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# Rāgabodha: A Śābdabodha-Based Framework for a Theory of Rāga

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## Abstract

In Indian knowledge traditions, Vyākaraṇa describes the rules for the formation (prakṛti-pratyaya-vibhāga) and use of correct words (śādhuśabda). The Vākya (sentence) is postulated as the primary unit of communication. “śābdabodha” deals with the cognition of sentential meaning. Similarly, in Indian music, every rāga has a lexicon and grammar (rāga-lakṣaṇa): a rāga only allows some notes and not others, and it has rules for constructing phrases—notes to be highlighted, notes to end phrases on, ornamentation, etc. These phrases of the rāga are comparable to “vākya” which when presented with due regard to certain other considerations generate an apprehension of the rāga (rāgabodha). During presentation of a rāga, an artist aims to evoke the rāga-cchāyā or rāga-svarūpa and also an emotive state in the listener. There is a cognitive aspect to the informed listening of a rāga that is parallel to linguistic communication. We seek to understand how these parallels work between śābdabodha and rāgabodha. We postulate that the conditions of expectancy (ākāṅkṣā), logical consistency (yogyatā) and proximity (sannidhi) in combination with the theory of sphoṭa provide a framework to explain how a rāga is expounded and cognised.

**Keywords** Rāga · Language · Śābdabodha · Ākāṅkṣā · Sphoṭa · Indian music

## Introduction

In communication, a speaker or a vaktā speaks something. This speech is heard by a listener—the pratipattā—and the purport understood. Something is transmitted sequentially and perceived by the listener not as a sequence but as a unitary cognition. This purport is conveyed and understood using the principles nurtured by the community of speakers. (वृद्धव्यवहारः). Similarly, in the realm of music, when a performer performs and a listener listens, something is transmitted. We are here speaking of music that is performed in a performance space before an audience. In

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that broad sense, music is a means of communication—of something: many say, of emotion.

## The Nature of Communication in Music

Music, in its primal impact, is sensual and non-cognitive in the sense that it evokes some emotion or the other in the listener. However, most advanced musical systems of the world, referred to as “Art Music” or “Classical music”, have a cognitive aspect at their core. This is of a different order than the non-musical association that most music has such as association of songs or tunes with certain functions or events. In a recent experiment,<sup>1</sup> Singh and Mehr demonstrated with some plausibility that the **forms** of songs that are used for lullaby or romance or war, etc. are common across cultures so that a person with no exposure to a remote civilisation can still make out that a song is a lullaby or a war song, etc. These songs were drawn from remote cultures including those of hunter gatherers, pastoralists and farmers, and the participants were asked to rate it along six dimensions—whether it is a lullaby or a healing song or a love song, etc. The study concludes “These findings are consistent with the existence of universal links between form and function in vocal music”. Music then might well have a universality about it. But once we go beyond everyday music,<sup>2</sup> when we move on to music that is performed for its own sake and not as part of a larger purpose or function (such as a lullaby, harvest song, etc.), we are in the realm of “Art Music”. Here, we need to go beyond the form and understand the content to achieve appreciation. The form itself expressed through the content is not easily perceived—both content and form display considerable complexity. The cognitive aspect of these advanced musical systems is comprised of the abstract principles of music-making which constitute that musical system. Communicating the cognitive aspect by artistes and its apprehension and appreciation by the cognoscenti forms two crucial aspects of performance. In this sense too, music is very much communication. Many also hold that music communicates or is a representation of emotions. This does seem a very plausible idea to pursue, but is not our immediate concern here. This paper concerns itself with the cognitive core of Indian classical music (ICM).

## What is a Rāga?

Indian classical music, which is about presentation of rāga-s, is also a highly sophisticated knowledge system. Rāga can be spoken of as a framework of rules. The framework itself is derived from practice and feeds practice in turn. The rules cannot all be exhaustively and precisely listed; the framework is not entirely inflexible and is held together in *practice* by the musical community. Rules are of varying degrees

<sup>1</sup> Form and Function in Human song, Samuel A. Mehr, Manvir Singh et al.

<sup>2</sup> Heinrich Bessler's *Gebrauchsmusik and eigenständige Musik*—everyday and stand alone music.

of precision and abstraction. The musician seeks to stay within the framework while seeking also to express her artistry. That is the challenge of ICM.

