

Raga- its Evolution & Concept

Dr. Maneesha Kulkarni,

Assistant Professor, Department of Music,
University of Mumbai,
V.V. Bhavan, 'B' Road, Churchgate, Mumbai - 20
Email : maneesha_kulkarni@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT:

Raga is a highly developed concept of Indian Music. Indian musicians have explored and structured the scales and have come up with the structured melodic movements that have power to delight. The musicological treatises help us to understand both the emergence and development of the very important concept of "Raga". Raga is media through which the musicians unfolds himself and hence it changes color with the artists. This paper studies the emergence, evolution and concept of Raga in detail.

Keywords:

Hindustani Music, Raga, Indian musical scales

INTRODUCTION

Music is a Universal language. Dr. Ranade defines Music as "Art which has sound related events as its raw material is called Music"¹. Thus sound is a basic material of Music. According to S.K. Saxena the basic elements of Music are rhythm, tempo, dynamics, timbre, melody and harmony². These elements are explored, processed, fused and organized throughout the world and various systems, categories and genres of Music have emerged. Hindustani Music is one such system of India. Raga and Taal are the unique units of Indian Music. Naradiya Shiksha (150 BC to 200 BC) is the first treatise found on Indian Music which relates to Vedic Music. The term Raga, rather Grama Raga is found in said treatise³. Thus, Raga Music is in India since its early civilization.

We are in 21st century and Indian Music has changed significantly since Naradiya Shiksha. However, the use of word 'Raga' in almost all the treatises since Naradiya Shiksha shows that these are not mere changes but it's an indication of evolution of Indian Music that revolves around the concept of "Raga".

We will study the evolution of Raga in different periods of History. Before we move on to the evolution of Raga, let us first consider its etymological connotation.

Etymology of word "Raga" -

Raga is a noun derived from the Sanskrit root ranj, 'to colour', especially 'to colour red', and hence 'to delight'. Red is the colour of passion, hence raga implies the emotional content of a song, by which the listener is delighted. It also means to entertain or lose one's identity and be one (or colored) with something else. The words Raga and Anuraga are taken together.

The word Anurag means to love passionately. In Medini Kosh⁴ the word Raga is explained as

‘रंजनो राग रंजने, रंजनं रक्तचंदने, which means the

word Raga is used for conveying the "entertainment" or "Red colour". It is said that 'Rajayati Iti Raagh' is the common definition which means one that delights or entertains is Raga. Thus on the macro level we can say that a melody that has power to delight and makes one lose his own self and get colored with the emotion of the melody is Raga.

Evolution of Raga :-

In Vedic time, Indian Music was initially was of one note which was known as Archik. Subsequently, of two notes, known as Gathik, then of Samik of Three notes and finally Saptak was discovered in Vedic period. The seeds of Raga system were sown in Vedic period itself. Sama Gana was sung by changing the key note and thereby searching for new musical scales. In a way it contained seed of subsequent Murchhana, Jati and Raga.⁵ Naradiya Shiksha (150 BC to 200 BC) is the first treatise found on Indian Music which relates to Vedic Music. It deals with origin of Saama scale (Krushta, Prathama, Dwitiya, Tritiya, Chaturtha, Mandra & Atiswarya). It also mentions six Gram Ragas viz. Madhyam Grama, Shadja Grama, Sadharita Grama, Panchama, Kaishiki, Shadva, Kaishiki Madhyama. Though the structure of the said Ragas is not mentioned, but it mentions Raga as a technical term. Further in Epic Period, Ramayan & Mahabharat have also reference to Music. Former refers to Jatis and later refers to Grama Ragas only.

Bharata (7-8 century) includes description of Grama & Jati system in Natyashastra. There were three Gramas Viz Shadja, Madyam and Gandhar. The Gramas were scales obtained by different Bhavas. Grama is defined as "a group of notes of relative tonal

value organized into an integrated whole comprehending within its fold the span of saptaka (heptad), a scale of seven notes which serves as the basis for musical composition"⁶. Thus, Grama is a group of tones which further form the basis of murchana. The definition of grama as quoted by Nijenhuis in Dattilam⁷ "A grama was an un-singable group scale, so to speak consisting of all the SuddhaVikruta svaras collected together and preserved, as such, for the purpose of selecting, from that group scale, any desired set of seven notes with a graha or starting point - which set, when sung in the natural order of ascent and descent was called Murchana and which when a harmonic individuality was established with the help of amsa, nyasa, vadi samvadi etc., took the name of Jati". 18 Jatis and Murchanas evolved through the shadaj and Madhyam gram 10 jaati lakshanas given in Natyashastra are - GRAH, AMSH, NYAS, APANYAS, SHADAVATV, AUDAVATV, ALPATV, BAHUTV, MANDRA, TAAR. In modern concept of Raga all these Lakshanas are relevant. We can thus see that Gram-Murchhana and Jati Systems have contributed in the evolution of Raga.

Though the Nardiya Shiksha & Natyashastra mention the Gram Ragas, it was Matangmuni who first time defined the term 'Raga'.

