A Brief Look at the Identity, Connectedness and Alienation in the Traditional System of Indian Music

B. A. Mahalalshmi Prasad

Abstract

The present paper looks at the paradigm of Indian classical music, in the context of Raga system wherein the individual swaras play an important and pivotal role in defining and creating an identity as a raga, while at the same time maintaining their individuality within the wholesome product that is the raga. The paper also briefly explores its present reception among the youth of India.

Indian Musical Heritage

India has a rich musical heritage, unique and diverse. It is like two rivers that flow separately and yet together form a vast ocean. These two rivers are: a) Hindustani (North Indian) and b) Carnatic (South Indian) classical music. Each has its own set of ragas. However, Hindustani music has adopted several Carnatic ragas given the vast array of ragas that exist in the Carnatic system.

Both systems of music shared a common history until the arrival of the Islamic rulers of India. It was under the influence of Islamic musical traditions and Muslim musicians that Hindustani music began to develop a mixed genre and developed its own separate identity as a musical system.

Carnatic Music

Carnatic music kept to its traditional vedic roots and identity. (Bagchee, 1998), In her book, Indian Music: A Vast Ocean of Promise (1972), Peggy Holroyde argues, that because Indian music is so vibrant and full of individuality, it does not have to fear change. She explains

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that there is bound to be confusion at first because we all tend to judge an artistic experience by the standards of taste and criticism that we currently possess and therefore "We understand what we know". Regardless of their distinct historical evolution, both systems of music have several ragas with identical swaras (e.g. Malkauns-Hindolam; Sudha Bhairavi-Thodi; Purya Dhansri-Panthuvarali etc). However, even though the basic essence remains universal and same in the two traditions, they exhibit unique schemata of rendition when being sung and in the techniques used to render the kriti. These differences are seen due to dissimilarities in the articulation of gamakas. Gamakas are faster in Carnatic music, but not in Hindustani music. In Carnatic music, the articulation of the gamakas is faste,r while the amplification is smaller. According to some scholars, this fast but short amplification of gamakas in Carnatic music is not as conducive to the expression of emotions.

Origin and History of Carnatic Music

The origin of South Indian classical music (Carnatic music), can be traced back to the age of vedas. However, Bharata's Natya Sastra, (from about the 5th century A.D), and Saranga Deva's Sangita Ratnakara (from the early13th century A.D). , are considered to be the best ancient recorded treatises that are available today on the approach to and achievements of Indian classical music.

Carnatic music is mainly sung through compositions, especially kritis: a form developed between the 14th and the 20th centuries by composers such as Purandara Dasa and the three doyens of Carnatic music: Sri Thyagarajar , Sri Shyama Sastri and Dikshitar (Wikipedia, 2013). Carnatic music is based on a 72 calibration agenda (swaras) as against the 12 calibration agenda in western classical music. But in all its applied aspects and purposes, not more than 16 additions are used. An altered aggregate of these addition, or swaras, is said to evolve into abstracted ragas. The appearance and the constraints of a raga will be acutely authentic in the adjustment of the addition in its arohanam (ascendance addition) and avarohanam (bottomward addition). Thus, in Carnatic music, the raga connotes affection or an avenue in which the music is declared to travel. Altered combinations of the addition give acceleration to altered raga, thereby creating and maintaining a unique identity of the raga. Thus, there are numbers of altered ragas, as per approach. However, only a few are conducive for performance in the present day. Gamaka and

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Brighaa are the two most important appearances of the raga. The above refers to the accentuation of the abundance of an accurate swara and the closing refers to the acceleration with which the artist performs a set of swaras or notes. Both the gamaka and the brigha help to advance the address of the agreement that is rendered. The swaras are performed in an application of assorted modulations. The brigha could be generally 8, 16 and so on.

