

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture -37
Aspects of Tala IV

Suladi sapta talas as I said is about 500 years old. And it is very much part of carnatic music and is still of continuously part of carnatic music. But it might seem little overly complicated for a musical system, why do we need so many kind of talas? We know why should we have gestures? Why these gestures. Now the question of why only these gestures, it is probably a research topic, why these gestures are come down.

In fact, there is a suggestion in Abhinav Gupta's work, that these gestures are possibly derived from the gestures, that were used during the sacrifices Sama Vedam. For instance Sama Veda prescribes hand gestures, specific gestures that are to be used specifically during specific points of time during any sacrifice.

So, this beating and counting, beating and throwing your hands aside, why only these; why not something else; It is ultimately, it is only arbitrary. In fact this context, I might also have mentioned that these three Angas, that I spoke about Laghu beating and counting, Drutham beating and throwing your hands aside and Anudrutham just this beating, that the three Angas that is used in Suladisaptha Tala.

There are other Talaangas, which are used in another tala system which is called 108 Anga tala you could that is almost very rare to find compositions or performances using those talas. Among the hundred and eight talas, if at all they are performed, that is only for an interest, novelty a kind of demonstration for demonstration purpose.

But performances, 108 talas are not has never been used these days Suladisaptha tala are still used the other Angas. That the 108 tala system uses are called Guru Plutam and Kakapadam.

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Guru has a count of 8 and Plutam has a count of 12 and kakapadam has a count of 16. And the Tala Kriya, what is done gestures, it varies from four down, four here and four there and four up. Sometimes, they do some kind of a circular movement, these are all the Kriyas, that are associated with the other tala Angas, which is not of a concern at all. It is of course, certainly a part of carnatic music, until about a couple of centuries ago or even the last centuries, early parts of twentieth century.

You might have had some active renditions of these talas, certainly in contemporary carnatic music, these are not actively performed. So Suladisaptha tala coming back to it, the one reason why do we need to maintain the tala cycle with this kind of codified gestures is that, as I have mentioned earlier, this is the reference for everybody, for the performer and for the singer. If there is a singer for the accompanist and also for the audience.

You need to maintain the tala cycle, maintaining the tala cycle as I said is as important as maintaining the sruthi and maintaining the pitch. Pitch fidelity as it is important to maintain the raga grammar or the composition integrity. These are all the things that are must in carnatic music. In a classical musical form, these are all things that are unenviable.

The tala cycle is one such thing, if you have a tala cycle of 6 beats in a composition or 7 beats or 21 beats that cycle has to be maintained throughout the rendition of that pace. And unless, we have this performance of this tala, it is quite difficult because these cycles are long.

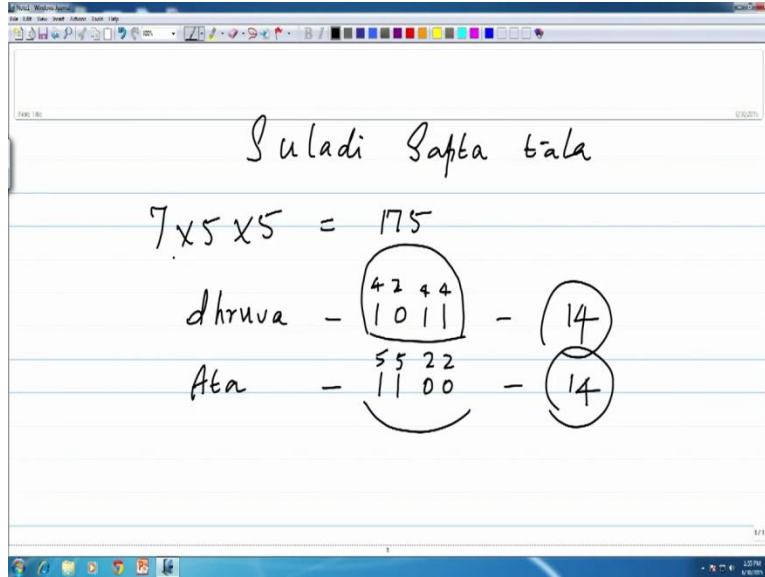
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They are not short once, like “1,2,3,4 “, “1,2,3,4”, “1,2,3”, “1,2,3” . If these are short cycles, then it is possible to remember it to keep track of it. When we have longer cycles, it is not easy to keep track of cycle. Of course great masters, who have been performing for years, decades, they do get into the system. Possibly they do not need a external reference to perform.

