

Melakarta Ragas

In Carnatic music, a Melakarta raga is a complete parent scale from which many other ragas can be derived. The system contains 72 Melakarta ragas.

A raga qualifies as a Melakarta only when it:

- Contains all seven swaras: S, R, G, M, P, D and N
- Uses all seven notes in both the arohanam (ascending) and avarohanam (descending)
- Places the notes in regular ascending and descending order
- Uses the same set of notes while ascending and descending
- Has only one form of Madhyamam, which is either M_1 or M_2

A Melakarta structure is:

Arohanam: S R G M P D N S

Avarohanam: S N D P M G R S

The precise forms of R, G, M, D and N determine the identity of the raga.

Why are there exactly 72?

The 72 ragas are divided into two equal groups:

- Ragas 1–36: Shuddha Madhyama ragas using M_1
- Ragas 37–72: Prati Madhyama ragas using M_2

Within each half, six valid combinations of Rishabham and Gandharam are combined with six valid combinations of Dhaivatam and Nishadam:

$6 \text{ R-G combinations} \times 6 \text{ D-N combinations} \times 2 \text{ Madhyamams} = 72$

Shadjam and Panchamam remain fixed in all 72 Melakarta ragas.

Chakras

The 72 Melakarta ragas are organized into 12 chakras, with six ragas in each chakra.

The word *chakra* means “wheel” or “cycle.” In this system, it is simply a convenient way of grouping ragas with a shared structure.

All six ragas within one chakra have:

- The same Madhyamam

- The same Rishabham
- The same Gandharam
- Different combinations of Dhaivatam and Nishadam

The first six chakras use M_1 , while the next six use M_2 .

Chakra	Name	Melakarta numbers	Madhyamam
1	Indu	1–6	M_1
2	Netra	7–12	M_1
3	Agni	13–18	M_1
4	Veda	19–24	M_1
5	Bana	25–30	M_1
6	Rutu	31–36	M_1
7	Rishi	37–42	M_2
8	Vasu	43–48	M_2
9	Brahma	49–54	M_2
10	Disi	55–60	M_2
11	Rudra	61–66	M_2
12	Aditya	67–72	M_2

The chakra names also help indicate their numbers. For example, Indu, the moon, represents one; Netra, the eyes, represents two; Agni traditionally refers to three sacred fires; and Veda represents the four Vedas.

Within every chakra, the six ragas follow the same D–N sequence:

1. $D_1 N_1$
2. $D_1 N_2$
3. $D_1 N_3$
4. $D_2 N_2$
5. $D_2 N_3$
6. $D_3 N_3$

This repeating pattern makes the system highly organized.

Janya Ragas

A Janya raga is a raga derived from a Melakarta or parent raga. The word *janya* means “born from” or “derived from.”

Unlike a Melakarta raga, a Janya raga does not need to contain all seven notes or use the same notes in ascent and descent.

A Janya raga may:

- Omit one or more swaras
- Use five notes in one direction and seven in the other
- Follow a zigzag or vakra movement
- Repeat certain notes
- Use distinctive phrases that define its character
- Include an occasional foreign note in certain phrases

For example, Mohanam uses only five notes:

Arohanam: S R₂ G₃ P D₂ S

Avarohanam: S D₂ P G₃ R₂ S

It is commonly associated with the 28th Melakarta, Harikambhoji, even though Mohanam omits Madhyamam and Nishadam.

Other examples include:

- Malahari, derived from Mayamalavagowla
- Hamsadhwani, commonly placed under Shankarabharanam
- Madhyamavati, derived from Kharaharapriya
- Hindolam, derived from Natabhairavi
- Khamas, derived from Harikambhoji

However, a Janya raga is not defined only by the notes it contains. Two ragas can use similar notes but sound very different because of their characteristic phrases, ornamentation, emphasis and movement.

Common Types of Janya Ragas

Janya ragas are often described according to the number of notes they use.

- Sampoorana: Seven notes
- Shadava: Six notes
- Audava: Five notes

A raga may use different numbers of notes in ascent and descent. For example:

- Audava–Audava: five notes both ways
- Audava–Sampoorna: five ascending and seven descending
- Shadava–Sampoorna: six ascending and seven descending

Janya ragas may also be classified as:

- Upanga: Uses only notes belonging to its parent Melakarta
- Bhashanga: Uses one or more foreign notes in particular phrases
- Vakra: Uses a non-linear or zigzag note sequence