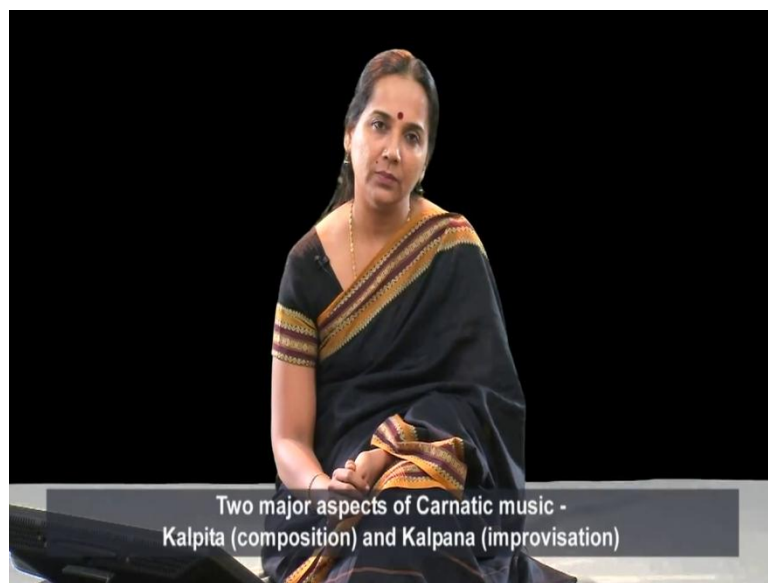


Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture – 41
Kriti - The Premier Compositional form in Carnatic Music

We are talking of composition in carnatic music. We have seen that, there are two major aspects to carnatic music, one is the composition, the compositional aspect, the other is the improvisational aspect Kalpita and Kalpana Sangeetham as they are called.

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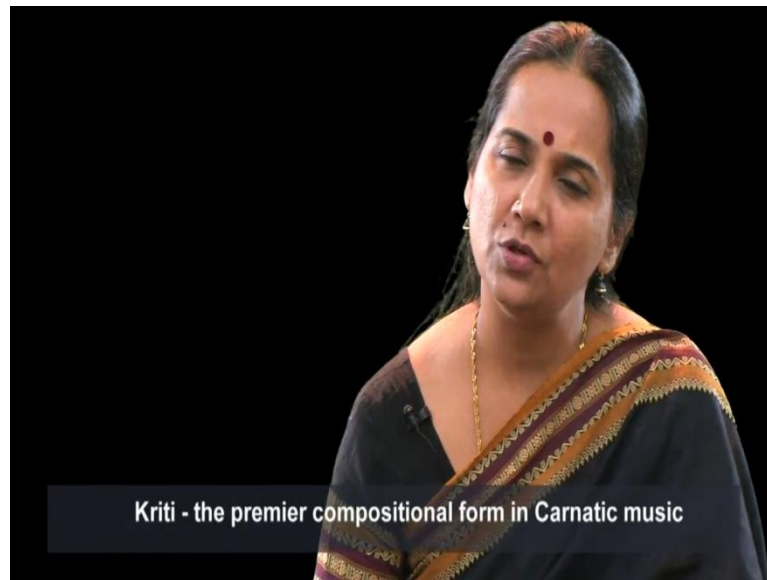


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There are many kinds of composition in carnatic music. In the last two sessions, we saw Varnam which is a major compositional form. We saw the structure of Varnam, its presentation in concert, its importance in pedagogy. We will now talk about kriti.

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Kriti is the premier compositional form in carnatic music. It is premier because it is the most prominent. Today, if you were to go to a carnatic concert, this is what you would hear. In a concert of say two hours or so, you likely to hear seven to eight pieces, most of which would be kritis. Whether or not other compositional forms are presented kriti is almost always present in the carnatic concert, that is the case today.

But is it conceivable that, there should be a carnatic concert without kritis. In other words, can we conceive of the carnatic concert without kritis, certainly we can. In fact, century are so ago, the bulk of a carnatic concert was taken up by another presentational form called Ragam Tanam Pallavi, this is something have referred to earlier.

Kritis, were very few and far between in concerts, that happens in the early parts of the twentieth century and before that. It is only over the last seventy, eighty years that kritis have come into the forefront and carnatic music is predominantly, it revolves around presentation of kritis.

So, in this sense, it is a premier compositional form. Now, what do we mean by talking of a compositional form? what are the other compositional forms that kriti is different from?

