

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture -02
Music Everywhere Finding the “Classical”

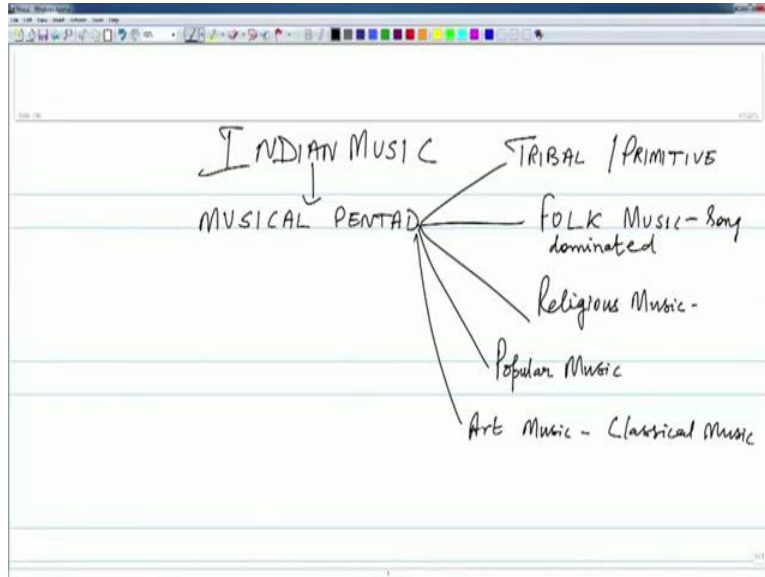
Music is all around us, beginning with toddler's dithis like, “Twinkle Twinkle Little Star” or “Nila nila oadi vaa” or “Chandha maama dur ke”. Beginning with such small songs, mother’s lullabies; songs that mothers sing to put their children to sleep, school prayers, national songs, national anthems, songs to celebrate births, harvest, marriage, songs sung in praise of deities in temples, religious songs, bhajans and we have in ubiquitous pop music and we also have classical music.

Music is indeed all around us. In today’s world, more so than ever before. What with all these modern gadgets, music is a constant companion almost. It is astonishing to think about this variety of music that we have and more so when we consider that all these variety has sprung from just seven notes and their five variants as we shall see shortly.

Now given that what we call Carnatic music is a variety of music that we get to hear today. It is, it can be illuminating to try to understand what Carnatic music is, in the context of these other forms of music, these other genres of music. To understand it by way of contrast. Eminent musicologist, Dr Ashok Ranade; he suggested that Indian music, what is called Indian music, by which is meant by music that is Indian in origin.

Indian music can be understood as falling under any of five categories. This is what he calls the Musical Pentad. So Indian music, the wide variety of music that we can hear, that is Indian belongs to one of these five categories. So according to Dr Ranade, there is a variety of music that we can hear that is Indian, falls under any of these five categories what he calls the musical pentad.

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So this is Indian music which according to Dr Ashok Ranade can be understood as a Pentad. The five categories of Indian music according to him are tribal or primitive music. This is music that you and I cannot easily get to hear. This is music that is practiced in the context of tribal rituals and ceremonies.

And this music is particularly isolated, quite immune to influence from outside. And in turn it does not influence other forms of music. The second category is Folk music; what is called lokh geeth. This is literally music of the folk music that is sung in rural settings on occasions of birth, marriage, death, harvest and other village gatherings.

Now some of the core features of this music, of folk music are that it is song dominated. And these songs are not usually traced to any one person as their author; the songs, the music are the creations and properties of the entire rural community and the music itself serves the function of strengthening the communal bond.

That the third category is Religious music; this is music sung in temples and in other religious gatherings. Here the songs are appropriate to the temples, the deity or the occasion or even the Sampradaya, the particular tradition of religious ritual or religious gathering that is happening. And the purpose of this musical performance is to heighten the religious fervour among the gatherings.