याऽसौ ध्वनिविषयवस्तु स्वरवर्ण विभूषितः
रंजको जनचित्तानां स राग कथ्यते बुधैः।

Matanga's definition combines the structural and aesthetic aspects of the concept: 'That particularity of notes and melodic movement by which one is delighted, is raga'. Pt. 'Kallinath' defined Raga as, "one that is formed of the four Varnas i.e Sthayi, Aarohana, Avarohana and Sanchari"⁸

चतुर्णामिदि वर्णानां यो रागः शोभना भवेत्।
स सर्वो दृश्यते येषु तेन रागा इतिस्मृताः ॥

All most all the later musicologists have followed the definition given by Matangmuni that Raga is a structured melody which provides a melodic movement and has a power to delight. But the limitations of such technical definitions were recognized early: around 1100 AD, Nanyadeva observed that 'There are many variants among the ragas [which] are subtle and difficult to define, just as the different flavours of sugar, treacle and candy...cannot be separately described, but must be experienced for oneself"⁹. Thus the listening to rendition of Raga which is handed over to artists in oral traditions is the only way to experience Raga. Swami Pradyanand opines that Raga is Emotional product or emotive Manifestation of Mental Attitude¹⁰.

Thus technically speaking, a Raga, like a mode, is simply a group of note. This however, would be a gross understatement, as there are many more qualifiers required to establish the many fine features

of any given raga, which may be more aptly described as a melodic concept or seed idea, to be led to blossom by the musician. Thus each raga is a unique tonal frame work. The frame emerges due to unique syntax in phraseology and punctuations that each raga observes in Hindustani Music. Due to this syntax the raga in Hindustani Music differs from Carnatic music and modes or various other genres that explore the scale on melodic lines.

By the medieval period the concept of Raga had evolved and number of Ragas were created and performed. In the medieval era many musicians like Amir Khusrau (Yaman Kalyan, Kafi, Bahar), Sheikh Bahauddin Jakaria Multani, (inventor of Raga Multanishri, also credited to invent many new Ragas on the basis of Maquam system), Sultan Hussein Shirqui (Jaunpuri & 4 types of Todi), Nayak Bakshu (Mangal Gurjari, Gurjari Todi), Tanasen (Darbari Kanada, Miyan ki Todi, Miyan Malhar, Miyan ki Sarang)¹¹

The invention of new Ragas is still being done. Ustad Allauddin Khan (Hemant, Maluha Kalyan), Ustad Ali Akbar Khan (Jogiya Kalingada, Chandranandan), Pt. Ravi Shankar (Tilak Shyam, Parameshwari, Gangeshwari, Kameshwari), Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasiya (Haripriya, Kalaranjani, Sandhyashri), Pt. C.R.Vyas (Dhanakoni Kalyan, Shiv Abhogi) are the artists who have invented Ragas in recent time.¹²

It is observed that the new Ragas invented by employing the following techniques.

1. Mixing two Ragas
 - a. Mixing Ascent or descent of different Raga
 - b. Mixing purvang and uttarang pradhan Ragas
 - c. Mixing phases of many Ragas together.
 - d. Mixing phrase of in new Ragang.
2. Changing the melodic movement (Chalan) of known Ragas.
3. Changing the tone/two notes in popular Raga.
4. Changing Vadi – samvadi.
5. Changing the tonic (using Murchhana)
6. Adopting the scales of other cultures, folk tune, Carnatic system.

Modern concept of Raga -

In modern times G.H. Ranade says following requirements are to be fulfilled by scale to qualify as Raga.¹³

1. It must necessarily possess aesthetic potentialities.
2. It can not omit Sa.
3. It must employ full range of octave and so must cover both the tetrachords.
4. It can not simultaneously omit both Ma & Pa.
5. It must not take both the sharps and flats of the same note consecutively.

We can further enumerate the features of Rags system prevalent today.

1. Ragas are explored and performed through the medium of genre like Dhrupad & Khyal.
 2. It is structured melody, a melodic line in seed form. The structure of Raga is based on (a) the notes (Shuddha-Vikrut) it employs (b) Ascent and Descent (c)Vadi, Samvadi,(d) alpatva – bahutva of notes (e) Tetrachord it emphasizes (Purvangvadi –Uttarangvadi) (c) inclusion of specific melodic movements & phrases (Chalan)
 3. The suitable Ornamental devices like Meend, Kana, Gamak, Khatka, Murki, Kampan, Andolan etc. are used to explore the Raga.
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CONCLUSION:

Raga is a highly developed concept of Indian Music. Indian musicians have explored and structured the scales and have come up with the structured melodic movements that have power to delight. The said process is in-exhaustive and still continues. Not only the Ragas of yester generation are being explored and their boundaries are stretched, but the musicians are also inventing new Ragas even today. The Raga Vidya of Indian Music has witnessed many forms to express & explore it; be it Dhruva, Prabandha, Dhrupad or Khyal & it still continues to flourish further.

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