

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture 67
Kanjira

And we will move on to the Kanjira. We saw the two handed mridangam first, this is just a one handed Kanjira - one of the few percussion instrument which is one handed and very simple in construction. Same wood as the mridangam because the masters and the masters of manufacturers also who have done it over the years - it has been proved that the Jackfruit wood... the tonal purity and the nadam rich tone that you get Jackfruit wood cannot be matched in any other wood.

Of course there are other woods which have been used for mridangam and kanjira also - they have tried other woods but finally this is the wood in which you get the rich musical tone. The skin is of the Monitor Lizard and is called the udumbu, udumbu thol in Tamil. Same as what I told for the wood, the nadam produced in the udumbu thol is very rich. There have been other skins also tried. But masters and experts have finally chosen this thol as the best to explore and play kanjira.

There is a small.... when you play you will get a jingling sound here, these are small coins, two coins inserted here, these are the old quarter of a coin. In Tamil they call pazhaiya kaal ana, pithalai, it gives a very musical and melodious, you know, feel to the kanjira tone and the original tone of kanjira will be like this. It is almost equal to the mridangam when there is no paste on the left side. It is not exactly that but similar to that sound when you put that paste you get the bass sound. So, instead we sprinkle water here inside portion and make it wet over a period of few minutes, not put it all and make it wet you know it becomes got a lot of wrinkles and you cannot do anything with it then.

You can only reduce you cannot rise the pitch here. And Kanjira is one instrument which cannot be tuned to a particular pitch unlike Mridangam or Ghatam or Morsing.

It is something like a thavil or a drum it has his own richness and nadam, you have to play in that sound and the tone. You cannot tune it to say C, D, E or G whatever it is whether I am playing for a musician who is singing at 1 shruti or where I am playing for instrumental or whether I am playing for a female musician who sing at G or G sharp. I will play with the same kanjira - there will no difference in that.

Now coming to the sound this will be the original sound after sprinkling the water and after making wet you will get a comfortable bass sound - this will be it.

Unlike mridangam you will not get sounds-tonal rich sounds, dimension of ...wide spectrum of tones in kanjira but it has its own uniqueness and lot of mridangam vidvans and yesteryear vidvans have found this instrument as their favourite and also played-maybe not professionally. But they played it also along with mridangam because it fascinates. It is just a small tiny instrument of this size, it is up to an artist to explore and play anything. Whatever the two... you are playing with two hands...any instrument you can play with this it also has the unique tone and anything you can do on kanjira it is up to an artist.

So the basic strokes of kanjira are - this is the main stroke this is thom, this is life of the instrument.

This is Tha, it is just a combination of 4 or 5 strokes and using the Gumki you will produce lot of permutation and combination of rhythmic patterns

(Music Demonstration Start Time: 04:43)

If you play this sarvalaghu what Praveen played in mridangam, without Gumki it will sound like this

(Music Demonstration Start Time: 05:01)

The Gumki is... when I play along with the Gumki the tone is very pleasing and listen to this, it sounds very rich.

(Music Demonstration Start Time: 05:18)

That is it about kanjira, we will move on to with further, advanced level of playing in our next rounds.

I picked up just playing kanjira from my first Guru Praveen's father M.L. Veerabhadraiah, he had a kanjira with him I just picked the Kanjira and started playing. He found some... he thought that I had a natural ability to handle this instrument. So, based on the mridangam techniques and whatever I was taught in mridangam I just started playing. He said you have a natural ability to, instinct to play the kanjira, why don't you also play and he taught me to play the nuances of kanjira. But after a point of time I found it a bit difficult to manage both because playing mridangam the fingering is absolutely different and it is two handed and playing kanjira ... of course any instrument is strain to play after point of time, you have to master it. But I found out that it is difficult to manage both after a point of time, professionally playing.

Then lot of senior artist suggested to me that I should pick one instrument and concentrate on one instrument and specialise in it. I also thought that it sense to play one instrument. Then I picked kanjira; but learning mridangam for over 16 years has immensely helped me on stage. Because first thing that I can enjoy any style of mridangam playing and whatever the mridangist plays I can enjoy it myself - that gives me greatest satisfaction.

Even the smallest nuances anybody plays, I am able to enjoy it because I have learnt it myself. Second thing is whenever I am playing with mridangam vidvan, I will strike the immediate rapport because I have learnt it myself. So, I know it ...what comes next, what is the thing, what happened next, how it is played, how to gel with them - it is a great advantage learning mridangam and learning kanjira.

But there are now musicians who have not learnt mridangam and they have learnt respective instruments on their own and they have really done well. So I mean it is up to an artist's ability how he picks up....it is an added advantage, when you learn something. But definitely learning vocal music is a must. Whether you learn mridangam and learn this instrument it is up to an artist, I did it. But lot of musicians do not have to, you can learn the instrument. Now there are techniques, there are schools wherein you can learn kanjira, ghatam and morsing directly from basics without their learning mridangam - that much of scope is there. But if you learn because it is a, when you accompany, when you learn vocal music I think you are a ... huge asset, you can accompany with, you know, that much of confidence. Because finally you will be accompanying for composition. Or else you will be only specialising as a good solo artist. So, if you learn vocal music, the added advantage is there and that will reflect in your playing. That taste and ruchi will be there definitely.