

Carnatic Music- Classification of Ragas

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, this month, I conclude the series on classification of *ragas* by examining some lesser known classification criteria. By now, you would have concluded that any *raga* will fall into multiple categories based on the classification condition.

In addition to the classification criteria that we have examined in the previous months, *ragas* may be classified based on the *gana kala* (time of singing) i.e. whether it is sung during the day or night or the seasons in which it should be sung. Some ragas can be sung at all times- *sarvakalika ragas*. Examples of these *ragas* include Bhairavi, Arabhi, Kambhoji and the like. *Ragas* like Bhupala, Bhowli, Revagupti are typically sung before sunrise- *purva suryodaya ragas*. Evening *ragas* include Vasantha, Natakuranji and Purvi Kalyani among others. The classification of *ragas* based on time is typically only a guideline and is not strictly adhered to in Carnatic music.

Ragas can also be classified based on *rasas* i.e. the emotions invoked by the *raga*. It is important to note however that a *raga* may invoke more than one *rasa* (emotion) depending on the way that it is rendered. *Ragas* like Khamas are used to portray *sringara rasa* (love) while *ragas* like Nadanamakriya and Punnagavarali are used to portray grief or sadness. *Ragas* like Kalyani and Shankarabharana can portray more than one *rasa* since a single *swara* (musical note) in itself has no *rasa*- it is the combination with the other notes, the tempo that it is rendered in that generates the various emotions in the listener.

Closely allied ragas are derived from the same *melakartha* (parent *raga*) but are still different from each other due to either the tempo in rendering, the difference that the *gamakas* take, the *prayogas* (way of rendering) of the *raga*, etc. Examples of closely allied ragas include Bhairavi and Manji, Arabhi and Devagandhari, Darbar and Nayaki among others.

Some *ragas* are common to both Hindusthani and Carnatic systems of music- examples of such *ragas* include Hindola (Carnatic) and Malkauns (Hindusthani), Suddha Saveri (Carnatic) and Durga (Hindusthani). These common *ragas* are frequently selected for Carnatic-Hindusthani *jugalbandhi* presentations as it provides an insight into how the same *raga* is rendered in different styles.

Again, there are many other ways to further classify *ragas*; however many of these are not relevant to general listeners of music while the relevance of some other classification methods no longer exists. Till we meet next time, do listen to the Carnatic *raga* Mohana and its Hindusthani equivalent Bhoopali (Bhoop) - it is indeed very interesting to listen to the same *raga* rendered in different styles.

Smitha Prasad is a Carnatic vocalist based in Cary, NC and can be reached at smithakprasad@outlook.com or www.facebook.com/smitha.k.prasad