

THE ANATOMY OF RAAG RAMDASI MALHAR ACROSS DIFFERENT VERSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

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ABSTRACT

Ramdasi Malhar is a medieval Raag and is believed to have been conceptualised by Saint Ram Das during Akbar's reign. In today's context we find multiple versions of this Raag. Recordings of Khayaliyas of the yesteryears also confirm diversity in the interpretation of this Raag, probably owing to its compound tonal architecture thus rendering it either a Chhayalag or a Sankeerna Raag based on the particular interpretation in question. This paper aims at understanding and evaluating some of the major versions of this Raag in circulation.

Keywords- *Ramdasi Malhar, Versions, Gharana, Khayal, Bandish, Raag*

Introduction

Ramdasi Malhar is traditionally ascribed to the 16th-century saint-musician Guru Ram Das, who lived during the reign of the Mughal Emperor Akbar. The authenticity of this attribution, however, is open to question. A preliminary examination reveals that the popular version of Ramdasi Malhar is largely structured upon the framework of Miyan Malhar, supplemented by elements from a few additional Raagangs. Given that Guru Ram Das and Miyan Tansen—credited with the formulation of Miyan Malhar—were contemporaries associated with Akbar's court, it remains debatable whether the version attributed to Guru Ram Das was in fact modeled on this recently developed Malhar variant. While such a possibility cannot be entirely dismissed, it appears improbable. Nevertheless, as there are presently at least 3-5 distinct versions of Ramdasi Malhar in circulation, it is conceivable that one of them may approximate the original conception.

For the purpose of this study, various interpretations of Ramdasi Malhar will be analysed, through deep listening of available recordings and also via literature survey. This discussion will begin with a foundational overview of Ramdasi Malhar. For ease of understanding, throughout this paper:

g- Komal Gandhar, G- Shuddh Gandhar, n- Komal Nishad, N- Shuddh Nishaa, m- Shuddh Madhyam

Prakar 1 (Gwalior, Agra)

The most elementary framework of Ramdasi Malhar may be discerned from Annasaheb Ratanjankar's compositions in the *Abhinav Geetmanjari*, specifically "Madho Mukund Giridhar Gopal" and "Byahana Aayo Hai".¹ These *bandishes* delineate a synthesis of three ragas—Miyan Malhar, Gaud Malhar, and Shahana. The structural foundation is primarily sustained by Miyan Malhar, with nuanced incorporations of Gaud Malhar and Shahana emerging at various points within the *saptak*.

The Poorvang is as follows:

S RGm R, mR mR P, nP m^g m^g m R S

Or

S mR mR P, nP mGm, P m^g m^g m RS

Or

S RGmP, P m^g m^g m R S

The Madhayng includes phrases like:

mGmP, mGmnP

P m^g mR P m n P

n P mGmP mnP

The Passage to the Uttarang is as follows:

PDNŚ or MPDNŚ or PnDNŚ (Miyan Malhar)

Or

mpŚ or mnPŚ (Shahana) or PŚ

The Descent is as follows:

Ś DnP, nmP, mGm, P m^g m^g m Rs

Let us take a look at the Bandish “Madho Mukund” from Annasaheb Ratanjankar’s Abhinav Geetmanjari

Recordings of Pt. S.N Ratanjankar ² himself and also his disciple Pt. K.G. Ginde ³ helps in throwing light on this particular variant of the Raag.

Within this *bandish*, the *angas* of Miyan Malhar, Gaud Malhar, and Shahana manifest distinctly at various points. The *mukhda* of “*Madho Mukund Giridhar Gopal*” demonstrates, in its opening segment, the contour of Kanhada through the phrase “*nmP gmRSRS*”, which may be construed as deriving either from Miyan Malhar or Shahana Kanhada. The latter segment of the line, “*Giridhar Gopal*”, reveals the tonal hues of Gaud Malhar in the phrase “*S R G M P, mP mGM*”. Further, “*Krishna Murari*”, notated as “*PŚ, ŚDnP*”, is unequivocally associated with Shahana, while “*Madhusudhana*”, expressed as “*mP^mGm-Pmn*”, incorporates Gaud in the portion preceding the hyphen and Kanhada in the succeeding passage.

Another bandish in a similar vein is found among the compositions of Pt. Govind Narayan Natu in Part 2 of Geet Samooh ⁴. We find a similar version of Ramdasi Malhar among the compositions of Pt. Ramashrey Jha “*Ramrang*” ⁵.

