

Carnatic Music- Readers Questions Answered

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, as we enter the New Year 2013, I hope that it is filled with peace, prosperity, happiness andmusic, but of course! Over the past two years or so, we have traced the evolution of Carnatic music, starting with its inception from the *Sama Veda*; through the centuries, the nature of Carnatic music has undergone changes as it responds to changes in contemporary realities. We examined the *Bhakti* movement, the influence of the British rule, the influence of Hindusthani music, the role of kings as connoisseurs and composers, the role of women and most recently, the influence of technology. Quite a journey! I trust that you have found this journey both enjoyable and fascinating.

I would like to begin this year by answering some of the questions that readers have sent me and other questions that I find I am constantly asked.

One of the most common questions that I am asked is to do with the practice that a student has to put in to learn Carnatic music. Carnatic music, like any other art form, has to be regularly and rigorously practiced. Most students have lessons with their teacher once or twice a week; regular practice is a must if a student hopes to benefit from their music lessons. Your guru will be able to guide you in terms of the specifics of practice.

While on this topic of music education, I'd also like to elaborate on the benefits of listening to Carnatic music on a regular basis. These days, there is no dearth of websites offering streaming of Carnatic music. Apart from this, most big cities in the US have music organizations that organize *kutcheris* on a regular basis- most of these organizations require either the purchase of a ticket or a membership in the organization to attend concerts. There are also a few organizations that arrange free concerts on a regular basis- any of these listening opportunities always provide valuable experience.

A student of music recently asked me about the importance of *Akaara Sadhana*- *akaara sadhana* is the practice of singing the initial exercises (*sarali varasai, janta varasai*, etc.) using vowel sounds- 'akaara', 'ikaara', 'ukaara', etc. During this practice, the jaws do not move; the only movement is from the throat/vocal chords. *Akaara sadhana* is typically done early in the morning; however practicing it at any time is better than not practicing at all! *Akaara sadhana* helps a vocalist develop speed as well as an ease in singing- the speed is built up with regular practice over a period of time.

Till we meet next time, I look forward to more of your questions. Do continue listening to classical music in general; Carnatic music in particular!

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