

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture - 03
Classical Music – Art Music

Let us stop for a minute and consider what we mean by calling Carnatic music or Hindustani music “Classical”. That is how we refer to, Carnatic music. We say, it is the classical music or Carnatic music of South India. Now the expression classical music, primarily applies to Western Orchestral music that was composed in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, specifically the music of Beethoven, Mozart, Haydn and others. And this music came to be called classical music only sometime in the nineteenth century.

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And we speak of western classical music, as the music that has evolved in the west from say some 1000 A D to the current times. That is Western classical music, between, we speak of western classical music is capital “C” we mean the music that was composed, in the period of the eighteenth century, specifically. Now it this, expression came to be applied to certain forms of music and dance in India, for various reasons.

Now if we try to understand, what we mean when we say that the Carnatic music is classical. One of the things certainly that has some antiquity, that it has been around for quite some time for many centuries may be at least many decades. Certainly, it is true in the case of Carnatic music; has been around may be for at least four centuries.

And secondly, we mean not only that, it is valuable because its old but also because it has value; it has intrinsic value; we call Sanskrit, for instance, a classical language; because it is a very ancient language, but also because it has great literature in it. It has, what is very significant, the accent, all kinds of works written in this language, which is why we call it classical. Again, we have classical forms of dance Bharatanatyam, Mohiniyattam and so on.

But our own word for music, Carnatic music is Shastriya Sangeetham. In fact, we just refer to it as Carnatic music. There is no word in our languages for classical, when we also mean, when we call something Classical. Classical dance, Bharatanatyam or Carnatic music, we also mean that it has a certain grammar, well defined grammar and a certain level of training is needed to be able to perform it. And very importantly, we also mean that there is a textual tradition; a tradition of writing about this music or dance. All this is true in the case of Carnatic music.

In the case of, in fact, in the case of Carnatic music, the tradition of Lakshana Granthas which is, also something, we talk about this later. It is an ancient tradition, it goes back many centuries, where texts describe and discuss this music. Now interestingly, Carnatic and Hindustani music came to be called classical, only in the twentieth century. In fact, there is this book Raja Sourendra Mohan Tagore (Video Starts: 4:12) (Video Ends: 4:26), which was published sometime in the late nineteenth century. And it is titled “Hindu music”, but nowhere is there any reference to the expression, Classical music.

The book talks about Khyal, Tumri and so on. But there is no use of the word, classical music. Even the much later, twentieth century work by P Sambamoorthy, which is a definitive work on South Indian Music and in fact the whole series is titled South Indian Music. There is no talk of classical music. He just speaks of South Indian music. Now we will see, in fact that the defining of Carnatic and Hindustani music as classical music of India was a part of the attempt, on the

part of the Indians to seek and forge and celebrate their cultural richness, in the context of the struggle for freedom.

It is true that most musicologist, beginning with as we saw Dr Ashok Ranade himself, preferred to use the term Art music, rather than classical music when we speak of Carnatic or Hindustani music. But in my opinion, it is quite harmless to use the word expression classical music because it is quite clear what we mean, when we say by classical music of India, in terms of what it refers to, is quite clear.