

Notation and Transcription (from *The Raga Guide: A Survey of 74 Hindustani Ragas*, ed. Joep Bor, written by Suvarnalata Roa, Wim van der Meer, Jane Harvey, transcriptions by Henri Tournier, translations by Lalita du Perron (Nimbus records and Rotterdam Conservatory, 1999))

In Indian music, the seven basic tones or scale degrees (*svaras*) are called *shadj*, *rishabh*, *madhyam*, *pancham*, *dhaivat* and *nishad*. In teaching, singing and notation they are abbreviated to the syllables Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha and Ni. For those not familiar with this fundamental aspect of Indian music, it may be helpful to compare the Indian sargam notation with the western sol-fa system, where Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha and Ni are equivalent to do, re, mi, fa, sol, la and ti (or si) respectively.

Indian music uses twelve semitones. The first and fifth scale degrees, Sa and Pa, are unalterable. The other five scale degrees can be altered from their natural position. When Re, Ga, Dha and Ni are lowered by a semitone they are called *komal*. A sharp Ma is called *tivra*. A scale consisting of only *shuddh* (or natural) notes corresponds to the western major scale.

Three registers or octaves are mainly used in performance: *mandra* or low, *madhya* or middle, and *tar* or high. Each octave can be divided into a lower tetrachord or pentachord (*purovang*, from Sa to Ma or Sa to Pa) and a higher tetrachord or pentachord (*uttarang*, from Pa to Sa or Ma to Sa). In the Indian notation used here for the ascent-descent of the ragas, their melodic outlines and the transcriptions of the recorded introductions, the syllables Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha and Ni are further abbreviated to s, R, G, M, P, D and N. The flat notes are shown as R, G, D and N, and sharp Ma is given as \bar{M} . High octave notes have a dot over them and low octave notes a dot beneath.

The image displays two musical staves. The top staff is in bass clef and the bottom staff is in treble clef. Above each staff is a line of sargam notation. The top staff's notation is: $\underset{\cdot}{S}$ \underline{R} \underline{R} \underline{G} \underline{G} \bar{M} \bar{M} | \textcircled{S} \underline{R} \underline{R} \underline{G} \underline{G} \bar{M} \bar{M} \underline{P} \underline{D} \underline{D} \underline{N} \underline{N} |. The bottom staff's notation is: $\underset{\cdot}{S}$ \underline{R} \underline{R} \underline{G} \underline{G} \bar{M} \bar{M} \underline{P} \underline{D} \underline{D} \underline{N} \underline{N} |. The notes on the staves correspond to these syllables, with flats and a sharp sign used to indicate specific alterations.

Indian musicians have a great sense of accuracy of intonation. Still, there is no absolute or fixed pitch for the tones. It is generally recognised that the actual position of the semitones, excluding the natural fourth, natural fifth and octave, can vary slightly from one raga to another and from one musician to another. Flat notes can be lowered by approximately 20 cents, and are then called *ati komal* ('very flat'). Similarly, the augmented fourth can become *tivratar* ('very sharp'). Such microtonal variations are usually referred to as *shrutis*.

Although Hindustani music often uses long steady notes, what happens in between the notes, i.e. the manner in which the notes are linked and embellished, is at least as important. In many cases specific ornaments are characteristic features in the

performance practice of a particular raga, and therefore define its flavour. Of the many embellishments that can be listed, the following appear in the transcriptions.

Kan: a single grace note or inflection before or after an articulated tone. In the Indian notation it is written in superscript or as a small rising or falling sign.



Mind: a slow, continuous slide from one tone to another. It is indicated as an oblique line between two notes.



Andolan: a delicate oscillation of a single tone. It is indicated by one or more tilde signs after the note.



Murki: a fast and delicate ornament similar to a mordent, involving two or more tones. It is indicated by a circumflex or inverted circumflex sign before the articulated note or by a zigzag pattern, or by writing the notes used in the murki in superscript.



Gamak: a shake on a single tone. It is shown as a wavy pattern over the embellished notes or in superscript.



The ascent-descent and the melodic outline of each raga, as well as the transcriptions of the introductory movements of the recordings, are presented in both Indian and western notation. Middle C is given as the tonic, Sa; however, the actual pitch of the tonic of a vocalist or instrumentalist will depend on the pitch range of his or her voice or instrument.

