

Notes on Karnatak ragas

NOTE: these notes do not pertain to Hindusani ragas

raga is the basic pitch concept in Indian music.

uses of the term *raga* (or *ragam*, in Tamil)

- etymologically means: to color (the mind), to please, to love (desire and passion)

- a raga evokes feelings, moods

- raga time theory not used in concerts (but used in temple music for nagaswaram)

- raga as a melodic entity (between tune and scale)

- raga meaning alapana (in RTP)

pitch system for ragas is based on 7 pitches (swara-s) with 12 chromatic varieties called *swarastana*-s (4 pairs are enharmonic) variously tuned according to 22 *sruti*-s.

(the term *sruti* has many meanings

- drone notes

- the tuning of tonic pitch

- microtonal touches

- singing and playing in tune)

A raga can be roughly characterized by an upward (*arohana*) and downward (*avarohana*) scalar motion; but may involve stepwise, oblique, gapped, and zigzag patterns

A raga as an ascending and descending scale (useful, but not definitive)

Ragas derived from a basic parent scale of 7 notes up and down (*janaka*)

derived ragas (*janya*) have less than 7 up and/or down

enumeration of janya ragas:

- 3 out of 5 = 10, 4 out of 5 = 5 totals 15 up and down.

- 30 x 72 scales 2160 up and down patterns

72 parent scales called *melakarta*-s or *mela*-s.

- same names as real ragas but with prefixes to the raga name

- Bhairavi raga vs. Bhairavi mela called Natabhairavi

A raga has functional notes

- tonal centers other than the tonic (reciting tones) (*jiva swara*)

- final tones (*nyasa*)

- initial tones (*graha*)

- highest tone (*tara*)

- weak tones (*alpatva*)

- passing tones (*bhashanga*) not in scale of parent mela raga

- ornamented tones (*gamaka*)

may have shakes, turns, slides, long pure tones (*dirga prayoga*),
microtonal deviations (*sruti*)
ornamentation is a very important source of emotion (*bhava*)
classifications into 6 to 22 types (on vina)
three basic kinds of gamaka-s
 kampita (oscil and shakes)
 jaru (slides)
 voice uses glottal stops

A raga has a basic stock of phrases (called *sancari* or *prayoga*)

See Kassebaum Examples

Raga Sankarabharana. Fig 4. scale with ornamentation
and Fig. 5. hierarchy of tone functions

Fig 6. Derived ragas Madhayamavati and Purvikalyani

All this passed on by tradition in role learning from teacher (guru) to student (*sisya*)
(although theory may also be taught, too)

emotion, connotation and ragas
 bhava (emotion)
 rasa (9 basic moods)
 bhakti (devotional mood)
 time of day
 season
 association with a god or goddess

raga types
 ghana (heavy, august)
 naya (sweet and delicate)
 rakti (deep emotional, best for improvisation)
 desya (regional and Hindustani)
 sadava (6 tones)
 audava (5 tones)
 bhasanga (uses alien notes outside of a mela)
 panchamantya, *dhaivarantya*, *nisadantya* (band-limited ragas to 5-5, 6-6, or 7-7 octave)

See Pesch examples of ragas

ragas used in compositions (*kalpita*) in classical forms
 pedagogical pieces
 varnam
 kriti

kirtana

tillana (lighter)

ragamalika (garland or string of ragas in a composition (or improv.))

ragas used in improvisational forms (*kalpana manodhruma*)

alapana (free unmetered improvisation on raga)

tanam (improvisation on raga with pulse, but no tala)

niraval or *sahitya prastara* (improvisation on text in raga and tala)

swara kalpana (melodic/rhythmic improvisation on raga and tala, uses sargam)

pallavi (improvisation on a phrase from a song)

RTP (sequence of raga (alapana), **t**anam, **p**allavi)

ragas used in poetry recitation

Sanskrit poem = *sloka*

Tamil poem = *viruttam*

Telugu poem = *sisapati*

ragas used in different ensemble music

periya melam (temple music: nagaswara (double-reed instrument, talam (cymbals) and tavil (drum)

cinna melam for dance (forms included swarajati, varnam padam, javali, tillana)

Bharata Natyam (South Indian classical dance) two melody instruments, two

vocalists, *nattusvanar* (dance master (vocalize drum patterns called

solkattu) and *talam* (finger cymbal)

Other theater traditions:

Kuchipudi (from Andhra Pradesh)

Kathakali (Kerala) (use different names for Karnatak ragas)

both use elaborate costumes

Yaksagana (from north and south Kannada and Mysore) (use Hindustani ragas)

ragas also used in

story telling (*harikatha*)

film songs (may not always use ragas)

playback singers