Raga and Tala

In Carnatic music raga and tala are considered of paramount importance and are treated as parents: raga being mother and tala being the father. It is mandatory for a student to be knowledgeable about raga and tala. Tala is the beat/ rhythm (time) of a composition. There exists a *Sapta Tāla* system (35 talas) according to which there are seven families of tāla. A tāla cannot exist without reference to one of five *jatis* (genres) differentiated by the length in beats. The following table describes the different talas with their jatis

Tala	Anga Notation	Tisra (3)	Chatusra (4)	Khanda (5)	Misra (7)	Sankeerna (9)
Dhruva	lOll	11	14	17	23	29
Matya	lOl	8	10	12	16	20
Rupaka	Ol	5	6	7	9	11
Jhampa	lUO	6	7	8	10	12
Triputa	lOO	7	8	9	11	13
Ata	llOO	10	12	14	18	22
Eka	L	3	4	5	7	9

1. Laghu, which is a clap (palm facing downwards) and finger counts and its symbol is | .
2. the Drutam, which consists of a clap (palm facing downwards) and a wave (palm facing upwards-' visarjitam') and its symbol is **0**.
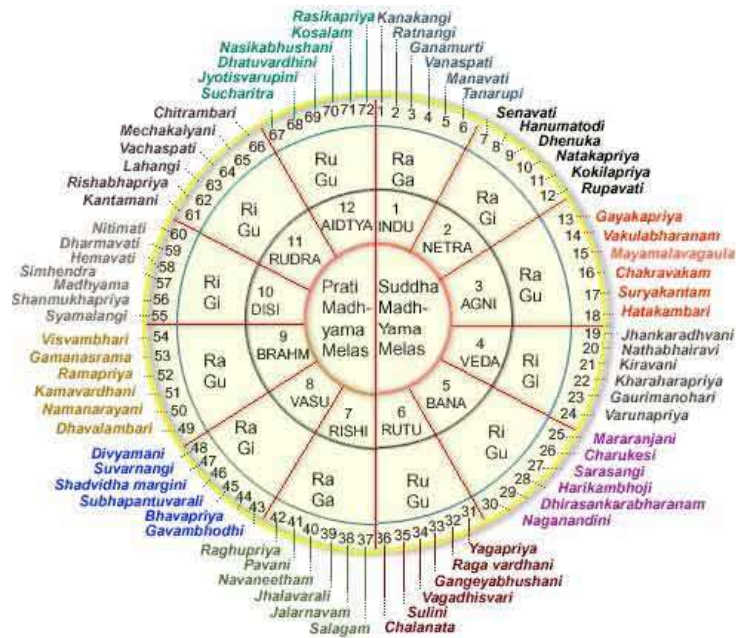3. the Anudrutam, which is just a clap (palm facing downwards) and its symbol is **U**.

The Melakrta Ragas refer to the base of 72 'janaka' (parent) ragas for all of the existing ragas in Carnatic Music. All of these ragas accept seven additional saptaswaras, accept all seven

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swaras which are Sa, Ree, Ga, Ma, Pa, Da, Ni and Sa. The arrangement is added, disconnected into two sets of 36 ragsa by addition of the indigenous set with the original Ma and the addition of a bluff Ma. Table 1 illustrates the arrangement of Ragas in Carnatic System

(http://www.carnaticindia.com/)

Another actual important aspect of the Carnatic music is the tala or the rhythm. The tala is the accent of the allotment that is actually performed. Today, there exist more than hundred thalas. The most prevalent ones are with three, four, five, seven or eight beats in them.

The Rhythm Base

The rhythmic base for Carnatic music is the arrangement of talas. The Seven Talams are Dhruva, Matya, Rupaka, Jhampa, Triputa, Ata, and Eka Talams. With the application of these sapta talas all of the 150 Carnatic talas can be derived. The rhythmic arrangement is based on 7 counts of talas which use a loan of 3 of the 6 accessible apparatus of an Indian talam - Anudrutam, Drutam, Laghu, Guru, Plutam, and Kakapadam.

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Raga: Meaning and Interpretation

The Sanskrit word 'Raga' translates as 'colour' or 'mood'. This meaning takes the core of a raga beyond the mere scalic classification. The realm of performance is based on this power of a raga to evoke a particular mood. The mood is intricately woven into Bhava (emotion) and Rasa. Dimond. 2007, tries to explain Rasa as an occurrence wherein one tries to experience emotions using arts as a medium and point of entry. Take, for example, the feeling one experiences when one sees the 'Sunflowers' of Van Gogh. Rasa theory is the crux of the aesthetic system of Indian tradition. In his book Art experience Hiriyanna (1997) elaborates on the Rasa within the purview of Sankhya. To paraphrase Matanga, a raga is in essence the coming together of the melodic sound, melodic notes and the movements (*aroha/avaroha) that* rouse appropriate emotions in a sensitive mind.

