

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture - 11
Swara in Sanskrit Textual Tradition

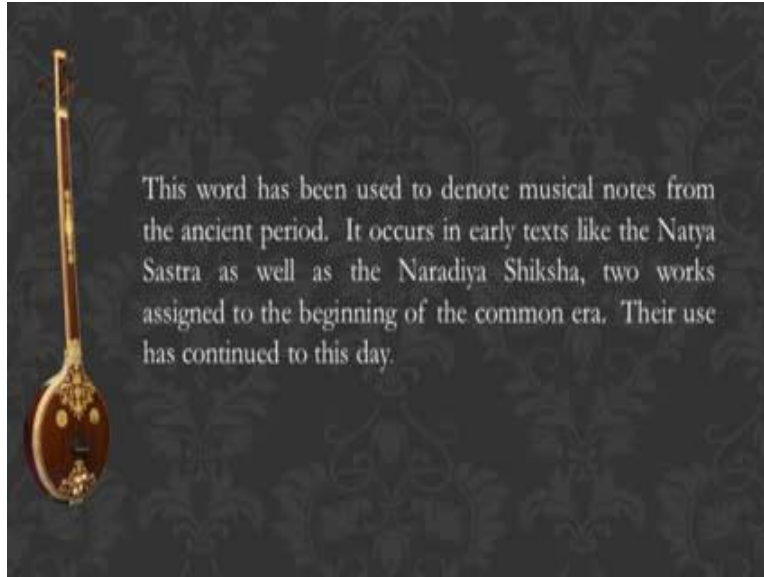
The Indian tradition has identified two concepts, Swara and Shruthi, to account for musical sound. So, musical sound, in the Indian tradition, two very important concept certainly are Swara and Shruti. There are other concepts like Nada we won't go into that. So, let us spend some time, and try to understand, how Sanskrit tradition specifically has a treated and has tried to understand the concept of Swara and Shruti. Shruti which is also very closely related Swara.

This tradition, I am speaking of something, I have referred to earlier that, there is a textual tradition that tries to describe, that tries to understand the music. This is called the Lakshna Grantha tradition. Lakshna means grammar and Grantha is a text. So, treaty is dealing with grammar. These texts are more descriptive of the music. There are also attempts to understand concept like Swara and Shruti.

Now, how does Lakshna Grantha tradition talk of swara? Swara is found in very old text, as old as two thousand years ago, Natya Shastra and Naradiya Shiksha. These two are very important ancient treatise, talk of music of those times.

And we knew these terms, Swara, Shruti, Tala, Laya and many more, they are still in use today, even two thousand years later. Certainly, the meanings of those words, have altered subtly and not subtly, but the fact is that we are still using that terminology that our ancestors were using, two thousand or two thousand five hundred years ago.

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Now let us look at, Swara, this word has been used to denote, musical notes from very along ago from Natya Shastra, Naradiya Shiksha times.

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The seven swaras, they are given names, the Natya Shastra talks of with us like this “Shadjasca rishabhashcaiva gaandhaaro madhyamastathaa, pancamo dhaivatashcaiva saptamo atha nishaadavaan”.

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These are the names of the seven swaras Sadja, Rishabha, Gandhara, Madhyama, Panchama, Dhaivatha, Nishada. These were names given to the seven swaras and later on sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha, ni, these are used to refer these swaras.

Now there was some very intrigue aspects, to how these swaras are talked of in the Lakshna Grantha. For a instances the seven notes are associated with animals and birds. For instances, the first notes sadja is associated with the peacock, rishabha ri is associated with bull, gandhara is associated the goat, madhyama with a heron, panchama with kuku bird, dhaivatha with a horse nishada and with the elephant. Each swaras is also associated with kala, with a particular rasa, and finally with a particular deity, devatha, swara devatha.

