

A Raga and its Uniqueness: a Lecture-Demonstration

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Abstract:

Alphabets are the building blocks that construct a word. But when it comes to words, the individual letters do not mean anything, rather the word is perceived as a gestalt — take an example of ‘p’ in ‘pathos’ and ‘parrot’. Likewise when we talk about a raga, the notes are not of prime significance but the raga-personality as a whole. I will take some example ragas Marwa, Puriya, and Sohini to delineate this fact. Even if the same notes constitute these ragas, the dimensions — accent, intonation, approach, dynamics, connectivity, emotion — of each note are unique. I shall demonstrate how ‘technically’ close the ragas can be, yet creating no confusion about their identity. There are different ways we recognise a person, e.g. we all know Rabindranath Tagore by his photograph, some of us know him by his literature; still this is not equivalent to acquaintance or family-belongingness. Likewise, knowing a raga can also be at different levels. We learn the ‘picture’ of a raga first by its notes, aroha-avaroha; subsequently by its nayas, vad-samvad, and pakads. Still there is a lot more to explore — the identity of each note in a raga family is unique. Judicious use of alankars is crucial — it is an aesthetic call of an artist to choose between straight and ornamented use of a note. However it is important to judge when a note demands its typical embellishment to reinforce the raga identity. Finally, the bandish is of paramount importance — it is literally the ‘home’ of the raga family. Knowing at least 6-7 unique compositions naturally leads to an enriched understanding of the raga-personality. In the Q&A session at the end of the seminar, I will be happy to entertain questions from the audience.

About the Speaker:

Padmashri Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty is nearly a cult figure among Indian classical vocalists of today. Although considered a scion and doyen of the Patiala-Kasur gharana, he can portray equally well even the most subtle features of other major gharanas like Indore, Delhi, Jaipur, Gwalior, Agra, Kirana, Rampur and even Carnatic music of South India. Despite having such pure classical taleem in the Dhrupad-Khyal genre, he is amazingly adroit and a trend setter, in rendering all the lighter forms like Thumri, Tappa, Geet, Bhajan, Keertan, Folk, film/non-film and modern songs. Shri Chakrabarty graduated top of his class in music, both in B.A and M.A from the prestigious Rabindra Bharati University in Kolkata and joined the ITC Sangeet Research Academy in 1977. Being the academy’s very first outstanding scholar, he became their only gold medallist fellow, a member of their Experts’ Committee and a senior Guru where he still serves as a prime mover in all its promotional courses to date. Ajoy-ji is a recipient of prestigious national awards by the President of India — Padma Shri (2011), Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1999), Kumar Gandharva Samman (1993). Recently, he was honoured with the prestigious D.Lit. degree by IEST Shibpur and Kalyani University, West Bengal.