lecture demonstrations on YouTube. A literature review was performed using the available resources.

Based on the knowledge obtained from the literature, a qualitative study was conducted on the lyrical part of selected compositions of Tyāgarāja. The thematic analysis was conducted on the composition and on Nāda Yōga practices from the primary sources available in ancient literature to the practice procedure followed today. For the analysis part, the translation of the lyrics was also collected from the available resource as the language of the compositions was Telugu, for better and precise analysis. A comparative analysis has been carried out relating the lyrical content and the scientific approach of Nāda Yōga practice.

Relevance of the study

This study may unlock the ideology that music is also one of the most important ways to progress in one’s spiritual growth. It also provides new scope for future researches, not only on the greatness of Tyāgarāja’s composition but also on the spiritual aspect and the practice methods discussed by Saint Tyāgarāja in his compositions.

Analysis

The list of selected for analysis is the result of the literature review that was varied out. The translation of the lyrics of Tyāgarāja compositions were taken from the Book of Sri T.K. Govinda Rao - “Compositions of Tyāgarāja”, which served as a basic aid for carrying the analysis forward.

As mentioned earlier, the effective and simple Nāda Yōga practice as mentioned in various grantha-s are the practice or meditation on the Prāṇava Nāda - AUM, meditation by the repetition and recitation of mantras/ names of deities and meditation on svarās and its vibrations of music. In Tyāgarāja’s composition, we can



find a relevant explanation of the same. Tyāgarāja also explains the result of Nādōpāsana in the lyrics of his compositions.

To begin with, the meaning of the Sanskrit word Nāda which has a scientific explanation by itself, has been beautifully mentioned by Tyāgarāja in the Charana of his composition “Mokṣamu Galadā” as: *prāṇānala saṃyogamu valla praṇavanādamu saptasvaramulai*. This part of the lyrics from the composition indicates the vital force Prāṇa and Anala constitute in the generation of the Prāṇava Nāda which is the Omkara, and the seven svarā-s that emanated from Prāṇava Nāda. This also explains the science behind the production of Nāda that when the breath is consciously used along with the fire/heat that is produced when the heat is applied from within produced the Nāda.

Another composition explains that the ultimate essence of Veda-s, which we refer to as the oldest written source for the path of salvation, is the Omkara itself and the seven svāra-s emanating from it. This marks the origin of practice of Nāda Yōga from the Vedas. This is mentioned in the charana of the composition “Sāmajavaragamana” as *‘Veda śiro mātrja saptasvaranādācaladīpa!’* And in the Pallavi and Anupallavi of the composition “Nāda sudhārasa” as: *‘nādasudhārasambilanu narākṛtāya manasā, vedapurāṇāgama śāstrādulakādāhāramaina’*.

The first step for meditation on Prāṇava Nāda is the correct production of the Nāda which is AUM. This aspect is addressed by Tyāgarāja in his compositions, in the Anupallavi of the composition “Sobhillu Sapta svāra” as: *‘nābhīhṛtkaṇṭharasanā nāsādulayandu’*, this part of the lyrics means that the proper way to produce Nāda is that it should originate right from below the navel/Nābhi and the sound produced from there should travel through the heart/Hrt, throat/Kantha, tongue and nasal cavity/Rasana and Nasa, etc. This practise will help carry the energies upward, whose natural flow drifts downward. This upliftment of energies or reversal of energies in turn activates the Chakra, right from the Mūlādhāra chakra to the Āgna chakra of the human body, which enhances our consciousness and takes us towards self-realisation. Mūlādhāra to Āgnā covers 6 chakra-s and the remaining topmost chakra, the Sahasrara Chakra, will be activated with ultimate conscious meditation, which is carried out with an understanding of the science behind it.

In another composition “Svara Rāga sudhārasa” in the charanam part Tyāgarāja mentions that *‘mūlādhāraja nādameruḡe mudamagu mokṣamurā’* which means ‘understanding the divine Nāda which originates from

the basic or primal Chakra of human body ie., Mūlādhāra chakra gives one supreme bliss or leads one on the path of salvation’.