Rāga is a framework for composition and improvisation. It is an abstract entity, manifested in performances of it. In its improvisatory aspects, no two presentations of a rāga are identical. What then makes them the performance of the same rāga? It is the cognitive content that binds different performances of the rāga. The Indian classical musician's performance has this constant underlying objective—to communicate the cognitive core of the rāga. The listener too seeks to expand his knowledge of this cognitive aspect of rāga-s. Knowledgeable listeners are accorded great respect in the musical community. This communication of the cognitive aspect of rāgas bears similarities with the use of language within a community of users. The parallels between language and music have been suggested by many. (End Note 1) This paper explores these parallels using ideas from Indian knowledge traditions.

Discussions regarding language and communication are found mainly in the Vaiyākaraṇa and mīmāṃsā as well as tārkaika granthas. These are in the context of śabdapramāṇa—śabda as a means of knowledge. Rāga, being music, may be seen as not concerned with pramā or knowledge. However, a performance of rāga is concerned with conveying the cognitive content of the rāga. A musical performance of a rāga is primarily judged for its capacity to give a clear picture of the rāga. Phrases must be well formed and not ambiguous between rāgas. If a phrase leaves one in doubt, “Is it this rāga or that?”, then it is not considered good. When the cognition of one thing (a phrase heard) leads to the cognition of another (it is a phrase of śaṅkarābharāṇam), then it is knowledge and hence the validity of speaking of rāgabodha in conjunction with śābdabodha.

Thus, the title: “Rāgabodha: A śābdabodha-based framework for understanding rāga development and cognition”

*(Henceforth whenever we refer to communication through a rāga, it is communication of this cognitive core. While rāga music is absorbed by all kinds of listeners, we are here concerned with the informed listener; one who herself has knowledge of rāga, as a listener. What is said here would apply to varying degrees to less informed listeners too.)*

## The Primary Significant Unit or Building Blocks of a Vākya/Rāga

Shared knowledge of Vyākaraṇa underlies communication via language. Vyākaraṇa describes the rules for the formation (प्रकृति-प्रत्यय-विभागः) and use of correct words (साधुशब्दाः), and this correctness (साधुत्वम्) is based on the recollections (स्मृतिनिबन्धनम्) of the learned (शिष्टाः).<sup>3</sup> A śabda incorrectly used such as गोपी or गावी in place of गौः

<sup>3</sup> साधुत्वज्ञानविषया सैषा व्याकरणस्मृतिः ।  
अविच्छेदेन शिष्टानामिदं स्मृतिनिबन्धनम् ॥ VP 1.141.

(cow) can generate comprehension, that is due to anumāna or inference and not arising from the śabda per se.<sup>4</sup>

Shared knowledge of rāgalakṣaṇa underlies communication via rāga. The cognitive content of a rāga is the framework of rules. This framework is comprised of many levels and is not exhaustively defined nor is it always inflexible. Every rāga is described in terms of its lakṣaṇa; and every rāga also abounds beyond its lakṣaṇa both in the sense that a rāga cannot entirely be captured in lakṣaṇa and that, in its artistic aspect a rāga, on rare occasions, tolerates flouting of accepted lakṣaṇa. Like language, the ultimate arbiter of correctness of a rāga rendition is the community of vidvāns. Again, an ill-formed rāga phrase might lead to the cognition of the rāga, but here too inference (anumāna) is involved, and it is not the direct apprehension that musical experience is.

Vaiyākaraṇas argue that vākya is the only real entity. The definition of vākya<sup>5</sup> (End Note 2) varies among the proponents of various schools of thought, but it is the vākya (utterance) that is used in communication and analysis. When we hear a vākya, we apprehend a meaning. The meaning that is apprehended is also unitary and impartite. But a vākya is a coming together of various sounds and words—what then is the unifying factor? Vaiyākaraṇas hence posit sphoṭa as the vākya—the one unitary vākya is the sphoṭa which is a partless whole and the meaning apprehended is because of the sphoṭa which bursts into our consciousness. Further, ordinary linguistic discourse happens by means of vākya. The reality of vākya is thus vyavahārasiddha, attested by how language is acquired and used in the world. There are metaphysical aspects of sphoṭa which are not relevant here for our purpose.

In music, phrases are made of notes, but one does not sing or listen to phrases as divided into or made up of parts. Nor is it taught or absorbed that way. Only at the level of analysis (शास्त्रमात्रम्), we may speak of the coming together of notes in phrases with subtle oscillations and glides, with structural considerations of notes elongated, notes just touched, etc. Thus, the idea of akhaṇḍa vākya or akhaṇḍa musical phrase that is grasped as a whole applies to the cognition of rāga.

