

Carnatic Music- Classification of Ragas

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, over the last few sessions we have been examining ways of classifying *ragas* based on different criteria. The most recent column explored *janya ragas* and their classification into *Upanga* and *Bhashanga* ragas depending on the absence or presence of an *anya swara* (foreign note), respectively. Thank you to all those who got back to me with the answer to the question in last month's column. *Raga Bhairavi* is a *janya raga* of the *mela* Natabhairavi- the *anya* (foreign) *swara* is the *chatusruthi dhaivata* (D₂).

In this month's column, we continue to explore other ways to classify *ragas*. *Janya* (child) *ragas* whose *arohana* (ascending scale) and/or *avarohana* (descending scale) contain a zigzag pattern of *swaras* are called *vakra ragas*. An example of a *vakra raga* is the raga Kadanakutuhalam (S R M D N G P S) - here the *swaras* are not in straight order but follow a crooked pattern. *Vakra ragas* in turn can either be classified as *Upanga* or *Bhashanga*.

In addition to the *mela-janya* classification, *ragas* can also be classified as *ghana* and *rakthi* as well as *Karnataka* and *Desya* ragas. A *ghana raga* refers to a *raga* that is majestic in nature. It is used to evoke the bolder *rasas* (emotions) such as *veera* (valor), *roudra* (anger), *adbhutha* (surprise) and *bhayanaka* (fear). The traditional five *ghana ragas* include the *ragas*- Nata, Gowla, Arabhi, Varali and Sri Raga. A *rakthi raga* is one that draws the hearts and minds of the listeners. It evokes the emotions of *sringara* (beauty), *karuna* (pathos), *hasya* (laughter) and *shanta* (peace). Examples of these *ragas* include Thodi, Shankarabharanam, Natakuranji and the like.

Using a geographical method of classification, *Karnataka ragas* are those that are indigenous to South India like Bhairavi, Ananda Bhairavi, Kedaragowla and the like. *Desya ragas* are those *ragas* that have their origin mainly in Hindusthani music but have gained popularity in Carnatic music. Examples include Yaman Kalyani, Behag, Dwijavanthi among others.

There are many ways to further sub-classify ragas; however these merit separate discussions and will possibly be of interest only to students of music. Till we meet next time, do listen to the Carnatic *raga* Kadanakutuhalam- there is a beautiful composition in this raga "Raghuvamsha Sudha" which brings out the zigzag nature of the raga beautifully.

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