



Concept of Gamaka- in retrospect

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Abstract

Gamaka is an inseparable element of raga, which gives colour and life to Indian Music. It is in Carnatic Music that the concept developed with divisions and sub divisions, based on the lakshanagrantas. The panchadasa gamakas explained in the medieval work, Sangita Ratnakara have been explored by later musicologists and scholars to that extent that now an interested person can identify each one of the gamakas, with examples given by them. The raga delineation is perfect only when the admissible gamakas are embedded in it. This article tries to explore the meaning of the concept, its historical aspects and the dignitaries who worked on it from ancient time onwards. It should be brought to the attention of aspirants, connoisseurs and performers that the concept has such an antiquity which took years of experimentation and interpretation to reach the present status. The interpretation and meaning given to panchadasa gamakas by the modern musicologists such as Subbarama Dikshitar and Smt Vidya Shankar who reworked on the explanations given in Sangita Sampradaya Pradarsani need to be propagated and recognised through various ways. Eventhough this article doesnot go deep in defining each gamaka as explained by these scholars, it exposes the major contributions attributed to each of them and also illumines the stream of ancient writers who dealt with the topic. The precursors of gamaka such as alankaras, the similarities found, the different ways of samavedic chanting which have resemblance with the later gamakas are dealt with in this study

Keywords- Gamaka, svara, raga, lakshanagranta, concept

Gamaka- meaning and definitions

Changing the plain character of svaras in various ways to please the human ear is the simplest definition that can be given to the term, gamaka, which is considered to be the backbone of Indian Music, especially Carnatic Music, wherein it is much developed through centuries of experimentation.. Gamaka enhances the melodic beauty inherent in a svara, serving as a connecting link between two svaras, adjacent or far off, and also by fabricating the svara passages with a fine touch of aesthetic beauty. Raga delineation is always embellished with gamakas. This doesnot mean that plain svaras are absent in our music. Infact, Indian Music, especially Carnatic Music achieves its peculiar individuality through the intermixing of gamaka svaras and plain svaras.

Matanga is the first lakshanakara to speak of the term, Gamaka. Among the different definitions given to the term, the following two are prominent and relevant.

Svarasya kampo gamaka:

Srotr chitta sukhavaha :

(sloka no: 87-89, Prakirnakadhyaya, Sangita Ratnakara)



Svasruti sthana sambhootham chayam srutyantarasrayam
Svaro yat gamayet geeto gamakosou niroopitaha:
(Sangita Samayasara of ParsvaDeva, Trivandrum edition, 1925,p- 4)

The former definition gives the idea that gamaka is a shake given to a svara , which is delightful to the listener's mind. The latter one spoken of by Parsva Deva is more explicit and says that gamakas are demonstrated when a note takes colour of srutis other than those which are its own. This definition also agrees with the verbal meaning of the word, Gamaka (the root word ' gam ' means to move or go)Venkatamakhi also defines gamaka as “ gamayateeti gamaka:”(that which goes is gamaka)

The movement of a svara from its actual degree of pitch imparts it a peculiar shade and colour, with the help of an adjacent svara , higher or lower in pitch , which will be in accordance with the melodic identity of the raga. In actual sense, ragabhava means explaining the character of svaras,in particular phrases/ svara passages . Even a single svara assumes different bhavas / shades when applied with different gamakas in different melodic contexts. Madhyama in Begada exemplifies this fact. It is sometimes/ more times heard as an oscillation from above, the typical Begada Madhyama, and at other times with either a single stress or as a steady note. These add to the emotional richness of a musical piece.

In most of the lakshana grantas ,the words like deflect and glide are used to describe gamakas and this shows that most of them had their origin in Vina play. In understanding the nature of each gamaka, the study of vocal music and Vina play proved to be complementary to each other. We come across Gayaka Sambandha Gamakas and Vadya Sambandha Gamakas in ancient treatises. Accuracy and perfection of gamakas are achieved only through guru – mukha pathantara, even though certain symbols in notation indicate correct anusvaras and the way of rendering each gamaka.

