

Appreciating Carnatic Music
Dr. Lakshmi Sreeram
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

Lecture -34
Avartana, Samam and Graha

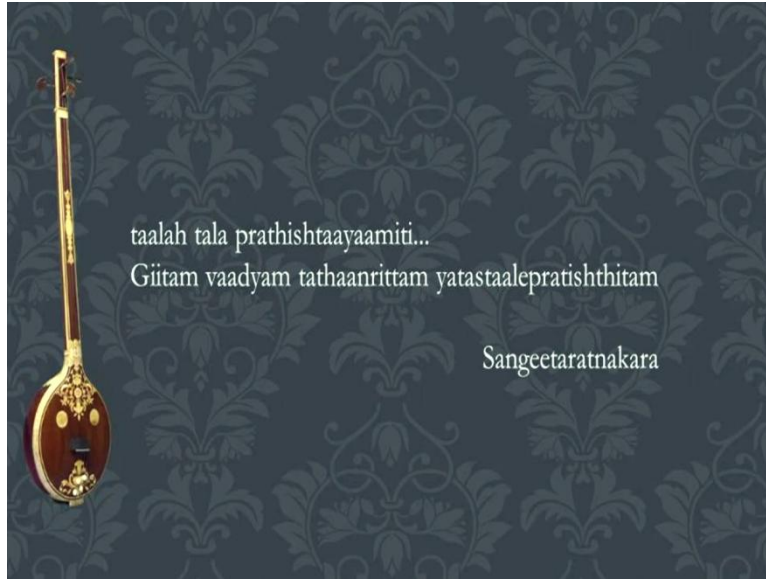
Tala is idea, tala as a temporal organisation of music. This is quite unique to Indian music. The word tala occurs in very ancient texts, it is very ancient concept, really. And we find it in Natya Shastra. And in the Natya Shastra the word sangeetha actually, it is used to refer to Gita, Vadya and Nritha. That is song instrument and dance in Natya Shastra, if you remember it is a treatise on theatre and music, dance and instrument they were all part of theatre.

Now tala comes into the picture because that is the principle. Because of which these three elements can come together. Unless there is such an ordering principle, there can be no coordination between the singer and the dancer and the instrumentalist. So this is the tala, is the external reference point, it is the ordering principle.

Now to give another example in western and classical music, you have the conductor who manages the orchestra. The orchestra will consist of Violinists, Sensualist and Pianists and all kinds of instruments. The conductor, one of the main roles of the conductor is to set the tempo and maintain it. Now he or she is the external reference point for the music. For all the musicians and they have to take their cue from the conductor a gesture.

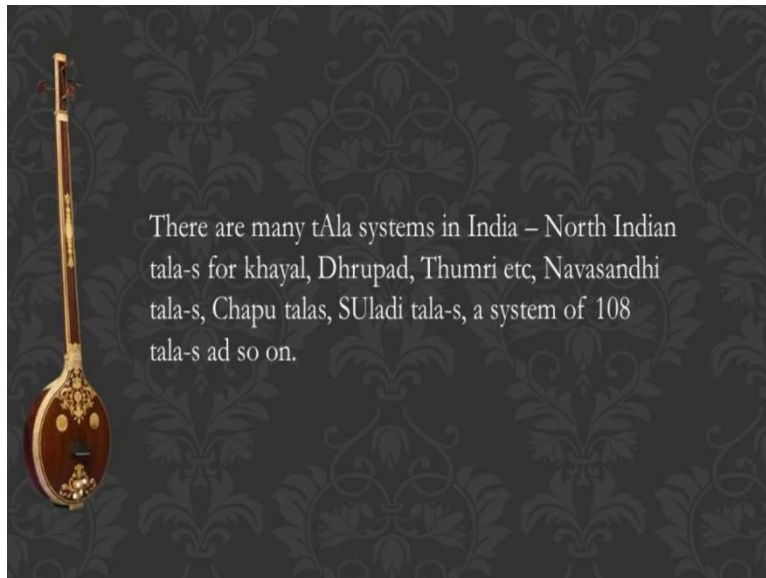
Now of course tala is much more than just a tempo. There is a cyclicity, has certain duration, which repeats, which recurs. So in the Natya Shastra, the tala is seem like that, it is the factor, the tala is the principle because of which these three elements can be organized. Because of which they come together the Sangeetaratna Kara for instance says:

(Refer Slide Time: 3:07)



“Taalh taal prathishhtaayaamiti geetham vaadyam tathaanrittam yatastaalepratishthitham”. So Gita, Vadya and Nritham they are based on tala. That is they are grounded in the tala and that is the base. Tala is the word, tala is seen, has been derived from the word tala. Tala is the base, anything upon which they can be constructed.

(Refer Slide Time: 4:00)



So that is the ground principle, tala is the ground principle. On which these three elements can come together. Tala actually has had a long and complex evolution and we have different systems of tala in India. We have the North Indian system in Kayal, we have Dhrupad and Thumri has another set of talas. We have what are called Navasandhi tala, we have a system of 108 talas, that are supposed to be very ancient.