Vaiyākaraṇas posit that varṇas and padas are theoretical necessities<sup>6</sup>, but it is only the vākya that provides the functioning context. They use the analogy of sense organs (इन्द्रियाणि) in the human body, where each sense organ, while separate, only functions when it is in the body.<sup>7</sup> Like the Vaiyākaraṇa idea of unreality of varṇas, etc. the traditional view in music is that svaras are only relevant at the level of analysis and perhaps for explication. The first aspect of rāga-lakṣaṇa

<sup>4</sup> अस्वगोण्यादयः शब्दा साधवो विषयान्तरे ।  
निमित्तभेदात् सर्वत्र साधुत्वं च व्यवस्थितम् ॥VP 1.148.

<sup>5</sup> आख्यातशब्दः सङ्घातो जातिः सङ्घातवर्तिनी ।  
एकोऽनवयवः शब्दः क्रमो बुद्ध्यनुसंहतिः ॥  
पदमाद्यं पृथक्सर्वं पदं साकाङ्क्षमित्यपि ।  
वाक्यं मतिं मतिभिन्ना बहुधा न्यायवादिनाम् ॥ VP 2.1–2.2.

<sup>6</sup> पदे न वर्णा विद्यन्ते वर्णेष्ववयवा न च ।  
वाक्यात् पदनामत्यन्तं प्रविवेको न कश्चन ॥ VP 1.73 .

<sup>7</sup> इन्द्रियाणां यथा कार्यमृते देहान्न कल्पते ॥  
तथा पदानां सर्वेषां पृथगर्थनिवेशिनाम् ॥VP 2.419 cd 420 ab.

is the notes that are permitted in the rāga. We acknowledge seven natural svaras (prakṛta-svara) and five variant svaras (vikṛta-svara), in all making twelve svarasthānas. Each rāga only allows a few of these and excludes the others. This is the first level of the framework and is the most sthūla (macro-level).

A rāga is, however, much more than a set of notes. In practice, svaras are disregarded in favour of phrases. Traditionally, music is **not** taught through notes, but through phrases and whole musical sentences and through compositions. That is also why notating of music is not encouraged except perhaps as a tool of reference and is seen as a futile and even detrimental activity. Phrases need to be taught by the guru and absorbed by the student as a whole.

The listener too listens to phrases as a whole without experiencing them as made up of parts (notes). Here, the parallel with sphoṭa is obvious. The experience of listening to rāga is linear, and it unfolds note by note, but the cognition of the rāga is a kind of burst like the sphoṭa, not any kind of putting together of the notes that have been heard and trying to work out or infer what the rāga is or any such analytical operation.

This “unreality” of the notes lies at the heart of the highly nuanced texture of rāga music—both Carnatic and Hindustani. (End Note 3). Notes are only the skeleton of a rāga and have to be fleshed out in specific but varied ways. This then is the next layer of rules, a finer mesh of the framework. And it is here that the rāga resides. The spacing of the notes within the phrase, the accent, the gamaka or ornamentation, the note which is the beginning of the phrase (graha), and that which can be at the end of the phrase (nyāsa)—these and other factors are critical in bringing out the rāga. Often the same set of notes come together differently in phrases in different rāga-s.

For example, taking the notes of the śaṅkarābharaṇam scale of Carnatic music, Pa Ma Ga Ri—the way these are put together in phrases in rāgas like sāmā or ārabhi or begaḍa or saḥānā are subtly different.

Again, in Hindustani music, Mārṅwā and Puriya are two rāgas that have the same scale, but the notes are used very differently in phrases primarily because the vādi and samvādi svaras (the most important notes) are different but also because of subtler aspects. These are only a few examples—rāgas are pervaded with such subtleties.

We may use the same analogy of **aṅga and aṅgin** from language and argue that a svara gains life and reality only within a phrase. In music, it is sometimes difficult to even separate the svara from the way it occurs in a phrase because of the highly nuanced nature of the melody. Thus, though we do speak of svaras as the basic building blocks of a rāga, for the rāga to actually emerge, the phrases are the primary units. In other words, rāga is communicated through phrases.

For example, Saḥānā of Carnatic music is conveyed just by its unique intonation of the Ri, Ri, which is actually the Ri with a delicate touch of the Ga, and thus a phrase Ri,, Ga Ma Pa,, Ma Ga,, Ma Ri,, and other such phrases convey Saḥānā. The notes individually or brought together without regard for phrasal characteristics such as the shake of the Ri or the glide from the Ma to the Ga or the elongated Pa and Ri will not convey the rāga.