Now, if I will just present you a short list of the various kinds of composition, that you might encounter in carnatic music. We have already seen varnam. I am talking of carnatic music concerts, presentational compositions.

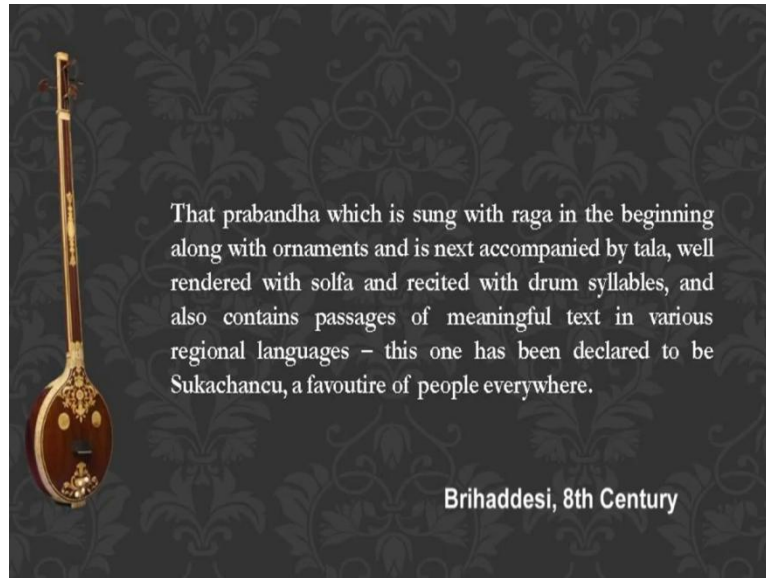
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We have already seen varnam. We have kriti, then we have a form called "Swarajati", we have Padam, Javali, Tillana, of course we have RTP, Ragam Tanam Pallavi. If we were to take a look at compositions in north. In north India, classical music, we have Kayal, Dhrupad, Thumri, Tappa, Tarana, Trivat and so on. Now all these compositional forms have likely evolved from older compositional forms.

We find references to a large variety of compositional forms in treatises like Natya Sastra, Brihaddesi of eighth century and Sankeetaratnakara. The description of, one such compositional form, is can, I just quote this description it is from Brihaddesi. Here, Matanga the author of Brihaddesi, describes a compositional form a Prabandha called Sukachancu. Prabandha is actually a compositional a very generic term for certain kind of composition.

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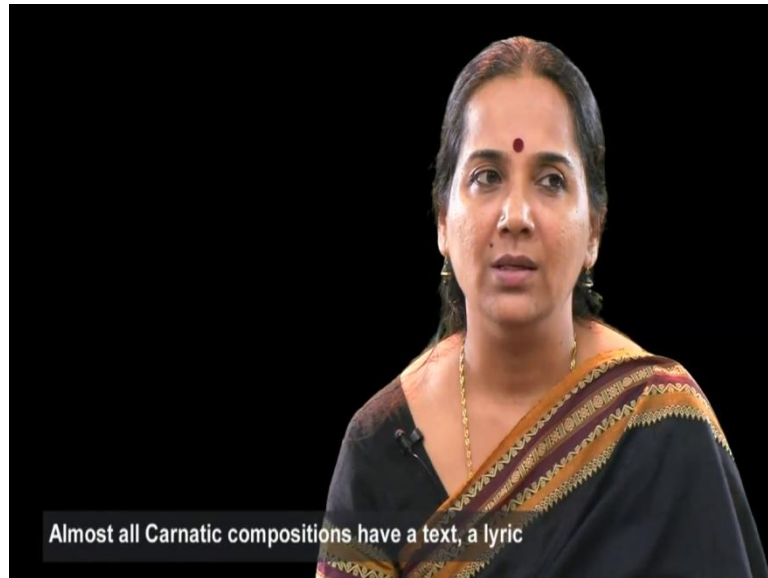
Now Sukachancu according to Matanga, is like this. That Prabandha, which is sung with raga in the beginning, along with ornaments and is next accompanied by tala, well rendered with solfa and recited with drum syllables. And also, containing passages of meaningful text in various regional languages. This one has been declared to be Sukachancu a favorite of people everywhere.

This is the description of a compositional form, that was prevalent about the eighth century. And in many of these descriptions of compositional forms, that we find these texts, we can see seeds of contemporary compositional forms.

And, what we sing today, that what we hear today is most likely evolved from those older forms. Due to various factors, historical cultural, there have been influences from the world of dance, the percussion from literature. And we have a good number of compositional forms in carnatic music, among which today certainly kriti is preeminent.