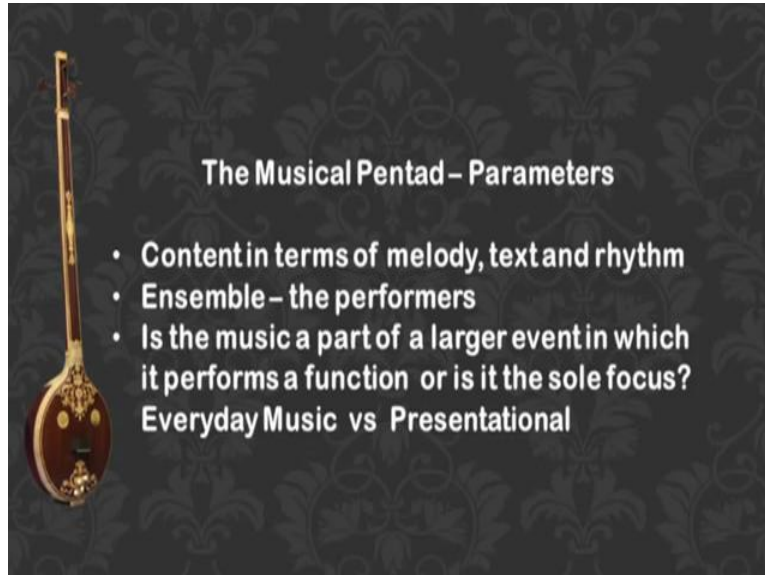
The fourth category is what is most widely heard and widely liked this is popular music. And in the case of India, Indian popular music is certainly, mostly film music. And finally, the last category of Indian music is what you call as Art music which is what is called as classical music, Hindustani, Carnatic and such other musical genres belong under the category of art music.

Now the main feature of art music is that the intent of the performer is artistic. That is the art musician or the classical musician whether it is Carnatic or Hindustani, performs in order to be recognised as an artist, in order to show case his or her artistic standing, artistic ability. To give an example most compositions in Carnatic music are religious in content.

They are in praise of some one or the other Hindu deity. But Carnatic music is not religious music in the sense that Dr Ranade speaks about, though the content is religious, the intent of the Carnatic musician is artistic. So when the Carnatic musician performs a composition in praise of a Hindu deity, he or she is not trying to certainly ought not to try to just evoke religious fervour in the listener.

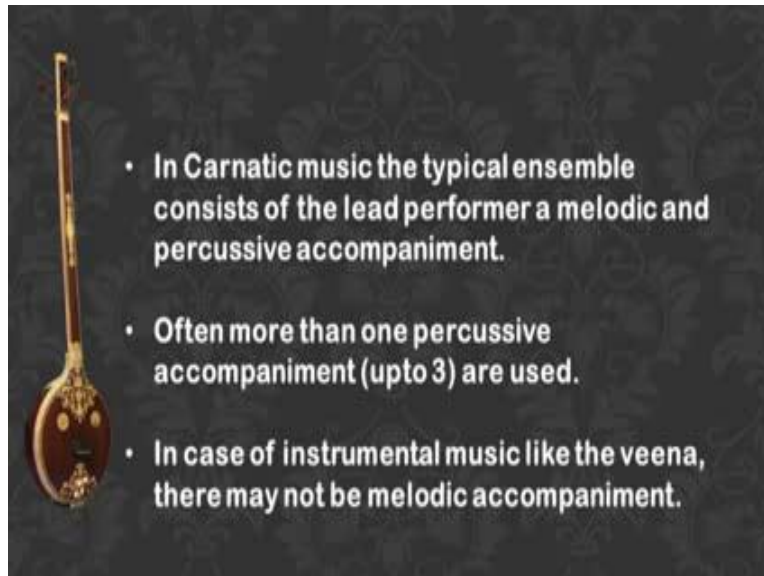
That might happen as a side effect but the primary intent of the performer is artistic; it is to present the composition in a technically and aesthetically satisfying way. So that is how art music or classical music the primary feature of this is genre is the intent of the performer is artistic.

Now, given that there are these five categories of music, what are the criteria that distinguish one from the other? What are the criteria that can separate these five categories? We look at the slide (Refer Slide Time: 8:34)



The first criterion would of course be, content of the music itself. Content, in terms of text melody and rhythm. To make a, to give an example, folk music or religious music will have a certain kind of rhythm, a certain kind of percussive accompaniment element which you would not find in classical music. Folk music and religious music, the percussive accompaniment is likely to be very full of verve, which kind of heightens the celebratory mood of the occasion.

