

SIMHANANDANA TALAM VS. SHARABHANANDANA TALAM

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Abstract

In Carnatic music, "Talam" (or "Tala") refers to the rhythmic framework or time cycle that underpins a musical composition. It is a fundamental concept that dictates the timing and structure of a piece of music, ensuring that the rhythm is maintained consistently throughout the performance. The Talam sets the pace for the composition and the musicians and dancers adhere to this rhythmic cycle throughout the performance. It provides a metrical structure within which melodies and improvisations are developed. Understanding Talam is essential for both performers and listeners to appreciate the complexity and beauty of Carnatic music. Ancient music texts classify Talams into Marga and Desi and list the classical 108 Talam-s (Astottarashata Talam-s). Among these, Simhanandana Talam stands out for its gigantic structure and is often referred to as 'Simhaswapnam' by musicians. Sharabhanandana Talam is an intriguing creation attributed to Shyama Shastri, one of the music trinity, and is equally complex as Simhanandana Talam. In this article, we will compare and contrast these two Talam-s in more detail.

Keywords: Talam, Simhanandana Talam, Sharabhanandana Talam, 108 Talam-s, Desi Talam, Bobbili Keshavayya, Shyama Shastri

INTRODUCTION

तकरे शङ्करः प्रोक्तो लकारे पार्वति स्मृता | शिवशक्तिसंयोगात्ताल इत्यभिधीयते ||

The word "Tala" is derived from the union of 'Ta-kaara,' representing Shiva, and 'La-kaara,' representing Shakti. Also 'Ta' denotes Tandavam and 'La' denotes Lasyam. Talam is the concept of musical time in Indian music, fundamental to vocal music, instrumental music, and Dance. Unlike Western music, Indian music boasts a vast array of time measures. The South Indian Tala system is particularly complex and intricate and can be considered unparalleled by any other musical tradition worldwide. The myriad rhythmic patterns in South Indian music far exceed the time measures used by all other musical systems combined. This high level of rhythmic sophistication is attributed to the development of Tala mnemonics and the art of drumming.

In Indian concerts, a mridangam player accompanies musicians not just by maintaining the basic rhythm, but by creating intricate cross-rhythms that complement the style, movement, and rhythmic structure of the performance. This rhythmic harmony significantly enhances the quality of an Indian music concert. In a musical composition, rhythm functions to maintain the musical balance. A minimum of three aksharakala-s (time units) is necessary to constitute a Tala, making the Tisra jati Eka Tala the shortest conceivable time measure.

Ancient music texts like Sangeeta Ratnakara classify Talam-s into Marga and Desi categories and list 108 Tala-s (Ashtottarasata Talas). Over time, a simpler system of 35 Tala-s based on Pancha Laghu Jaati-s emerged, popularized by Purandaradasa through his compositions of Alankara-s, Gita-s, and Suladi-s. While the 108 Talas incorporate all six anga-s (components), the 35 Tala-s use only three: Laghu, Drutam, and Anudrutam. Additionally, there are varieties of Chapu Tala-s (Tisra, Khanda, Misra, and Sankirna), as well as Desadi and Madhyadi Tala-s. The Navasandhi Tala-s, used in temple rituals since ancient times, add further depth to the rhythmic repertoire.

The 6 - Shadangas of Talam-s are:-

Talangam	Symbol	Aksharakalam
Anudhrutam	U	1
Dhrutam	O	2
Laghu		Depends on the Jati.
Guru	8	8
Plutam	⁂	12
Kakapadam	+	16

These Shadanga-s are the basis of the 108 Talam-s which Sarangadeva mentions in his Sangeeta Ratnakaram. The longest Talam of these 108 Talam-s is Simhanandana Talam. Let us delve into the details of Simhanandana Talam.

SIMHANANDANA TALAM

Simhanandana Talam is mentioned as the 34th Talam of the 108 Talam-s in Sangeeta Ratnakaram. However, Prof P Sambamoorthy in his book ‘A Dictionary of South Indian Music and Musicians’ mention it to be 37th Talam of the 108 Talam-s. ‘Gayakalochanam’ of Tacchuru Singaracharya Brothers mention it as the 38th Talam of the 108 Talam-s. It is the longest Talam of the 108 Talam-s. Musicians often refer to it as ‘Simhaswapnam,’ meaning very terrific or challenging, due to its numerous anga-s, which are difficult to remember and perform. It has 18 angas and 128 akshara-s per avartam (one cycle of the Tala).

