

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture – 40
Varnam and its Presentation

Varnam is a very important compositional form, because it is expected, many traditional varnams do full fill this expectation, that a varnam should encapsulate all the major features of that raga. So, varnam in Saveri or in Kalyani. It will incorporate, all the major feature of that particular raga. So, for instance (Singing Starts: 00:55) (Singing Ends: 01:07)

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This is very characteristic of Saveri (Singing Starts: 01:12) (Singing Ends: 01:28). This actually gives a very clear, blue print of the raga as it were. How the raga, how the swara are formed into phrases, which notes is emphasized; which is shaken and how. So, the varnam offers a blue print of a raga as it were. So, it has, teacher's emphasis necessity, need of learning and internalizing, many varnams, in order to gain mastery over the carnatic music.

So, we have only one hand, the importance of varnam, because it showcases the raga, in his accent. and in a fairly exhaustive way. On the other hand, it is also important from the point of

view of, laya of tala. The varnam, traditional varnams, are composed in such a way that, we have patterns of four's and three's and five's.

If you remember we have talked about the Jathis. We can have patterns of four, we can have patterns of three or five. Now varnam, the compositions as such brings together many of these patterns in a aesthetic way. For instance, you see (Singing Starts: 03:12) (Singing Ends: 03:19) so for is four (Singing Starts: 03:21) (Singing Ends: 03:26) these are all fours (Singing Starts: 03:28) (Singing Ends: 03:33).

So for it is all fours (Singing Starts: 03:36) (Singing Ends: 03:40) suddenly it goes into threes (Singing Starts: 03:42) (Singing Ends: 03:26) so these is threes (Singing Starts: 04:06) (Singing Ends: 04:16).

These are how, these patterns are interlude. The swaras, are the lyrics are also brought together, with such patterns. In carnatic music, the texture of carnatic music, such that it is filled with these patterns. There is a tightness to the structure of, the texture of, the carnatic music. You have very little relaxing, of the laya, of the tala.

So, if you have (Singing Starts: 04:53) (Singing Ends: 04:57). It has to go in that tempo, all the words, the notes have to fall accurately and precisely, where they suppose to fall. Now, this is for instance, if take look at Khayal, Hindustani music, it is a very different musical form, because that kind of tightness is not there, in Hindustani music.

If you have to sing a Khayal, there is a certain amount of laxity or freedom. There you can call it laxity or freedom, of how the words and the tala are woven together, how two are juxtaposed. Here in carnatic music, there is a tightness and learning a varnam proper way, gives you a good grounding in how, that texture can be brought out.

Speaking of tala, most varnams, Tana varnams we find predominantly, they are in Adi talam. There are also very important and some very great varnams composed in, Ata talam. Ata tala is one of the (()) 06:20 talas.

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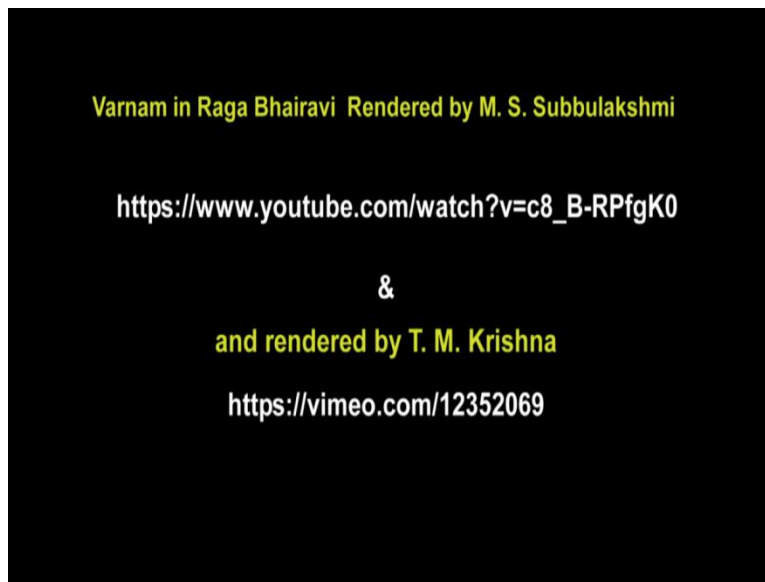
Ata tala, Kanda Nada, Kanda Jathi, ata tala. Ata tala will be, “one two three four five six seven eight nine ten eleven twelve thirteen fourteen”, this is also a tala, that is used in varnams and we have some great traditional varnams in Ata tala. Now, an interesting feature of Ata tala varnam, is that the eddupu, where the composition start is always here. There is one two on the third mathra, Ata tala varnams always starts from the third mathra and that eddupu is maintained.

Now varnams are the compositions, that offer great hope for, of course for realizing ragas potentials. But it is, there are some varnams, which are also have very interesting and challenging swara patterns. For instance, this in Kalyani, this pattern is swara in kalyani varnam, ata talam. You see how the swara jump, there is lot of movement in this varnam. And it is very good varnam to practice (Singing Starts: 08:06) (Singing Ends: 08:27)

So, this is a Charana swara or a Etukada swara, which is there in the ata tala varnam, in Kalyani. And no talk of varnams, can be complete, without the referring to, without mentioning ata tala varnam in bhairavi.