## Vākya and Musical Vākya

According to the vaiyākaraṇas, a vākya is a single impartite utterance (एकोनवयवः) and it is cognised in a flash as a single indivisible sphoṭa which bears the purport (वाचकत्वम्). The buddhi or the cognising indriya is where this cognition takes place.

Even though the vākya is the basic meaningful unit, it is comprised of words coming together in certain ways. Any set of well-formed words uttered in a sequence does not lead to śābdabodha. It is here that the ideas of ākāṅkṣā, yogyatā and sannidhi are brought in as factors for vākyārthanirṇaya. It is when these are satisfied that words which are uttered in sequence (अनन्तरश्रुतिः) can give śābdabodha. In music too, the coming together of swaras in phrases and phrases in musical vākyas can be seen as governed by the factors of ākāṅkṣā, etc.

According to the mīmāṃsakas and vaiyākaraṇas (End Note 4), a collection of words serving a single purpose forms a vākya if on analysis the separate words are found to have ākāṅkṣā for each other.<sup>8</sup> This was the basic theory as propounded by the śābarasvamin in his bhāṣya and later expanded by Kumārila Bhaṭṭapāda as

*ākāṅkṣā, sannidhi and yogyata—these three constitute the basis of the relationship (i.e. between the padas). Mere sequence is not the hetu or reason for the relationship.*<sup>9</sup>

Drawing from this theory, in the realm of music, we can speak of a rāga exposition as well-formed phrases linked together by mutual expectancies; rāga can thus be seen as a vākya/series of vākya. That its cognition is unitary and not analytical is anubhavasiddha while svaras, individual phrases and the interrelationship among them are discussed and posited only for the purpose of analysis (शास्त्रमात्रम्).

Here, we wish to dwell on the broader idea of anticipation or expectancy as a feature of all communication. Communication does not occur in a vacuum. It is only possible within a framework of shared symbols that generate shared expectancies to be resolved in specific ways. A symbol is meaningful to the extent that it generates specific expectancies or makes complete sense by itself, having no unresolved expectancies. Music, it has been pointed out, involves anticipation and expectancy; just like a story, we want to know what next. The performer too, just like the story teller, builds up dynamics through generating anticipation for the possibilities of development. This is especially true of improvisatory music. And when the anticipation is not a vague and open-ended expectancy but more specific and close-ended, then the interest created is greater. The tighter the dynamics of expectancy generated and resolved, the more satisfying the experience.

Though rāgas can be described in terms of their notes, the phrases constructed out of these notes are the primary meaningful units in the above sense. A note by itself does not generate specific expectancies—like a varṇa by itself. If one just utters the syllable pa, it is a non-starter. It generates no specific expectancy. But if it is a complete pada-paṇḍitaḥ, then it generates expectancy and is meaningful. Thus, for a

<sup>8</sup> पृथक्सर्वं पदं साकाङ्क्षम् VP 2.2.

<sup>9</sup> आकाङ्क्षा सन्निधानं च योग्यता चेति च त्रयम्।

सम्बन्धकारणत्वेन क्लृप्तं नानान्तरश्रुतिः ॥ TV V1 P.455.



rāga to be cognised or conveyed, the minimal requirement is a phrase, and a phrase is minimally required for generating expectancy. In both these senses, phrases, not notes, are the primary building blocks of a rāga exposition.

Expectancy as mentioned above is also one of the conditions of vākyārtha-nirṇaya.

## Ākāṅkṣā

ākāṅkṣā (mutual expectancy) is a primary condition for śābdabodha. *ākāṅkṣā* is the inability of a word to convey a complete sense in the absence of another.<sup>10</sup> Alternately, it is the desire on the part of the listener (जिज्ञासा) upon hearing a word in a sentence to get a complete sense.<sup>11</sup> In the sentence, “Bring the Cow” (“गाम् आनय”), without the action of bringing (आनयन क्रिया), the word “गाम्” stands alone and cannot give rise to a vākyārthabodha. Similarly, if you say “आनय”, you do not know whether a घटः or पटः to bring. The sentence “Rama goes to the forest” (“रामो वनं गच्छति”) yields śābdabodha; so do “रामः गच्छति” and “वनं गच्छति”. But “रामः वनम्” does not. This is because there is expectancy between “वनम्” and “गच्छति”, and “रामः” and “गच्छति”, and there is no expectancy between “रामः” and “वनम्”.