As shown in the following example, we have chosen a type of proportional notation which is commonly used in contemporary western music. To indicate the approximate duration of individual notes, a sustained note is followed by a horizontal line; the faster the passages, the closer the notes are placed to each other.



Finally, a slur links a particular melodic movement, and a comma indicates the end of a phrase or section, or a pause. As is common in Indian notation, the note which appears before the comma is usually sustained.



What is a Raga?

As king Nanyadeva of Mithila (1097-1147) wrote, the variety of ragas is infinite, and their individual features are hard to put into words, 'Just as the sweetness of sugar; treacle and candy [. ..] cannot be separately described, [but] must be experienced for oneself'³ He warned his readers that: "the profoundly learned in raga, even Malanga and his followers, have not crossed the ocean of raga; how then may one of little understanding swim across?"⁴

In the history of ragas, Nanyadeva's predecessor Malanga played a crucial role. He is quoted by virtually all later scholars as the foremost authority on raga. His *Brhaddeshi*, completed in about 800 AD, is a landmark in that it reconciles the theory of ancient music (*marga*), described in earlier works, with the living music (*deshi*) practised in various regions of India. Matanga's treatise includes musical notations of scales and melodies, and also the first definition of raga:

"In the opinion of the wise, that particularity of notes and melodic movements, or that distinction of melodic sound by which one is delighted, is raga."⁵

In other words, ragas have a particular scale and specific melodic movements; their characteristic 'sound' should bring delight and be pleasing to the ear (or the "minds of men," as Matanga puts it elsewhere). But what exactly is a raga? Is it possible to define raga?

Virtually every writer on Indian music has struggled with this fundamental question and usually begins by explaining what it is not. As Harold S. Powers puts it: "*A raga is not a tune, nor is it a 'modal' scale, but rather a continuum with scale and tune as its extremes.*"⁶ Thus a raga is far more precise and much richer than a scale or mode, and much less fixed than a particular tune. A raga usually includes quite a large number of traditional songs, composed in different genres by the great musicians of the past. But ragas also allow the present-day creative musician to compose new songs, and to generate an almost infinite variety of melodic sequences.

Broadly speaking then, a raga can be regarded as a tonal framework for composition and improvisation; a dynamic musical entity with a unique form, embodying a unique musical idea. As well as the fixed scale, there are features particular to each raga such as the order and hierarchy of its tones, their manner of intonation and ornamentation, their relative strength and duration, and specific approach. Where ragas have identical scales, they are differentiated by virtue of these musical characteristics.

Yet ragas are not static. We shall see that in the fascinating but complex history of ragas, some can be traced back to ancient or medieval times; others originated (or were rediscovered or reinvented) only a few centuries or even a few decades ago. Virtually all ragas, however, have undergone transformations over the centuries, and many of them have fallen into disuse.

Most importantly, a raga must evoke a particular emotion or create a certain 'mood,' which is hard to define, however. As the term raga itself implies, it should 'colour' the mind, bring delight, move the listeners and stimulate an emotional response.' In other words, the concept of raga, which has evolved over a period of two millennia, eludes an adequate brief definition. It is an open-ended concept in which the association of a particular raga with a specific emotional state, a season or time of day, though intangible, is as relevant as its melodic structure.

Raga: its structural features

Ragas must consist of at least five notes.' They must contain the tonic (Sa) and at least either the fourth (Ma) or fifth (Pa).' Both varieties of a note which can be altered (Re, Ga, Ma, Dha or Ni) should not be used consecutively, although there are some exceptions.¹⁰

The broadest way to describe a raga is by its characteristic ascent-descent pattern (*aroha-avaroha*), from middle Sa to high Sa, although it should be remarked that not all ragas begin on the middle tonic. When ragas contain all the seven notes of the scale in ascent and descent they are called *sampurna* ('complete'). Ragas with six notes are called *shadav*, and those with five, *audav*. However, there are many ragas in which the number of notes in ascent and descent are not identical, and where one or more notes may be omitted in the descent (or less frequently in the ascent). These are the so-called compound (*sankirna* or *mishra* 'mixed') ragas, which may even have more than seven notes, when both the natural and flat or sharp varieties of one or more notes are included in either ascent or descent.

