

ESSENCE OF SPIRITUALITY IN THE RAGAS OF HINDUSTANI AND CARNATIC MUSIC SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

Essence of spirituality is that concept which is liberated from physical entity, beyond the limitations of human comprehension and which is elevated to transcendental spheres or spiritual sublimity. Music is one of the best medium to attain ultimate spiritual ecstasy. This has been proved by many saints like Saint Tyagaraja, Sant Kabir etc.

Raga system is the striking aspect of Indian music. The ragas in which the notes and lyrics transport the artist and the audience's mood from appreciation of art to experiencing pure bliss and unalloyed joy of spiritualism. This is the core or hallmark of any raga. Every raga, other than its physical form, has its own essence in the internal form also that enables the artist and the audience to develop oneness with the Supreme Being.

Here the objective is to prove that Spiritual essence can be attained through rendition of ragas with bhava that helps an artist or a devotee to reach the heights of Anaaahata sangeet to some extent. Ragas have the quality of expressing the feelings to God without the necessity of language. Therefore Saramati and Gurjari Todi etc. kind of ragas are selected from both music systems to explore the spiritual essence in the ragas.

INTRODUCTION:

NADA:

The entire creation of God is based on the *Nada Brahma*. Mystics say that this creative sound is God Himself in dynamic action. God is the centre of all existence.

“Vibration was the first original aspect of Brahma, the creator. Every impulse, every action on any plane of existence has its origin in the one source.”¹

- Inayat Khan, *Sufi message*

Nada or Sound has been central to the worshipping practices and beliefs on origin of creation in majority of religions and faiths.

SOUND AND MUSIC:

In the words of Swami Prajnanananda², “Music originated from the sound (*Aahad Naada*), which is the product of ether (*akasha*): “*Shabda Akasha Sambhavah*”. Sound originates in the living beings, from the friction of air (*Prana vayu* or Vital breath) and heat energy (*agni* = will-power). It evolves first in a casual form (*Anahad*) and then in a gross forms (*Aahad*). When the gross sound emanates from the vocal chord, it is called sound, and when again it is sweet and soothing, it is called Music or Sangitam”. Music is a moulded form of sound.

Music is one of the best medium to attain ultimate spiritual ecstasy. The entire creation of God is based on the Nada Brahma. Scientifically this theory is called as BIG-BANG theory.

Raga being the most refined form of sound man has developed and applied, with the unique quality of elevating oneself from sensual level to the transcendental or spiritual planes as revealed by saints and seers throughout the history of mankind like saint Tyagaraja, Sant Kabir etc. who preached in their compositions that *NADA* the sound is ultimate.

Music and spirituality are inseparable elements. Music that we hear (*Aahad*) is a moulded (soothing) form of sound. Here music of *Aahata nada* is compared to external music or *Aahata sangeet* (*Apara vidya*) and *Anaahata Nada* i.e. Internal music is compared to *Anaahata sangeet* (*Para vidya*).

Music of India is regarded as means of divine contemplation and bliss in that Raga system is the striking aspect of Indian music system.

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SPIRITUAL ESSENCE IN THE RAGAS:

The ragas in which the notes and lyrics transport the artist and the audience's mood from appreciation of art to experiencing pure bliss and unalloyed joy of spiritualism. This is the core or hallmark of any raga. Every raga, other than its physical form, has its own essence in the internal form also that enables the artist and the audience to develop oneness with the Supreme Being.

