

## **Carnatic Music- Classification of Ragas**

By Smitha K. Prasad

Dear readers, last month, we looked at the most basic way of classifying *ragas* as either *mela ragas* or *janya ragas*. This month, we look at further ways to classify *ragas* based on certain characteristics. While readers may wonder whether such exercises are relevant only from a theoretical perspective, in reality, it is helpful to anybody- a student or a lay listener of Carnatic music as it not only familiarizes you with terms used in Carnatic music, but also helps explain why *ragas* are sung in a particular way.

As we discussed last time, a *janya* (child) *raga* is a *raga* said to be derived from a *melakarta* (parent) *raga*. For the most part, a *janya raga* will have the same *swaras* as the parent *raga*; however *janya ragas* may also include one or two “foreign” *swaras* primarily to enhance the melodic beauty of the *raga*. *Janya ragas* which take only the notes present in their parent *raga* are called *Upanga Ragas*. Examples of these *ragas* include Malahari, Arabhi, Mohana among others. *Janya ragas* which, in addition to the notes present in the parent *raga*, use “foreign” notes are called *Bhashanga Ragas*. These *anya swaras* (foreign notes) occur in certain characteristic phrases (*sancharas*) of the *raga* and bring out the *raga svarupa* (embodiment of the *raga*). Examples of *Bhashanga ragas* include Bhairavi and Bilahari among others.

*Janya ragas* can also be classified based on the number of *swaras* present in the *arohana* (ascending scale) and *avarohana* (descending scale). The terms *sampurna* (all seven *swaras* present), *shadava* (six *swaras* present) and *audava* (five *swaras* present) are used to describe the *arohana* and *avarohana*. Thus the *raga* Arabhi is an example of an *Audava-Sampurna* (5 notes in *arohana*, 7 notes in *avarohana*) *raga* while the *ragam* Sriranjini is an example of a *shadava-shadava* (6 notes in *arohana*, 6 notes in *avarohana*) *raga*.

Till we meet next time, do listen to the Carnatic *raga* Bhairavi- you will find multiple samples of this *raga* on the Internet. Since Bhairavi is a *janya raga*, look up the parent *raga* (and its scale) and then find the *anya swara* in the *raga* Bhairavi. Do email me your answers- I look forward to hearing from you!

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