

## Gamakas

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### Namaskaram

The topic that is the subject of my talk this morning is "Gamakam" in Carnatic music. This unique aspect that is so vital for our music is what differentiates the way Carnatic music is rendered from other systems of music. While I plan to approach the subject from a practical point of view, I will begin with a brief overview of its historical perspective.

Sarangadeva, a thirteenth century musicologist lists fifteen gamakas in his Sangitaratnakara, the most important musical treatise of India's medieval period. Sarangadeva describes many of his gamakas in terms of their execution on the vina, but so little is known now about the actual sound of this period's music that musicians can only generally interpret Sarangadeva's definitions and understand it in the perspective of today's music. The Sangita Ratnakara of Sarangadeva defines gamaka as:

"svarasya kampō gamakaḥ srōtra citta sukhāvahāḥ  
tasya bhedastu tiripaḥ sphuritaḥ kampitastathā"

Following this a list of types of gamakas such as līna, āndōlita, vali, āhata etc is given but what is most important is the line which mentions the joy that gamakam creates in the minds of the listeners. It is an experience shared by both the singer and the listener.

The Vina was the instrument used for demonstration and explanation of musical terms. A major advance in the written description of gamakas came in Somanatha's RagaVibodha (1609). He lists 23 symbols for use in vina notation. Somanatha describes the execution, vadana-bheda of the corresponding gamakas in the vina.

Sangita Sampradaya Pradarsini (1904) written by Subbarama Diksitar is a treasury of compositions in the family tradition of Muttuswami Diksitar (1775-1835). Subbarama Diksitar's work attempted to reconcile the 15 gamakas of the written theoretical tradition with ten from the oral tradition. In other words, he lists 15 gamakas but assigns symbols to only ten of them. Thus it becomes quite clear that the oral tradition of primary importance and that is what the focus will be on in this lecture demonstration

Gamakam is a very unique aspect of our music, one could also call it extraordinary and special. I will share whatever I have understood and learnt about gamakas in my experience. My firm opinion is that we learn from our preceptors and that is the only way to imbibe the finer aspects of music including gamakas. A Gamaka is often defined as an ornament or "embellishment" but perhaps such a definition is quite inadequate, to the extent that they suggest something incidental added on to what is fundamental, for gamaka is itself a fundamental element of a raga.

Gamaka performs an integral, rather than decorative function in our system of Carnatic music. Theoretically, one can define a svara simply as a scale, but in practice a svara is properly defined only when taking into consideration the gamaka associated with it. Gamaka is what gives a raga its unique character. Thus svara and gamaka are intimately intertwined.

The gamakas, are the subtle shades of a tone, delicate nuances and inflections around a note that please and inspire the listener. The gamakas are not arbitrarily attached to a note, instead they are an integral part and grow out of it.

How gamakas bring forth the essence of a raga is what we will see today. We will go with the more recent work, the Sangita Sampradaya Pradarshini of Subbarama Diksitar. There is a gamaka called vali mentioned in the book. That is a gamaka that is very close to what I am going to explain today.

The 72 mela scheme that we have is a boon that we have inherited from our musical predecessors. They have created it so perfectly that there is no room for confusion or doubt. These melakarthis are basically a permutation and combination of notes. How we breathe life into these notes really brings out the raga. We can look at the mere scale of Sankarabharanam, Mayamalavagaula or Todi and see how to form them into ragas. If the notes of Todi are sung as plain notes without any oscillation, it will sound like Sindhu bhairavi and very close to Hindustani music. This is because Hindustani music uses more of flat notes.

One can realize that plain notes are sung as a scale and the same notes sung with oscillation or gamakas form as a raga. We can identify the raga Todi only when the svarās are sung with gamakam. The life of a raga lies really in the gamakas.

Ragas may be classified as gamaka pradhāna rāgas and svara pradhāna rāgas. In the case of svarapradhana ragas like Malavi and Kadanakutuhalam, it will not be possible to introduce gamakas. What has to be observed is the movement of the notes, the varjam and vakram, in other words what has to be adhered to here is the succession of notes and the prayogas. One did not do a raga elaboration in such ragas in those days however great a vidvan. Alapana was sung for 'periya' or big ragas which had ample scope for elaboration or for rakthi ragas.

Again we can look at raga alapana in different ragas in two ways : (i) how ragas may be differentiated by some typical phrases and (ii) how the same note may be rendered differently based on the raga.