Functional role of anusvaras in the execution of gamakas

Anusvaras are svaras that are heard along with the main svaras, which give strength to the target note by standing behind and giving their impression in a fleeting or firm manner. They connect or separate two notes. In most cases anusvaras would be those present in the aroha- avaroha of the raga. There are exceptions also, like the presence of Chatusruti Rishabha in raga, Todi to deflect gandhara in certain phrases.(Eg: G,,, grR,)

Progenitors of Gamaka

Even before the emergence of lakshanagrantas, one can perceive the presence of gamakas in the samavedic hymns, being recited with vibration and elongation of syllables. Kampa in vedic recitation means elongation of the syllable to 3 matras, wherein the sound deviates from its pitch over the middle of it, which is nothing but a bend or swerve from the true pitch level. (G.H.Ranade,1966).Gharshana, Vikarshana, Udghata and Vridhi are the different ways of movement of musical notes, which resemble the different ways of executing later gamakas.

Various alankaras have been explained in Natya Sastra , like Prasannadi, Prasannantam etc. Of these, Kampita (which is a later connotation of a gamaka)is one which holds on a note for 2 matras . Premgholitam is explained as a to and fro movement between 2 alankaras, Bindu and Kampita . In Taramandraprasannam (srgmps) and Mandrataraprasannam (spmgs),there is immediate coming back and forth between lower and higher notes.

Dattila also explains Premgholitam as an Andola or swinging movement between two notes. Kampita, hasita and Rechita are produced by shaking of notes by a quiver of 3 srutis in the chest,



throat and head. Bindu holds on a note for a long period and then touching the higher note, returns to the same like a flame.

The list of gamakas in various treatises varies in number and nomenclature. Sangita Makaranda gives the number as 19, whereas Bharatabhashya of NanyaDeva describes 7 gamakas . Even the medieval works dealing with the concept gives only a vague idea of how to execute each gamaka. The peculiarity of Saranga Deva's contribution is that he has given the accurate tempo or kaalapramana of 15 gamakas. Even then, one cannot identify how they are sung/played. Chaturdandi Prakasika follows Saranga Deva in the description of 15 gamakas. Somanatha's RagaVibodha tries to display the gamakas with the help of Vina play and explains Vadanabhedas such as Pratihati, Aahata, Anuhati, Ahati etc. Ahobala's Sangita Parijata expounds 17 gamakas, the nomenclature of which differs entirely from other works. Srinivasa in Ragatatva Vibodha also explains the concept with Vina play.

Coming to the modern period, it was Sangita Sampradaya Pradarsani that gives a clear cut idea of the concept with needed exemplification. The publication of Subbarama Dikshitar's work is a landmark in the history and evolution of gamakas. The concept has reached its acme of perfection with this work. Smt Vidya Shankar, an eminent vainika of the modern period studied the topic in a vivid manner and added many modifications to the symbols representing a few gamakas. For example, she has given three varieties of Kampita with three different symbols, for which Subbarama Dikshitar has used only a wavy line. For the gamakas, Sphurita and Pratyahata, two triangles like symbols were introduced by Vidya Shankar for which Subbarama Dikshitar used only three dots. Pratyahata, even though mentioned as Sphurita in descent, which is a janta prayoga, is made clear by Vidya Shankar with an example from the beginning of aditalavarna in Kalyani. She also explains that Tiripa / nokku and Odukkal are short forms of Kampita. Apt examples for understanding the gamakas, Ravai and Khandippu are given by her. Vidya Shankar's writings on the concept with the needed examples remain as inestimable and unparalleled for the cause of Carnatic Music. Her publications "Aesthetic and scientific values in Karnatic music", "The art and science of Karnatic Music" and "Syama Sastri's Compositions" are valuable reference sources for understanding and exploring the concept.

Conclusion

The text books of modern period from Sampradaya Pradarsani onwards illustrate gamakas with examples and symbols which make it easier for the readers understand each gamaka with accuracy. The authenticity and perfection with which Subbarama Dikshitar interpreted gamakas with examples inspired the later scholars to work on it. The lack of a standardised notation system in India might be the reason for the lesser clarity in ancient lakshanagrantas.

Even if gamaka is expressed in singing /playing, knowingly or unknowingly through repeated practice, the terms mentioned in treatises with apt examples revealing the anusvaras, will help even a mediocre performer to understand the concept so much so that they may not get deviated from the intrinsic melodic individuality of ragas /ragabhava.



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