When meditation on svāra-s or Rāga-s of music is concerned, Tyāgarāja gives guidance and methods in many of his compositions. Tyāgarāja explains how to approach meditation on music in the Pallavi of the composition “Gīthārthamu” as: *‘gītārthamu saṃgītānandamu nītāvuna jūdarā! o manasā!’* Which means ‘to understand the significance of Gītha (music) and the bliss of music, one has to delve deep into oneself and behold them in their supreme stateliness’.

The essential tool to carry along during the practice of meditation on music is explained beautifully by Tyāgarāja in the Pallavi and Anupallavi of the composition “Sangīta jñānamu” as: *‘saṃgītājñānamu bhaktivinā sanmārgamu galade manasā, bhṛṅgi naṭeśa samīraja ghaṭana mataṅga nārādādulupāsijce’* which means ‘the knowledge of music without devotion in the heart will lead nothing. Devotion is the tool to be carried, for which he gives the examples of sages and saints like Bringī, Matanga, and Narada, who worshipped lord through music’. The same is also mentioned in the Pallavi of another composition “Svara Rāga sudhārasa” as: *‘Svara rāga sudhārasayuta bhakti svargāpavargamurā o manasā’* which means ‘when the devotion is blended with the svāra-s and Rāga-s of music will lead one to the path of salvation’. In the same composition in the charana part: *‘kolāhala saptasvara gṛhamula gurute mokṣamurā o manasā’* which means ‘when one realises that the subtle and mystic sources of the seven svarās of music which emanated from the Prāṇava Nāda is directly referred to as the seven energy centres or chakras of the body, rendering which is the Yōga by itself and will lead one to salvation’.

The most effective method to practice meditation on music as explained in charana of the composition “Kaddanu Vāriki” as: *‘Niddura nirākariñci mudduga tambura baṭṭi śuddhamaina manasuto susvaramuto paddutappaka bhajiyiñcu’* which means ‘waking up in the early morning casting the sleep aside, holding on the Tambura nicely which maintains the basic drone, being devoid of pre-occupied thoughts which will help in receiving the benefits, and the practice has to be done with the sense of aesthetics’. Tyāgarāja mentions in another composition “Nādalōludai” that ‘a complete involvement in music meditation through countless Rāga-s will lead one towards salvation or oneness with the lord’ in the Anupallavi as: *‘svādu phalapraḍa*



saptasvara rāga nicaya sahita’ to which he adds that “the eternal Trinities, Indra, Ganesha, Subrahmanya and other personages were all Nādōpāsakā-s themselves” in the charana of the same composition as: *‘hariharātma bhūsurapati śara janma gaṇeśādi varamaunulupāsiñcare’*.

Tyāgarāja who is Nādōpāsakā himself, who attained salvation through the path of music, describes the result of Nādōpāsana in his life through the composition “Sangīta śāstra jñānamu” as: *‘saṃgīta śāstra jñānamu sārūpya sauravyadame manasā! śṛṅgāra rasādyakhilasāra pūrīta rāmakathānandābdhiyuta, prema bhakti sujanavātsalyamu śrīmad ramā varakaṭākṣamu nema niṣṭha yaśo dhana’mosaṃgune-nerpu galgu tyāgarāju nerccina’*. Which describes that ‘Tyāgarāja was capable of conferring him to attain oneness with the lord through the proficiency in the traditions of music which Tyāgarāja acquired and practiced’.

Tyāgarāja also mentions the benefits which we get as the result of Nādōpāsana - meditation on the Prāṇava Nāda or music which emanated from Prāṇava Nāda, in his compositions. In the Anupallavi and charana of the composition “Sītavara”, Tyāgarāja mentions *‘gītādyarivalopaniṣatsārabhūta jīvanmuktuḍautaku ākāśa śarīramu brahmamane ātmārāmuni tā sarijūcucu’* which refers that ‘Jeevanmukthi can be attained through Nādōpāsana and identification of Ātma Rāma’. He also mentions the healing power of music which is now being proved scientifically, in the lyrics of the composition “Sripāpriya” that ‘loosing oneself in music is regarded as treasure. Music has the healing power which can destroy all ailments such as physical, mental and paranatal’. He further explains in the Anupallavi of the composition “Ni dayache Rāma” as: *‘nāda brahmānanda rasākṛtigala’* which means that ‘Nādōpāsana or worship of music gives one the supreme bliss and the oneness with lord’. The ultimate result of the worship of Nāda and music was beautifully explained by Tyāgarāja in the charana of the composition “Rāgasudhārasa” as: *‘sadāśivamayamagu nādoṅkāra svaravidulu jīvanmuktulani tyāgarāju telīyu’* which means ‘Tyāgarāja knows that one who have knowledge of Nāda, Omkara and svara are the closest to Śiva and they attain Jeevanmukthi’.

