

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture – 24
Mela system of classifying raga-s

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We are talking of classifying ragas, and we are now ready to talk about, the mela or the melakarta system of classifying ragas. Now, this is a major theoretical advance, that started sometime in the mid sixteenth century. And, was pursued with great zest, in the lakshana granthar tradition, for two or three centuries and it has made a deep impact on carnatic music. This is perhaps, one case of theory, impacting practice.

Now what is mela, is that the idea is actually quite something. We are here talking of grouping ragas or classifying ragas. Now let us take this group of ragas, where Arabhi, Hamsadhwani, Nalinakanti, Bilahari and Kedaram, the aroha avaroha of these ragas are you can see it in the slide.

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As you can see, they use swaras, that belong to the major scale or the dheera sankarabharanam scale. They do not use all those swaras, but they use some of the swaras, that occur in the sankarabharanam scale. So, arabhi uses, ri two, g two, ma one, da one and ni two, though of course, the aroha of arabhi does not have, ga and ni. But still, if you must say, what are the notes that occur in arabhi, the notes that occur in arabhi are the notes of the major scale.

Again, the notes of hamsadhwani is a audava raga, it has only five swaras, and it does not use ma and dha. But, the re, ga, sa, re, ga, pa, ne. re, ga and ne are the swaras from the major

scale, shankarabaranam scale. So, also the nalinakanti, nalinakanti has a vakra form, there is a certain, zig zag pattern in the aroha avaroha itself. (Singing Starts: 03:26) (Singing Ends: 03:49).

These are also notes from the sankarabharanam scale. (Singing Starts: 03:57) (Singing Ends: 04:03). Again, notes from the sankarabharanam scale, arabhi (Singing Starts: 04:07) (Singing Ends: 04:14), bilahari is (Singing Starts: 04:16) (Singing Ends: 04:21), kedaram (Singing Starts: 04:24) (Singing Ends: 04:33) this is kedaram.

So, now all these ragas, their structure is very different, hamsadhvani for instance, does not have ma, does not have da. Whereas bilahari has both ma and da, kedaram does not have a da. But in terms of the swaras, that these ragas take, they can be seen as sub sets, so to say of the sankarabharanam scale.

So, the sankarabharanam scale, has sa re ga ma pa da ne and arabhi takes a few swaras from this. Hamsadhvani takes another set of swaras from this. Nalinakanti takes, yet another set of swaras from the same scale, sankarabharanam scale. So also, bilahari and kedaram. So, this is the idea of mela, that all these ragas can be grouped under the sankarabharanam mela.

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Sankarabharanam scale: S R2 G2 M1 P D2 N2	Arabhi: S R2 M1 P D2 S' S N2 D2 P M1 G2 R2 S
Hamsadhvani S R2 G2 P N2 S' S N2 P G2 R2 S	Nalinakanti S G2 R2 M1 P N2 S' S N2 P M1 G2 R2 S
Bilahari S R2 G2 P D2 S' S N2 D2 P M1 G2 R2 S	Kedaram S M1 G2 M1 P N2 S' S N2 P M1 G2 R2 S

That, this is one scale, the scale of sankarabharanam and all these ragas can be grouped under it because the swaras that occur in these ragas, are the swaras of that scale. So, that is the very simple idea of mela.

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So, if you have a raga like, say for instance lalitha or something, (Singing Starts: 06:20) (Singing Ends: 06:27). Now these notes, are not the notes of sankarabharanam, so lalitha would not be classified under sankarabharanam. It may be classified under some other raga, mayamalagowla. So, the idea of the mela, was simple that it is a scale and under this mela or in this mela, all ragas that take those swaras they are grouped under that mela.

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This method of classifying is first attempted by Ramamatya, in his Swaramelakalanidhi. It was written in the mid sixteenth century, Ramamatya was attached to the Vijayanagara court.

And in this, he advances the theory of mela, as a method of classifying ragas, and he has listed twenty such melas. And the names of those melas are here for your interest.

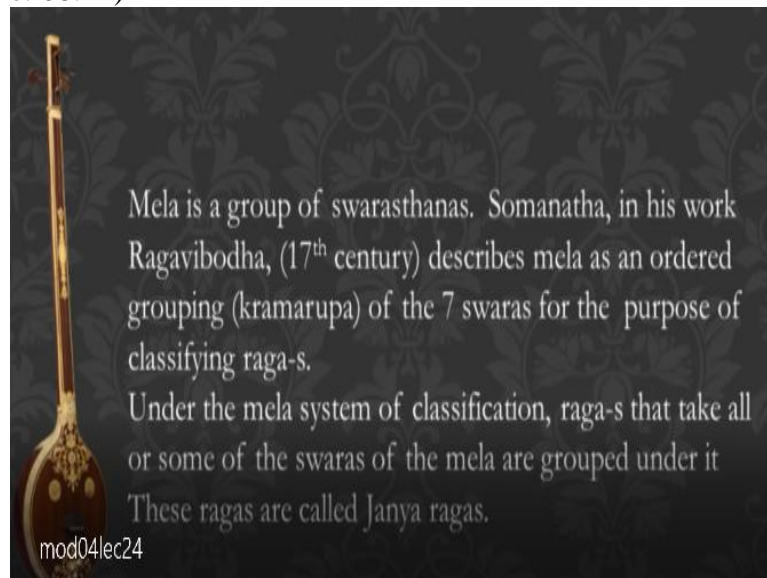
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Names of Melas mentioned in Swaramelakalanidhi of Ramamatya (1550)