राग रामदासी मल्हार- त्रिताल (मध्वलय)
स्थायी- माधो मुकुन्द गिरिधर गोपाल
कृष्ण सुपायी मधुसूदना
अंतरा- जपत अनंत हरे नाम, पवे आनंद उल सुजाना ॥
स्थायी

राग रामदासी मल्हार- एकताल (विलम्बित)
स्थायी- मोरला बोलाई-आई बरखा रु, छाई घेटा कारी कारी ।
अंतरा- भर आई नदी नारे झिगुरा झन कारे 'रामरंग' चहुँ ओरी ॥

X	0	2	0	3	4
ने	स	सग	निप	धनि	सा
ला	ई-	आऽ	उई	का	खा
प	मम	पधनिऽ	धनि	प	(प)
टा	ऽऽ	काऽऽऽ	ऽऽ	री	उका

X	0	2	0	3	4
सं	-	धनि	निसं	सं	सं
ई	ऽ	ऽऽ	मदी	नाऽऽऽ	ऽऽ
मम	स	सरेप	मरे	मरे	प
काऽ	ऽ	रे	राऽऽ	ऽऽ	रंग

Geet Samooh- Bhaag 2
Govind Narayan Natu

Prakar 2 (Do Gandhar Ki Nayaki- Jaipur)

This variant of Ramdasi Malhar has been exemplified by Vidushi Manjiri Asanare Kelkar in her *Amodini* series on YouTube. ⁶

A basic outline is given below:

- R णS, P ण P S m^gm^gm R, mR mRP
- Pm, GGm
- mP m^gm^g m mRSR
- PmP, mPnPŚ, RnŚ, PnP,
- nmPm, GGm, Pm^gm^g mRSRS

This variant of Ramdasi Malhar has been exemplified by Vidushi Manjiri Asanare Kelkar in her *Amodini* series on YouTube. It appears that this particular form is not frequently encountered on the contemporary performance stage. The bandish presented in her rendition is “*Badra Umad Ghumad*” set in Jhaptal. The same composition, however, is also performed within the Agra

tradition in Teentaal, articulated in a manner that is stylistically and structurally distinct—an aspect that will be examined in due course.

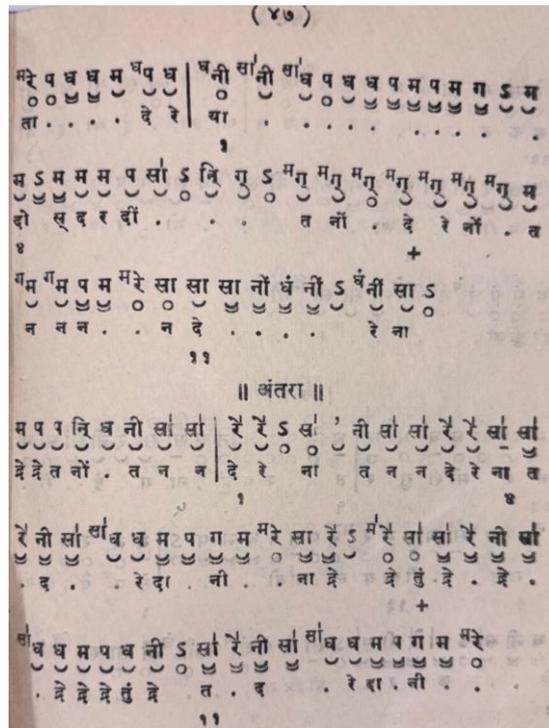
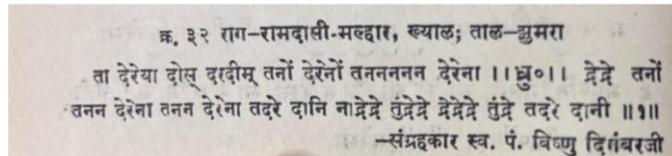
Prakar 3 (Gwalior Variant)

This variant of Ramdasi Malhar is found in the illustrations of Pt. Vinayakrao Patwardhan in his book Raag Vigyan. ⁷

This particular version of Ramdasi Malhar, has a distinct flavour from most of the other versions due to prominence of Shuddh Nishaad in the Aarohatmak and Avarohatmak passages in the form of a special prayog. In the other prakars, after the phrase ‘mPDN’, the way forward would either be to touch Taar Shadaj and return in the standard $\overset{\text{S}}{\text{D}} nP$ or $\overset{\text{S}}{\text{N}} P$ fashion. The other way to navigate typically is to slide from Shuddh Nishaad to Komal Nishad with a heavy meend, and then resolving with a DnP . The entire meend laden phrase would sound like ‘mPnD N^Nn DnP’.

In contrast, this distinctive Gwalior interpretation employs a more linear and unembellished descent after “mPDN”, expressed as “NDPmGm”, resulting in the phrase “PDNNDPmGm”. Alongside this structural feature, the raga also reveals sangatis associated with Gaud Malhar, Miyan Malhar, and Shahana: Gaud Malhar appears in phrases such as “SRGmR” or “RP, DmPmGm”; Miyan Malhar is evident in “nP mgmRP mgmRS” and “S^NnDNS”; while Shahana surfaces in “mP $\overset{\text{S}}$ ”.