The angas of Simhanandana Tala, in order, are: Guru, Guru, Laghu, Plutam, Laghu, Guru, Dhrutam, Dhrutam, Guru, Guru, Laghu, Plutam, Laghu, Plutam, Guru, Laghu, Laghu, and Kakapadam. The symbol for the tala is: 88||8|8OO88| 18| 188||+ ie, $8 + 8 + 4 + 12 + 4 + 8 + 2 + 2 + 8 + 8 + 4 + 12 + 4 + 12 + 8 + 4 + 4 + 16 = 128$ akshara-s per avartam.

In the Sangeeta Ratnakaram, Sarangadeva says

सिंहनन्दनकः पुनः ॥ तपौ लगौ द्रुतौ गौ लः पलपा गो लघू ततः ॥ २७४ ॥

चत्वारो लघवोऽशब्दाः ५५।'५।५००५५।'५।५५।।४x इति सिंहनन्दनः (३४)

This means Simhanandana Tala has one $\bar{\tau}$ – gana, represented as $\bar{\text{ss}}$ (Guru – Guru – Laghu), followed by a Plutam, then a Laghu and a Guru, then two Dhruams, followed by two Gurus, then a Laghu, a Plutam, a Laghu, another Plutam, a Guru, two Laghus, and finally, four silent Laghus (ie, Kakapadam, the angam which has Nishabda kriyas). It is interesting to note that the Talanga-s are given in Gana-s, similar to those seen in Chandas. Simhanandana Tala can be seen as a combination of six Tala-s from the 108 Tala-s: Chachatputa, Rati, Darpana, Kokilapriya, Abhanga, and Mudrika. It is one of the rare Tala-s and the only one with Kakapadam as its anga.

The Simhanandana Tillana in Kaanada ragam, composed by Mahavaidyanaadha Iyer, is the only musical form found in this Tala. It has only two avartas one for swaram and one for sahityam. A jati of two avartas composed by Patnam Subrahmaniya Iyer is also seen in this Tala. Some musicians have also attempted Pallavi-s in Simhanandana Tala. Suguna Purushottaman, Mudikondan Venkatarama Iyer and Kanchana Sisters are said to be experts in Simhanandana Tala. A sculpture depicting Simhanandana Tala can be found at the Madurai Meenakshi Temple, on a pillar before Nataraja Swami in the inner prakara of Lord Somasundareshwara Temple.

Simhanandini is a type of dance form where the dancer creates a picture of lion through footwork and the Talam used to perform this art form is Simhanandana Talam. This dance form was very popular in the 14th and 15th centuries and it is prevailing even till date in Telugu States by some traditional Dance families.



SHARABHANANDANA TALAM

Sharabhanandana Tala is another equally complex and intricate Tala. It is one of the very few Tala-s that is rarely used today that employs the Shodasanga-s. The 16 - Shodasa angas of Talam-s mentioned in some Musical Texts are:-

Talangam	Symbol	Aksharakalam
Anudhrutam	U	1
Dhrutam	O	2
Dhruta Virama	U O	3
Laghu	I	Depends on the jati.
Laghu Virama	U I	5
Laghu Dhrutam	O I	6
Laghu Dhruta Viramam	U O I	7
Guru	8	8
Guru Virama	U 8	9
Guru Dhrutam	O 8	10
Guru Dhruta Viramam	U O 8	11
Plutam	¹ 8	12
Pluta Virama	U ¹ 8	13
Pluta Dhrutam	O ¹ 8	14
Pluta Dhruta Viramam	U O ¹ 8	15
Kakapadam	+	16

Of these Sixteen Talanga-s, Virama has been completely replaced by Anudhrutam. Only a few Tala-s incorporate these angas. One such Talam is Sarabhanandana Talam. This Tala requires intense concentration and consists of 24 anga-s and 79 akshara-s per avartam.

According to book , ‘A Dictionary of South Indian Music and Musicians ‘ of Prof P Sambamoorthy , the anga-s, in order, are: Guru, Laghu, Dhrutam, Laghu, Laghu, Dhrutam, Anudhrutam, Laghu Viramam, Dhrutam, Dhrutam, Dhrutam, Anudhrutam, Laghu Dhrutam, Laghu Dhruta Viramam, Laghu Viramam, Dhrutam, Anudhrutam, Dhrutam, Anudhrutam, Dhrutam, Laghu Viramam, Dhrutam, Dhruta Viramam, and Laghu Dhrutam ie, 8 + 4 + 2 + 4 + 4 + 2 + 1 + 5 + 2 + 2 + 2 + 1 + 6 + 7 + 5 + 2 + 1 + 2 + 1 + 2 + 5 + 2 + 3 + 6 = 79 aksharakalas per avartam. These angas are said to be taken from the manuscripts of Shyama Sastri by Prof P Sambamoorthy.