Now this is composition on “Pachimiriam Adiyappa” who was the court poet in Maratha ruler in Thanjavur eighteen century. He was, in fact the guru of one of the Carnatic trinities of Shama Sastri.

This varnam it starts in a very sedate way and builds up in a very good beautiful way, and rendition of this composition is here, you may listen (Singing Starts: 09:26) (Singing Ends: 10:16). This is the pallavi of this composition, rest of it you can hear this link (Refer Slide Time: 10:23)



Now a varnam, there is certain way of presenting a varnam in concerts. That is quite unique to the varnam. No other composition is presented, the way the varnam is, and the presentation fully showcases the two part of the varnam.

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Presentation of varnam follows this pattern:

1. Pallavi lines
2. Anupallavi lines
3. Mukthayi swaram
4. The entire lot is sung in 2nd speed and sometimes tisram
5. The purvangam is brought to a close with the pallavi line in the original speed
6. Charanam line is sung usually in a faster tempo.
7. The etugada swaras are sung, ending each with the charanam line
8. Finish with the charanam line.

So, a typical presentation of the varnam, will follow this way, first the pallavi is sung, then the anupallavi, that normally together it will make four lines, four avarthanas, of the compositions and then the Mukthayi swaras is sung.

After which you go back to the pallavi and sing it at twice the speed and then come back finish the entire thing, finish the entire purvangam and come back to the pallavi and go back to the original speed. And then Charanam is normally sung at a very different unrelated speed very often. But usually, at a much faster speed and the Charanam swaras or the Etukada swaras sung and the Charanam line is repeated each of the Etukada swaras.

Now actually, traditionally, there was another, for many of the varnam traditionally, there is another sahithya line or text that follows all the Etukada swaras. That kind of provide a link back to the Charanam line or sometimes the pallavi line.

But, these days the way in contemporary carnatic music, Anubhandhas are almost always not heard. So, to do so, sometime what happens as an interesting exercise, the Thisra Nadai is also performed in varnams.

Let me just demonstrate a bit, so Thisra Nadai is, suppose is the same varnam. I will take it "Sarasura" (Singing Starts: 12:49) (Singing Ends: 12:59), this is the first speed, the second speed

(Singing Starts: 13:04) (Singing Ends: 13:16), so two avarthanas of the compositions will fit into single avarthana tala.

So, what in the first speed, took two avarthanas to sing, we will sing it in one avarthana in the second speed. What happens in the Thisra Nadai is (Singing Starts: 13:36) (Singing Ends: 14:01) So three line of the text will be fitted into two avarthanas.

what is happening actually, threes are fitted into the, what happens is “one two three four” “one two three four” “one two three four” instead of that “one two three” “one two three” “one two three” “one two three” (Singing Starts: 14:26) (Singing Ends: 14:28) instead of that “one two three four” “one two three four” “one two three four” instead of that (Singing Starts: 14:32) (Singing Ends: 14:28) “one two three” “one two three” one two three” “one two three” these is what is happening, when we do Thisra Nadai.

So, the song, the composition remains the same, but we are fitting only three units into each mathra. Where it is “one two three four” “one two three four”, we are fitting “one two three” “one two three” “one two three”. So, the laya remains same, the tempo remains the same, the song also remains the same. There is no tampering with the song, it is not that the syllable is elongated here are shortened here. The song is also intact, the avarthana is intact, tempo is intact.

But how the words are distributed within each mathra, that is different. So, this is actually, what we are doing is Thrisha Nadai, Thrisha Gati. So, that we are doing a Thrishnam of the varnam, this is something, that in fact was also part of Dhrupad practice.

Dhrupad is north Indian style of music and what is called Thibone in Dhrupad and traditionally Dhrupad composition must supposed be rendered in Dhogone, twice the speed, Thrigone thrice the speed and Chaugone four times the speed though the original speed, that was part of the presentation of Dhrupad. Nobody, presents it like that taste is, perhaps the audience have no taste for rhythmic excitement.

But in carnatic music, you mean carnatic music actually, Thrisram are more or less, very rarely heard. And this Thrishram, also has the place in another kind of presentation called Ragam Talam Pallavi. We will see, when we come to it.

But varnam presentation, a varnam presentation is essentially follows this way, that Pallavi Anupallavi are sung. Then the swaras are sung and then the whole poorvangam is repeated twice the speed. Sometimes the Thrishanam is also performed and then we go to the Charanam, that is Utharangam and the swaras as well.

Sometimes, we even perform few Mano Dharma for Kalapana swaram in varnam, as a rule Mano Dharma elements, do not find a place in varnam, as a rule. But varnam do offer scope for the Kalapana Swarams and we will now listen to presentations of the traditional varnam in Rithigowle. This is in Ata talam, and the musicians are Ramakrishna Murthy on the vocal, RK Shri Ramakumar playing the violin, Arun Prakash playing the Mridangam, Anirudh Athereya playing the Kanjira.

So please listen to it this varnam. (Music Starts: 18:08) (Music Ends: 27:14)