Rāgas permit many phrases based on established practice that has evolved over a few generations; rāga elaboration in an ālāpāna takes place with a logic and aesthetic: a certain way of linking phrases together governed by a syntactic expectancy and a structural expectancy.

## Syntactic Expectancy in Music

Syntactic expectancy refers to the need of each phrase for another to make a complete musical statement. For example, Ni Dha Ni Ri Ga of rāga Yaman has an expectancy for some other phrase like Ma Ri Ga, which in turn has an expectancy for more phrases until it is resolved usually when the ādhāra ṣaḍja is attained. Predominantly, expectancies generated by phrases are resolved with a phrase ending on the Sa or Pa or sometimes Ma.

While there is no blueprint for how the phrases may be linked in an ālāpāna, there is an implicitly understood and acknowledged logic that binds performers and listeners in the act of communication. One may not be able to bring any two phrases of a rāga together without sensitivity to this logic. Linking some phrases, even though both are rāga-vāchaka, may lead to bewilderment, for example, the phrase Re Ma Pa Ma Re followed by Pa Ni Sa in Brindāvani Sāraṅ of Hindustani music. Or RiGa-MaPaMaGaMaRi of Sahāna (Carnatic music) followed by Dha Ni Sa. Such a juxtaposing of two phrases that do not resolve mutual expectancy might still resolve itself with the next and next few phrases. For example, in Sāraṅ above, RiMaPaMaRi

<sup>10</sup> पदस्य पदान्तरव्यतिरेकप्रयुक्तान्वयानुभावकत्वम् आकाङ्क्षा। (परस्परम् अविनाभावः) (TS 49).

<sup>11</sup> वाक्यसमयग्राहिका आकाङ्क्षा। सा चैकपदार्थज्ञाने तदर्थान्वययोग्यार्थस्य यज्ज्ञानं तद्विषयेच्छा 'अस्यान्वयर्थः कः' इत्येवं रूपा पुरुषनिष्ठैव। PLM आकाङ्क्षा विचारः। (PLM P.77 आकाङ्क्षा विचारः).

followed by PaNiSa will leave it hanging, but if this were followed by RiMaPaMaRi, this would be a kind of pattern reinforcing the phrase.

Thus, when one sings a phrase in a rāga it generates expectancy for another phrase to follow. And this is often a large set of phrases to choose from. There are at least some other phrases of the rāga which when linked to it does not resolve the expectancy created but lead to bewilderment. Creative singers are able to create new possibilities, new links between phrases while retaining the communication without causing bewilderment or loss of the rāga (rāga-bhaṅga). This is the realm of artistry.

## Structural Expectancy in Music

Even a single phrase can communicate the rāga. So, the cognitive aspect can be taken care of by even a single phrase. But presenting a rāga is not a cognitive exercise. It is an artistic one. Thus, a rāga is presented over a few minutes of say, an ālāpana, with an edifice of melodic phrases. Each phrase reinforces the cognition of the rāga while also creating interest and expectancy. The rāga is developed or unfolded over the entire range of a couple of octaves. How the unfolding occurs is by using the principles as has been nurtured by the community of performers, teachers and listeners (वृद्धव्यवहारः). This is also the basis for structural expectancy.

Structural expectancy governs the build-up of the ālāpana. One musical statement leading to another until a melodic edifice is created with zones of varying texture and dynamics makes for the artistry of the exposition. So, within the entire ālāpana, there might be a zone of dense phrases; another of elongated svaras mixed with phrases; another of gamaka-filled movements in a steady tempo or laya; another with movements confined to one part of the range; and another that might traverse octaves or sthāyī. And there may be pockets of a mixture of these.

The rāga-svarūpa itself is brought out only by a sensitivity to the rules of build-up of the ālāpana; otherwise, it will be just a collage of phrases and musical statements. In music too, the listener has jijñāsa—the informed listener also knows the lakṣanas of the rāga being performed—she knows the notes, the phrases that are admissible. Thus, any informed listener, being part of this community and having imbibed these principles, has specific expectancies on hearing a phrase.