A raga may be further characterised by one or more key phrases or motifs (*pakad*), or by a more extensive series of note patterns in the form of a melodic outline (*chalan*, 'movement') which summarises its development. In the raga descriptions we have focused on their melodic outlines, given as a series of consecutive, ascending and descending phrases. The notes may be phrased in straight sequences, or in oblique, zigzag (*vakra*) patterns or, more often, a combination of both, since not all ragas permit a direct ascent-descent.

A raga is more dynamic, far more complex and less fixed than a melodic outline; however, a *chalan* composed by a master musician can disclose its basic grammar, and the treatment and melodic context of each tone. Melodic outlines may vary from one musician to another; they appear to depend very much on the traditional songs the artist has in mind when he composes them. Yet there are few differences of opinion about the melodic progression of common and well-known ragas.

Brief as it is, a melodic outline cannot (and is not intended to) reveal the minute and decorative details of a raga performance. It cannot disclose how an artist builds up or releases tension by creating a micro-universe around one tone for some time, or how he increases the tension by creating ever-changing combinations of two, three, four or more notes.¹¹ But a melodic outline can show the characteristic patterns and motifs of a raga, and in which way it is distinguished from other ragas. It can also show which notes are emphasised, often repeated and sustained, which notes are weak or hidden, and on which notes phrases should end.

A note that is frequently used, or that is held for a long duration is usually referred to as the *vadi* ('sonant' or dominant note). Theoretically there should be another strong note at a perfect fourth or fifth from the *vadi* which is called the *samvadi* ('consonant'). Since there is not always perfect agreement about which note-pair to designate as sonant-consonant in a given raga, we have chosen to use terms such as 'important', 'strong', 'emphasised', 'articulated', 'sustained' or 'pivotal', as well as 'weak' or 'oblique' to denote the various musical functions of tones.

Raga classification

[...]

A that ('framework'), as Bhatkhande used the term, is a scale using all seven notes including Sa and Pa, with either the natural or altered variety of each of the variable notes Re, Ga, Ma, Dha and Ni. In Bhatkhande's system all ragas are grouped under ten scale types, each of which is named after a prominent raga which uses the note varieties in question.

The image displays ten musical scales, each with a sequence of notes above a staff and a corresponding melodic line. The scales are: Bilaval (S R G M P D N S), Khamaj (S R G M P D N S), Kafi (S R G M P D N S), Asavari (S R G M P D N S), Bhairavi (S R G M P D N S), Kalyan (S R G M P D N S), Todi (S R G M P D N S), Purvi (S R G M P D N S), Marva (S R G M P D N S), and Bhairav (S R G M P D N S). The notes are represented by letters S, R, G, M, P, D, N, S, with some variations in the original image (e.g., S R G M P D N S for Bilaval, S R G M P D N S for Khamaj, S R G M P D N S for Kafi, S R G M P D N S for Asavari, S R G M P D N S for Bhairavi, S R G M P D N S for Kalyan, S R G M P D N S for Todi, S R G M P D N S for Purvi, S R G M P D N S for Marva, and S R G M P D N S for Bhairav).

There are quite a few inconsistencies in this system, however, which Bhatkhande himself was partly aware of. [...]

Ragas in performance

Hindustani music is essentially solo music and invariably performed with a drone, usually provided by the *tanpura*. The tanpura player does not participate in either the exposition of the raga or in maintaining the rhythm, but must keep the drone going independently. Usually the two middle strings of this unfretted long lute are tuned to the tonic and the outer strings to the low fifth and the low tonic (PSSS). Instead of Pa, the first string can be tuned to the natural fourth

(Nsss) when Pa is omitted or weak; or to the natural seventh (Nsss) when there is an augmented fourth; or sometimes even to Dha or Ga.



Each of the recordings on the CDs represents a raga performance in miniature. Performing a raga involves a number of movements such as a non-metrical introduction (*alap*), one or more compositions (a vocal *bandish* or instrumental *gat*), rhythmic improvisation (*layakari*) and fast passages (*tana*). The order in which these are presented, and the emphasis placed on them, depend largely on the vocal or instrumental genre as well as the individual style of the performer.

