

Evolution of Carnatic music- a series

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, as we have seen previously, until the 12th century A.D., only one form of music prevailed all through India. Around this time, the Islamic presence was beginning to be felt in North India. The musical practice there came under the influence of Persian and Arabic cultures and came to be known as Hindusthani music. In south India, the original music was preserved and handed down through the ages and is known as Carnatic music.

With these two streams of music having had a common origin, it is interesting to look at the influence of Hindusthani music on its Carnatic counterpart. The Carnatic composer Sri Muthuswamy Dikshitar was exposed to Hindusthani music during his travels in North India. That he was greatly influenced by Hindusthani music is evident in a number of his compositions, both in terms of the *ragas* as well as the style of the composition. Dikshitar showed his creativity and his ability to incorporate the best aspects of both systems of music in *ragas* like *Dwijavanthi*, *Hamir Kalyani* and *Yaman Kalyani* among others. Apart from Dikshitar's compositions, we also have a number of compositions in *ragas* derived from Hindusthani music. Popular compositions include *Krishna Nee Begane Baaro* (*Yaman Kalyani*), *Rama Namame* (*Desh*) as well as numerous compositions in *raga Sindhu Bhairavi*.

Folk music is another form of music that is believed to have influenced the structure of Carnatic music. Even though folk music is more a spontaneous presentation as compared to Carnatic music which has strict definitions, *ragas* like *Punnagavarali*, *Anandabhairavi* and *Yadukulakambhoji* are among those that can be correlated to folk tunes.

In last month's column, we had also looked at the influence of the British Raj on Carnatic music both in terms of development of new *ragas* like *Kadanakutuhlam* and the incorporation of western instruments such as violin, saxophone, etc. into Carnatic music.

It is obvious from all these influences that Carnatic music, despite its strict adherence to tradition, is not immune to changes in the surroundings; rather it has the ability to incorporate the best of these influences and evolve as a traditional art form.

Till we meet next time, do listen to the Carnatic compositions *Krishna Nee Begane Baaro* as well as *Raama Namame* – they are both beautiful compositions and bring out the essence of their *ragas*.

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