

SOME BASIC TERMINOLOGIES IN CARNATIC MUSIC AND THEIR DESCRIPTIONS

The word used to denote a musical sound is *'naadam'*. It is said that *'naadam'* is the basis of *'shruthi'* (Musical tone), *'shruthi'* give rise to *'swaram'* (musical notes) and *'swaram'* give rise to *'raagam'* (musical scale). *'Raagam and taalam'* are the basis of Indian classical music. *'Taalam'* is the rhythm maintained by the singer .

The Indian musical scale is said to have evolved from a set of seven primary notes or *'swarams'* (*'sapta swarams'*) on the basis of twenty two intervals (tones - *shruthi*). A scale is divided in to 22 shruthi or intervals that constitute the basis of musical notes or *swarams*. The *'sapta swarams'* are "*sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, da, ni*". The allocations of shruthis from *'sa'* to *'sa'* that is the seven notes of the scale did not have equal intervals between them. Listed below.

sa
ri
ga
ma
pa
da
ni

In Carnatic singing, a singer is always accompanied by an instrument called *'tanpura'* (or these days with an electronic shruthi box - drone) which is tuned to suit the singer's key note or *'aadhara shadja* or *shruthi'* (equivalent to the Western *'tonic'*). This is the basic note upon which the singers' singing scale is based and this also is the basis for tuning the accompanying instruments. This is often referred as the signature pitch of the singer. However, in Carnatic music the *'pitch* or *shruthi'* is a relative factor and it can not be taken as a standardized element. In Western music, the vocalists are trained to specialize in one particular pitch like the bass, baritone, tenor or soprano. In contrast to this, the Carnatic music allows the singer to choose his/her *aadhara shruthi* - a relative pitch factor that is flexible.

The combination of several notes woven into a composition in a way which is pleasing to the ear is called a *'raagam'*. *Raagam* is the basis of classical music. A raagam is based on the principle of a combination of notes selected out of the twenty two note intervals of the octave. A performer with sufficient training and knowledge alone can create desired emotions, through the combinations of *shruthis* and *swarams*.

In Carnatic music, there are seventy two '*melakarta raagams*'. By definition, the '*melakarta raagams*' are symmetric with respect to ascending (*aarooohanam*) and descending (*avarooohanam*) notes in the octave. These are also called '*sampoorna raagams*' or complete *raagams* (These involve all the seven notes). The five note scale is called a pentatonic *raagam* (*oudava raagam*). Similarly a six note raagam is called a sextatonic raagam (*shadva raagam*). From these complete raagams (also called '*janaka*'), '*Child raagams*' (*janya*) can be derived by omitting a note either in the *aarooohanam* or *avarooohanam* or both. These raagams can be delivered at three speeds, viz. slow ('*vilambit*'), medium ('*madhyama*'), and fast ('*duritha*').

Next to pitch, the characteristic of a musical note is loudness. According to ancient music treatises, sound has been classified under five heads, viz., very subtle (*atisuukshama*), subtle (*suukshama*), nourished (*pushta*), under developed (*apushta*), and artificial shades of sound (*kritrima*). This classification is based on the strength in the production of sound.

The next characteristic of a musical tone is timbre. Musicologists refer to variations or embellishments on the *raagam* or *swaram* more as a quality attribute while singing. The note can be prolonged and produced in a steady plain manner. At times a note is produced with some graces known as '*gamakams*' (ornamentations).

In Indian classical music, '*taalam*' (tāl (Hindi), tāla (anglicised from *taalam*; in Sanskrit), literally a "clap", is a rhythmical pattern that determines the rhythmical structure of a composition. Each composition is set to a *taalam*, and as a composition is rendered by the main artist(s), the percussion artist (s) play the pattern repeatedly, marking time as well as enhancing the appeal of the performance.

The *taalam* is the time measure or rhythm while singing or playing musical instruments. The musical time is divided in to simple and complicated metres. When accompanying the dance, vocal and instrumental music, the *taalam* maintains the balance which is the most essential function of music. Musical rhythm has three aspects: '*taalam, layam and maatra*'. *Taalam* is a complete cycle of metrical phrase composed of a fixed number of beats. *Layam* is the tempo, the speed of delivery of the musical phrases. The *maatra* is the smallest unit of taalam. *Taalam* is the most important aspect of classical music, and it can be considered to be the very basis or pulse of music.