Vocal *dhrupad* recitals usually begin with an *alap*, a fairly extended section without rhythmic accompaniment.²⁷ In this part, a musician methodically explores the raga through a concentration on distinct phrases, patterns and movements. Also, in the *alap* a musician discloses his knowledge of the details which make up the raga he performs, as well as his musical and improvisatory skills. The exposition starts around the middle tonic, Sa, moves slowly into the low octave, gradually works its way up to the middle and high octaves, and then finally returns to middle Sa. Thus the raga is delineated in the three main octaves.

The *alap* has no text and is therefore the ideal medium for expressing and manifesting the salient features of a raga. One way of performing vocal *alap* is to use abstract syllables such as *te, re, na, ta, nom, tom*. This is referred to as *nom-tom*. [...] An instrumental performance may also commence with an elaborate *alap* to develop the raga. On the CD recordings, both Hariprasad Chaurasia and Buddhadev DasGupta present a condensed version of the *alap* before they play and elaborate the composition with *tabla* accompaniment.²⁸ [...]

Yaman

Since Mughal times, Kalyan (today usually referred to as Yaman) has been regarded as one of the grandest and most fundamental ragas in Hindustani music. It is also one of the first ragas which is taught to students, as musicians believe that a thorough knowledge of Yaman creates a foundation for understanding many other ragas. Yet Kalyan is not an ancient raga. It is first mentioned in music literature of the late 16th century, by which time it had emerged as a very popular raga.²⁹ According to Ventakamakhin (1620), Kalyan was a favourite melody of the Arabs, and Pundarika included Yaman among his 'Persian' ragas.³⁰

Kalyan is described by Meshakarna (1570) as a "lord in white garments and pearl necklace on a splendid lion-throne, under a royal umbrella, fanned with a whisk, chewing betel." Later authors also describe him as a brave, noble-minded hero. In *ragamala* paintings Kalyan does not seem to represent a stereotyped iconographical theme (plate 21).³¹

In today's Yaman, both Sa and Pa are frequently omitted in ascent. Judging from old compositions and recordings, however, this rule was not adhered to in the past.³² The ascent may begin on low Ni or low Dha. Ga and Ni are the sonant-consonant pair, while Pa and Sa are frequently sustained and function as final notes.

When natural Ma is occasionally added in a concluding figure leading to Sa, the raga is known as Yaman kalyan. In other respects, today's Yaman kalyan is so similar to Yaman that many musicians do not recognise it as an independent raga.³³

Time: Early night, 9 - 12.

Ascent-descent

$\dot{N} \dot{R} G \bar{M} D N \dot{S} \quad \dot{N} \dot{R} G \bar{M} P D N \dot{S} , \dot{S} N D P \bar{M} G R S$

or

Melodic outline

$S \quad \overset{NRDS}{\dot{N}} , \dot{D} \dot{N} \overset{G}{\dot{R}} \overset{\prime}{G} - R S , \dot{N} \overset{G}{\dot{R}} \overset{M}{\dot{G}} \bar{M} P - \bar{M} \backslash G , G \bar{M} D N - \dot{D} P ,$

$\bar{M} D N \dot{S} , D N \overset{G}{\dot{R}} \overset{\prime}{G} - \dot{R} \dot{S} , \dot{R} N \dot{S} N - D P , D P - \bar{M} \backslash G , \bar{M} R G$

$- R S , \dot{N} \dot{R} G \bar{M} P \backslash R \overset{\prime}{G} - R S$

Performance by Shruti Sadolika Katkar

N^G R^M G^D M^N D N — D , M[~] D[~] N[~] S[~] — N[^] D[~] D[~] N

D[∨] P[^] M[^] G — R[~] G[~] M^{DP} M[~] M[~] G R — , N^D G R G — R S —

Composition follow in fast *tintal* (16 counts) 3:39

Song text

एरी आली पिया बिन
 सखी कल न परत मोहे
 घडी पल छिन दिन ।
 सखी जब तेँ पिया परदेस गवन कीनो
 रतिया कटत मोरी तारे गिन गिन ॥

Hey friend, without my lover
 I don't find peace
 At any moment of the day;
 Since my lover went away
 I spend my nights counting the stars.

In this famous composition we again encounter the theme of *viraha*, love-in-separation.