The scale by itself is therefore inadequate to define the 'inherent' nature of a raga. While appearing to be bound by a rigid scale, a raga is capable of creating unbounded emotions in the minds of the listeners because of its 'infinite' improvisational attributes. Each Raga has its own Prayoga(usage) which gives it its distinct identity. Every raga has its own characteristic Jiva swara (primary note) that forms an integral part of the main prayoga in the raga.

Rasa

Different Upanishads (treatises/commentaries on the Vedas) explain rasa in different ways. Taittiriya Upanishad describes rasa as an essence, something which is beyond senses. Kaushitaki Upanishad understands rasa as a sacred mantra in verse form called Brahman, and Isha Upanishad describes rasa as something that appeals to, and moves the mind. (Wikipedia, 2007) Sage Bharata in the 9th century tried to unravel the meaning of rasa and its connection to the emotions of human beings. The "world of emotions" consists of nine inherent emotions or sentiments. However, several sources claim that a ninth rasa: *Shanta (*peace)*,* and a tenth one *Laija (*shyness,) were added to the original eight. Thus Rasas, as they appear today, are as follows-

- Karuna – sadness, pathos
- Shringar – love, joy

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- Vira – heroism, valour

- Hasya – laughter, comedy

- Raudra – anger

- Bhayanaka – fear

- Vibhatsa – disgust
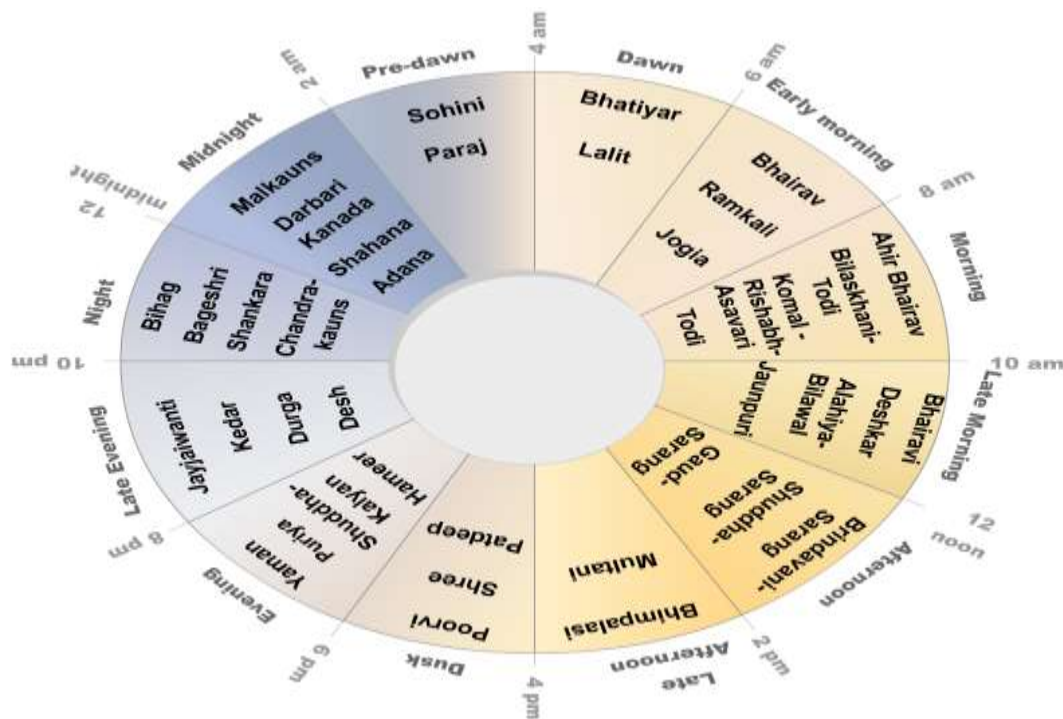
- Adbhuta – surprise

- Lajja- shyness

- Shanta – peace

Quality to Transform Beings

Art historian, Coomaraswamy, notes that these sounds are, "Created by God' and 'were passed down through the rishis (saints) to help (mankind) purify the mind and soul' (Ruckert, 1996). Coomarsway in his erudite essays espouses the transformative power of art and that precisely is the nature of rendering a raga, which is to transform the audience onto a higher plane. Coomaraswamy, quoting Aristotle in the context, reiterates that the 'ultimate goal of art is the good of man'.