The second criterion would be ensemble. What is the ensemble of performers? Now to take if you consider pop music, a film song, for instance, the ensemble consists of a one or two singers, play back singers and whole lot of people that comprise the orchestra. Whereas if you take Carnatic music is a very simple ensemble (Music Starts: 9:56) (Music Ends 10:04)
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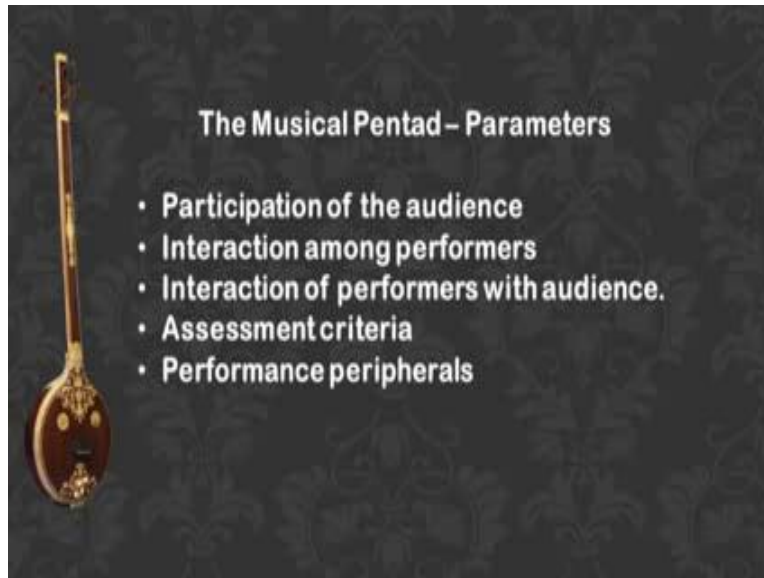


The kind of accompaniment the kind of ensemble constitutes folk music will also be different. The third criteria which is quite important is a question, is the music part of a larger event, fulfilling some function or is the music the sole focus? Clearly religious music if you have bhajan singing in the temple, bhajan singing in a radha kalyanam in Thanjavur or in any southern town, the music itself is part of the larger function, the larger purpose of the religious gathering which is to evoke the devotional fervour.

Music itself is not the sole focus. Music has a function, whereas in Hindustani or Carnatic concert the music itself is the sole focus. It is not part of some larger function or larger purpose. There is an interesting distinction made by ((Hyndrick Wesler))(11:20) a distinction between everyday music and presentational music. Now folk music or mother's lullabies or even to some extent religious music these would all belong under everyday music.

Music that is part of a larger function. Presentational music where music is something that stands in its own right and the focus is entirely on the music itself that is something that would only subsume art music and possibly popular music.

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Now, another criterion is the participation of audience. How does the audience participate? Is the audience passive? Is the audience simply sitting and listening to the music? Or is it actively participating? The performers, amongst the performers also; what is the kind of interaction amongst the performers and how do the performers interact with the audience?

In a pop music concert, for instance, you will constantly find the performers trying to engage with the audience, trying to get them to stand up and start dancing or clapping or something; but this is something that will never happen in a classical music concert.

And we also have assessment criteria. Given that there has been a performance of Carnatic music or of Sankar Mahadevan. How is the concert assessed? Do we have objective criteria for assessing such a concert? And finally but quite importantly, there are what is called performance peripherals. The ambience of the performance the kind of costumes that the performers and the audience wear, the kind of lighting that we have.

Obviously the ambience in a pop music concert is very different from the ambience in a classical music concert. And again it is very different from the ambience in a religious musical gathering. This then was the musical pentad that Dr Ashok Ranade has suggested where we have five categories of music that can account for all the variety of Indian music.

Now, needless to say, these categories are not water tight. There is considerable straggling of these categories so that you may have musical forms which may not quite belong to one or the other category; but to two at the same time. So also the distinction between everyday music and presentational music that I spoke about some time ago. There are musical forms or musical performances which may not clearly belong to one or the other genre; none of the other kind of music.

Now just to get a feel of what these kinds of music, what are the kinds of music talking about, let us listen to some musical clips. The first clip is a song from a Tamil movie called Karuthamma. Let us listen to the song.

