

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture - 10

Understanding Raga -3 (A Glimpse into Ornamentation & Phraseology)

We just saw how swaras make raga and as I have said it is only the basic feature of the raga. If we can speak of tip of the iceberg, this swaras really are the tip of iceberg. There is a whole lot of a complexities nuances that lie under the water. What gives the raga forms, swaras it is a skeleton what flushes it out.

It is how the swaras are used. Ornamentation, what is called gamaka. This swaras are not sung like this. (Singing Starts: 01:06) (Singing Ends: 01:12) This is not how we sing it. This is a staccato rendition of swaras. (Singing Starts: 01:18) (Singing Ends: 01:22) Already I have said (Singing Starts: 01:25) (Singing Ends: 01:29) this is not how we sing it. (Singing Starts: 01:30) (Singing Ends: 01:34)

So, there are so many things, we do to the swaras, we shake them, we pull them.

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We push them, we glide from one swara to another. There are rapid flashes, there are flicks, there are many kinds of ways that we approach swaras. This is what, the very generic term for all

this is gamaka. Both carnatic and hindustani music, gamaka is a very fundamental feature of Indian music.

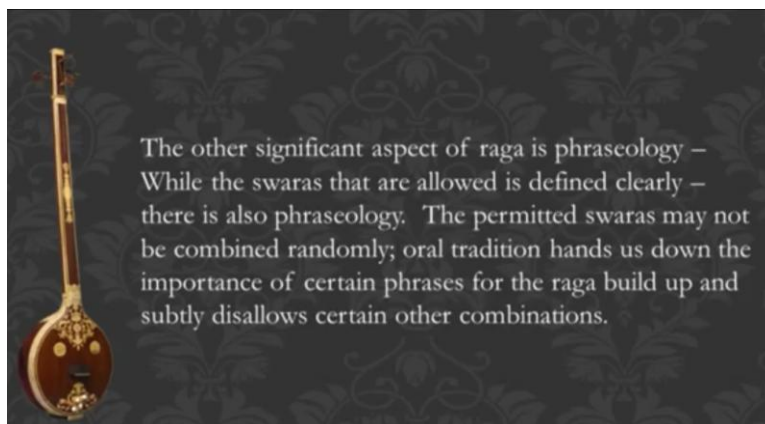
In the sense that, we approach swaras not as discreet units. (Singing Starts: 02:23) (Singing Ends: 02:25) This is not how we treat swaras units. (Singing Starts: 02:29) (Singing Ends: 02:42) So this kind of continuum is maintained in the way we treat swaras.

Now these shakes ornaments, that we speak of they are not arbitrary they are very precise. The way precise based on ornamenting swaras. If I missed it, If I may use that expression and because of this there are subtle micro tuning inflections. What is a micro tone? we will see little later. So, this then is a brief glimpse into the concept of gamaka.

The other aspect of a raga apart from swara and gamaka is also phraseology. Phrases, now given that raga, has given set of swaras it has say ga and not ma and you know the aroha and avaroha. You know how it goes, you know the swaras that comprised.

Not any combination of these swaras will bring out the raga. There are very clear phrases, there are phrases that immediately evoke the ragas image and oral tradition hands this phrases down through compositions and through expositions by masters.

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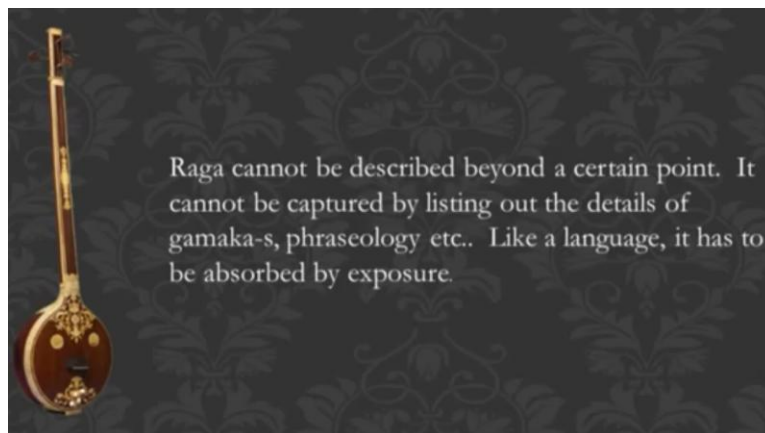
Given that only some swaras are permitted in certain ragas others are not, even those swaras which are permitted in rag which comprise the raga they may not be combined in many way. This is not a question of mathematical combinations figuring out some combination and trying to create melodies. That is not, how it works.

There are phrases using those swaras, which will clearly bring out the form of the raga, more clearly than certain other phrases. So, what is called ragavachaka? That immediately speaks raga the energy phrases which immediately tell you, what raga it is.

There are other phrases, which oral tradition subtly disallow. You see in all this, we speak of swaras, we speak of ornamentations, we speak of phraseology. But ultimately raga transcends all attempt at description of any raga. That is not something that you can list out as this is how it has to be done. It is beyond the discursive realm that is something that has to be absorbed.

Learning a raga is definitely not by way of guru, never tells the student that this is the way you have to ornament or these are the ornaments or these are the phrases. This is not how it is done.

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The way of transmitting raga, way of grasping the raga is entirely through exposing yourself to the raga in various context This is much like language. How do you learn language? How do you speak language? you expose yourself to it.

This is how a child is able to speak his mother tongue, if sit with set of grammar books of a foreign language. You are not going to be able to master it, go live in that the place, where native speakers of the tongue you will pick up the language.

That is how raga also absorbed, it is also how a raga is taught. In order to learn a raga is no other way to learn the compositions in it. Compositions from a good teacher. You learn it, you hear it again, that is how grasp the raga. So, it is this that we now look at these two aspects of raga gamaka or ornamentation and phraseology.

But before we going into this, because when you speak of gamaka it is gamaka of a swara. Swara that has a gamaka and in the context of a raga, the same swara will have a different gamaka and in different raga. So, let us spend some time trying to see how swara has been treated. The concept of swara, how it has been treated in the tradition.