

**Appreciating Carnatic Music**  
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**Lecture - 07**  
**Carnatic Music as RAga Music**

What we have so far seen is that Carnatic music is primarily a melodic system, it is a highly nuanced melodic system. How it is exactly it is nuanced is something that we would see in our forthcoming sessions. We have taken a look at the musical material, the seven swara-s and their five variants, which really form the music material for any music at all in the world. We have looked at the concept of sthAyI or the octave (Singing Starts 01:02) now between these two lies these two lies one octave (Singing Starts 1:10) this is the lower register the mandra sthAyI, (Singing Starts 1:17) this is the Madhya sthAyI and (Singing Starts 1:23) and so on is the tAra sthAyI.

We have also seen the concepts of ascending and descending scales - Arohana and avarohana. An ArohI scale is an ascending scale (Singing Starts 1:46). These are all Arohi and (Singing Starts 1:52) these are all descending scales. And music making essentially involves ArohI and avarohI phrases. There are phrases, sometimes you use the same note for a long time. There is another movement possible (Singing Starts: 2:16) this is possible (Singing Starts 2:19) this is possible but you cannot keep doing this. You have to have movement also. Which is what Arohi and avarohi phrases are all about.

We have also seen the concept of the AdhAra shadja or the fundamental, the tonic and we have seen that the Carnatic musician or any Indian musician for that matter chooses the tonic of his or her convenience depending on the range - epending on his or her vocal range and performs with that as the base. It is expected that any Carnatic vocalist - and in Carnatic music the voice is the primary instrument, vocal music is central to the tradition, as we will see later on and instrumental music is dealt around the vocal tradition. It draws from vocal tradition. So the vocalist is expected to have a range of half an octave below the AdhAra shadja and one and a half octave above the AdhAra shadja. So, you have the range of two octaves and Carnatic music can be performed with this two octave range, with any pitch at all as the fundamental rhetoric.

Now, so much talk about music and much more to follow. It is perhaps a good time to reflect on what this exercise of bringing such a course to you can achieve or what I can attempt to achieve in this course.

Now music is something that is best heard and experienced. If you can create music, that is even better; but talking about music? There are musicians who disdain any attempt to talk about music - for good reasons. But why? What is the rationale, the reason, what is the gain of such courses - such as this?

Now listening to music and enjoying it is like star gazing and I am borrowing this metaphor from Carl Seashore who has written this landmark book - Psychology of Music. Star gazing can give us sublime moments: just looking at endless clusters of twinkling diamonds on this black carpet, hanging down as it were. It is surely beyond words. The experience is beyond words and it can put us in touch with the deepest recesses of our being and music can also do that, listening to music can also do that, that is value really. What about an astronomer, who studies stars and other celestial bodies. Does he also enjoy the experience of star gazing?

Surely an astronomer too must marvel at the sight of a starry sky and probably with greater intensity because she has an idea, she knows something about that world, she knows something about the stuff and the order of that world and she also knows that there is so much else that are unknown, that is yet to be explored.

A course such as this can only attempt to lay bare the complexities of this very sophisticated musical form that is Carnatic music. And this will hopefully urge you to embark on your journey yourself. But star gazing must never be left behind and listening to music, listening to Carnatic music must - is really a part of this course. So I will be playing music, I will be playing music clips as a part of this course. I urge you to listen to them and soak in the music because that, as I said, is really what all this is ultimately about. So I will now play a clip with permission.

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This is a rendition of composition by Maharaja Swati Tirunal in the rAga Pantuvarali which is set to Adi tAlam. The performer is Smt. M. S. Subbulakshmi. I would just leave you to listen to it without any suggestions about what to look for in the music. Later on in the course we will attempt some guided listening too.

(Music Starts: 8:05) (Music Ends: 17:15)

So, that as I said was Smt M.S. Subbulakshmi singing a composition of

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**Maharaja Swati Tirunal's composition in  
Pantuvarali raga and Adi tala.**

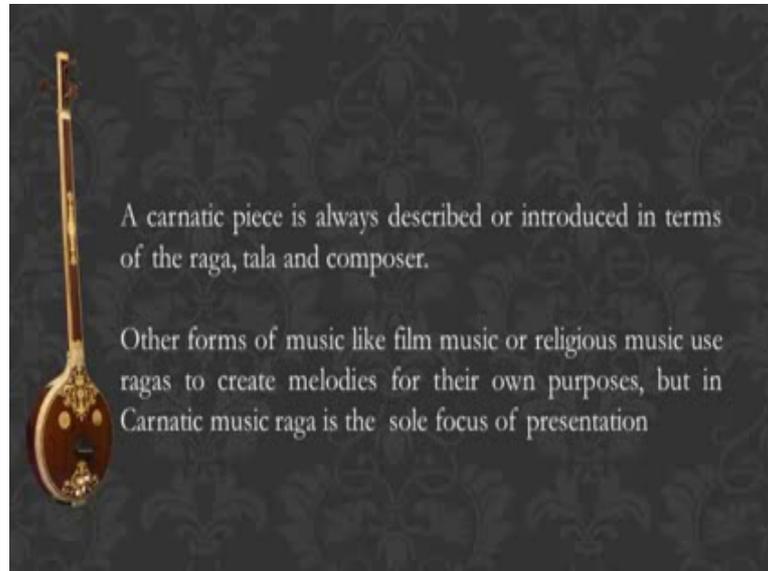
Maharaja Swati Thirunal in rAga Pantuvarali set to Adi tAlam. Now this is, this schema: i.e. the name of the composer, the name of the rAga, the name of the tAla, this is the default description of any piece of Carnatic music. Of course the names of performers are also included but given that you know the performer, the piece is described in terms of the composer the rAga and the tAla.