If you look at the classification of the melas, the first half of the octave is common to many ragas. Do we then rely on the latter half to be sung before the raga is identified? We should be able to bring out the feel of the raga without having to sing all the svaras that a raga takes. This is where gamakas come in handy and they help us out. Let us take the example of a single common svara, say for instance śuddha rishabham. This rishabham occurs in many ragas. Sometimes it may be oscillated, sometimes held at a position slightly higher or lower than the svara sthāna, sometimes it may be rendered flat.

Parsvadeva in his Sangita Samayasara gives a beautiful definition of gamakas.

Svasrutisthāna sambhutām chhāyām srutyantarāsrayām  
Svarōyadgamayed gīte gamakōasou nirupitah

A note often oscillates between its own svara sthana and the next, in fact it borrows shades of the next svara and this is referred to as gamakam in Carnatic music. Let us take Kalyani for instance. The Kalyani gāndharam is usually held with a gamakam, that is the sampradayam. The Kalyani gandharam is not held flat. The moment the note is oscillated, it has the sound of mg, mg, mg, Curiously it does not reach upto the pratimadhyamam which is the note for this raga. In a gamaka, the next sruti is usually touched by the note. Kalyani as a raga can be shown even without reaching the pratimadhyamam by just producing an oscillating gandharam. A flat gandharam will automatically have shades of Sankarabharanam. Just the gandharam with or without a gamakam differentiates the two ragas. The life of the raga exists within a single note.

One more point to be noted is that if one svara is oscillated, then as a rule the svara adjacent to it is usually held flat. For instance if the kalyani gandharam is oscillated, then the rishabham is held flat and vice versa with Sankarabharanam. Thus ragas have their uniqueness and there can be no doubt as to the identity of the raga. There are examples in kritis such as "Enduku peddala" which has an oscillating rishabham followed by a flat gandharam right at the outset. "Bhajare re chitha" in Kalyani has an oscillating gandharam. Our gurus have taught us how to use these gamakas in different ragas. All we have to do is to keep it in mind while singing so that the listener does not have to wonder about the raga that is being sung. Adhering to this might help an inexperienced singer from slipping into shades of another raga while doing an alapana. Understanding gamakas will facilitate going into the depths of a raga with singing with involvement. This is a path that can be followed.

Let us see how the same single svara has different hues in different ragas. Take for instance śuddha rishabham- it is present in Mayamalavagaula, Todi and other

ragas like Gaula, Sourashtram, Chakravakam and Saveri. In Gaula, the phrase pmgmr has a rishabam that is almost ekasruti.. It is very close to the shadjam. In Saveri the rishabham does not have too much of an entity. In Mayamalavagaula, one can hold a bold flat antara gandharam. Though Nadanamakriya is almost like Mayamalavagaula, the flat gandharam does not have a place in the raga.. The svara sthanas may be the same but how do we differentiate the ragas? It is only through gamakas.

Also the position of the svara in the same raga may vary depending on the phrase that is being sung.. For instance, In Sankarabharanam, the phrase srgmñ, the oscillating madhyamam is close to the Gandharam while the real svara sthanam of the suddha madhyamam is much higher. While singing a raga alapana, such an oscillating madhyamam indicates that one may sing below that svara or weave patterns around that svara.it would help singing within that range for a while. Singing this madhyamam while ascending to higher notes may not be comfortable or apt although it may still be within that raga. In such a case, the gamakam would keep the madhyamam closer to the panchamam and the ascent will be much smoother! A demonstration of the various shades of madhyamam in Sankarabharanam will make it much clearer.

Sometimes we find that a particular raga seems to elude us even though we hold the specified notes. Here it is important to understand that some notes have to be stressed and others held flat depending on the following note. Take for instance Harikambodi which takes the Chatusruti dhaivatam and Kaisiki nishadam. A raised dhaivatam will automatically push the nishadam higher and the beauty of the raga will be lost whereas one can raise the d in Sankarabharanam as it takes the kakali nishadam. The moment the dhaivatam is stressed a little,it borrows from kaishiki nishadam and it will be hard to sing a kaishiki nishadam after that svara. A flat dhaivatam will automatically lead to kaisiki nishadam. In the case of the above ragas, the nishadam was different and the rest of the notes were the same.

Let us take two ragas which have the same notes within a range such as Bhairavi and Kharaharapriya and see how gamakam makes a difference to their very existence. The phrase rgmp in both are sung differently. Kharaharapriya takes flat notes whereas in the raga Bhairavi, the madhyamam is sung with some emphasis. The moment a flat madhyamam is held, the chatusruti rishabham will follow automatically and bring Kharaharapriya along with it.