Then in current Carnatic Music, we have the Suladisapta tala, which is a very prominent tala system that is used. Besides that we have also the Chapu talas. We talk in detail about these, but the couple of features that are common to all these tala systems. These are all various systems of tala. Now, what is common to all these thing is or these tala systems is that they have the concept of “Avartana”.

For instance avartana is a very fundamental concept avarta or avartana, means one cycle of the tala. So Adhi tala, it is what we have been seeing it is a cycle of 8 beats, 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8. This is avartana, this is one avartana of adhi tala and as much as we have to maintain the discipline of pitch or raga. We have to maintain the discipline of the avartana.

The Avartana cannot be trifled with it has to be maintained at all costs and you will see whenever a performer performs the tala, he or she will always stop only after returning to the first beat of the tala cycle. In fact the word Avartana derives from the word Avrithi. Avrithi means returning recurrence. We speak of so many avridhis of any mantra.

For instance, that is the act of repetition, that is avrithi and adhi talam has is an avartana of eight beats. You have other talas like roopaka talam. Which is a cycle of six beats, one two three four five six. This is roopaka talam and you have tala like 1,2,3,4,5,6,7 ; 1,2,3,4,5,6,7; this is an avartana of 7 beats called Mishra Chapu talam.

In Hindustani music, we have Teen Tal, which has an avartana of 16 beats or Ek Tal which is an avartana of 12 beats. So this concept of avartana is a very important, fundamental concept that all tala systems have, that is simply the number of beats in one cycle of the tala and that recurs. This Avartana keeps recurring, as the word itself means recurrence, returning. And in carnatic music the smallest avartana in the tala cycle, the smallest avartana is is Thista Ekam.

We will talk more about it, it is the cycle of three beats that is the smallest possible tala cycle and the longest longest tala cycle is 29 beats this would be Sankeerna Jatidhruva Talam. As I said, we will talk about all these, but there are other tala systems like the 108 tala systems. That I just referred to, it is a very ancient tala system. We have talas with avartanas upto 128 beats per cycle and that is called Simha Nandana Tala.

You have another tala with a very odd number Saraka Nandana Talam its 79 beats per cycle. So whatever it is, the concept of avartana is very fundamental in all these systems of tala.

(Refer Slide Time: 09:13)



Now the other important concept is that of “SAMA”, Sum the first beat of every tala cycle is called the sam or the samam. And there is also a very significant point esthetically, technically, that has very important role. In fact if you watch a performance of Carnatic music or Hindustani music, the tala cycle will only end on the first. You come back,

How many hour avartanas, the performance has gone into the particular piece, it will come back, it will not stop anywhere in the midway, it has to come back to the first avartana. It has to come back to the first beat of the avarthana that is sum, that is where the piece will be ended.

Now another very important beat in the tala cycle especially in the carnatic music, it is of great significance and that is called the graha or the edupu. This is the point where the composition starts. Suppose, you have an adhi tala Vatapi Ganapathim (Singing Starts :10:25) (Singing Ends: 10:36) so the adhi tala starts with “1,2,3,4” and so on. The song, the composition also starts on the first beat (Singing Starts 10:44) (Singing Ends: 10:52) this is.

So in this case the graha or the edupu or where the composition begins is the sum itself samam. The first beat of the tala cycle this is called samayeduppu. Now adhi tala itself, let me take another composition, which you heard earlier in this course. (Singing Starts 11:15) (Singing Ends: 11:49) Here 1,2 (Singing Starts 11:52) it is not it is not like that one two

(Singing Ends 11:59). So, if each beat, if we divide it into four “1,2,3,4”, “1,2,3,4”, “1,2,3,4”, “1,2,3,4”, “1,2,3,4” and 1,2 (Singing Starts 12:08) (Singing Ends 12:12)

So this is called Ara Graham, the Eduppu or the big commencement of the song composition is half into the first beat. So this is a particular kind of graha and this has to be maintained throughout, you cannot think of, you cannot move it here and there. The composition integrity in terms of the music also in terms of the tala structure has to be maintained.

Now another composition (Singing Starts: 12:48). (Singing Ends 13:39) So here eduppu is “1,1,2,3,4,”,”1,2” sarase that is half into second beat of the tala. One beat is gone, the second beat half of that you pick up the composition (Singing Starts: 13:57) (Singing Ends 14:07). So theses are different kinds of edupu, so you cannot have a eduppu or graham before the saman itself (Singing Starts: 14:19) (Singing Ends 14:40).

This is another composition, where the composition starts just before the sam 1,2 (Singing Starts: 14:51) (Singing Ends 15:01) or in this composition (Singing Starts: 15:02) (Singing Ends 15:25) so hari comes here before the sam.

