

RESEARCH METHODS ADOPTED IN THE ANALYSIS OF RAGA ALAPANA FROM SELECT RECORDINGS OF SOUTH INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

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Abstract

Raga alapana is an important element of Manodharma sangita and refers to the creativity aspect in the Classical Performing music tradition. Raga Alapana is the first part in manodharma and reveals the presentation of the melodic structure of a raga in a capsule form. In a concert, this is an indispensable part and brings out the potential and caliber of an artist. This article has proposed to analyse the structure of raga alapana, as presented by select veteran musicians of South Indian classical music and the same available through recordings. The minute details of the alapana format and the different methods by which a researcher can approach the subject are presented herein. This study would enable to understand the significance of the raga alapana form and also the style of an artist in classical repertoire. The methods used for music analysis of abstract forms like alapana would be beneficial for researches of this kind.

Key words: Raga Alapana, Manodharma, Raga phrases, Concert, Analysis of alapana, style of an artist.

INTRODUCTION

South Indian classical music is one of the ancient music forms in India, the origin of which, dates back to the Vedic period. This system of music has undergone several changes and improvisations which eventually transformed as the creative art form. The compositions composed in this particular form of music gave a room for further creativity and establishment of the performing tradition. In the contemporary period, the creative part of music performance is known by the term, Manodharma.

Manodharma is a unique part of South Indian classical music and alapana is one of its elements. Many great stalwarts had contributed to the development of this classical art form in the past hundred years. Being an absolute improvisational form of music rendering, analysis of manodharma, particularly alapana is highly challenging. There had been some research directly focusing on the styles of composers, musicians and artists. Yet the research design differs for each of them. The proposed paper attempts to present the basic research methods that

can be followed in the analysis of alapana, based on the audio recordings of stalwarts in the recent years.

AIM & OBJECTIVES

The present article aims to undertake a systematic analysis of Raga alapana of few musicians and bring out the significance of the form and the style of the artist in a concert.

SCOPE OF STUDY

- The study has taken only the alapana component of a performance and is restricted to only a few musicians.
- The audio recordings chosen for the study are only those belonging to the vocal concerts.
- The analysis is restricted towards the structure of alapana with select parameters, as applicable to the samples.

METHODS OF ANALYSIS

- Recordings of select vocal artists are collected from the available resources.
- The alapana portion was first observed and notated as svara phrases.
- The whole alapanawas divided into parts or sections.
- Each part was observed carefully after repeated listening.
- Notable features are observed and documented

SAMPLES SELECTED FOR THE STUDY

- K V Narayanaswamy – *Carukesi* raga
- K V Narayanaswamy – *Bhairavi* raga
- D K Jayaraman – *Kalyani* raga
- Madurai mani iyyer – *Kamboji* raga
- M D Ramanathan – *Sahana* raga
- M S Subbalakshmi – *Bhairavi* raga
- Semmangudi Srinivasa Iyer – *Bhairavi* raga
- Voleti Venkateshvaralu – *Bhairavi* raga

- Nedunuri Krishnamurthy – *Bhairavi* raga
- Musiri Subramanya Iyer – *Bhairavi* raga
- D K Pattammal – *Saveri* raga
- D K Pattammal – *Bhairavi* raga
- Maharajapuram V Santhanam – *Mohana* raga
- Madurai Mani Iyer – *Bhairavi* raga

ANALYSIS OF ALAPANA

The alapana is described as an essaying of a raga and is rendered systematically in different stages. As mentioned above, recordings of the raga alapana samples were collected and a systematic analysis was carried out. The collected samples can be categorized in the following types:

- Alapana of a same raga rendered by different musicians. (For this purpose *Bhairavi* raga was chosen)
- Alapana of raga-swith different time durations.

Each one is being discussed below.

ALAPANA OF RAGA BHAIRAVI BY DIFFERENT MUSICIANS

Bhairavi is considered as one of the major ragas of South Indian classical music. There are many prominent compositions in this raga and sung in concerts frequently. It is observed that many phrases characteristic of the raga, figure profusely in all the concerts. Further, there were many similarities between the vocalist and the supporting accompanists in the rendering of phrases. The beginning and the total melodic movement of Bhairavi raga differs in each case, but still presents the raga in its complete form¹.

