

Appreciating Carnatic Music
Dr. Lakshmi Sreeram
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras

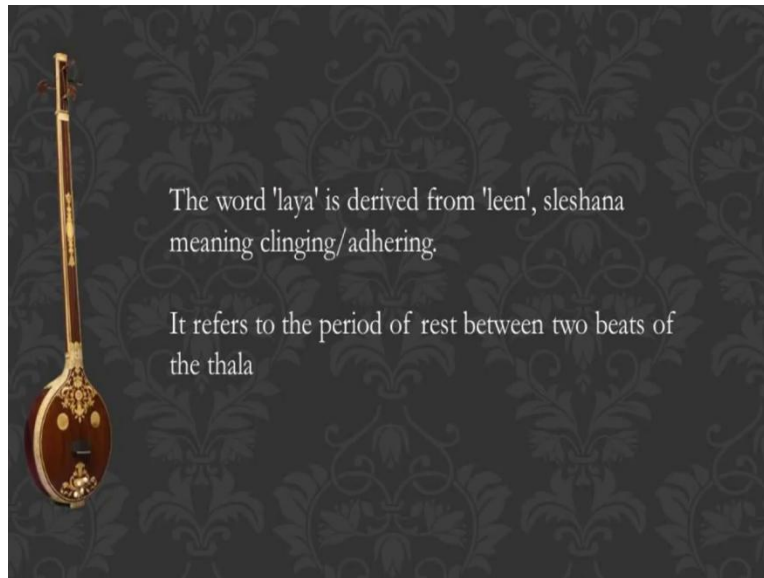
Lecture -33
Tala and Laya – 3 level of laya

Let us see, what Tala is? One essential aspect of Tala which has already been indicated by might be a noticed Tala cycle; cycle city. It is a cycle of Tala in a, for instance, in a piece of western music, of western classical music. It is the rhythm or the pace you can conceive. It has a time line punctuated at regular intervals: 123,123,123. And there is a sense of a piece of music flowing forward in the case of carnatic music as well as Hindustani music.

There is sense of coming back to the first beat, the music is organized like this, music created like that. And we will see later on, when we talk more in detail in Tala also about improvisation aspect about music. How the act of coming back to the particular beat, if you say, if you have Adhi tala; it has eight beats. Now the act of coming back to either the first or one and half beat, whatever it is, that the composition starts with that essence of create significance in how the music is presented.

So the Tala is actually a cycle and when you experience carnatic music, you have the sense of coming back to the first line or to the first beat. This, this feeling of coming back is very vital aspect of experience of music and also performing music. We do come back to the first line of the composition; will come back to the first beat of the Tala cycle. So that is one very vital aspect of Tala; very, very fundamental feature of concept of Tala, that it is cycle of beats. Now getting back to the concept of laya.

Refer Slide Time: 03:13



Laya, the word, the words origin is from 'leen' which means 'sleshana' it is 'clinging or adhering'. Now laya here means the period of rest between two actions. That is laya. And unless the period of rest is there, action also does not make any sense. However small that period of rest that is necessary for us to perceive an event or an action in a Tala, these events are what we perform with the hand, the hand gestures.

Those are the events and laya is the period of rest between the any two movements of the hand that is laya. So if you have one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight; this is one laya or one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight; this is another laya or one, two, three, and so on; so this is how laya differs in compositions. Is there any standard? There are no standard, objective standard, though traditionally, there is reference to time.

That blinking five times takes; that is regarded as one unit of laya of tala. There are no objective standards to say what is a fast laya or slow laya.

Refer Slide Time: 05:23



Traditionally, we speak of Indian musical tradition, we speak of broadly three layas: Vilamba or Vilambita, Madhya and Drutha. Vilamba laya is a slow pace, leisurely the compositions we have is the Sanjay Subramanian, 'Mayama nena' generally rendered in a Vilamba piece, Vilamba pace. It is a slow song. It is a composition that has to be rendered in a leisurely pace. And then we have Madya laya which is a medium tempo; not too fast, not too slow.

And then, you have Drutha laya which is fast. What is Vilamba laya? Do we have objective standard for it? No, we do not. We do not have anything like, so many beats per minute; nothing like that. We can say safely, that carnatic music is mostly about Madya laya, Madhima tala. It is a medium tempo, is what is most characteristic of carnatic music. Not to say that there is no place for Vilamba or Drutha laya.

There is but there is; but the predominant laya is Madhya laya, Madhima laya. And in contrast we can say Hindustani music, the most predominant laya. There is the Vilamba laya, slow. More leisurely and it is not to say that there is no place for Madhya and Drutha laya very much there. But the general feel that you get about the music, about general experience of the music is that it is more leisurely kind of music; whereas carnatic music is more Madya laya, it is a medium tempo.

The music is mostly in medium tempo. Now what it is? That means to say, that music is mostly medium tempo. We have composition of course and these compositions are typically, each composition is typically associated with a particular tempo. Again it is not hard and fast or so many beats per minute; but broadly this way or that way when nobody think of singing ‘Mayama nena pilichidhe’ it is very fast pace; it would not work, that raga itself not rendered self to fast treatment.

We saw in our earlier session about types of raga ‘Gananaya Deshiya’ some ragas ‘Vrithi ragas’ some of the Vrithi ragas are such that they are so heavily nuance; there is full of gamakas and other nuances that it is difficult to sing at a fast pace. So some composition even some ragas themselves are associated with certain layas. There are other ragas which cannot be sung at a very drawn out, very leisurely pace.

Gana ragas like ‘Nattai arabhi’ or even lighter ragas you cannot treat them a very leisurely treatment. So composition like ‘Vathapi gana pathimpaje’, it is typically associated with a Madyama laya. But it is not to say that you cannot sing it in another laya effectively. So the general laya is (Song Starts: 09:21) (Song Ends: 09:37)

So I can little faster: (Song Starts: 09:40) (Song Ends: 10:10). This is a relatively a faster way of faster tempo faster laya. This is a definitely Druthitha laya or even we can say: (Song Starts: 10:20) (Song Ends: 10:54). So variation in laya is possible for some composition. It is possible and it really is up to the performer. Some performers like to speed up thing. Some performers like to sing more drawn out pace.

And with ‘vathapi ganapatim’ as I said, most carnatic music composition have traditionally and generally rendered at a Madhyama tala at a medium tempo. And that is where the music is at its tightest; that is the, that is the wisdom that we have gained from our teachers and elders and peers. And that, that is where the music is most impactful and that at medium pace. So let us listen to this rendition of a another composition by Thyagaraja ‘Raruma intiki’, Raga: Saveri; adhi talam by Sanjay Subramaniam.

This is in a typical Madyama laya, a medium pace; medium tempo 'raram inti thaka raghuvira sugumara mrukiatha' the tala is adhi (Song Starts: 12:25) (Song Ends: 13:21). Let us listen to the Sanjay Subramaniam singing this composition: (Music Starts: 13:25) (Music Ends:18:55).