A traditional Khayalnuma which Pt. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar received from Pt. Balkrishna Buwa Ichalkaranjkar under the name of Ramdasi Malhar is as follows:



The above Khayalnuma has also been rendered by Smt. Veena Sahasrabuddhe. Minor elements of the Rakhaav may differ, but the overall melodic motif is the same. ⁸ On the lines of this particular variant, we find an original composition of Pt. Vinayak Rao Patwardhan, “Badarwa Geher Aaye”, which has become rather popular in the current times. ⁹

Prakar 4 (Agra Variant)

In this variant the component of Megh is the main player. The usage of Shuddha Gandhar in an Arohatmak and Vakra Arohatmak manner is what gives this variant its unique flavour. There is a scarce and not very pronounced usage of Shuddha Dhaivat as well. The existence of this Shuddha Dhaivat is almost like the appendix of the human body. Its presence or absence doesn’t seem to add much to this variant’s overall flavour per se. Megh does the majority of the heavy lifting and this variant has a very Deergh Shuddh Madhyam. There is the use of Komal Gandhar in phrases like “PmGm, mnP”. In this prakar both Gandhar’s are used. Both Gandhar’s are used in upward movements only, ie, it is always gm or Gm and even mgm and mGm, but never GR or gR.

mPDnP, (Gaud Malhar)

PnDnDNŠ, *DnP*, *mPDnP*, *RmRP* ^m*gmRS* (Combination)

Mallikarjun Ji sings a Bandish with “Ghumad Dekh Bhayi” as its mukhda. The rest of the words are difficult to discern.

Prakar 7 (Shuddh Gandhar Only)

The final version that we will be discussing in brief has been illustrated by Pt. Ramashreya Jha in a lecture-demonstration/discussion. He talks about the Gwalior Variant (Badarwa Geher Aaye) and the Agra variant (Kit Te Aaya) before going to demonstrate a unique Shuddh Gandhar only variant.¹⁵

The Mukhda of the bandish seems to have a blend of Gaud Malhar and Shahana. The majority of the structure is Gaud Malhar. Shahana seems to be restricted to only a single phrase, i.e, PS or mPS for the Uttarang launch to Taar Shadaj. From the recording and notation, it appears that this variety of Ramdasi does away with the Dhaivat as well.¹⁶

From the notation a basic Chalan can be deduced as follows:

SRGmP, mGm

RmRP, nmPŠ, nP

mP nP, N Š, nPmRS

SSRGmnP mRS or SSRGmP mGmRS

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is safe to say that Ramdasi Malhar means a lot of different things to different Gharanas and musicians, the reason probably being that it is a compound melody achieved through the weaving together of two or more Raagangs. In such a scenario, differences in interpretation are likely to occur. While there are some anomalies, what seems to be the primary theme of Ramdasi Malhar in most cases is the fusion of Shuddh Gandhar (through Gaud Malhar phrasing) with another prakar of Malhar/Kanhada, be it Megh, Nayaki or Miyan Malhar, or a combination of them.

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मध्याह्नीन मल्हार के प्रकार

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राग रामदासी मल्हार त्रिताल (मध्यलय)

(केवल शुद्ध गान्धार युक्त- तीसरा प्रकार)

स्थाई- गरज-गरज बरसाने को, आईं री बादरिया, बरसन लागी बूंदरिया ।

अन्तर- एक तो गरजे बिजली चमके, मोर पण्हारा बोलन लागे, उबट गयी मोरी नीडरिया ॥

स्थाई

०	३	X	२
रे म रे प	प नि म प	सां - - -	नि प म -
ग र ज ग	र ज ब र	सां ऽ ऽ ऽ	ने ऽ को ऽ
ग - - ग	गरे ग म प	म - ग -	म रे सति रे
ऽ ऽ ऽ आ	ऽऽ ईं री ऽ	वा ऽ ऽ ऽ	ऽ ऽ ऽ दऽ रि
सा - - सासा	रेरे सा - सा	सासा रेग मनि	प म रे सा -
धि ऽ ऽ बर	सन ला ऽ गी	बूँऽ ऽऽ ऽऽ ऽऽ	द रि वा ऽ

अन्तरा

०	३	X	२
म म प -	नि प नि -	सां सा सां -	सां रे सां -
ए क को ऽ	ग र जे ऽ	बि ज री ऽ	च म के ऽ
निसां रेग म रे	सां नि सां -	नि - प म	रे - सा -
मोऽ ऽ ऽ प	पि ह रा ऽ	बो ऽ ल न	ला ऽ ने ऽ
रे म रे ग	प नि म प	सां - - -	नि प म -
उ च ट ग	ईं को ऽ री	नी ऽ ऽ ऽ	द रि वा ऽ