RENDERING OF A RAGA FOR DIFFERENT TIME DURATION

Duration of an Alapana is dependent on the scope of the raga, the total time duration of the concert, the kind of audience and the context (theme) of the concert. Further it is also observed that artists perform thealapanaaccording to the size of the composition. Thus if it is short Kriti, the amount of duration for alapana is maximum 3 to 5 minutes. When it is a Vilamba or choukakala Kriti, the duration is between 7 to 11minutes. When it is Ragam Tanam Pallavi the duration is above 14minutes.

The short alapana rendered by any artist is mostly in medium or fast tempo. In longer durations, the artists render in three speeds namely, *vilamba*, *madyama* and *druta*. It also has many intermediate stages of sustaining on some svaras.

OBSERVATIONS ON ALAPANA RENDERINGS

The rendering of alapana in the case of a shorter kriti, often consists of fast phrases which express the complete essence of raga. In this first stage the starting note of alapana would preferably be madhya sthayi Panchama or Tara sthayi sadja². In the rendition of alapana for vilambakala kriti, the alapana is sung in three tempos - vilamba, madhyama and druta. In this case, the accompanist will also be given chance for their rendition.

While in the rendition of alapana for RTP, it consists of three speeds and a pause will be given to a particular svara to express the raga bhava. In this stage the accompanist will be given chance to perform immediately after the pause. Given below are some of the observations with regard to the phrases occurring in alapana.

BEGINNING PHRASE IN AN ALAPANA

The most significant factor in alapana is the beginning phrase. Ragas can be classified into two major types namely, phrase-oriented raga (like, Bhairavi) and scale-oriented raga (like, Carukesi). On careful listening, it is found that most of the musicians begin with the most common important phrase. This probably indicates that it is the tradition that is being followed, by and large. For example:

- In the recording of Madurai Mani Iyer's rendition of the Kriti, '*yaro ivar yaro*' in bhairavi raga set to Adi talam, by Arunacalakovirayar, the beginning phrase is 'DPMGRG-MPDP'.
- In the Kriti '*balagopala*' of Muthuswamy Diksitar rendered by K V Narayanaswamy the same phrase occurs at the beginning (DPMGRG - MPDP).
- Some ragas denote a single svara which acts as a phrase to show the raga svarupa. That is also a beginning phrase to the raga. For example:
- MD Ramanathan's rendition of '*giripai*' in sahana raga, the catursruti risaba itself provides the completeness of the raga.

SYMMETRICAL PHRASES

Symmetrical phrases link the raga in all the three sthayi namely mantra, madhya and tara to show the beauty of the raga. For example:

- K VNarayanasamy's rendition of '*balagopala*' in the raga Bhairavi has, 'GR-ND-GR'.
- D K Jayaraman's rendition of '*bajare rēcita*' in the raga Kalyani has, 'ND-GR-ND'.
- D K Pattammal's rendition of '*sankari samkuru*' in the raga saavi has, 'SRGSR', 'PDNPD', and 'SRGSR'.

Such phrases are rendered towards the conclusion of the alapana.

DIRGHA SVARAS IN PHRASES

A dirgha svara denotes that svara, which can be prolonged for a longer duration. In the alapana, there are some svaras that can be prolonged and made to sustain for a longer time duration. Usually melodic phrases are woven around with this svara as a centre. For example,

- MS Subbalakshmi's alapana for the Kṛiti '*enati nomu palamu*' has, 'GRGRSNDNSRGR-GRGRSNDPNSRGR'³.
- Voleti Venkateshvarulu's alapana for the kṛiti '*nee padamule*' has 'DP,DPMRGMPDP - DPMNDPMGRGMPDP'⁴.

The dirgha svara of phrases have two qualities namely, sustainance and nyasa.

SVARA ON WHICH DETAILED EXPOSITIONS ARE MADE

Based on listening of the recordings, svara are varied by means of raga. In bhairavi, tara sthayi rishabha and madya sthayi rishabha are used predominantly. For example:

- In the Voleti Venkateshwarulu's rendition of the kṛiti '*lalite*' in the raga bhairavi, he performed alapana as, 'R-P-R- RDNSR-GGRRSNDPNSRGR-NSRGMPDNSRGR'.
- D K Pattammal's alapana for the kṛiti, '*arumarundoru*' in the kambōji raga, tara sthayi gandhara was used profusely. For example: 'G- GMG-GMGRGMG-GRGRGMG-MGRSNDPDSRGMG'.