There are such subtle nuances that make so much difference.If there is so much in the little that I have mentioned, imagine how much more there is to gamakas. It is like the unfathomable ocean. If one is able to find a svara sthana, be one with that perfect note, there is a sense of bliss and a total oblivion at that time. It is quite inexplicable but at the same time it is an experience to be felt. It is a kind of sakshatkaram. It is said that Ramakrishna Paramahansa and Ramana experienced Brahmananda or

went into a trance. We do not know what that may have meant but certainly there is Brahmanandam in our music. We have to look at our music in that way.

We can search for subtle nuances in our music. We can find the answer in many of the compositions of great vageyakaras. Although it is true that kritis may not be sung in the same way by all. Certain changes may have crept in because of the nature of the voice or for convenience in voice production. However, if we look at certain varnams or some big compositions which have remained relatively unchanged, we may unearth a wealth of information about the raga. It is often that popular compositions have undergone the transformation whereas rare pieces have remained relatively untouched.

Kritis of the mummurti have the essence of ragas. When we learn a kriti, it would be a good idea to look into the nuances of the raga as well.

The myriad shades of the Todi gandhara are shown explicitly in the chitta swaram of the kriti '*Gajavadana sammodita veera*' composed by Kumara Ettendra. The gandhara varies with the different phrases but each of those phrases is so typical of Todi raga. While singing an alapana too the same kind of variety is seen based on the phrase. It is possible that the Chatusruti rishabham has crept into Todi because of the oscillation on the gandharam. The nishadam in Todi too has a different range based on the ascending or descending phrase that is being sung.

Ragas such as Ritigaula or Anandabhairavi are quite similar in the range of shadjam to pancamam. It is not that the phrase pnnas has to be sung before Ritigaula can be identified. The difference can be made in the gamaka on the gandharam itself. It can be shown through the oscillation and the frequency of oscillation. Anandabhairavi does not have sancharam below the mandra nishadam. This is to retain its identity as different from that of Ritigaula. Again in the madhyasthayi Ritigaula has the mnas and not pnnas (this occurs only in the mandra sthayi) prayogam so that confusion with Ananda bhairavi does not arise.

Let us look at a cluster of ragas like Kedaragaula, Arabhi, Devagandhari, Sama, and Surati. These ragas uniformly have the same svara sthanam between sadjam and pancamam. But the differing of the ragas can be shown with gamakas keeping within this range of svaras. This can be done with absolute clarity. A demonstration of phrases will show the difference between these ragas. In Arabhi the gandharam has no place, it is expressed close to the madhyamam. Suruti too has no place for gandharam. On the descent it sounds like *mr* touching the gandharam briefly.

Thus gamakas give shape and life and shape to many ragas. In yet other ragas, there may be less emphasis on gamakas and the difference may be prayoga based such as Kurunji and Navaraj. Kurunji has no sancharam below the mandra nishadam

whereas in Navaraj one can descend up to the pancamam. However today this subtle difference has been overlooked by many and Kurunji and Navaraj have merged just as Manji and Bhairavi have. Muthuswami Dikshitar has clearly shown both ragas. The very first line of the Navaraj kriti Hastivadanaya comes down to the mandra pancamam. Tyagaraja too has composed in both Kurunji and Navaraj but what has happened is that the popular "*Sita Kalyanam*" which was originally in Kurunji has been converted to Navaraj. "*Napali Srirama*" fortunately continues to be sung in Navaraj.

There are many such ragas and I have shown you just a few. To end on an auspicious note, I would like to show the difference between Madhyamavati and Sriragam. One can differentiate based on the rishabham. Usually the Madhyamavati rishabham is oscillated while the Sriragam rishabham is held flat. This is to allow for the flow of the gandharam in Sriragam. Muthuswami dikshitar employed the pdn prayogam in Sriragam, perhaps to differentiate it from Madhyamavati.

Gamakas are very crucial in achieving the desired impact of a raga. Singing or playing the same kind of gamaka throughout, makes it dull and monotonous. A happy combination and intertwining of the various gamakas is what is wanted. Knowingly, and very often unknowingly, musicians in general, make use of the several gamakas. But a good musician knows exactly when to use a particular gamaka and how to use it to advantage. This is possible when one learns from an experienced Guru.

I thank the Music Academy Madras for having given me the opportunity to share my learning and experience about gamakas. My namaskaram and sincere thanks to the members of the Experts' Committee and all the rasikas present here today.

