

## Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi

**Pallavi** in general in south India means the opening, recurring refrain section of of a multi-section composition, or of all compositional forms. *Pallavi* in this context, however, designates a single line of text, often set in a complex time-cycle, used as a composition to be subjected to the “breaking up” improv technique.

### Improv styles:

no pulse:	no tala:	<i>alapana</i>
with pulse:	no tala:	<i>tanam</i>
	with tala:	<i>niraval, kalpana svara</i> <i>anuloma/pratiloma</i> (in pallavi exposition)

**Improvisation in the composition:** Improv without tala begins in the opening movement establishes the principal degrees, extends downward and upward to the degree midway between the principal degree and its upper octave, producing the notes with inflections and ornaments appropriate to the raga; then the medial degree is established followed by a return to the principal degrees, then the medial degree and the upper octave of the principal degrees, then a return to the upper octave of the principal degrees.

**The exposition of a Carnatic raga:** In *alapana* occasional sustained pitches are alternated with other scale degrees prolonged in wide and vigorous shakes, often preceded by a few short semi-detached notes, the whole constantly interspersed w/ bursts of melodic flourish. The last section of the *alapana* brings the pitch and intensity level down gradually through melodic motifs of the upper and lower octaves, and concludes with a few phrases below the system tonic before resting on the tonic. Traditionally the full *alapana* of a major raga is presented in connection with *ragam-tanam-pallavi*, in principle the major item in a program of Carnatic music, although these days a *kriti* sometimes stars.

**Tanam** is close to Hindustani *nom-tom*: the syllables are ta nam, ta ka nam, etc. Separate sections of tanam are built in successively higher registral levels; each concludes with a short unpulsed passage of *alapana* before the next is begun.

**Improv with tala** is of two kinds: “**Back to the beginning**”: each passage leads back to the opening and principal motif; and *Bhanjani*--“**Breaking up** (a phrase)” singing the words of one line or the whole composition in different

ways. “Back to the beginning” is the basis of most of the widely used improvisation techniques. A line of the composition (not necessarily the first) is chosen and “Back to the beginning” free improv is required to lead directly, naturally but also precisely to the first part of the phrase, which may or may not proceed to a strong arrival point (*arudi*).

### **Elaborations on a given composition:**

*niraval* (filling up): a single line of text from the composition (one round of a slow time cycle, 2 or 4 in a fast one) is sung repeatedly, following the original rhythmic distribution of text syllables, but with melodic phrases appropriate to the raga supplied by the performer. In practice it is like *kalpana svara*: the improv of *niraval* must lead back to the beginning of the original setting at the proper time-point and *svara* position; and it proceeds at two speeds, first several rounds at the basic pulse then a number of rounds at double time. Often *niraval* is followed by *kalpana svara* attached to the same line of text, or by one or the other.

### **Improv in the Pallavi Section:**

The *pallavi* itself is one line of composed melody--traditional, newly composed or from a *kriti*. The accompanists must reproduce the soloist's *pallavi* after one hearing. *Pallavis* are from one to six cycles long, and constructed so that the point of principal rhythmic weight is the halfway point in the *tala* cycle. After it is sung or played by the principle artist several times, so that the accompanists can grasp the rhythmic shape and its distribution over the time cycle, the *pallavi* is subjected first to *niraval* then with its time values systematically reduced to a half (double speed, *dvigun*), a third (triple speed, *tisra nadai*), and a quarter of their original length (quadruple speed, *caturasra nadai*), . This allows the composition to be sung through twice, thrice and four times in the number of rounds of the time cycle originally required to sing it through once, and is called *anuloma* (with the current, because the time cycle is kept constant and the composition is sung faster. In *pratiloma* (against the current) the composition is sung at a fixed tempo and the reckoning of the time cycle is speeded up, or the composition is sung more slowly while the time cycle is kept constant. The *pallavi* exposition is then supplemented w/several rounds of “back to the beginning” *kalpana svara*.

**Drums:** The *mrdangam* player in principle plays independent basic patterns conforming to the time cycle controlling himself and the soloist; many modern drummers guide the accompaniment by the rhythmic configuration of the particular song.