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RAGA: THE MELODIC SEED OF INDIAN MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

The main and essential character of Indian Music is its linearity of one-line movement. This is what is meant by saying that the music of India is melodic.

KEYWORDS: *Melodic Seed , acquired grammatical formalization , Indian Music.*

INTRODUCTION :

Since melody is a movement of one-tone-at-a-time, the progressions of sound patterns along the stream of time become significant; and it is such a process which gives us tunes and rhythms.

The melodic seed

Through the ages these tunes and rhythms have acquired grammatical formalization becoming *raga-s* and *tala-s*. *Raga*, had as its seed the primitive melodies of various tribes and folk cultures of the country. Similarly, *tala* has attained its sophisticated form from the ancient

rhythms of the people.

Further, a *raga* is basically an incipient melodic idea. It has to be elaborated in bringing out its aesthetic potentialities, which procedure is often called improvisation. This necessitates various formal constructions, rhythmically bound or free. However, these forms themselves get slightly different colourings due to musical dialects which in India are known as *gharana-s* or *bani-s*. Finally, of course, there is the style and the individuality of the musician himself. What has been said of *raga-s* applies to *tala-s* also.

The understanding of this music becomes simpler, perhaps, by an analogy. Music, like all gregarious actions, is a form of communication. It is motivated by an urge to 'express' and 'communicate' on the part of an individual. The receiver of the message not only 'understands' but, being socially conditioned for ages, learns to 'desire' it. And then there is the 'message'. This is in essence a set of signals arranged in a 'recognizable' pattern. This pattern is one which has developed-both unconsciously and consciously by a mutual consent between the 'sender' and the 'receiver' of the message. This pattern or 'structure' of the message is the 'grammar', and the state of mind expressed and excited, when common to the communicators is the meaning of the message. All this is being said to make the comprehension of *raga* easier. For, a *raga* is a form of communication comparable, *mutatis mutandis*, to any code. Further, in its earliest stage it is a vocal act and hence closely relatable in origin and function to speech and language. Consider a language. It has a total structure analyzable into its alphabets, syntax, morphology, punctuations, intonation and so on. Further, there are dialects which are variations of common characteristics of a speech community. In actual speech not only these but also the individual's brogue is indispensable to its speech-personality. Now every *raga* can be compared to a language. It has its alphabets, syntax, phrasings and so on; there are the dialects (*gharana-s*). Formal structures in language



like the epic, the novel, the lyric have musical counterparts in the dhrupad, the *pallavi*, the *thumri*, the *javali* and so on.

Raga, neither as we now know it nor in its more ancient form, was the earliest melodic construction. It is to tribal and folk music that one must turn to find the origins of our melodies. The simple tunes of these people in the course of time, after much polishing and formalization, became *raga-s*.

Raga as a concept and in practice seems to have matured by 5th Century A.D. To this period belongs Matanga (5th-9th Cent.) whose work, *Brihaddesi*, while dealing with *raga-s* says, "no classical melody can be composed of four notes or less; those with less than five are used by tribes such as Savara, Pulinda, Kambhoja, Vanga, Kirata, Valheeka, Andhra, Dravida and forest dwellers". Here is recognizable a process of grammatization of folk and tribal music.

This is an aspect that is very often forgotten. An excessive reliance on texts and a lack of ethnomusical approach has so conditioned Indian musicology that the grass roots of our culture are seldom noticed. It is this that makes many to overemphasize the 'purity' of a *raga* and the 'traditional correctness'. However, 'tradition' is never a dead weight bound up in books, but an ever growing phenomenon. This dynamics can be observed in the formation of *raga*, as Matanga noted the difference between the 'classical' and 'tribal' melodies.

The earliest cultural interaction in this direction was evidently between the Aryans who came from outside India and the local inhabitants. This can be recognized in the names of many *raga-s*. Notable examples are *pulindika*, *Saveri*, *Takka*, *Botta*. These *raga-s* now no more heard-except *Saveri* which some render-have either ethnic, regional or linguistic significance. The *Pulinda-s* either ethnic, regional or linguistic significance. The *Pulinda-s* were a people from central India *Raga Saveri*, some say, has perhaps something to do with the Savara tribes of Orissa and Andhra. *Botta* is associated with *Bhottadesa*, today's Tibet. *Takka*, according to some, had its origin in Attok, in Sind. Very obvious tribal names are *ChenchuKambhoji*, *Bhairav* and *Bhairavi*. The *Chenchus* are forest people in Andhra; the *Bhairavas* are again a very well-known tribe.

Besides these tribal appellations there are, of course, regional ones. *Raga-s* like *Bangala*, *Kambhoji*, *Gurjari*, *Karnata* point to areas in this country. *Hejjajji* is most probably a melody (*maquam*) from Jijai and Arabia. *TurushokaTodi*, as its name indicates is foreign melody; so is *Yaman*, now a very major *raga*.

Thus the growth of the structure and the ethos of *raga* has derived inspiration and sustenance from many sources and has been conditioned by the Historical changes in this society. This being so, what is necessary is to trace the birth and the development of *raga concept* and not the *minutae* of grammar, form and style.

The earliest defined music that we do know of is that of the *veda-s*. *Rgveda*, the oldest, was recited using three tonal regions *Samveda* which is the sung version of *rgveda* in its most developed stage was chanted in a descending manner, with seven notes. This was the ecclesiastical melody, the *margisangeeta* and highly symbolic. There were the *gandharvasangeeta* and the *desi sangeeta* which, not bound by the occultic framework of vedicsinging, were the secular art forms.

As early as the *Ramayana* (400 B.C.) and *Bharata's Natya Sastra* (200 B.C.-200 A.D.), the earliest compendium on the performing arts, mentions of *grama raga-s* can be found. In the *Ramayana*, Lord Rama's sons, Lava and Kusa, come to his court to sing his tale; he, of course, does not know them as his children. They sing in various *grama raga-s* to the accompaniment of *veena*, perhaps a harp. The preceptor, saint Valmiki, enjoins them, "you should sing before the assembled sages according to the methods taught by me.....Do not aspire for money, for it has no vale for a hermit living on fruit and roots". But a definite concept and standard idea of *raga* takes shape by about the 5th Century A.D. The secular art of music-what was known as the *desi sangeeta* has been described by Matanga in his *Brihaddesi* (5th – 9th c.)

The earlier music was based on *moorcchanapaddhati* (modal shift) whereas today's music is founded on a universal tonic. We shall discuss this later.

CONCLUSION

Today *raga* is defined by certain empirical rules of practice which are adhered to in varying degrees of strictness. In the main, these conditions of construction are traditional and hence not 'Universal'. They are more like the rules of a language strict within certain limits of communicability and intelligibility but changeable through history.

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