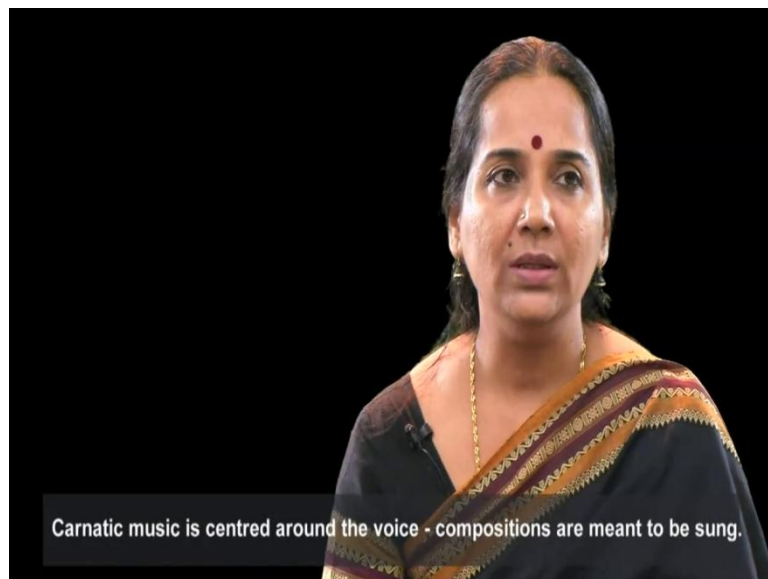
Now, what is it to talk of a compositional form? What is common to all these compositional forms? What could be different? Now, what is common? Is certainly, see there is a textual aspect, a lyrical aspect to it. There is a song definitely, the song could consist of meaningful lyrics, meaningless syllables, sometimes swaras, sometimes percussive syllables. But there is text to the composition.

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Almost all Carnatic compositions have a text, a lyric as I mentioned in previous, in one of my previous sessions. There is almost, no Carnatic composition that does not have a textual aspect to it.

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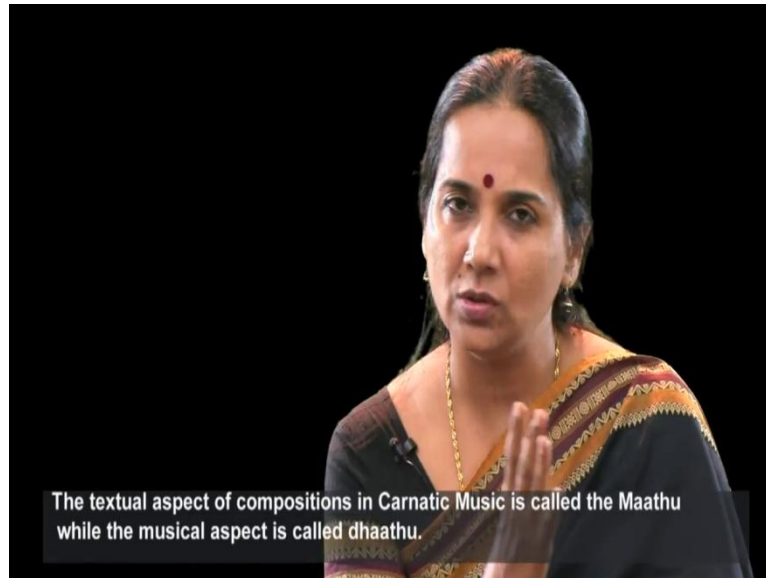


So, in this sense Carnatic music is heavily centered around the voice, compositions are basically meant to be sung. Any instrumental music draws from the vocal repertoire, repertoire of these songs and presents it, in the instrumental music around these compositions.

Now just is unlike for instance, we all know Western classical music, as enormous number of musical compositions, that is solely instruments center. The compositions are written for one or a large assemble of instruments. Even in Hindustani music, we have compositions called

Gat, Masitkhani Razakhani Gats, which are solely meant for instruments. And Sitar players and Sarodears they use these gats.

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There is no textual aspect to these compositions. in carnatic music, there is always a textual aspect and this is called the Maathu. The textual aspect of a composition is called Maathu, it is contrasted with the Dhaathu, which is the musical aspect.

Now this text, is always in all these compositional forms. Is always set in a raga and in a tala, that is a common feature of all compositions in carnatic music.