## Yogyata

Yogyata is the compatibility of the padas in a vākya, such that what they convey does not conflict with what is obtained in reality. The absence of yogyata is arthabādha<sup>12</sup> in a vākya while it is lakṣanabādha in a rāga. A standard example given here is “He waters with fire”—“अग्निना सिञ्चति”. This statement does not yield śābdabodha because such a thing is impossible. śābdabodha does not concern itself with the abstract “meaning” of sentences but rather with the phenomenon of

<sup>12</sup> अर्थबाधो योग्यता। TS 49.

sentences uttered by a reliable person being a source of knowledge. In a performance of a rāga too, an incorrect phrase will simply be dismissed and not considered for its musicality otherwise—a phrase either conveys the rāga or is not music at all! We are not talking of using rāgas in other contexts like film music, etc. where liberties can be taken but of a classical music performance.

Yogyata or appropriateness or correctness functions at different levels in music. At the macro-level, of course, a wrong note in a phrase or by itself will impede rāgabodha. If one is singing Kalyāṇi, then a flat Ni will negate the rāgabodha leading to rāgabhaṅga. A wrongly highlighted note, or wrong or inappropriate ending or an absent gamaka, also has the effect of impeding or negating rāgabodha. Violating the phrasal structure and integrity also can be brought under this factor. There are also subtler matters of a phrase that is acceptable in all respects but because of its strong association with another rāga, it impedes the rāgabodha. These are the various ways in which yogyata is a factor in rāgabodha. Yogyata is a factor within phrases.

The pada-s in the vākya “वह्निना सिञ्चति” are sākāṅkṣā, i.e. they fulfil each other's expectancies, but there is “योग्यता-बाधः”, and thus, the vākya does not lead to śābdabodha. Because we have the general rule that a kārakapada has ākāṅkṣā for a kriyā pada, “वह्निना सिञ्चति” passes the ākāṅkṣā test. However, in music there are no such generalised rules for linking phrases. It is all rāga-specific and even performance-specific. In a given performance, the linking of the phrases and statements creates its own logic which is in turn based on the general logic that has evolved in the community. This general logic is not describable. It is a loose sum of the various expositions that one has heard as a student, a listener, etc. Yogyata concerns itself with the rāga-lakṣaṇa, and this too as has been mentioned before is not fully describable. What might violate yogyata can only be learnt by absorbing from practice, from learning under a knowledgeable guru who would point out and correct mistakes.

## Sannidhi Proximity/Time Between Phrases

Sannidhi or āsatti is continuity in time.<sup>13</sup> An example involves saying “bring” (आनय) and “cow” (गाम्) at different time intervals. Here, it is the absence of proximity in time or space that is a factor in not generating śābdabodha. A rushed phrase like “दशरामशराः” will not generate śābdabodha because of lack of clarity arising from faulty sannidhi. One of the aspects of rāga phrases is the internal laya or spacing. In the nuancing of rāga-s, these have to be taken care of. When we speak of phrases as more than just a coming together of notes, this is one of the main factors. How a note is highlighted by being held on for longer than other notes is essentially the spacing of notes. Sannidhi then holds within phrases primarily, while ākāṅkṣā holds between phrases.

**For example,** the elongated Ma within the phrase Ri Ga Ma Pa Ma,, Ga is critical for conveying Nīlāmbārī of Carnatic music, or of Ri in the phrase Ni Dha Sa Ni

<sup>13</sup> पदानाम् अविलम्बेनोच्चारणं सन्निधिः । TS 49.

Re,,, Sa... in Mārṡā of Hindustani music. Again, a short Ri and Dha are critical in Bihāg (Pa Ga Ma Ga,,, RiSa). The terms for these are alpatva and bahutva.

The entire edifice of the ālāpana then is held together by these principles of ākāᅅkᅅā, sannidhi and yogyatā. Phrases which have to answer considerations of yogyatā and sannidhi internally are linked with other phrases with due regard to the ākāᅅkᅅā they generate. Pauses and silences (sannidhi) are of great significance for the entire presentation from the point of view of the dynamics of the presentation as also its evocativeness.

Rāga ālāpana is regarded as improvisation. Ālāpana, etc. are not learnt like compositions are—they are created on the spur of the moment. Even so, it is disputed whether real creativity in the nature of novel phrases, etc. is ever created. Since it has to stay within the framework of the rāga lakᅅaᅅa, it does not seem possible to create something novel. Even if new phrases are not possible, the ākāᅅkᅅā element can lead to surprises. When strong expectancies are created and the resolution offers a surprise in the sense that it does not fall within what the listener expects, then we have creative music. Artistry lies in strong generation of expectancies and offering surprises in its resolution. When these expectancies are worked and the conditions are met, there occurs rāgabodha and there is a successful artistic presentation.