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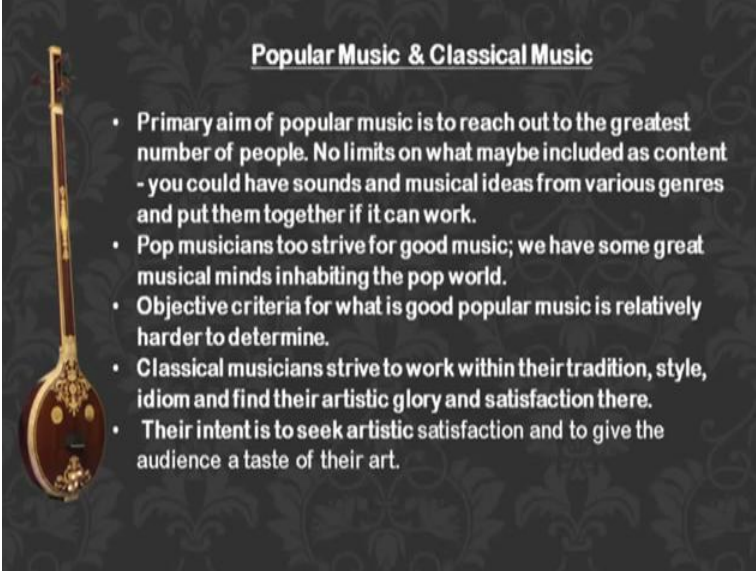
Now this is a song as I said from the movie called Karuthamma, whose music director is A R Rahman and the song clearly has folksy feel to it even without the visuals of the rural setting. Just the song itself gives the feeling of a rural setting . And this is achieved by two main things one is the lyrics itself; the lyrics themselves. And secondly, very importantly, the rhythm the kind of rhythm that the song has it lends it a very folksy feel.

Now alongside this, clearly folksy sounds of the percussion in the interludes of the song, you could hear an orchestra of violence. Now this is what is most interesting about popular music.

Now clearly this belongs to the genre of popular music; that there is no restriction there is no limit really to what a musician may use, to create a song, in the genre of popular music.

What matters is really that it should make the required impact in the context of the film or that it should be very simply popular. The main focus of the popular musician is that a lot of people should like it. It should cater to the taste of a lot of people.

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Popular Music & Classical Music

- Primary aim of popular music is to reach out to the greatest number of people. No limits on what may be included as content - you could have sounds and musical ideas from various genres and put them together if it can work.
- Pop musicians too strive for good music; we have some great musical minds inhabiting the pop world.
- Objective criteria for what is good popular music is relatively harder to determine.
- Classical musicians strive to work within their tradition, style, idiom and find their artistic glory and satisfaction there.
- Their intent is to seek artistic satisfaction and to give the audience a taste of their art.

This is not to say that pop music does not concern itself with good music. We have some very fine musicians in the world of popular music. And any musician, at all must strive after good music. What are criteria's in the world of popular music. This is certainly fuzzy than it is in the case of classical music. In fact, we like to believe that there are objective criteria for good music in classical music.

The classical musician, the Carnatic musician is expected to adhere to traditional values of content and presentation that ensure the dignity of the music above all. And not tinker with form or content. But there are experiments going on in this world too even if the majority of the community of Carnatic music approaches such experiments verily. Eventually of course change does happen for the good and the bad which after all a mark of a life of traditional music.

But the classical musician is expected to stick to the core values and should hope it appeals to many people. It would be an exercise to consider the relations between the classical musician and popularity.

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But this is true if a musician is seen as suiting the music mainly to cater to a larger cross section of people he or she is likely to be branded as populist.

Now this is a second clipping that I will play now. This is, this belongs to the category of, why don't you tell me what category it belongs to? (Music Starts: 18:57) (Music Ends: 24:58)

Yes I am sure most of you have guessed right. This is religious music; the performer is Udhaiyalur Kalyana Raman, a leading performer of what you call nama sankeerthana. Now there is a tradition of what is called bhajana sampradaya which is at least two hundred years old coming from Thanjavur.

Thanjavur is some of you would know had a period of rule by the Maratha kings. And this bhajana tradition actually has its roots in the bhajana tradition of the Maratha religious gatherings as you could see the kind of accompaniment that they have they ensemble, how they percussion highlights, heightens the effect of that music, all that is very unique to the religious music. Now let us hear this piece now:

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You just heard Sanjay Subramanian, a leading carnatic performer and he was performing the alapana, or an improvisation of raga Panthavarali. Now here, as you would have made out the music is a sole focus. What will it sound when percussion also kicks in. Let us listen, to a short clip from another piece:

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So that is how it sounds when percussion also joins. This is particularly a fast piece and it doesn't always sounds like this: the percussive effect is not always like this. And as we will learn little later in the course that the percussive instruments are used were the mridangam, the gatam and the vorse.

Now clearly the kind of interaction among the performers is of a very different kind from the performance of the kind of interaction that you have in a bhajan or in film music because here there is lots of spontaneity that is involved. And there is lot of anticipation that is expected on the part of the accompanists and also the level of technical expertise, aesthetic attainment is quite different in the case of classical music.