

ROLE OF GAMAKA-S

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*svādutva anuṅṅā bhavanti hi yathā śāke rasāḥ ṣaṭ ca |
te rāḡavyaktyanukūlā hi gamakā rāḡespi sañcārīṅṅṅ ||*

In the Carnatic Classical music system 'gamaka' is a term that is oft referred today. It is that component which makes our music unique and different from other systems of music in the world. In fact, this 'gamaka' lends so much subtlety and aesthetic value so as to make Carnatic classical music very special even with respect to other genres of Indian music like light music or devotional music. The concept of gamaka has been in vogue in our music system from the time of Bṛhaddeśī of Mataṅga (7 – 9 A.D). From then to Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśinī of Subbarama Dikshitar (1904) and now, there is an unbroken thread of history in the case of this 'gamaka' Most of the earlier treatises define and classify gamaka and say that it is used in the elaboration of rāḡa-s; Caturdaṅṅī Prakāśikā talks about it with respect to svāra; the SSP stresses the importance of gamaka and deals with it elaborately. In today's music, gamaka has become almost an indispensable feature and plays a major role, be it svāra or a combination of svāra-s or rāḡa. This article will discuss about gamaka-s, taking a brief look at the history and evolution and then its role today, with respect to svāra, rāḡa and our music system itself with regard to vocal music in particular. The music texts that are taken as the main references are Saṅgīta Ratnākara, Rāḡa Vibodha, Caturdaṅṅī Prakāśikā and Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśinī.

What is 'gamaka'? 'svārasya kampo gamakaḥ śrotṛcittasukhāvahāḥ' says Śāṅgadeva. Shaking or oscillation, are the terms generally used to define gamaka. But the root 'kamp' also means 'to move about', and in keeping with this, 'gamaka' may be defined as 'movement' of svāra, which is pleasing to the listener. For, when we say that gamaka is employed to svāra it not only refers to shaking the svāra but many other types of movements like stressing on the svāra and gliding from one note to another – eg. 'g m p' in Śaṅkarābharāṅam, with 'm' having different shades depending on whether its movement is from 'g' or from 'p' or in its place itself, each being a different type of gamaka. Even if the type of movement is the same, other factors like, its frequency, intensity and the placement of the svāra in that phrase makes the same gamaka sound different in each context.

The term 'gamaka' is used from the time of Bṛhaddeśī of Mataṅga (7-9 A.D). The Nāṅyaśāstra of Bharata describes 'alāṅkāra' which, scholars opine, may be similar to 'gamaka' of later texts. Even in Bṛhaddeśī the term 'gamaka' is found only as part of the description of types of ḡīti-s and no separate definition or description of gamaka is found. In the Saṅgīta Makaranda of Nārada (1100 A.D) the names of nineteen gamaka-s are mentioned but not explained. The text also classifies rāḡa-s based on the usage of kampita gamaka. This shows the importance of gamaka-s with reference to rāḡa. Three categories are mentioned - muktāṅga kampita rāḡa-s (where kampita is extensively used), ardha kampita rāḡa-s (where kampita is used minimally)

and kampavihīna rāga-s(devoid of kampita). Nānyadeva, the author of Sarasvatīhṛdayālaṅkāra (11 A.D) also mentions about gamaka.

Pārśvadeva of the 13thA.D, in his work Saṅgītasamayāsāra defines 'gamaka' as -

*'svaśrutisthānasambhūtām chāyām śrutyantarāśrayām
svarūpam gamayed gīte gamakossau nirūpitaḥ' (2.63).*

This definition is based on the meaning of the root word of gamaka, 'gam' (to go) - in its causal form 'gamayati' – to lead one to, to convey or to reveal. This definition will be taken up in detail, later in the article.

Pārśvadeva mentions seven types of gamaka-s – sphurita, kampita, līna, tiripa, āndolita, āhata and tribhinna.

