

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture - 21
Raga in the textual tradition

Let us look at, raga in the context, of the textual tradition, what textual tradition, itself has to say of raga. Now the Bhaddeshi is a is an eighth century text and perhaps the earliest definition of raga is found in this text.

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There are many verses in this text, which talks explicitly of raga. One of them is this, ranjanajjayate rago vyutpattih samudshrtah itevam ragasabdasya vyutpattih abhidhiyate brhaddesi.

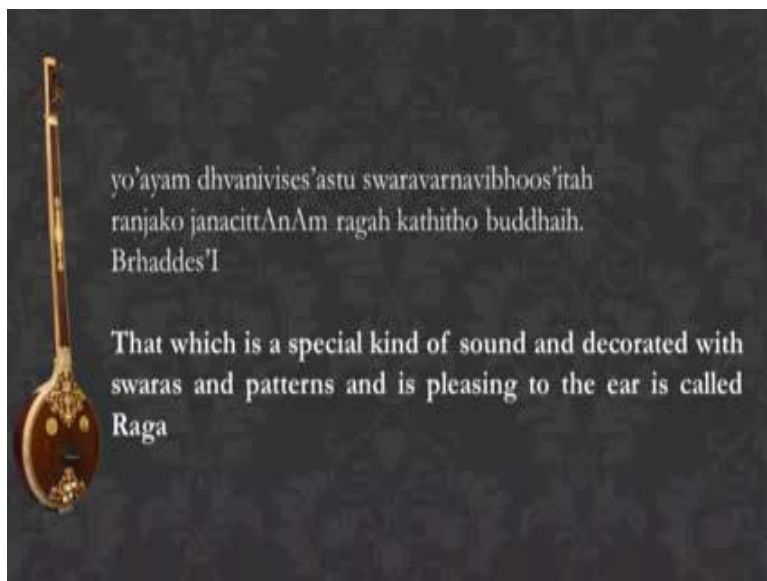
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Raga, ranjanajjayate rago, ranjanai is to colour, so raga is born from the act of colouring, colouring the mind actually, of bringing colours into the minds of the listener, which is essentially means to suffuse it with colour, or with pleasure. So, raga is born from the act of colouring or delighting. This has been set, to be its etymology, and this is therefore spoken, as the etymology of the word Raga.

There is this other very, oft quoted and very famous verse that, yo'ayam dhvanivisesastu swaravarnavibhoositah ranjako janacittanam ragah kathitho buddhaih

(Refer Slide Time: 01:46)



That which is a special dwani, dwani vishesha and is be detect, it is decorated with, swara and varna. And delights the minds of people, ranjako janacittanam, that is said to be raga. This is what said from brhaddesi, an eighth century text.

Now it seems, that in the earlier text, the concept of raga, is not quite, what it is today. Which for, its an abstract entity, raga exists as a possibility of melodic creation, whereas possibly, in the earlier text raga, refer to a particular melodic entity itself.

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Today of course, raga is many people speak of it. S. K. Saxena, an important writer and thinker of the twentieth century, he has suggested that, we could view raga as a melodic matrix, it is a matrix. And any composition, or any other improvisation of the raga, partakes of that matrix. In the sense, that is also the substance of that music.

Others have suggested, that we can think of raga as a melodic cloud, a cloud from which possibly melodies would rain. There is this, interesting and fairly used description of raga by Deepak Raja, another important writer of one music and it reads like this:

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“Even a casual listener is aware that the word raga is used to describe the melodic facet of a piece of music. He also knows that a raga is not a pre-composed melody. The same raga, performed on different occasions can sound entirely different while yet retaining a strong basis in familiarity. She also knows that there are hundreds perhaps thousands of raga-s in circulation, and that experienced listeners can distinguish one raga from others. From this most listeners can infer that a raga is, broadly, a melodic structure, tight enough to remain distinct and identifiable, and yet loose enough to form the basis for considerable individual freedom”.

Deepak Raja

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