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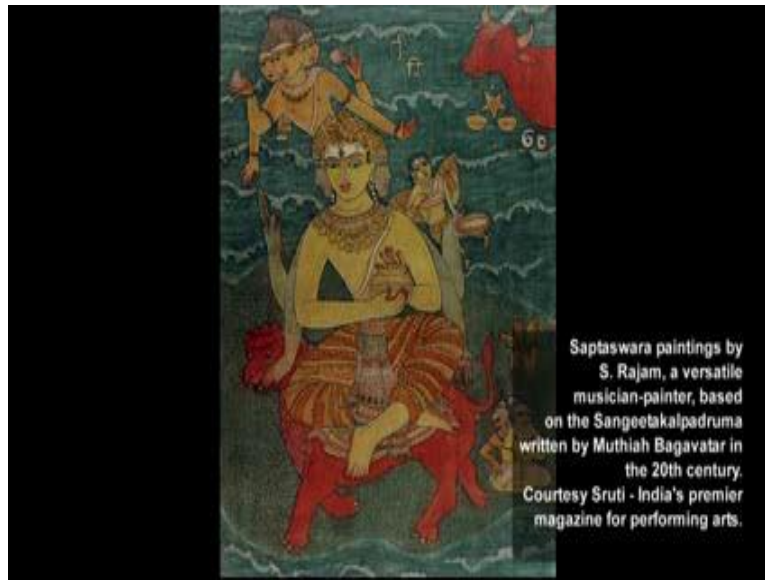
Swara	S'adja	nishabha	gAndhAr a	Madhyama	Pancama	Dhaivata	Nishada
Colour	Rakta or red	Reddish yellow	Golden red	White	Black	Yellow	Multi coloured
Diety	Vanhi	Brahma	Candra	Vishnu	narada	Tumburu	tumburu
Animal/bird	Peacock	Bull	Goat	Heron	Cuckoo	Horse	elephant

There is a table here for you to take look at, so just you take sadja, the first swara, is associated with the peacock and it's colour is padmapatrabha. It has the colour of the petal of the lotus, that redness, and its diety is vanhi or fire and the rasa or the mood, emotions that is associated with veera, adbhutha and roudra. Veera is (())5:41, adbhutha is wonder and roudra is anger. You can see all the seven swaras, have these associations. These are found in text book like, Sangeeta Ratnakara and others, beginning from Naradiya Shiksha such associations in may many text across the across the millennia.

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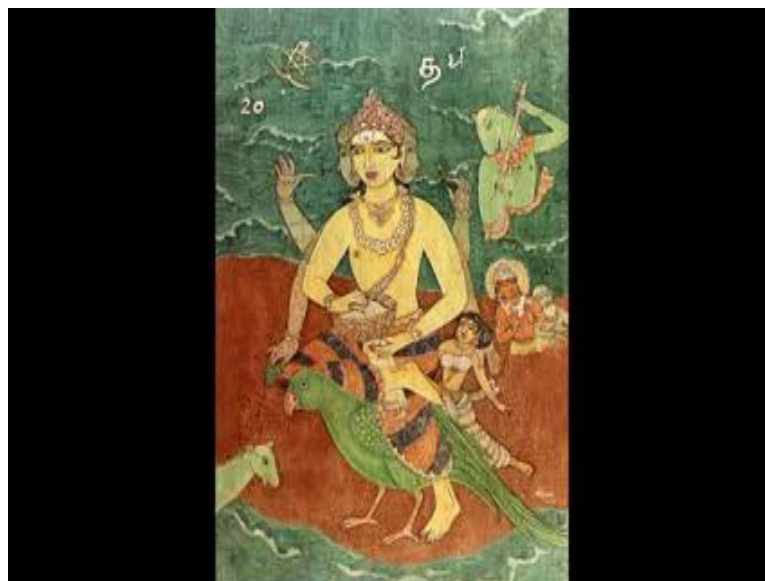


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In fact, what you see here, this is a painting by versatile and highly respected musician painter called S. Rajan. He has depicted many aspects of Carnatic music, in his own stylized painting and sketches. In fact, his rendition, of the important main composers of Carnatic music are seen everywhere, wherever Carnatic music has a presence.

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Now these painting of the swaras, he based these paintings on the textual material of Sangeetakalpadruma. Which is a twentieth century Lakshna Grantha by Muthiah Bagavatar, who was a leading musician and composer of the early parts of twentieth century. The painting that you see right now, it is the paintings of dha deivatha, the six note. We can see that the image of a horse, the presiding deity is saint thumbhuru, who is also seen. There are many more details all drawn from Sangeetakalpadruma. The text, twentieth century text written by Muthiah Bagavatar

What do we make of all those? First and quite importantly it is, that the swara the note is personified. It is given a personification, it is associated with deity, which makes it sacred and both the sacredness and personality was bestowed upon musical notes. And in the attitude of many musicians, in India in fact, music is considered divine, there is a sacredness associated with music.

Our musical instruments are sacred, we treat them like personification of deities. A Tambura or Veena are treated with at most reverence. The same reverence that you will accord to a deity. We would never think of playing a instrument with our feet. Many musicians, their approach and attitude towards swara is tinged with this reverence. Later on in the tradition, we also have raga Dhayana Slokas, that is slokas that is suppose mediate on evoke the raga.

So now all this in sense, all this in essence, all this attempts to talk about swaras as personalities, all this really make sense, in the overall idea of music in the Indian mind. What music means to the Indian mind?

