Melakarta is a collection of fundamental ragas (musical scales) in Carnatic music (South Indian classical music). Melakarta ragas are parent ragas (hence known as janaka ragas) from which other ragas may be generated.

In Hindustani music the Thatt is equivalent of Melakarta. There are 10 thaats in Hindustani music, though the commonly accepted melakarta scheme has 72 ragas.

A melakarta raga is sometimes referred as mela, karta or sampoorna as well.

Rules for Melakarta

Ragas must contain the following characteristics to be considered Melakarta.

- They are sampurna ragas - they contain all seven swaras (notes) of the octave in both ascending and descending scale
- They are krama sampurna ragas - that is the sequence is strictly ascending and descending in the scales, without any jumps or zig-zag notes
- The upper shadjam is included in the raga scale (ragas like Punnagavarali and Chenchurutti are not melakarta as they end with nishadham)
- The ascending and descending scales must have the same notes

Each melakarta raga has a different scale. This scheme envisages the lower Sa (Keezh Shadjamam), upper Sa (Mael Shadjamam) and Pa (Panchamam) as fixed swaras, with the Ma (Madhyamam) having two variants and the remaining swaras Ri (Rishabam), Ga (Gandhaaram), Dha (Dhaivatham) and Ni (Nishaadham) as having three variants each. This leads to 72 seven-note combinations (scales) referred to as the Melakarta ragas as follows.

The 72 melakarta ragas are split into 12 groups called chakras, each containing 6 ragas. The ragas within the chakra differ only in the dhaivatham and nishadham notes (D and N), as illustrated below. The name of each of the 12 chakras suggest their ordinal number as well.¹

The 72 melakarta ragas can be divided into two parts. viz..., suddha Madhyamam and prati Madhyamam ragas. When a given suddha madhyamam raga's M1 is replaced by M2, we get the corresponding prati madhyamam raga. See Katapayadi sankhya for more information on how to derive the various swaras of a raga from its melakarta number.