Tyāgarāja also mentions the powers one can get through meditation on Omkara/Nāda in the charana the composition “Nādōpāsana” as: *‘mantrātmulu yantratantrātmulu mari manvantram lenno galavāralu tantrīlaya svara gānaviloluru tyāgarāju vandyulu svatantrulu’* which means ‘through Nādōpāsana or

practice of Omkara/Nāda, one can uphold the Veda-s and transcend them; pervade the universe; acquire immense occult powers; can have the form of mantra, yantra and tantra; long life span and can become free souls which is not bound by anybody’s command’. Tyāgarāja also explains Anāhata Nāda (Nāda which is audible or available from the nature) in the charana of the composition “Vara Rāga layajñulu” as: *‘Dehodbhavamvagu nādamula divyamau praṇavākāramane dāhamberugani mānavula tyāgarāju nūta ye ceru rāma!’* which explains that ‘Aesthetic sounds emanating from the human body are the sparks from the eternal Omkara Nāda’.

Tyāgarāja explains the importance of attaining salvation through his composition “Svara Rāga sudhārasa” that ‘it takes countless births for one to attain the human form which is wise enough to think of liberation’. In the composition “Bajana seyave”, Tyāgarāja explains ‘Being born as human enables one to acquire knowledge of Omkara, quintessence of Nāda, Seven Notes/svara-s, Vedas, Mystic chanting, Scriptures and Ethics and 64 arts, which can lead us in the path of Salvation’.

Result And Conclusion

From the above analysis, the methods for the practise of meditation on Nāda and meditation on music have been clearly explained by Tyāgarāja through his compositions. Tyāgarāja was the one who lived as an example as the one who practised meditation and worshipped music and attained salvation through music. He clearly gives the method to approach, ultimate tool to have which will help elevate the practise the method of practise result of practise power of music etc. in his compositions. It is clear that Tyāgarāja had the best understanding of both the Yōga of Nāda and the science behind it to practise it in the right way. Somewhere, this aspect of his compositions was unexplored. This study unveils a new perspective on his compositions, which provides scope for future research.

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Footnotes

1. He lived during the period 1684-1711.
2. Verse from BrhadDēshi - sloka number 20-21 – 5th to 8th century.



3. Nada Bindu Upanishad is an Upanishad associated to Rig Veda which describes in depth about the Nada and its various qualities. It gives the practice of nada and benefits of Nada.
4. "This AUM, the imperishable Udgita, must be worshipped". "Of all this creation, earth is the essence; water is the essence of earth; herb is the essence of water; man is the essence of herb; speech is the essence of man; poetry is the essence of speech; music is the essence of poetry; the Udgita or the Pranava (AUM) is the essence of music". "Thus, Omkara is the highest and most valuable, final essence of the whole creation". (Ramanujachari)
5. Vijnāna-bhairava-tantra defines that "the mental absorption produced by music gradually leads to the realization of oneness with the divine spirit". (Ramanujachari)
6. "By practicing the great yoga of music, a man is able to merge in Parama Siva. With the help of yoga of musical knowledge (Nada Yoga), a man is being redeemed". (Mallikarjuna Rao)
7. "The Anahata nada, which keeps ringing in the heart ceaselessly like the tumult of the sea, like the drone of the bee, like the melodious notes of the flute, like the magical notes of the lute, remains as the cause of mind's dissolution or merger with the ultimate". (Mallikarjuna Rao)
8. "Om/AUM is the bow; atman is the arrow and the brahman/Paramathma is the target. With the unwavering mind if one concentrates on the target and hits, the arrow/soul's essence will be carried to the target with the help of bow" (II:4). (Mallikarjuna Rao)
9. "One who is knowledgeable in veena play, adept in the varieties of Shruti and tāḷam achieves/attains salvation with ease". (Ramanujam) (Sunder)
10. "Worshipping the Nada Brahma is a way to liberation". (Mallikarjuna Rao)
11. He lived in the period of 1767-1847.

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