In the Saṅgīta Ratnākara of Śārṅgadeva, we find the definition of gamaka which was mentioned in the beginning, '*svarasya kampo gamakaḥ śrotṛcittasukhāvahaḥ*' This defines gamaka as an oscillation or better still, movement of a svara that is pleasing to the listener. Śārṅgadeva gives 15 types of gamaka-s and explains each of them. These will be discussed briefly while dealing with the types of gamaka-s.

Most of the later authors like Tulaja and others have stuck to Śārṅgadeva's definition and types of gamaka-s. In his Caturdaṇḍī Prakāśikā, Veṅkaṭamakhi gives both Śārṅgadeva's and Pārśvadeva's definitions. Interestingly, Somanatha a contemporary of Veṅkaṭamakhi describes this concept of 'movement of svara' differently. In his text, Rāga Vibodha he calls these movements as 'vādanabhidah' or techniques of playing, and explains them with respect to the vīṇā. He talks about 22 such techniques, explains how they are to be played on the vīṇā, creates symbols for these and also gives characteristic phrases of some of the rāga-s of his times alongwith the symbols. What is noteworthy is that, according to Somanatha 'gamaka' is one of the 'vādanabhidah' It is described as – the oscillatory movement of a svara, thrice or four times. Then we have the Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśinī (SSP) of Subbarama Dikshitar, a monumental work that records the practical and theoretical aspects of music as they were, a century ago. Here the author lays great emphasis on the importance of gamaka and the vital role they play in our system of music. He has delineated the types of gamaka-s in a very systematic manner, devised symbols for them and has notated many compositions alongwith these symbols. More importantly, his notes on rāga-s which include not only the lakṣaṇa śloka and mūrchanā-s but also phrases(with the appropriate gamaka symbols) that are characteristic to the particular rāga, help in understanding the form of the rāga-s as they were sung then. It may be said that Subbarama Dikshitar wanted to emphasise the importance of the usage of appropriate gamaka-s and hence gave it as a part of the description of the rāga itself. After the SSP there have been more recent authors who have dealt with gamaka-s and used them in the form of symbols while notating compositions, some of them following the footprints of Subbarama Dikshitar.

A striking thing about the delineation of gamaka-s in the texts mentioned above is its placement in the course of the work, which apparently throws some light on the perception of the concept of gamaka at the particular points of time.

The Saṅgīta Ratnākara talks about gamakas in the prakīrṇaka adhyāya - the chapter that deals with topics which are not brought under other heads like svara, rāga, tala and prabandha. Though the term 'gamaka' is used with respect to gauḍa rāga-s in the rāga prakaraṇa, gamaka is defined and explained only in the prakīrṇaka. This may be because, while the treatise seems to be more concerned with laying down hard core theoretical aspects, gamaka was perceived as more of a practical concept.

The Caturdaṇḍī Prakāśikā deals with gamaka in the context of svara. After describing gamaka-s under the svara prakaraṇa, Veṅkaṭamakhi says 'svaraḥ nirūpitaḥ sosyam' – 'svara has been elucidated', and then talks about the types of svara-s. The author possibly saw gamaka as an integral part of svara.

In the Rāgavibodha, Somanātha describes 'vādanabhidah' in the 5th chapter dealing with the rūpa or form of rāga-s. He says rāga's rūpa is of two kinds – nādamaya and devatāmaya. And these techniques of playing are the embellishments of the svara that contribute to the manifestation of the nādamaya rūpa of the rāga. Here the movements like gamaka are the core features of rāga, manifesting themselves as a part of svara.

In the SSP, gamaka is described in the lakṣaṇa saṅgrahamu. Here Subbarama Dikshitar begins his note on gamaka as - "Musicians who know tradition do not sing the śuddha and vikṛta svara-s as plain svara-s but employ gamaka-s"(as found in the English version of the SSP). And as mentioned before, he stresses the importance of gamaka and defines rāga-s with their salient gamaka-s and also says that, though rāga-s may have identical mūrchanā-s, gamaka-s serve as the main differentiating factors and also are responsible for giving the rāga a unique form of its own.