## Tātparya

Tātparya is laid down as the fourth condition for śābdabodha. According to the grammarians, this primarily occurs when there is ambiguity. In cases of such ambiguity, the intent on the part of the speaker who uses this pada/vākya to convey such and such a meaning is termed tātparya.<sup>14</sup> In such cases, other supplementary factors such as context and proximity to other padas are used to determine the intent such as the use of the word “saindhava” while eating refers to salt and its use in a battle refers to a horse.

Tātparya, as the intention of the musician in the context, plays a role in rāga music. Though every raga has typical phrases, there are phrases that it shares with others. For example, the ārohaᅅa of Bilahari and Mohanam is the same—Sa Ri Ga Pa Dha Sa is common to both; the avarohaᅅa is different as is the typical phraseology and these lend a very different colour to the two. But once a musician has established rāga Mohanam, even when the ārohaᅅa is sung as a phrase in the ālāpana, the listener understands that it is Mohanam and not Bilahari because the singer would intend that. More interestingly, tātparya is a factor in rāgabodha in the performance of senior vidvāns, who because of physical infirmity may falter in the delivery of their musical ideas. Their voice may slip, their phrases may be unclear, they may even at times slip into a wrong note, but the listener knows of his vidwat and will, by tātparya factor, cognise the rāga. If a young performer slips in a similar way,

<sup>14</sup> नानार्थस्थले लोके तात्पर्यन्तु एतत् पदं वाक्यम् वा एतदर्थप्रत्ययाय मया उच्चार्यते इति प्रयोक्तुः इच्छारूपम् । PLM तात्पर्यविचारः P.84.

no licence or slack is cut. But, in the case of senior performers, though physical infirmity may impede clear execution of musical ideas, there is great value attached to their musical performance. This is primarily because the lakṣaṇa of the rāga is expressed with maturity. An amateur performer would be worried about getting the lakṣaṇa right and would hardly afford any new insights into the rāga, whereas with a senior musician who has soaked, so to say, in rāgas for a lifetime, is relaxed and in command. In fact, he sets the bar and the standard. The yogyata aspect is defined by this kind of music. Here, the listener, almost always other musicians or students, does not expect clarity of delivery and would be prepared to work out the tātparya or what the senior vidvān intends.

## Conclusion

We have here advanced a theory of rāgabodha using the categories of vākya, sphoṭa, ākāṅkṣā, yogyatā and sannidhi. We believe there is much scope in this approach to understand rāga itself as a principle of melody making and also understand the different approaches to it in the classical traditions of Dhrupad, Khayal and Carnatic music and possibly the various styles within each of these. Improvisation and the excitement of spontaneous creation can be explained by ākāṅkṣā and lies more in the expectancies generated and resolved rather than in the novelty of expression or content.

The expectations that are aroused within a Dhrupad ālāp are different from those in a Khayal ālāp or a Carnatic ālāpana. So also the idea of a well-formed phrase differs across these traditions, something that might be seen as appropriateness which is yogyata. We believe that approaching rāga music through this framework of concepts articulated in Śābdabodha theories may be very illuminating.

## End Notes

1. K.G.Vijayakrishnan, in his “The Grammar of Carnatic Music”, has examined language and music from the standpoint of modern linguistics theory, prescriptive and descriptive grammars, symbolic systems and shows how language and music share design features. Deepak Raja in the “Rāga-ness of rāgas” has examined Hindustani rāgas and says that it primarily has an emotional meaning and analyses rāga classification using analogies such as allotropes, compounds and emulsions from Chemistry. R. Sathyanarayana in his paper, “The Meaning of Music” alludes briefly to the idea of using śāstra as a framework—sphoṭa and vākyaṛthajñānahetavaḥ and uses the term “meaning” in music. Richard Widdess in several of his papers on Improvisation primarily deals with Hindustani rāgas from the standpoint of Huron’s “Expectancy Theories” and applies “Schema Theories” from the field of Psychology.
2. As a verb (अख्यातः)—a minimal sentence. (2) शब्दसङ्घातः—a combination of śabda-s (3) जातिः सङ्घातवर्तिनी—A universal class—that inheres in the members of the collection. (4) एकः अनवयवः—A single impartite śabda (5) क्रमः—A

sequence (6) बुद्ध्यनुस्मृतिः—A vākya is a construct in the buddhiḥ composed of words that are dependent on each other. (7) पदमाद्यम्—the first word and 8) पृथक्सर्वं पदं साकाङ्क्षम्—The purport of the pada that is conveyed by the padas aided by āsatti, ākāṅkṣā, yogyata become the source of cognition because there arises vākyaarthabodha when such padas are present. This is the view of the mīmāṃsakas<sup>11</sup> as borne out by “तथापि पदार्थाः पदैः बोधिताः सत्याकाङ्क्षा-योग्यता-सहकृताः मूलं भविष्यन्ति तादृशपदार्थसद्भावे वाक्यार्थबोधसद्भावादिति । (SBM) and साकाङ्क्षावयवं भेदे परानाकाङ्क्षशब्दकम् ।