Coming back to terraforma, where we were before, we launched into this domain, of personifying swaras and evoking deities. We were talking of swaras and how it is treated in the traditions in Lakshna Granthas, svameva rajate iti swara, this is (())10:00 quoted etymology of swara.

Now what is etymology? Etymology is trying to understand the word by going to its roots. In Sanskrit, there is perhaps, it is sometimes, stretched to an over kill, this is etymology. Etymology

is something that any Sanskrit writer loves to engage in they can. Where it can get to overdo, sometimes very often, it also very creative.

And they take the word, and try to figure out, how it can be explained in order to fit, what it actually refers to. For instance, the word Sanskrit itself, Sanskrit of course it is anglicized version of the original word samskrutham. Now samskrutham, one etymological derivation of it is, samya krutham, it is samskrutham - samya krutham means that which is well formed.

So, the language is indeed well formed and therefore the name. In the case of swara, the one very common etymological derivations is given like this svameva rajate. Here it means that which shines on its own, rajate svameva, it shines in its own. Now this, actually etymological derivation that grammarians give.

See the word swara occurs in other context also, like grammar, Sanskrit grammar and vedic recitations. Sanskrit grammar as, many of you would know is highly sophisticated tradition of writing grammar. We have astonishing Ashtadhyayi Panini, many commentated, commentaries on it and grammar was taken to great heights in Sanskrit.

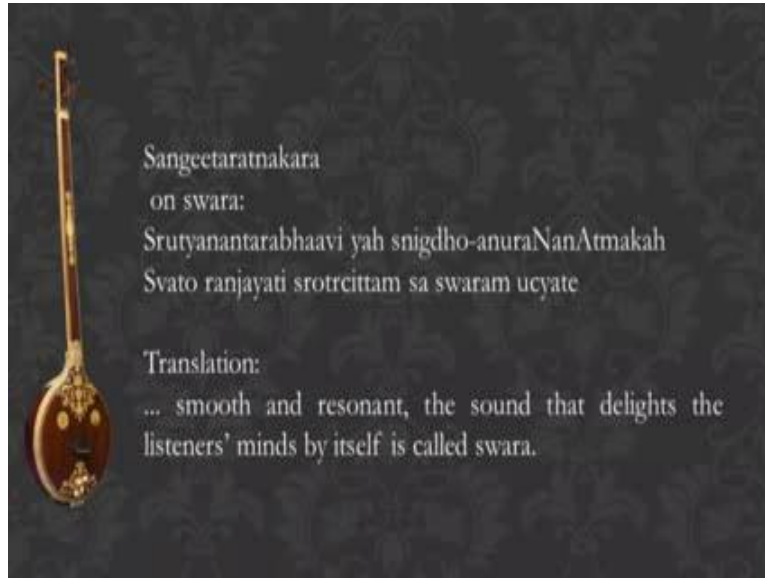
In the context of grammar, swara means vowel. Vowel in Sanskrit is, a, aa, eeh, eeeeh, ooh, ooooh, ae, ai, o and so on. These vowels are called swara and the grammarian explains, it in the same way svameva rajate, that which shines it on its own. And what does it is mean there, it means, that a vowel can manifest itself, in a way consonants cannot.

So, the consonants in Sanskrit for instances is, ka, actually a consonant in Sanskrit is unpronounceable without the help of a vowel. In English speaking k or p or m these are consonants, we can say in English. But in Sanskrit, it is impossible that is not, how a consonant is conceived.

Consonants in Sanskrit, is just the sound k, when it takes a support of a vowel say if k takes a support of a and it becomes ka. Then if it takes the support of a then it becomes ke, so the consonants or vyanjana, is something it does not shine on its own.

Vowel on the other hand, the swara shines on its own. What does it mean in the context of music? Then say, that is musical notes, something that shines on its own and that is something that, scholars has pounded over. And later work like Sangeeta ratnakara give slightly different etymology, is perhaps more apt in the context of music. Sangeeta ratnakara says this Srutyantantarabhaavi yah snigdho-anuraNanAtmakah svato ranjayati srotcittam sa swaram ucyate.

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It is anuraNanAtmakah, anuraNan is resonance, so the swara is full of resonance, in a sense that an ordinary speech is not. When I am saying come here it is not as resonance as I say. (Singing starts: 14:50) (Singing Ends: 14:54) There is a resonance in the musical note, which is not there in other kind of sound. That is what make it, swara and also etymology given here as svato ranjayati, it pleases the mind of the listeners. In itself, just sound is pleasing and therefore it is called swara.