Let us now look at the types of gamaka very briefly. Pre - Ratnākara authors have spoken of 7-19 gamaka-s. The Ratnākara mentions 15 gamaka-s, which almost became a standard for later authors. They are tiripa, sphurita, kampita, līna, āndolita, vali, tribhinna, kurula, āhata, ullasita, plāvita, humphita, nāmīta, mudrita and miśrita. These types are described based on the kāla aḷavu or the measure of time, and sometimes on the kind of movement involved. Some are also stated as being relevant to only vocal music and some other only to instrumental music. Veṅkaṭamakhi in his Caturdaṇḍī Prakāśikā has mostly stuck to Ratnākara's gamaka-s in name and description. In SSP, Subbarama Dikshitar takes the 15 gamaka-s of Ratnākara as the base. While he has used almost the same names, the descriptions are different, and he also introduces subdivisions for some of the gamaka-s. For example -

āhata - ravai & khaṇḍimpu
kurula – odukkal and orikai
ullasita - eṭṭa jāru and irakka jāru

There is also a school of thought that advocates 'daśavidha gamaka-s'. In the SSP, Dikshitar quotes a verse mentioning the names of the 10 gamaka-s, but also states that the author of the verse is not known. But the 10 gamaka-s mentioned by Prof. Sambamurthy are different from those in the SSP śloka.

Actually, as mentioned by the lakṣaṇakāra-s themselves, the types of movements are innumerable. More so because every subtle change in one or more factors involved in the movement like intensity, time and frequency produces a totally different shade of the svara or the phrase. But for the sake of understanding these types have been laid down, with a note that the internal variations in these types and other types of gamaka-s that may be used are to be known by studying the practical usages in different contexts.

Today, what do we mean by gamaka, how do we define it? What is its role in our music system? Gamaka in today's context, is an intrinsic feature of rāga, which is employed in a svara or a combination of svara-s, and it lends beauty and aesthetic value to the music itself. As far as defining gamaka is concerned, 'svarasya kampo gamakaḥ' – movement relating to svara holds good even today. In interpreting this definition, the beauty of Samskṛta grammar is seen – 'kampah' means movement. In 'svarasya' - the sixth declension has been employed which gives the meaning of 'sambandha' relating to ; thus implying a wide variety of movements pertaining to svara. Interestingly, svara itself is not defined as a dormant unit but is 'anuraṇātmaka', a vibrant idea in itself.

The other definition of gamaka given by Pārśvadeva which was referred to in the beginning is also to be noted. In this, the emphasis is on 'gamayati' - conveys or reveals. What does it reveal? The svarūpa. How does it reveal? By manifesting the shade of another śruti which originates from the particular svara's own śruti position.

Thus it may be said that gamaka is – a movement relating to svara where, with the svara's own śruti position the shade of another śruti is manifested, thereby revealing the form of the svara, the phrase and the rāga, and represents the spirit and essence of the melody itself. For example, let us take a svara, say gāndhāra. Māyāmājavagauḷa, and Sāveri have the same gāndhāra, but the variety of movements or gamaka-s employed for the gāndhāra while singing Sāveri are different from those of Māyāmājavagauḷa. Here, we see that gamaka aids in revealing the the svarūpa of the rāga. If we take gāndhāra in Toḍi, so many shades of the same svara may be sung in Todi itself by employing a variety of gamaka-s. Here, the svarūpa of svara is revealed by gamaka usage. Of course, this also undeniably shows the scope that our system of music offers for elaboration and creativity. This subtle relation between svara, gamaka and rāga was explained very beautifully through a simple analogy by my guru Smt. R. Vedavalli. Let us take an idol. It is certainly beautiful in its own right, but for it to be placed in the sanctum and worshipped, the ritual of prāṇapratiṣṭhā has to be performed; it has to be empowered by that samskāra. Similarly svara itself is pleasing ('svato rañjayati śrotṛ cittam') but gamaka empowers it to assume its place in the scheme of the rāga.