कर्मप्रधान गुणवदेकार्थं वाक्यमिष्यते ॥ VP 2.4

Thus, according to the mīmāṃsakas, a sentence is one which has its parts possessing mutual expectancy when they are considered separately but not possessing expectancy for anything external. The key feature here is that there is no “ekoanavayava-vākyaartha” over and above as this results in postulation of redundant entities. While a single “characteristic” phrase can communicate the rāga, this minimal definition is not feasible in terms of practical performance where the intent of elaboration is not just communicative but also artistic. Similarly, the idea of looking at rāgas only as a collection of phrases or as a mere sequence without anything else to bind violates what is actually experienced by the listener. The idea of jātis or class could only be related to the ancient concept of jāti a precursor to rāga sangita but not applicable to rāga-saṅgīta.

AB (28) तत्र केयं जातिर्नाम? उच्यते । स्वरा एवं विशिष्टसन्निवेशभाजो रक्तिमदृष्टभ्युदयं च जनयन्ति जातिरित्युक्ताः । अदृष्टाभ्युदयं च । कोसौ सन्निवेश इति चेत् जातिलक्षणेन दशकेन भवति सन्निवेशः ।

Each jāti had a set of rules or jāti lakṣaṇas, and each jāti gita or song would be a member and inhere in that jāti. A jāti in ancient times was manifested in a jāti gita. Abhinavaguptapāda<sup>6</sup> describes jāti as a class with a specific pattern of svaras that incorporates the ten characteristics of the jāti—jāti-lakṣaṇas that included commencing note, the extent or range, the terminating note, extent of use of notes and the restriction regarding the number of notes.

3. One may wonder about Hindustani music where rāga development proceeds note by note. Since the elaboration of a rāga is, at least apparently, note by note, the note may be seen as the primary meaningful unit. There are two responses to this: 1. The older gharānas of Hindustani music (HM) explore the rāga through phrases—Gwalior and Jaipur and Agra. 2. Rāgas in HM too are brought out by phrases which are constructed out of svaras and principles of highlighted note, end note, gamaka, etc. It would be an interesting question for musicologists to explore the shift of primary focus from phrase to svara from the perspective of yogyatā, ākāṅkṣā, etc. because these are still operative in rāga elaborations of gharānas like Kirana that adopt a more note-based approach. And even here, even when a note is presented in a long breath, phrases are always just around the corner and are crucial for rāgabodha. The kind of expectancy that a single note might evoke is different from that evoked by a phrase.
4. In terms of the relations between words in a vākya, while dealing with compound words (samāsa) the idea of mutual relation between words (vyapekṣa) and individual words coming together to give a unitary sense (ekārthībhāva) is mentioned in the sūtra, “समर्थः पदविधिः ।” (A2.1.1) in the context of a compound

word (samāsa). The idea of vyapekṣa is parallel to ākāṅkṣā. Commentators such as Kaiyaṭa apply this to the words in a vākya as well. The word ākāṅkṣā is used by Pāṇini<sup>15</sup> in another context. The Mahābhāṣya gives the example of a string of words that have no mutual relationship and hence meaningless.<sup>16</sup> Grammarians such as Nāgeśabhaṭṭa in his Paramalaghumañjūsā deal with the conditions of ākāṅkṣā and define it as the desire on the part of the listener on hearing a word to understand its relation to its meaning to get a complete sentence.

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<sup>15</sup> न यद्यनाकाङ्क्षे | A 3.4.23 | This disallows *ktivā* (or *namul*) in an utterance in which *yad* occurs if this lacks ākāṅkṣā.

<sup>16</sup> अनर्थकानि -दश दाडिमानि षड्रूपाः कुण्डमजाजिनं पलालपिण्डः अधरोरुकमेतत्कुमार्याः स्फयकृतस्य पिता प्रतिशीन इति | MBh. on A 1.1.1.1.