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Here the objective is to prove that Spiritual essence can be attained through rendition of ragas with *bhava* that helps an artist or a devotee to reach the heights of spirituality to some extent. Ragas have the quality of expressing the feelings to God without the necessity of language. "*Raga is rasa and rasa is anand*", therefore, *Abhinavgupt*, (a successor to Shankaracharya from Kashmir period 950 A.D. to 1025 A.D.) has compared *rasa* with God i.e. "*Bramhanand Sahodar*".³

Ragas like "SARAMATI, ABHERI, SINDHU BHAIRAVI" etc., in Carnatic music system and "GURJARI TODI, BHAIRAVI, YAMAN" etc., in Hindustani music are selected to explore the spiritual essence in the ragas and in their *swar sangatis*. Interviews with domain experts, teachers, professors, artists regarding their Spiritual experiences on selected ragas have been conducted to support the idea. Apart from the selected ragas, general interviews and opinions regarding various ragas of both systems are also taken from renowned artists, learned scholars, professors of both Hindustani and Carnatic music systems supporting the idea.

OBSERVATIONS:

Some of the interviews taken from renowned Hindustani artists on selected ragas:

Prof. Emeritus.V.Premkumari my esteemed guide and mentor, (*Ex-Head of the Department of Music and Ex-Dean Faculty of Arts, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra.*) an eminent musician in Hindustani music opines on Raga Gurjari Todi, "Raga Gurjari Todi" if performed to perfection can create wonders and evoke different emotions like benevolence and mercy. The quality of this *raag* has an overwhelming effect of tranquility, therapeutic value and provides a meditative calmness on the artist as well as the audience.

Especially the combination of notes like $\underline{R} \underline{G} \underline{R} S$, and when the *prayog* $\underline{G} \underline{M} \underline{D}$ resting on dhaivat note, $\underline{M} \underline{D} \underline{N} \underline{D}$, $\underline{M} \underline{G}$, $\underline{R} \underline{G} \underline{R}$, S..... type of combinations make it a suitable form for worship”.

Renowned Artist in Hindustani Classical Music, Mrs. Mamtadas Gupta mentions on Raga yaman “In the exploration of this raga I feel God’s own breath diffused in it. A versatile raag, its wondrous notes without the help of the lyrics can also express myriad expressions and evoke pious vibrations creating serenity in the mind.

The swar combinations like $\underline{N} \underline{R} \underline{G} -$, $\underline{G} \underline{R} \underline{N} \underline{M} \underline{G}$, $\underline{N} \underline{R} \underline{G}$, $\underline{D} \underline{N} \underline{R} \underline{G}$, $\underline{R} \underline{N} \underline{D} \underline{S}$ gives peace to our mind”.

Interviews other than selected ragas:

Prof. Swatantra Bala Sharma, Allahabad University, Allahabad says that she is in total agreement with the view that Ragas have spiritual essence. According to her the Union of words with ‘Swar’ can give rise to the feeling of complete devotion. She experiences spirituality or feelings of devotion particularly on rendition of ragas with qualities of serenity, peace and majesty like “Bilaskhani Todi, Bhairav, Malkauns etc. In the tenderness of Bhairavi raag also she experiences feelings of spirituality. In the compositions of raga Bilawal especially of Dhrupad style she experiences the feelings of spirituality deeply. Prof. Sharma also states that feelings of spirituality are particularly aroused in rendering ragas in Madhya laya rather than in Drut laya.

Prof. Sharda Velankar, Dean, Faculty of Performing Arts, B.H.U, Varanasi. Prof. Velankar not only agrees that ragas have essence of spirituality in them, but also says that she has personally experienced this. According to her, spirituality can be experienced more in ragas with minor notes (*Komal swaras*). She supports this view with an explanation that tenderness is the quality of spirituality itself and this quality cannot be experienced by rendering *Shuddha swaras* (major notes) in contrast to *Komal swaras*.

She adds that by using different combination of *swaras* a deep feeling of compassion and devotion can be aroused. The method of singing *Rishabh swar* in Shree raga has a deeper impact. She also feels that one experiences greater spirituality in the ragas like *Bhairavi*, *Malkauns*, *Bhatiyar* etc. also the erotic in *Thumri* compositions elevates to the highest level of

love of the devotee for his Lord, thus feelings of *Nirgun Bhakti* are clearly experienced in such compositions.