This svara exposition serves as a guide to find the power of sustaining a particular svara which adds beauty to the raga. Generally, artists involve themselves on to the shruti and their exposition sounds beautiful. Few artists create his/ her own style of rendering. For example: Madurai Mani Iyer's alapana for the kriti, '*maa jaanaki*' has 'MGGMPMMGGR'.

OVERALL RANGE OF ALAPANA - IN THE THREE STHAYIS

The range is decided by the ability and projection of voice of the vocalist for raga alapana. Maximum range of alapana performed by the main artist is from mandra pancama to tara pancama but some are exceptional. For example:

- K V Narayanaswamy's alapana for the kriti, '*balagopala*', goes up to the tara sthaya dhaivata as: RGMPDMPGRS'.
- The same kriti was rendered by MD Ramanathan, wherein, he performed up to mandra sthaya sadja in the phrase: 'PDNRSNDNS'.

REPETITION OF PHRASES

It is often observed that in the overall presentation of the alapana, a few phrases are sometimes repeated more than two or three times at various stages of exposition. The reason behind could be that the particular phrase needs to be rendered again to showcase the beauty of the raga. In some cases, the artist repeats the phrases so as to involve themselves in the aesthetic beauty of the raga. For example:

- DK Jayaraman's alapana for the kriti '*bajare re chita*' in Kalyani has: 'GDP-PDNDPMGRSR' occurring for more than three times in his alapana.
- DK Pattammal's alapana for the kriti '*arumarundoru*' in kamboji has: 'PDP-DRSNDP' for more than three times in the alapana.
- DK Jayaraman's alapana for the kriti '*tholi jenmamula*' in bhilahari has: 'DPMGR-GR' for more than three times in the alapana.

PHRASES SUGGESTING A DIFFERENT OR AN ALLIED RAGA

Generally, the main artist performs the alapana to explore the raga. This may be varied by duration, skill and the knowledge of the artist. Sometimes while the artist performs long duration alapana, some phrases denote the phrase occurring in a very closer or identical raga. For instance, in Bhairavi, occurrence of phrases

relating to huseni, mukhari or kharaharapriya; arabhi and devagandhari and so on. For example:

- Semmangudi Sreenivasa Iyer's Ragam Tanam Pallavi having the sahitya, '*dasarata paala ramacandrayya dayaniteh*' in bhairavi has, 'RGMRSN-GRSRGPM' (Kharaharapriya).
- K V Narayanasamy's rendition of alapana for the kriti '*tanayuni brova*' in bhairavi has, 'RGMRGS' (huseni).
- MD Ramanathan's alapana for '*balagopala*' has, 'SRSRSND' (mukhari).

FINDINGS

While giving an interpretation based on the listening of the recordings collected, there are many factors which need to be dealt minutely for getting a correct precise outcome. Some of the factors that influence the output effect are given below:

A) TIME DURATION OF INDIVIDUAL COMPONENTS

In alapana creativity is main element for the raga. In the short duration alapana we can hear the gist and crispness of alapana. In this, the artist has to sing only fast phrases and limit himself in time. Alapana does not have tala but it has rhythm and kala pramana.

The creativity is more in both aspects of rendering alapana like when it is for a long or short duration. Time duration is varied in singing a kriti as a main or sub main. Each has its own individual limitation and duration. Generally, alapana was rendered from 2 minutes to maximum up to 11 to 14 minutes. The duration has been minimized in places where they perform.

From this we are able to see that the definition of the alapana and how it is rendered in a particular time and the understanding of raga by the main artist has been clearly explained and proved by listening the musical recordings.

B) THE COMPOSITION THAT FOLLOWS THE ALAPANA (KRITI OR RTP)

In the past, main kriti or RTP was selected based on the varnam rendered by the main artist. There are certain phrases which occurs as a beginning phrase for alapana which is similar to the phrase of the 1st line of the kriti. For example:

- Madurai Mani Iyer's alapana for the kriti, '*yaro ivar yaro*' has 'NSRGRS'.
- MS Subbalakshmi's alapana for the kriti, '*yaro ivar yaro*' has, 'SRSND'.
- D K Pattammal's rendition of alapana for the Pallavi sahitya, '*velavane ninadu padame*' has 'DNSNNDPMPDNS'.