(Refer Slide Time: 15:48)



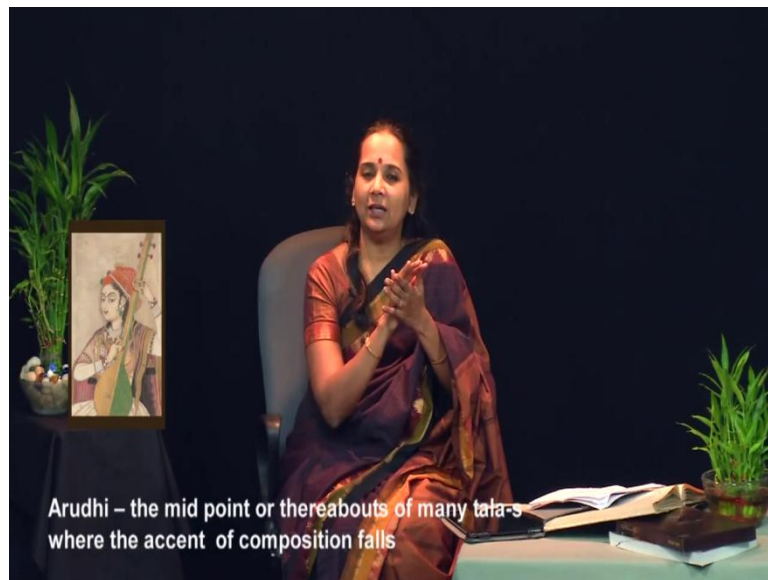
This is called, this is a different kind of eduppu, what is called an Atita Edupu. In fact this concept of graha or edupu or composition is also a very ancient one. You have the Sangeetharatnakara, which says “Samo athiitho anagathasheha grahastalo tridhaamatha”. That is it the graha or the eduppu can be either at the sama itself, that is we can form the sama

of the tala or it can be a little after the samam, that can be half or it can be one or it can be one and a half or in which case it is called “Anagatha Graha” or it can be “Atita”.

It can be the the graham, the commencement of this composition is just before the samam. So, we have three kinds of Eduppu Graha and in carnatic music. This is a very, very significant point in the tala cycle. Then you take a composition, this is something that has to be at all costs maintained, even during improvisation.

When you improvise with the composition, there are aspects of improvisation. Where we use the composition itself as the anchor and in that case also this graha has to be maintained at all costs. And that is in fact throws up some technical and ecstatic challenges, and how the performer acquits herself is what listener’s watch listeners enjoy.

(Refer Slide Time: 17:36)



In a tala like Adhi Talam, the midpoint of the tala is also important in compositions, that is called the Arudhi. And normally the accent the weight, that the composition will fall there.

For instance, (Singing Starts: 17:46) (Singing Ends: 17:47) so in some way the accent falls on the sam (Singing Starts: 17:54) (Singing Ends: 18:00), that is the midpoint of the tala cycle. The midpoint of the tala cycle is the fifth beat; “1,2,3,4,5”.

So (Singing Starts: 18:07) or (Singing Ends: 18:21) that is where the weight falls, (Singing Starts: 18:23) (Singing Ends: 18:30) again the accent falls on the midpoint of the cycle. Some tala cycles, like as we will see this Roopaka Talam, it cannot permit that kind of accent because Roopaka Talam is “1,2,3,4,5,6”. A very well known composition in this, is again

thyagarajas (Singing Starts: 18:57) (Singing Ends: 19:10). So the tala is like this, “1,2,3,4,5,6” (Singing Starts: 19:14) (Singing Ends: 19:46).

So the Roopaka Talam, compositions have a very different structure. (Singing Starts: 19:51) (Singing Ends: 20:49). This is another composition, it is slower pace, this is Roopaka Talam. (Refer Slide Time: 21:35)



Another popular tala, that we often see in carnatic music is “Mishra Chapu”. Mishra chapu is a very interesting tala and it lands itself wonderfully in improvisation. Also mishra chapu is like this “1,2,3,4,5,6,7”; “1,2,3,4,5,6,7” (Singing Starts: 21:29) (Singing Ends: 22:29). This is the composition of Muthusamy Dekshidar, very short composition. The next part of the composition is like this.

We will see, How this composition is split over this tala cycle? (Singing Starts: 22:47) (Singing Ends: 25:00). Now I will just sing a few a couple of lines, each of few compositions you could try to see, you could make a whether it is, I only sing Adhi Tala or Roopaka Tala or Mishra Chapu Tala. There are other talas, we will see, about it later. But between these three, I will just sing a few compositions and you can take it as a small exercise, try to figure out What tala it is?

One way is to try to figure out, how many beats are there between each repetition of the line? (Singing Starts: 25:43) (Singing Ends:26:24) This is part of one composition (Singing Starts : 26:41) (Singing Ends : 27:57) So these are 3 compositions, that I have sung, parts of the song and of course only the first part of the compositions have been sung and they are in different

talas. You can just try to listen to them again and again and ha see if you can identify how many beats are there and with that helps thats an easy guess for you about what tala these compositions are in.