Given that Ragas have the inherent quality to transform human beings and since humans are creatures of influence, it would be natural for them to be influenced by the change in season and if Ragas are the Sound of Gods, and hence have been endowed with magical prowess, it is not surprising that names and properties of seasons, moods, genders, deities, colours, and time are attributed to the ragas. There exists a clear earmarking of seasons for the renditions of particular ragas. The names of the Ragas themselves are evocative of the season in which they are to be sung, for example, the name Vasanta, means spring, or Megha means rain.

Time of Singing

Traditionally, Ragas are also sung at a particular time of the day. The table given below summarizes the various prescriptions for the rendition of ragas at particular times of the day

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(http://hindustaniclassicalmusic.wordpress.com)

Gender of Ragas

In Hindustani music depictions of ragas as male and female (as Ragas and Raginis) is very common. Many ragas depict the images of Bhairavi, a fierce goddess who is the consort of Shiva, the Lord Supreme.) The intention here is to try and encapsulate a 'collective human experience' of female divine power wherein Shiva and Shakti (the male and the female aspect) or raga and tala come together to create divine music (JL). Traditionally each swara has been attributed to an aspect of nature and of human anatomy such as the navel, heart, throat, nose etc. for example Sa is saranga, Ri is Rishabha and Pa being Panchama. Devadu in his descriptions of Veena and music compares the swaras to the individual spinal nerve and these to the frets of the Veena while at the same time placing its significance in vedic rituals by comparing aspects of Veena such as the fret boards, the strings and the swaras to the 24 bija aksharas (modal sounds)

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of the Gayathri Mantra. Tyagaraja's composition Shobillu Saptaswara in Jaganmohini Raga set to Rupak tala elaborates on the connection between swara, the human body and the divine[1].

Vast and Continuing Traditions

The Indian classical music traditions are vast, complex and fascinating. They have, at the same time, undergone changes throughout history because of vigorous influences from a variety of different sources. In recent years new influences have led to an amalgamation of the earliest puritanical scales with other contemporary genres like jazz, blues, hip-hop etc. Despite the plethora of fusion that exist and is being constantly expanded, such attempts still have few takers among serious teachers and students of the traditional classical form.

The Current Scene

The younger generation seems to feel a sense of distance, almost like alienation, from the 'classical' genre, in its true sense and seems to find it difficult to embrace it. Today's youth is reluctant to devote time and attention to the intricacies of classical performances and refuse to sit in concerts that might last for more that 3 hrs in duration, in which a musician exhibits the

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[1] Pallavi:
Shobillu Saptaswara Sundarula Bhajimpave Manasa!
Anupallavi:
Naabhi Hrut Kanta Rasana NaasaadhulaYandu
Charanam:
Dhara Rig Saamaadulalo Vara Gaayathri Hrudayamuna
Sura Bhusura Maanasamuna Shubha Tyagarajuni Yeda

MEANING:
O Mind ("manasa")! Praise ("Bhajimpave") the divine forms ("sundarula") of the seven ("sapta") musical notes ("svara").
Which glow ("yandu") in the navel ("naabhi"), heart ("hrut"), neck ("kanta"), tongue ("rasana") and nose ("naasaadhula") of the human body.
Which shine in the four Vedas ("Dhara Rig Samaadulalo") and in the sublime Gayathri Mantra as its essence ("Hrudayamuna"). Which sparkle ("shubha") in the hearts ("maanasamuna") of the celestials ("sura"), of worthy Bhusuras and of Tyagaraja.

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highly skilled renditions of prayogas that seek to, and often do, enthrall and at the same time transform a sensitive audience.

The death of the Masters like M. S. Subbalakshmi, Pandit Ravishankar, Bismillah Khan and others has contributed to a fissure wherein the stalwarts of classical music and their "rasika" (audience) who seek divinity through music are becoming increasingly rare. Missing is the genius of such stalwarts to let the new influence the old without either losing its essential quality.

The Question of Revivsl

In its present state of existence, Indian classical music needs a strong effort at revival so as to bring back the younger audiences to this divine experience while at the same time allowing world influences to enrich that already rich heritage in appropriate ways.

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Colophon:

Dedicated to my Late Guru, Sri. Vidwan Ramamurthy

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