



## **Tana Varnam-s: An Entry into Raga Delineation in Carnatic Music**

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*Tana varnam-s* form a genre of Carnatic music that bridges the gap between pedagogical etudes and concert music. A *varnam* is a composition explicitly designed to present the raga in which it is composed in all of its subtleties of ornamentation, special phrases, and over□all pitch movement; it teaches the student how to sing, perform, and eventually improvise in its raga, as well as serving as sort of raga dictionary, on which other compositions and performances are based.

Carnatic music is usually taught orally from teacher to student. But in recent years, supplements are often utilized, such as audio recordings and/or music published in Indian notation to help the student memorize compositions on her own.

An example of such pedagogical aids is the six-cassette recording called “Carnatic Lessons (Nottuswara Sahitya and Varnams)” sung and with commentary (in English) by S. Rajeswari, a lecturer in Tamil Nadu Government Music College. The tapes include the teaching sessions of 13 well-known varnams, in which Rajeswari sings each varnam phrase by phrase, first with Indian music note-names, then with the varnam’s text.

Another example is the book “Ganamrutha Varna Malika” by A. S. Panchapakesa Iyer, a collection of forty-one varnams in Indian notation, also in English.

The set of tapes and the publication provide data for an inquiry into raga structure via the analysis of raga patterns in three varnam-s found in both pedagogical sources: “Viriboni” in Bhairavi raga and Ata tala; “Vanajakshiro” in Kalyani raga and Adi tala; and “Intha Modi” in Saranga raga and Adi tala.

I study the way Rajeswari breaks up the compositions into phrases, what she emphasizes, and the way she sings the raga notes (before she joins them together into the melismatic text settings of the actual composition). This data is input to various computer programs in order to show typical patterns and ornamentations in the raga of each composition studied.