1. Mukhari	2. Sriraga	3. Malavagaula	4. Saranigamita
5. Hindola	6. Suddhamati	7. Desika	8. Paranjayanti
9. Suddhamati	10. Man	11. Kanchanagaula	12. Sindhaavanti
13. Ritigaula	14. Vasantabhara	15. Kanchanagaula	16. Hemam
17. Samavanti	18. Arunagiri	19. Samant	20. Kamblani

Many of these ragas certainly, the names, we have many ragas, by the same names even today mukhari, hindola, ritigawla and sriragam and so on. But most likely, very likely the ragas are changed over the centuries, but for Ramamatya and for many others, the mela is a group of swarasthanas and ragas are grouped under it which use the same swarasthanas and these ragas are called Janya ragas.

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Mela is a group of swarasthanas. Somanatha, in his work Ragavibodha, (17th century) describes mela as an ordered grouping (kramarupa) of the 7 swaras for the purpose of classifying raga-s.

Under the mela system of classification, raga-s that take all or some of the swaras of the mela are grouped under it

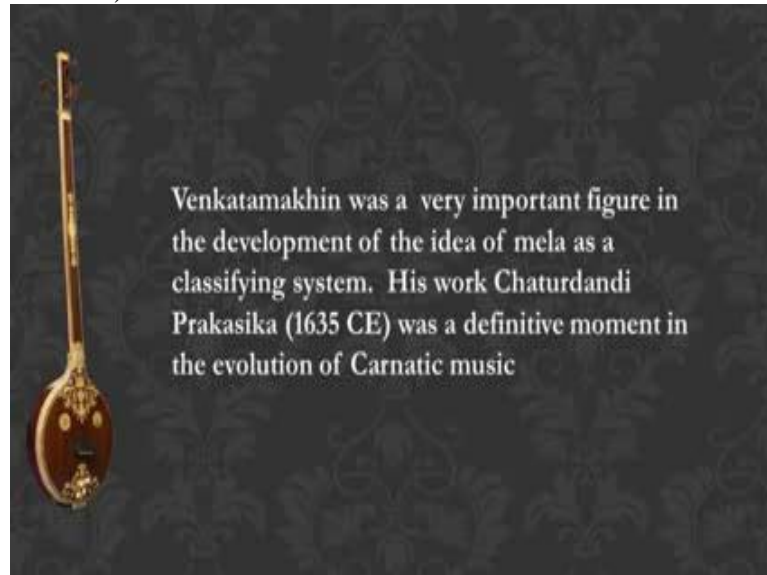
These ragas are called Janya ragas.

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Janya means born of, it is almost as, if these ragas are born of the mela, but that is only a terminology it is not, as if the ragas were born out of this mela. The ragas are already there, and the mela is only a construct, a scale which is suggested. Which we suggest, can be used

to classify ragas. Now, this idea of mela, caught on and after him every musicologist, every writer of any lakshana grantha, worked some ideas of his own about this mela. And one of the most critical figure in this endeavor, in this group of lakshana grantha, grandakaras was venkatamakhin

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Venkatamakhin in his very well-known Chaturdandi Prakasika, that is the treatise, that he wrote. He comes up, with a system for generating skills, how many skills can possibly be generated, that is question. You see as been Ramamatya set out on the path of mela. Many suggested that, mela is a way of classifying ragas. He was concerned with the ragas, that were actually prevalent and then he created, he suggested only those scales that were needed to account for the ragas, that were actually prevalent.

But soon, the issue of how many melas can be generated, that assumed life of its own. Musicologist, started trying to figure out ways of, figuring out of how many such melas are possible, without any reference to actual practice of music, that interested musicologist immensely. And Venkatamakhins suggestions, Venkatamakhin said that seventy-two such scales are possible and that is what rules, carnatic music even today.

Venkatamakhin worked in the seventeenth century, chaturdandi prakasika was written in the seventeenth century and even today, carnatic music, we speak of seventy-two mela karthas. Now how are seventy-two scales possible, seventy-two sampoorna scales possible.