U
U OOU U UO

The symbol of Sarabhanandana Talam is – 8IOHIOUOOUOI I I OUOUOIOOI.

Sarabha is a mystic creature in Hindu mythology which is said to be more powerful than Lion. It is said to have the face of a Lion, Body of a human and back of a deer with big wings. Sarabha also means elephant in

Sanskrit. There is a mention of Tala-s like Sarabhaleela and Gajaleela in texts like Sangeeta Ratnakara but they do not match with the anga-s of Sharabhanandana Talam. So Sharabhanandana Tala is said to have been created by Shyama Sastri, one of the trinity of Carnatic music. However, some say he has learnt it from his guru Sangeeta Swamy Garu.

It is said that, a musician named Bobbili Keshavayya who was renowned for his mastery of Desi Talam-s, traveled to various kingdoms, challenging their musicians to sing the Pallavi he composed in Simhanandana Talam which is the longest and intricate Talam of the 108 Talam-s. His condition was simple: if they failed, they must surrender their Tambura and accept him as their guru; if he lost, he would do the same.

Gaining the title of 'Bhooloka Chapa Chutti' (Jagadeka Chapa Chutti), he defeated many musicians until he reached Tanjavur. King Sarabhoji took it as a challenge and summoned Tyagaraja Swamy to compete against Bobbili Keshavayya. Tyagaraja, devoted solely to attaining Lord Rama, suggested Shyama Shastri as the only one capable of rivaling Bobbili Keshavayya. Reluctant at first, Shyama Shastri eventually agreed out of respect for the kingdom's honour.

The news that the great Syama Sastri had consented to meet Kesavayya in the musical contest spread like wildfire. Musicians and laypeople gathered in thousands the next day to witness the historic contest. The Maharajah was hopeful that Syama Sastri would uphold the reputation of Tanjore.

After the palace vidwans left, Syama Sastri sat alone, deeply pondering the matter. He felt somewhat unnerved at accepting the challenge. The vivid accounts of Kesavayya's musical prowess given by the palace musicians had an effect on him. After the evening prayers, Syama Sastri shut himself in the Kamakshi temple and prayed devoutly for success in the next day's ordeal. He sang the famous kriti in Chintamani raga, Adi tala "Devi brova samayamide." No other composer seems to have attempted a song in this raga. The lyrics of the charanam of this kriti, "repu māpani cppite ne vinanu (devī) ika tālanu nenu ī prddu daya ceyave kṛpa jūdave," meaning "Oh Devi! I cannot bear it if you say tomorrow or another day. Please come today and show mercy on me." reveal the perturbed state of his mind at that time. The Goddess was pleased with her devotee's prayers, and Syama Sastri saw signs indicative of his success. He returned home with great joy.

The next day, he left for the palace with the kumkuma on his forehead as usual. As he entered, the eager crowd cheered him lustily. Syama Sastri took his seat opposite the Bobbili vidwan, and soon there was profound silence. Everyone held their breath, eagerly awaiting the outcome. The Maharajah had ready before him all the costly presents on a silver tray for the victorious musician.

Upon the signal for commencement, Kesavayya tuned his Tambura and started singing a raga, Tana and Pallavi in Simhanandana Talam. He exhibited wonderful creative skill by singing Tana-s in different Jati-s and Gati-s. Kesavayya was at his best, trying all the intricate types he had learned and practiced for years. When he stopped, Syama Sastri asked, "Is this all or anything more?" This question was a bombshell to Kesavayya, who expected his opponent to immediately prostrate and acknowledge defeat.

When it was Syama Sastri's turn, he not only sang similar Tana-s effortlessly but also displayed greater originality by presenting newer aspects of creative music, executing Sharabhanandana Talam, which Kesavayya had avoided. After exhausting the possibilities in this direction, he explored other sub-varieties unknown to Kesavayya, who specialized only in the manava variety of Tana-s. The audience saw that while Kesavayya's music was somewhat stereotyped, Syama Sastri's was rich in musical conception and creative artistry. Kesavayya was humbled. He rose, took leave, and left, never to be heard from again. The spectators' joy knew no bounds. Numerous honours and encomiums were showered upon Syama Sastri by the Maharajah, for he had saved the honour of Tanjore.