When you think of great instrumentalist, who plays, when they perform, when playing on the instrument like Veena or Violin, your hands are engaged you cannot, you do not have hands to perform the talam. So great masters, they do not need the external reference, but anybody at the even slightly, less elevated level they need the tala performed for them to keep track of the tala cycle.

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Now coming back to Suladisaptha tala, for us to have seven into five into five equal to one seventy five tala. Now do we really need so many talas, for instance let me take Dhruva tala and Ata tala. Now Dhruva tala both of them are part of the Suladisaptha tala. If you remember Dhruva tala has a structure of “101”; one laghu that is “laghu drutham laghu” Ata tala has a structure of “1100”.

Suppose, this is, we take a Chatusyajathi Dhruva tala, then let us see how many beats are there per Avarthana this is four, this is two, this is again four and this is again four. The Chatusyajathi Dhruva tala “1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14” beats fourteen mathras.

Ata tala, let us take Khanda Jathi, in fact by default all of these are; Suladisaptha tala is associated with one or other Jathi. By default Dhruva talam associated with Chatusyajathi. Ata Talam by default is associated with the Khanda Jathi, it is five beats

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$$\begin{array}{l}
 \text{Suladi Sapta tala} \\
 7 \times 5 \times 5 = 175 \\
 \text{dhruva} - \overset{4}{1} \overset{2}{0} \overset{4}{1} 1 - 14 \\
 \text{Ata} - 1100 -
 \end{array}$$

So again Dhruva, if you take Ata tala, Khanda Jathi Ata tala, we have five, laghu is five, another laghu is five, drutham is two, another drutham is two, again you have 14 beats. So what is the point, why must we have two different talas, when the number of beats is the same?

There is a point, if you, we will watch a short demonstration. Now again performed at a very beginners level, as I said the Suladisaptha tala is introduced in the beginning beginners right away in the in a set of lessons called Alankara. Now Dhruva tala, the structure of the tala is like this “1011”. Ata tala structure is “1100”.

So this structure is very different, the composition structure will also be correspond to the structure of this tala. The internal structure of the composition will be, such that it will reflect this structure. Let us listen, let us watch this clip (Singing Starts: 9:47) (Singing Ends: 11:50). The next will demonstrate Ata tala, which is also of 14 mathras. But the Tala Kriya is different, the Ata tala ,the Kriya is like this “1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14”. So Ata tala is two laghu and two druthams (Singing Starts: 12:17) (Singing Ends: 13:25)

So as we saw Dhruva tala is laghu followed by drutham, followed by two laghu. So (Singing Starts: 13:33) (Singing Ends: 13:43) whereas Ata tala has two, so you see the Alankara, it is a composition, it is created such that it fits into tala anga is reflected in this. It coincides with the

tala anga (Singing Starts: 14:04) (Singing Ends: 14:11). Let us see how the Ata tala, Alankara is constructed and again that will reflect the tala angas. (Singing Starts: 14:19) (Singing Ends: 14:26)

Now suppose, if I am going to sing this Alankara in Dhruva talam, this is how the thing is structured (Singing Starts:14:33) (Singing Ends: 14:39). Whereas if you sing it in Dhruva talam (Singing Starts: 14:41) (Singing Ends: 14:44). It is coming in the middle of nowhere (Singing Starts: 14:46) (Singing Ends: 14:50). So the compositions and the tala cycles, tala angas there will be a close connection between these two.

Now, if we take a proper composition this is of course it is an exercise, what I just made about, what I demonstrated it is an exercise, what is called as Abyasana Ganam, that is Abyasana Ganam is a repertoire to a that is used only for practice. Now, we have the other part of carnatic music repertoire, which is called that is Sabhaghanam.

That is used for performances, even in compositions in Sabhaghanam, because that is what is relevant, we have a composition which are rendered in one or the other Suladisaptha tala, but the compositions the internal structure may reflect the tala anga structure.

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Suladi Sapta tala

Catura Matya - $4+4$ 101 = 10

Mishra Jhampa - $7+1+2$ 100 = 10

Now, let us take two other similar ,two other talas, which have the same number of beats Matya tala, Jhampa tala. Matya tala is also associated with Chatusyajati matya and Jhampa is always by default associated with Mishra. Ofcourse you can have other jhatis also. But by default unless otherwise mentioned, Matya tala is Chatusyajati and Jhampa is Mishra Jhati. Matya tala has a structure “101”, Jhampa has one Anudrutham and Drutham, so lago drutham lago lago anudrutha drutham.