Sometime the phrases of alapana is equal to the madyama kala sahitya in the Kriti's anupallavi or carana. For example; K VNarayanaswamy's alapana for the Kriti '*balagopala*' has 'SGRGMPDNDPM'.

C) ROLE OF ACCOMPANISTS IN DEVELOPING THE ALAPANA

Accompanists are the supporters of main artists in performing raga alapana. They are the first observer, listener, interpreter of the main artists. They involve main artists in the same pitch to improve the quality of alapana. The main artist's difficult phrases were easily played by the accompanists to show his creativity. Sometimes the main artists sing any phrase the accompanist play only the shadja. For example, DK Jayaraman's alapana for the kriti '*bajare re citta*' the performance of main artist and accompanist are as follows;

TABLE 1

Main Artist (vocalist)	Accompanist (Violinist)
SSS	S
GGRRSN	S
GGRRS	S
GGRRSNDNRGGRS	S P S
GGRGRSS	RGRSS
SSRGRSS	RGRSS
S RGRSS	RGRSS
S RGRSSRS	SRS

FACTORS AFFECTING THE ALAPANA RENDERING

- While performing an alapana the kriti is either main or sub main.
- Analyzing about whether it is a short kriti, there is a limited scope for performing alapana and the raga does not give enough space.
- The potential ability of the artist and the musical form can be identified.
- Time duration of the alapana in the sense of small kriti, large, vilamba kriti, Ragam Tanam Pallavi.

- Limitation of alapana in terms of time duration.
- There are two types of musicians based on beginning the alapana, like quick starting and slow starting.

CONCLUSION

This paper is a preliminary effort in terms of analysing the rendering of raga alapana, which is one of the main channels of Improvisation or manodharma in South Indian Classical music. The methods are devised in a manner that suits the samples without tampering the aesthetic zeal of structure of the raga. Each raga has its own unique feature for being expressed on the stage as alapana and the methods devised in the present study has helped to understand, document and bring out the beauty of the raga and the greatness of the performer, in a systematic manner.

Notes

1. Details are given in the subsequent sections of this paper.
2. In this stage mostly the accompanists will not be given chance to perform
3. The svara rishabha is prolonged here.
4. The svara panchama is prolonged here.

REFERENCE

- K V Narayanaswamy – balagopala – bhairavi raga : <https://youtu.be/UwYLebUiNO4>
Madurai mani iyyer – yaaro ivar yaaro – bhairavi raga : https://youtu.be/XToB_ypelB8
K V Narayanaswamy – krupaya palaya – Carukesi raga : https://youtu.be/e3HdCUc_A7U
D K Pattammal – Shankari samkuru – Saveri raga : <https://youtu.be/MCaAw24f1ko>
M.D Ramanathan – grirpai – Sahana raga : <https://youtu.be/qZqo6PNmsow>
D K Pattammal – RTP – Bhairavi raga : <https://youtu.be/hEx3CmMqD1w>
D K Jayaraman – Bajare re chitha – Kalyani raga : <https://youtu.be/8CkybthgpZ8>
D K Pattammal – Aru marundhoru – Kamboji raga : <https://youtu.be/8pZUFs86wWE>
Semmangudi srinivasa iyyer – RTP – bhairavi raga : https://youtu.be/C1c_Z8vfUL4
Madurai mani iyyer – thaye yezhai – bhairavi raga : <https://youtu.be/f66ZhKClSkc>
Voleti venkateshwarulu – nee padamule – bhairavi raga :
<https://youtu.be/FyZKdLfK01o>
KV Narayanaswamy – thanayu brova Janani – bhairavi raga : <https://youtu.be/p4Qt-9xM1WM>
Voleti Venkateshwarulu – lalite – bhairavi raga : https://youtu.be/rK0nqs_uFAw
Maharajapuram Santhanam – mohana rama – mohanam raga:
<https://youtu.be/2dHpzkehpx0>
MD Ramanathan – balagopala – bhairavi raga : <https://youtu.be/OZNXt20prZE>
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