COMPLEXITY OF SHARABHANANDANA TALAM

Sharabhanandana Talam, with 79 aksharas per avartam, poses a unique challenge due to its odd and prime number count. This makes it somewhat difficult to perform within the Tala. Adding to the complexity, Shyama Shastri introduced the concept of Virama, which had become obsolete by that time. Virama signifies half of the aksharakala-s of the anga—for example, Dhruta Virama represented one aksharakala—serving as a silent kriya without a beat. This was later replaced by Anudhruta, which includes a beat, making it easier to maintain the Laya.

In Sharabhanandana Talam, the usage of Virama-s, which require mental counting without any accompanying kriya in the Tala, remains a unique and challenging feature, contributing to its difficulty in execution. The usage of Virama-s is opposed by Aakella Mallikarjuna Sharma, who has intensively worked on Tala Prastara-s and Rare Tala-s.

SIMHANANDANA TALAMS VS. SHARABHANANDANA TALAM

Simhanandana Talam	Sarabhanandana Talam
It is one of the 108 Talam-s mentioned in Sangeeta Ratnakaram.	It is a creation attributed to Shyama Shastri .
It has 128 aksharas per avartam.	It has 79 aksharas per avartam
It has 18 angas	It has 24 angas
It is the only Talam that uses Kakapadam .	It is one of the rarest Talam to use different Virama-s and Laghu Dhruta of the Shodashanga-s.
It is the longest Talam .	Though it has fewer aksharas, it includes a greater number of angas, particularly those from the ancient Shodashanga-s, requiring high concentration to execute.

ETYMOLOGICAL HIGHLIGHTS

'Simha' means Lion in Sanskrit. Simhanandana Talam is indeed a 'Simhaswapnam', representing something very intricate, formidable, and challenging, as reflected in its extensive structure. On the other hand, Sarabheshwara is an eight-legged deity in Hindu mythology, depicted as part-lion and part-bird. Described as more powerful than a lion or an elephant, Sarabha is said to have the ability to clear a valley in one leap, as mentioned in Sanskrit literature and Hindu scriptures. The Linga Puranam describes the origin of Veerabhadra Swamy as Sharabheshwara in order to control Narasimha Swamy

अथोत्थाय महादेवः शारभं रूपमास्थितः ॥ ययौ प्रांते नृसिंहस्य गर्वितस्य मृगाशिनः।

अपत्तृत्य तदा प्राणान् शरभः सुरपूजितः ॥ सिंहात्ततो नरो भूत्वा जगाम च यथाक्रमम् ।

एवं स्तुतस्तदा देवैर्जगाम स यथाक्रमम् ॥

(लिङ्गपुराणम्)

The puranam describes Sharabeshwara as having the face of a lion, the body of a human, the back of a deer, and large wings like a bird. The purpose of this avatar of Lord Veerabhadra is to subdue the pride and anger of Narasimha Swamy.

A reference to Sharabha can also be found in the Annamayya keertana "Cheppaga Neragara," where the Rama mantra is compared to Sharabha in the second stanza. Annamayya states that just as Sharabha is the most powerful creature in the world, the Rama mantra is the most powerful mantra in the world. Shyama Shastri faced the challenge of creating a Tala that could surpass Simhanandana Talam. Hence, the name he chose,

Sharabhanandana, is apt and cleverly signifies that only Sarabha (Sharabhanandana Talam) can overcome Simha (Simhanandana Talam), drawing from the legendary strength and prowess attributed to the creature.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the comparison between Simhanandana Talam and Sharabhanandana Talam highlights their unique characteristics and historical significance within the realm of Indian classical music. Simhanandana Talam stands out as the longest Tala, known for its complexity and the challenge it poses to musicians with its 128 akshara-s per avartam. On the other hand, Sharabhanandana Talam, with its 79 akshara-s per avartam, incorporates ancient Shodashanga-s like various Virama-s and Laghu dhruta, demanding high concentration and skill to execute. The names of these Tala-s themselves reflect their distinct natures: Simhanandana evokes the powerful and majestic lion (Simha), while Sharabhanandana invokes the mythical deity Sarabha, symbolizing strength and the ability to conquer formidable challenges. Shyama Shastri's strategic creation of Sharabhanandana Talam to counter Simhanandana Talam underscores the deep cultural and spiritual symbolism embedded in Indian classical music, where each Tala not only serves as a rhythmic framework but also carries profound metaphorical meanings.

Thus, through their intricate compositions and anga-s, Simhanandana Talam and Sharabhanandana Talam exemplify the richness and complexity of Indian rhythmic traditions, continuing to inspire and challenge musicians across generations.

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