

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture - 18
RAga & Phraseology

So, we have seen, that ragas are comprised of swaras, and in the context of each raga, the swaras that comprise it, take on certain gamakas and some swaras will not take on certain swaras, and same swaras, may take different gamakas and different context and different phrases. So, we have seen these two aspects, swara and gamaka, very important aspects of raga.

Now, how then, do we go about it? how do we make music, given swaras and given that there are some gamakas. Now let us take a set of notes, let me demonstrate, I will take the, four notes from the major scale or five, (Singing Starts: 01:22) (Singing Ends: 01:29) I will take it some gamakas (Singing Starts: 01:32) (Singing Ends: 01:59).

Now, what I sang, were the swaras, sa ri ga ma pa, will belong to the major scale, I did sing it, with some gamakas. But that it makes no sense, what so other its completely in coherent this is the music. What I just sang, would not have evoke, any raga in the mind of any listener, anybody initiated into the carnatic music.

It cannot belong to any raga, what I just sang, it will not evoke any coherent image. Now, what is a coherent image? that is a more fundamental question. So, let us just say that, to an average listener of carnatic music, or a carnatic musician, what I just sang, would not make any sense, would not be seen, as belonging to any raga.

So, what is it, we had swaras, we had gamakas, what was not there, was the coherence, that well-formed phrases, can give this is. What is the idea of concept of phraseology? Raga, each raga is associated, has asset of core phraseology.

And these phrases are rendered, the ragas image is evoked. In fact, this is what we try to do, when we speak of raga, singing a raga, or performing a raga, on an instrument, this is all we try

to do, try to evoke, we try to bring out the raga, try to cokes the raga. We have, we know what is the raga, we know what the gamakas and we know may be the phrases.

But beyond the certain point, this is something that has to happened, raga has to manifest itself some time after ten or fifteen minutes after blabbering. You will not really succeed, but in the hand of the master musicians, just a couple of minutes, and the raga, ragas image is stands before us.

Now this is really the subtlety of raga music. Coming back, to the issue of phraseology, each raga, as I said, has some core phrases, that can be used to capture it, to catch it. In fact, the tamil word for this phrase, what I used as phrase, is actually a translation, very poor translation of, the tamil expression pidi. Interestingly even in the hindustani music, we have expression pakkad means, the same pidi or pakkad means to catch to grasp.

So, it is with these phrases, the raga can be caught, it can be grasped or we can even say that, by holding on to this pidi, we can possibly evoke the raga. So, what then is a phrase? A phrase, a musical phrase, essentially must have more than one note, and usually it is more, definitely more than one. It is usually, more than two, group of three or four swaras, usually comprise a good solid phrase. Which can help us in catching hold of raga, getting hold over the raga.

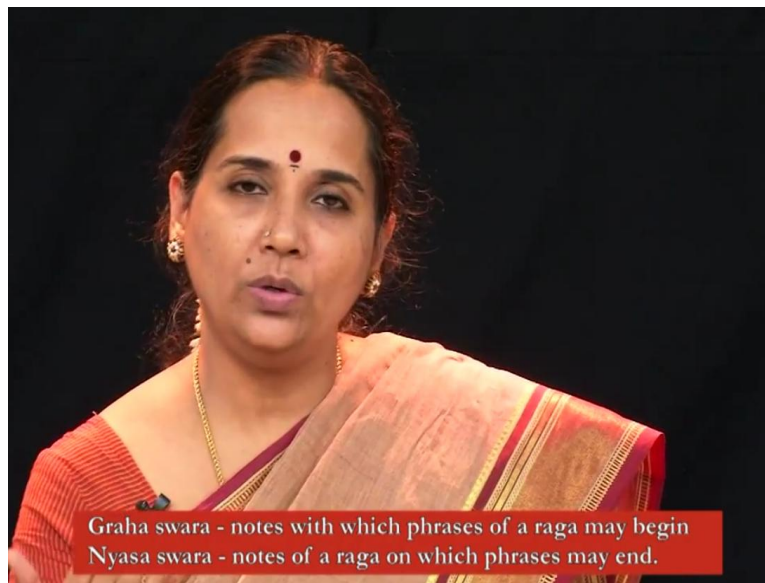
Then, what is phrase; It should have a beginning, a note with which begin the phrase, and the note with which you end the phrase. And there is something happening in between these two and there are notes and there is tempo and all these are important in understanding the idea of phraseology. Let me demonstrate, so I will take same set of notes, (Singing Starts: 06:51) (Singing Ends: 07:11), this is the phrase, that un ambiguously capture the raga called Sahana. (Singing Starts: 07:20) (Singing Ends: 07:22) In fact even just this note, (Singing Starts: 07:23) (Singing Ends: 07:50) this is Sahana.

Now, another raga, another very ancient major raga Shankarabarana. It has the same notes, (Singing Starts: 08:05) (Singing Ends: 08:07). But you would never sing this phrase in

Shankarabarana. You cannot, (Singing Starts: 08:12) (Singing Ends: 08:17) this is simply not allowed in Shankarabarana.

Shankarabarana to say, (Singing Starts: 08:25) (Singing Ends: 08:38). So, as many of you would made out, beginning of Sahana phrases at ri. (Singing Starts: 08:46) (Singing Ends: 08:52) That is in Shankarabarana (Singing Starts: 08:54) (Singing Ends: 09:10). So, in this, which is these two ragas, and the set of notes, two or three things, would have become evident. One is what determines the phrase of-course is, how, or what note the phrase begin; That makes world of difference. And again, what note the phrase ends.

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The terms for these two are, graha and nyasa. Graha is a swara, which you begin the phrase. Nyasa is a swara, with which you end phrases (Singing Starts: 09:55) (Singing Ends: 09:59). You cannot end the phrase like this on Gandhara, in sahana. (Singing Starts: 10:03) (Singing Ends: 10:11). So, ri is very important swara, again the phraseology, the phrases in the raga, highlight certain swaras, as more important and certain other swaras as weaker.

So, we have this idea of gragha, nyasa and also stronger swaras and the weaker swaras. And this is one main aspect of, one main concept of phraseology. We also have something that happens in between, beginning and the end of phrases. There you have the kala pramana, or the tempo.

Now, I will take the same swaras by two other ragas (Singing Starts: 11:19) (Singing Ends: 11:36) so you see the phrase, swaras in the middle, they have different tempos. (Singing Starts: 11:40) (Singing Ends: 11:44). The pa is longer ma, ga is longer, that (Singing Starts: 11:48) (Singing Ends: 11:52). If I sing, same swaras like this, (Singing Starts: 12:03) (Singing Ends: 12:11). That is completely different raga (Singing Starts: 12:13) (Singing Ends: 12:11). Here the ma is elongated becomes the raga called Neelambari, the earlier raga is was, yadukula kamboji. (Singing Starts: 12:36) (Singing Ends: 12:49).

So, all these thing, of-course, we have also the gamakas, the grouping of the swaras. There are many other aspect to phraseology. But on a broad canvas, you can say that, beginning point, ending point and the tempo, within phrase, all these and the distribution of swaras within the phrase, all these determine the identity. All these actually, constitutes phrases of the raga. If you tinkle with them little here and there, the flavor of raga is lost and you cannot possibly bring out the raga swarupa.

We have Dr. R. S. Jayalakshmi, again talking about the gragha and the nyasas swaras and how they are important, in the identity of ragas. She has taken examples of, important carnatic ragas and shown, how gragha swara and amsha swara. Gragha swara and nyasas swaras are very important in the ragas identity.

(Tamil Explanation Begins: 14:19) (Tamil Explanations Ends: 25:21)