

Kaali Ghata_A Very Short Story

In Carnatic classical music, ‘Ghatam’ is an important subordinate percussion instrument. It is made of burnt clay and is golden brown in colour. Its pitch is determined by its thickness and volume. It is unpredictable at times, because it is hard to tune. However, it is very consistent in speed and accuracy. This may sound contradictory. But, when played using all ten fingers at maximum speed, it follows the sound of hard hitting rain drops, inspiring the listener to lay back and relax. No confusions here.

An old vidwan once told me that about one hundred years ago, a pioneering Ghatam player in Tamil Nadu used a different type of Ghatam. It was black in colour, normally meant to store water and food grains. A Hindustani musician, who heard him play in a concert remarked that it really was a “*Kaali Ghata*”, [=*Heavy Black Cloud* in Hindi], a rich tribute indeed.

I wonder why we do not see it in present day concerts. The rain is no more unpredictably consistent, is it?

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