

Appreciating Carnatic Music
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Lecture -71
The Typical Carnatic Concert and Ragam Tanam Pallavi – RTP

In this session we will talk about what you can expect in a typical Carnatic concert. A Carnatic concert of, say two to two and a half hours is likely to have 7 to 10 pieces. Each of these will be in a raga and a tala. When a performer selects and decides what she is to perform in a concert, there are some considerations that are kept in mind; one is obviously that if you are going to sing for two and a half hours and you have an audience, you have to be wary - there has to be some variety. You should avoid monotony, monotony of raga. So there has to be variety in the ragas. So if you have ragas all of them with the same kind of swaras, the same swaras ... it is possible to have ten different ragas all of them derived from the same "Janaka raga". Though they are different ragas, but, they will end up sounding similar - especially in a concert experience. So you have to deliberately vary ragas. So if I have sung a raga with say, one variety of rishaba. I have sung two pieces with that variety, I should try to introduce a piece with the other variety of rishaba. So that gives the breaks the monotony of the concert experience and the more equally importantly there has to be a variety in tala and laya.

It is also expected that we include some great composition of the Trinity that gives the concert the solidity.

Now what about the manodharma aspects? Now, not every composition is prefixed with an alapana. In fact, only 2 or 3 or at the most 4 of these pieces would possibly have an alapana prefixed to it. Always there is one raga, always there is one piece in which the composition is selected is usually a big composition which is preceded by an elaborate alapana, which also has neraval and swaraprastara and which typically, also will include tani avartana. And this is called The Main and then you have what is called a Sub Main, which is not so elaborately treated, but again you have an alapana and probably swara prastara and then you may have one or two pieces in which just swaram is performed. You may have a couple of compositions in which just the composition is sung. So this kind of variety in treatment is found in Carnatic concert and unlike for instance in a khayal concert or even Dhrupad - any Hindustani concert. If you take a bandish it is always aalap taan boltaan all the elements are usually included in every piece of the concert.

But that is not the case in Carnatic concert - we could sing a very slow and magnificent padam, just the padam experience. Or you could sing a very quick composition to give a variation in the tempo and to give .. to get the percussive accompanist to loosen up. So this sort of variety you find in Carnatic music and the Ragam Tanam Pallavi, if it is included, is usually included at the end of the concert after which some lighter pieces are performed, so to say, as a winding down and tillanas and javalis and devotional songs ... these are performed in the end of the concert.

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So we will talk about RTP the Ragam Tanam Pallavi it used to be that every concert included the Ragam Tanam Pallavi. For the last few decades there has been some revival of sorts. But we don't hear Ragam Tanam Pallavi as a rule although in prestigious venues like Music Academy of Madras, Ragam Tanam Pallavi is almost always it is expected that you sing a RTP as it is called in a big concert in any serious concert.

Ragam Tanam Pallavi in fact as I mentioned before a century or two ago this is what most people heard in a Carnatic concert. A concert was essentially about a couple of two or three Ragam Tanam Pallavis in different ragas. Each Ragam Tanam Pallavi would go on for an hour or more.

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Now what is Ragam Tanam Pallavi? Ragam here refers to alapana - so if you do RTP in a particular raga, say Kalyani. So the Ragam is sung extensively exhaustively in the raga in Kalyani followed by the Tanam and then you have the Pallavi.

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What is Pallavi? Here you will remember Pallavi refers to the first part, the first section of a composition but in this case, Pallavi refers to a single avartana of composition. It is just a composition that has only a single line. Now this single line is set in a tala usually of some complexity and it can get very, very complex. So the typical Pallavi would be this (Singing Starts: 7:03) (Singing Ends: 07:27)

So the Pallavi is just this “venkata ramana sankat arana tirupathi venkata ramana” that’s all. It is all in one line, it is set in this tala. You can take a quick guess, ahat tala is it is? It is a suladi tala “venkata ramana sankat arana tirupathi venkata ramana”.

A Pallavi has what is called a purvanga and an uttharanga. So in this case the purvanga is “venkata ramana”.

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The Pallavi’s weight falls somewhere in the center - usually on the beat after the laghu. That is call “Padagarbham” or “arudi”. The portion before the arudi is called purvangam. The portion after is called uttharangam. How you construct a Pallavi? How you compose a Pallavi? There are expectations and conventions is about it. This tala, if you have guessed, is thisra thriputa “venkata ramana sankat arana tirupathi venkata ramana”.

This is as far as talas for Pallavi go very simple, you can have other jathis, you can have other talas, you can have nadai as in this Pallavi. Again you try and guess; What tala is? (Singing Starts: 9:22) (Singing Ends: 10:19) So the Pallavi is gopika manohara mudakara sudhakara samaprabha. gopika manohara mudakara sudhakara gopika manohara mudakara. Is where the pasagrabham or the arudi falls. And this tala is thisra jhampa, but khanda nadai - khanda gati.

That is each matra has five counts “1,2,3,4,5” “1,2,3,4,5” “1,2,3,4,5” 1,2,3,4,5” “1,2,3,4,5”. So this is tishra Jhampa. You know Jhampa tala has one laghu, followed by a anudrtam followed by

a drtam. So that is what ... this is in tishra jati, because I had only three counts - I mean laghu has a value of three "1,2,3" and then there are a anudrtam and then there was a dritam.

Each matra it was a khand gati or khanda nadai - "takka takita" "takka takita" "takka takita" "takka takita" "takka takita" "takka takita" "takka takita" "takka takita" "takka takita" this is khanda nadai thishra jati Jhampa tala. Now this is also by certain standards not a very complex Pallavi.

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So once the Ragam - alapana is sung and then the Tanam is sung and then you have the Pallavi line is sung and it is sung three or four times so that the accompanists get the hang of how the Pallavi is constructed - that you have to maintain at all cost. After that you do is neraval, during which the words have to be kept in the same order. You cannot move the words here and there - not too much at any rate.

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In Pallavi singing it is expected that we retain the compositional form as it is. Then you have swaraprastara usually in a Ragamalika and then you have what is called Trikalam is performed. The Pallavi is sung at twice the speed and then half the speed and sometime tishram is performed. So this kind of laya exercises also happens. That is why Pallavi many people say - the word Pallavi means Pada Laya Vinyasa.

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So there is laya exercises, there are exercises in which you use the pada or you use the sahitya also to elaborate. So that is why Pallavi is here stands for pada laya vinyasa.

So when the composition is sung twice the speed it is called anuloma and composition is sung half the speed it is called the pratiloma. All the time the tala is maintained as it is and then you

have the viloma, anuloma and viloma, pratiloma, where the Pallavi line is maintained in the original tempo but the tala is performed in twice the speed and at half the speed.

So these are all strictly laya exercises, that are simply a matter of practicing hard and delivering it correctly with concentration. Now we will listen to Ramakrishnan Murthy as he performs an RTP. This is basically... the Pallavi is in Kapi and the talam (Singing Starts: 15:39) (Singing Ends: 18:11) this is the Pallavi. The talam is khanda jati tripata tala chatushra nadai. So it is (Singing Starts: 18:22) (Singing Ends: 18:49) this is how it is set.

Ramakrishnan Murthy has performed Ragamalika even in the Tanam. The Tanam itself has a sequence of ragas the same ragas are sung in the Ragamalika swaram after the Pallavi is sung and there is a short tani after the Pallavi has wound up.

(Music Starts: 19:14) (Music Ends: 49:32)