In today's music system, it may be said that rāga is the central theme. All other limbs of the system have it (the rāga) as their source or as their end. Svara becomes meaningful when seen with reference to a rāga. Creative aspects that are very unique to our music system, ultimately bring to light the rāga svarūpa thereby leading to the experience of the rāga bhāva. Compositions are set to rāga-s and they are also deemed as repositories of the rāga svarūpa. In the case of compositions like those of the Trinity, they are considered as practical documentations of the rāga. It is because of this that even today we are able to draw clues about a particular rāga's lakṣaṇa and svarūpa from the compositions of the great masters. Above all, when one sings, the ultimate goal is to bring out the rāgabhāva and experience the joy of the rāga's rasa first for oneself and then to share this anubhava with the rasika-s. Thus rāga is a very vital concept on which the whole music system rests.

This 'rāga' is seen in two aspects – the structure and the form. The structural aspect comprises of the svara-s in a particular rāga and their arrangement - eg. - Toḍi – ṣaḍja, śuddha riṣabha, sādharmaṇa gāndhāra, śuddha madhyama, pañcama, śuddha dhaivata and kaiśiki niṣāda. The form is that through which the given set of svara-s is manifested as a 'rāga', taking it beyond the mere skeleton of svara patterns and giving rise to an experience which elevates both the singer and the rasika – eg. Toḍi with gamaka. Here the remarkable thing is that the svara-s' individual identities become secondary, and manifesting the rāga's rasa is the primary concern – eg. rāga ālāpāna in Sahāna- here the svarasthāna of individual svara-s gets merged in the rāga delineation. There is a striking similarity, atleast at the conceptual level, between the above said idea and the rasa dhvani of the great rhetorician Anandavardhana. He says- in the poetry, words and even their individual meanings become secondary and, 'rasadhvani' or the suggested sense of the underlying rasa, which is the soul of poetry, manifests itself, giving the rasika the experience of great joy. 'yatra arthaḥ śabda vā tamartham upasarjanīkṛtasvārthau vyañktaḥ kāvyaviśeṣaḥ sa dhvaniriti sūribhiḥ kathitaḥ'. That is soulful music where all aspects like svara-s, their permutations and combinations are employed with the primary objective of manifesting the rāga's rasa. The important point here is that, in this idea of going beyond structure to manifest the form of the rāga, gamaka-s play a vital role. Ever so subtle, aesthetic and beautiful, it is the gamaka that acts as a very powerful projector of the rāga svarūpa.

'Aucityam' or propriety in employing gamaka-s is as important as the concept itself. Stressing the need for propriety a scholar says – 'anaucityādṛte nānyadrasabhaṅgasya kāraṇam' Use of the right intensity of gamaka for the appropriate svara and in the right phrase, are some of the factors that require attention while employing gamaka-s. The reason for this is that use of the right type of gamaka-s is vital for the rāga svarūpa. Eg. gāndhāra is sung plain for Śaṅkarābharaṇam, and with gamaka for Kalyāṇi. When the gamaka is interchanged the rāga loses its flavor.

Aucityam in usage of gamaka is also very important in the case of allied rāga-s and rakti rāga-s for, in these, the subtle gamaka variations serve as major differentiating factors. Also, particular gamaka-s become unique features for the rāga-s themselves –eg. the madhyama in

Begaḍa is so unique because of the movement or gamaka employed in it. So much so that it is called 'Begaḍa madhyamam'

Sometimes improper gamaka usage may give rise to doubts about the identity of the rāga, in the minds of the rasikas. Hence, gamaka-s must be aptly employed so that, the rāga svarūpa is revealed. Eg. - Bhairavi and Kharaharapriya, Kedārāgaula and Surati – where, if the right gamaka is not used we might even slip into the other rāga!

Thus, it may be said that gamaka is the life breath of our music. It is the vital prāṇa that enlivens our music system, and is a very important intrinsic factor in the empowerment of svara and the manifestation of raga and its svarūpa in particular.

