



## Thaat and Mela: Foundations of Indian Classical Music

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### ARTICLE DETAILS

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#### Research Paper

**Accepted:** 19-04-2025

**Published:** 10-05-2025

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#### Keywords:

*Musician, Pt. Bhatkhandeji,  
Pt. Venkatamukhi, Thaata  
and Mela.*

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### ABSTRACT

Indian classical music, with its rich history and diverse traditions, has been a cornerstone of Indian culture for centuries. The classification of ragas, the melodic modes of Indian classical music, has been a subject of interest among musicologists and musicians alike. This article delves into the concepts of That and Mela, two fundamental systems used to classify and organize ragas in Hindustani and Carnatic music, respectively. Developed by legendary musicians Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Pandit Venkatamukhi, these systems provide a framework for understanding the melodic structure and emotional essence of various ragas. This article explores the 10 primary Thaats, which form the basis of Hindustani music, and the 72 Melas, which are central to Carnatic music, highlighting their characteristics, emotional connotations, and significance in Indian classical music. By examining the contributions of Pt. Bhatkhandeji and Pt. Venkatamukhi, this article aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the Thaata and Mela systems, shedding light on the intricacies of Indian classical music and its enduring cultural significance.

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**DOI :** <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15405870>

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### 1.0. Introduction

Indian classical music is a rich and diverse tradition that spans centuries. At its core are two fundamental concepts: Thaata and Mela. These concepts provide the framework for understanding and performing Indian classical music.



## 2.0. Classification of Thaats

Pandit Bhatkhandeji, a renowned musicologist, introduced the concept of Thaat in the early 20th century. In Hindustani classical music, Thaat refers to a melodic mode or a scale that consists of seven notes. There are 10 primary Thaats in Hindustani classical music, each with its unique combination of notes. These Thaats are:

1. Bilawal Thaat: Known for its bright and cheerful nature.
2. Khamaj Thaat: Characterized by its use of the flat seventh scale degree.
3. Kafi Thaat: Features a mix of natural and flat notes.
4. Asavari Thaat: Known for its solemn and contemplative nature.
5. Bhairav Thaat: Characterized by its use of the flat second scale degree.
6. Bhairavi Thaat: Features a mix of natural and flat notes.
7. Todi Thaat: Known for its intense and emotional nature.
8. Purvi Thaat: Characterized by its use of the flat third and seventh scale degrees.
9. Marwa Thaat: Features a mix of natural and flat notes.
10. Jhinjhoti Thaat: Known for its bright and playful nature.

Each Thaat has a specific sequence of notes, and ragas based on a particular Thaat will use the same sequence of notes. The Thaats are used as a framework for composing and improvising ragas.

### 2.1. Characteristics of Thaats

- 1 Aroha (Ascending Scale): The sequence of notes in the ascending scale.
2. Avaroha (Descending Scale): The sequence of notes in the descending scale.
3. Vadi (Sonant) and Samvadi (Consonant) Notes: The prominent notes that give the raga its unique character.
4. Pakad (Characteristic Phrases): Specific melodic patterns that define the raga.



5. Chalan (Movement or Progression): The way the notes move or progress in the raga.

### 3.0. Classification of Mela

Pandit Venkatamukhi, a Carnatic music maestro, developed the Mela system in the 17th century. He categorized 72 Melas, each with its distinct melodic structure and characteristics. The 72 Melas are categorized into several groups, including:

1. Suddha Melas (pure Melas)
2. Chaya Melas (shadow Melas)
3. Varja Melas (forbidden Melas)
4. Bhashanga Melas (derived Melas)

### 3.1. Characteristics of Mela

Pandit Venkatamukhi, a Carnatic music maestro, developed the Mela system in the 17th century. He categorized 72 Melas, each with its distinct melodic structure and characteristics. The 72 Melas are categorized into several groups, including:

#### 1.Mela(Melakarta):

A Mela or Melakarta is a fundamental, parent raga or musical scale in Carnatic music. It's the foundation upon which numerous derivative ragas (Janya ragas) are built.

#### 2.72Melakartas:

The system of 72 Melakartas, as established by Venkatamakhin in his treatise "Chaturdandiprakashika," is the cornerstone of Carnatic music's ragas.

#### 3.JanyaRagas:

Janya ragas are derivative or secondary ragas that are built from Melakartas. They can omit notes, alter the order of notes, or change the temperament of notes from their parent Melakarta.

#### 4.ArohanamandAvarohanam:

Each Melakarta raga has a specific ascending (Arohanam) and descending (Avarohanam) scale, defining its characteristic melodic contour.



### **5. Classification within Melakartas:**

The 72 Melakartas are further grouped into 12 chakras (circles), and each chakra contains 6 ragas that share a specific characteristic.

### **4.0. Importance in Carnatic Music:**

The Melakarta system provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and organizing the vast array of ragas in Carnatic music.

1. Aroha (Ascending Scale): The sequence of notes in the ascending scale.
2. Avaroha (Descending Scale): The sequence of notes in the descending scale.
3. Vadi (Sonant) and Samvadi (Consonant) Notes: The prominent notes that give the raga its unique character.
4. Melakarta Ragas: The 72 primary ragas in Carnatic music, each with its unique sequence of notes.

In Carnatic classical music, Mela refers to a melodic mode or a scale that consists of seven notes. There are 72 Melakarta ragas, which are the primary ragas in Carnatic music.

The Melakarta ragas are classified into two main categories:

1. Sampoorana Melakarta ragas (36 ragas): These ragas have all seven notes in the ascending and descending scales.
2. Shadava Melakarta ragas (36 ragas): These ragas have six notes in the ascending scale and seven notes in the descending scale.

Each Mela has a specific sequence of notes, and ragas based on a particular Mela will use the same sequence of notes.

### **5.0. Comparison between Thaata and Mela**

While both Thaata and Mela refer to melodic modes or scales, there are some key differences:

1. Number of Thaats/Melas : Hindustani music has 10 primary Thaats, while Carnatic music has 72 Melakarta ragas.



2. Flexibility: Thaata is more flexible, allowing for variations in the sequence of notes, while Mela is more rigid, with a fixed sequence of notes.
3. Style: Thaata is used in Hindustani classical music, while Mela is used in Carnatic classical music.
4. Thaata has 10 primary modes, while Mela has 72 primary ragas.

## **6.0. Legacy of Pt. Bhatkhandeji and Pt. Venkatamukhi**

The contributions of Pt. Bhatkhandeji and Pt. Venkatamukhi have had a profound impact on Indian classical music. Their work has provided a framework for understanding and classifying the vast array of ragas, enabling musicians and music enthusiasts to appreciate the rich diversity of Indian classical music.

### **6.1. Future Directions**

The study of Thaata and Mela continues to evolve, with new research and interpretations emerging. As Indian classical music continues to adapt and change, the importance of Thaata and Mela remains a constant, providing a foundation for musical expression and creativity.

### **6.2. Conclusion:**

In conclusion, Thaata and Mela are fundamental concepts in Indian classical music, providing a framework for composing and improvising ragas. Understanding these concepts is essential for appreciating the richness and complexity of Indian classical music.

The Thaata and Mela systems provide a framework for understanding Indian classical music's intricacies. Developed by Pt. Bhatkhandeji and Pt. Venkatamakhi, these systems preserve and propagate India's rich musical heritage, ensuring its timeless tradition continues to inspire and enrich future generations.

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