So Chatusya Matya will have four plus, two plus, four that is ten Mishra. Jhampa will have seven plus, one plus, two as equal to is again ten. Now there are two great compositions in this talas by Muthusamy Dikshidar, a part of group of krithis called the Navagraha Krithis. The Chatusyajati Matya tala is a composition in Asaveri ragam “Chandram Chandramanasa”.

The structure and the composition are like Matya tala, “1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10”. Now let us see how the structure of the composition coincides with the structure of the tala. (Singing Starts: 17:54) (Singing Ends: 19:28)

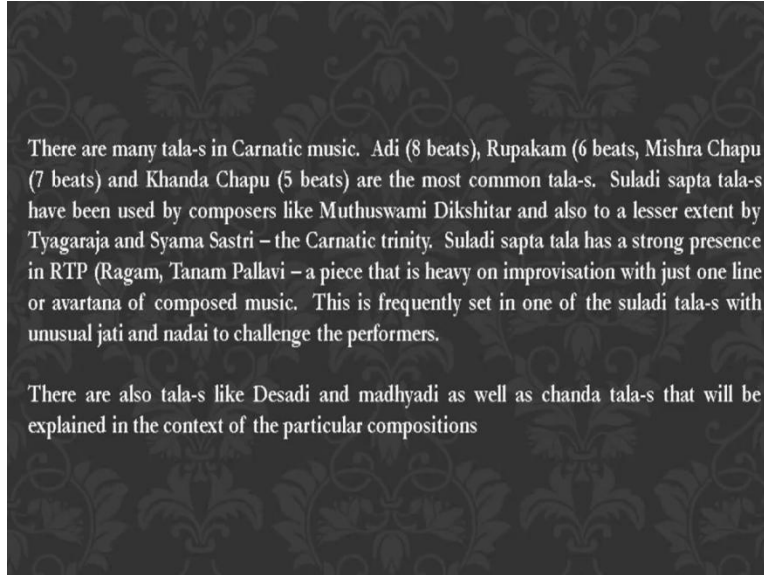
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A link to rendition of this composition is here, you may listen to it and other composition you may have to consider, is in Mishra Jampha tala. The compositions is Budama Ashrayami Compositi Mishra, Jampha tala is one Mishra is seven “1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10”. This is Mishra

Jampha tala and the composition is structured to reflect the tala angas. That you can see (Singing Starts: 20:08) (Singing Ends: 20:38). So that is the Mishra Jampha tala, which is “1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10” to wrap up our session on tala

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We have many talas in carnatic music, most widely used are, as I said Adhi tala of eight beats, Rupaka tala of six beats, Kandha Chapu of five beats, Mishra Chapu of seven beats and Sulathisuptha tala. Just you saw, are also used, in fact Ata tala has a significant presence in Varnam. Varnam is a kind of composition, which we will be seeing soon in our next session or so.

Varnam is a compositional type and most varnams are rendered in Adhi mostly. But we have a group of talas, which are rendered in Ata tala also so, Ata tala has a significant presence in varnam as a compositional form. Sulathisuptha tala has a very significant presence in the; what is called Ragam Talam Pallavi. Ragam Talam Pallavi is a presentational piece, it is a piece that is presented in carnatic music concerts.

And the pallavi which is the compositional aspects of which is the only compositional aspects, that is used in RTP. RTP is heavy on improvisation. But we have one line of composition and that composition is very often almost by default it is casting one of the Sulathisuptha talas, and in some unusual Jathi and Nadai. We will see more about all Sulathisuptha tala, when we talk about

ragan talam pallavi in detail. But in the mean time, even in the corpse of carnatic compositions, proper Sulathisuptha tala, has the significant presence.

So having covered raga and tala, we are now ready to take a look at carnatic music as it is performed, as it is heard. We hear carnatic music, what is that we hear tala and raga is underline principle. But, what we hear, the compositions improvisation in carnatic music, that is something we will now talk about in our next session.

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Suggested reading for Tala.

1. <http://www.carnatica.net/sangeet/layanubhava1.htm>

2. A Karnatic Primer by P. Sriram, Pages 18, 19
<http://www.ae.iitm.ac.in/~sriram/karpri.pdf>

3. Tala - A Conceptual and Structural Analysis by
N. Ramanathan in Music Research

<http://www.musicresearch.in/categorydetails.php?imgid=115>