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We do have a small group of compositions, which use more than one raga. These compositions, are caused in a string of ragas, as it were, these are called Ragamalikas, one raga after another. And more rarely, we also have tala malikas, there are more than one tala is also used within the same composition. But by and large, certainly the more serious compositions are always cast in a single raga and in a single tala.

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Then what makes for the difference, between compositional forms, one is the content, the lyrical content of the composition, the themes. We saw for instance in Varnam, there is always a romantic theme, which is the romance very often directed at a deity, sometimes, also at the king or the patron, but mostly at a deity.

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Now by contrast, kriti. The kriti is always religious, it is always directed at a deity. Even, when abstract, philosophical ideas have been propounded. As we shall see there are many compositions in carnatic music, that propound abstract philosophical ideas, especially of Advaita Vedanta. Even when you have such a composition, there is always reference to a deity, either Dakshina Murthy or Devi, some such appropriate deity.

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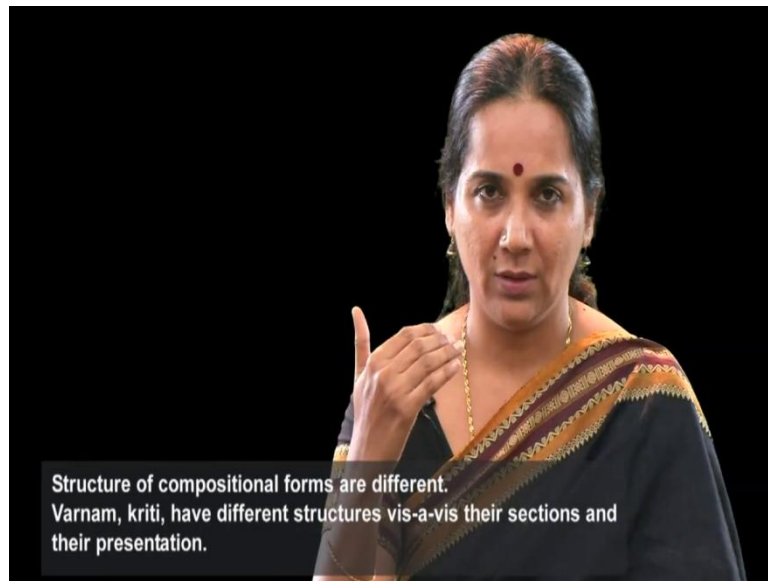


And we have another set of compositions, which are mentioned Padam, Javali. These are all completely connected with Sringara or love or romance. And again Padams, we will talk about these detail, but Padam is sometimes, the love that is expressed in Padams is quite often

directed at Krishna. We will see one prominent composer of Padam Kshetriya, he composed many compositions with “Moova Gopala” as the as a deity, as the figure, to whom the love is directed.

Now Javali on the other hand, is another composition form. There the Sringara the Roticism is of much more earthly kind. So, we have this kind of differences in theme, the basic tone of the text. There are differences amongst these compositional forms.

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Next there is also the difference in the structural compositions, we saw how Varnam is a two tier in structure with a clear demarcation between the Poorvangam and the Utharangam. And how the presentation of the Varnam also, is such that the two parts are shown separately and its quite clear that, there are two parts to this composition.

Whereas a kriti or even a padam, though there are sections, in these compositions, they are presented as a whole. The sections are not separated out, the way they are in varnam. A kriti as we shall see, is typically a three tier. There are three sections to a kriti. Padam has a slightly different structure, so that's Javali

Now Tillana, which is another form, which we will again see in detail. The textual content of tillana is filled with, meaningless syllables, often drawn from the world of percussion and dance. (Singing Starts: 14:14) (Singing Ends: 16:14).

So, these are some of the things that, distinguish one compositional form from another. But there is another, somewhat nebulous criterion, but important nevertheless, that is, plotting these compositional forms, on a scale from heavy to light.

A kriti is usually serious music. It is a heavy composition, and among kritis, we have some better quite heavy, heavier than the others, grander than the others. But by and large a kriti is not a light composition it is heavy, it is nuanced, it is musically complex.

So also, a varnam, varnam also musically complex. It is heavy music. Padam, is even heavier than a kriti or varnam. We see it is a very highly nuanced compositional form. Javali on the other hand, is quite light it falls on the other end of the spectrum, it is the lighter piece, lighter in the sense, the it is not as heavily nuance, it is not as filled in gamakas. So also, tillana, tillana is also generally regarded a lighter form.

It may not be always possible, to apply this criterion in the case of every composition. But it is to a large extent possible and it is pretty important criterion, to talk about the differences between these various compositional forms.