Now it is interesting to reflect, to consider, how other, how pieces from other musical genres are described. For instance, if we have a film song - in our country film music is the popular music. How is a film song typically described? You would say it is featured in this film; the lyricist the person who wrote the lyrics is such and such person and the music director is this person may be or A. R. Rahman or Ilaiyaraaja or whoever it is. And that is how a film song is described. How is a folk song described? You would describe it may be with reference to what the folk song is about what occasion it is sung on and so on. Now as a matter of fact a film song or a folk song are very likely based are very likely in a rAga, much like a piece in Carnatic music. But we never mention the rAga on which the film song may be based.

For instance, there is this fairly well known film song - it is few, may be decade are so ago. It goes like this (Singing Starts: 19:43)(Singing ends: 20:10). Now this is a film song, which is featured in the film called Gentleman - a Tamil film. This is out and out cast in a Carnatic rAga called Sankarabaranam - not only in terms of the notes but also in terms of nuances - it captures Sankarabaranam quite well. But when we describe, when we have to introduce the song Yen Veetu Thotathil we would never refer to the rAga. But a Carnatic piece has I said is always mentioned by talking about the rAga and the tAla and the composer. Why? Because

this is what is central to the music even though other forms of music in India draw from rAgas. They use rAgas for their purposes it is only in Carnatic and Hindustani music that rAga becomes the central focus.

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The focus of the presentation is the rAga and the presentation revolves around the composition which is set in a particular tAla. So that is how these three elements become very crucial in a Carnatic piece. Thus we can say that the rAga and tAla are the twin underlying entities that form a grid as it were for Carnatic music.

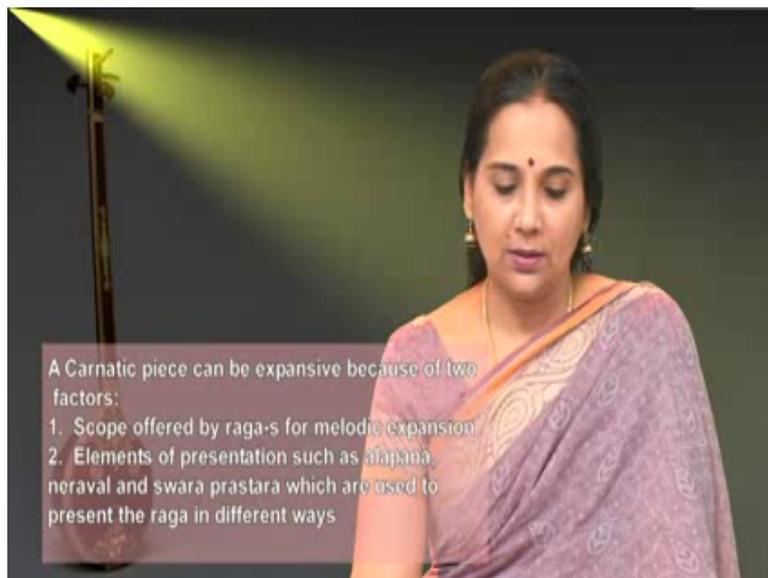
What is meant by this? It is that the focus of the presentation is the rAga and the presentation is organized around the tAla. Now, as I said, other forms of music also do draw from rAgas and in fact folk music has been a source of rAgas for Carnatic music. For instance, there is this very well known rAga called Ananda Bhairavi which is in origin of folk rAga. It is a folk tune which has been taken into Carnatic music and given the shape of a rAga .The folk tune will go something like this (Singing Starts : 22: 40 )(Singing ends: 23:06). This is a folk tune in Ananda Bhairavi and this has been the source of the rAga Ananda Bhairavi in Carnatic music.

As promised, I will play another clip in which Prof. V. V. Subramaniam has performed this rAga Ananda Bhairavi. V.V. Subramaniam is a highly respected violinist here. He is a virtuoso and a great master. We are lucky to have him here in our studio performing for us. Please listen to Ananda Bhairavi as performed by V.V. Subramaniam. We have Thiruvapur Bhakthavatsalam on the mridangam accompanying him on the mridangam. Listen to it and see how this folk tune has been transformed into a classical rAga.

(Music Starts: 24:09) (Music Ends:25:58 )

So that was sublime music, but a question for a novice is always this that a Carnatic piece is so long. Even a 10 minute long rendition is long for a novice and a Carnatic rendition, a piece in the Carnatic rendition can go up to 45 minutes to an hour. So what does a Carnatic musician do for this long how can anyone perform just a single piece for so long? This is a valid question.

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Now the answer lies in the scope offered by the rAga and also the presentation format that has evolved in Carnatic music. So we have two aspects, we have the rAga. Now many core traditional Carnatic rAGas offer immense scope for exploration, for build up. Number two- the presentation of a Carnatic piece has 4 or 5 elements. We will talk more about this later and of these 4 or 5 elements the composition is certainly one the others are aspects of improvisation.