Prof. Ravi Kumar Bhatnagar, Dept of Music, Dayalbagh Educational Institute, Agra, opines that ragas and essence of spirituality related in a way that rendition of different ragas evokes different feelings of spirituality. According to him the time at which the ragas are rendered arouses different feelings related to spirituality. He specifies that morning ragas like Bhairav, Bhatiyar, Lalit, Gurjari Todi etc. evoke feelings of calm, peace and serenity which are closely related to prayer. On the other hand evening ragas refers like Kalyan, Darbari, Kedar etc. arouse feelings of restlessness, inquietude leading to yearning, longing and the pain of separation.

Prof. Ravi Kumar feels that Swar-sangatis of particular ragas evoke feelings of spirituality, especially in raga ‘*Bhatiyar*’ the *swar-sangatis* like:

“D M P . . , (P) G R . . S” and in *Lalit raga* the swar-sangatis like:

“N R G M M M . . . M G” helps the subject to concentrate with complete devotion.

Interviews conducted with Carnatic artists on selected ragas:

An eminent Carnatic musician Mr. Sabari Gireesh a lecturer in S.V. College of Music and Dance, Tirupathi. “*Asthana Vidhwan of Kanchi Kaama Koti Peetham*”, states on Raga SARAMATI a janya raga derived from the 20th melakarta Natha Bhairavi “Raga Saramati has got an emotional request in it. This *raag* has complete divine tinge. It is entirely a spiritual raga with a strong emotional appeal for mercy from God. This raga is specially suitable for spiritual compositions.

The *Kritis* “*MOKSHAMU GALADA*” and “*MARI MARI NINNE MORALIDA*” are more than enough to portray the spiritual essence in *Saramati raag*

Combinations like: SRGM, PDM, NDM, GS, NDS.....

This raga has a mystical quality and leads one to introspect and paves the way for a rich and divine experience”.

Music exponent, Sri. G.Nageswara Naidu *GRADE-I vocal artist of ANNAMACHARYA PROJECT, TTD, TIRUPATHI*, conveys his opinion on Raga SINDHU BHAIRAVI.

He mentions that the sweetness simplicity and fragility of this raga makes it an ideal form for worship and also exhibits the deep desire of a devotee for the *darshan* of the lord.

Combinations like: S R G M P D N S, S N D P, P N D P, G M P D, N D P, D P M G R, G M P D P M G R, M G R S....

Interviews other than selected ragas:

“Padma Sri” Shobha raju who has been spending most of her singing career in composing devotional music, opines that much of the depth of feeling, devotion, love and surrender which we find in the *Keertanas* of *Annamacharya* is not only because of his powerful poetry but choice of the raga that allows the expression of deep devotional feelings apart from the words. *Annamacharya Sankeertanas* are therefore complemented by the ragas in which they are sung.

Example: *Adiho! Alladivo Sri Harivasamu...*famous *Keertana* of *Annamacharya* (a *vaggeyakara*) in Madhyamavati raga.

‘Sindhu bhairavi’ raga according to her is most suitable for expressing the desire for protection of the Lord and complete love, surrender in His Holy feet (“*Saranagati Tatwam*”).

Shri. Balakrishna Prasad, “Kanchi kamakotipeetha Aasthana Vidwan” Tirupati, drawing a distinction between spirituality and devotion Shri.G.Balakrishna Prasad admits that devotion may pave the path to spirituality. The style of rendering a *raga* and *swar* combinations may bring a change in the mood, *rasa* or emotion that is aroused.

Example: Raga Athaana in Carnatic music is dominant with the Veer rasa. However when the same notes are sung softly at a different rhythm it may create the emotions of devotion and love.

He opines that during a performance when the true artist sings in deep devotion and goes into a trance, this itself become a spiritual experience. Quoting a personnel experience he shared that listening to the swar combinations of raag Bhairavi and Hari Kambhoji he felt a moment of revelation which he says is indescribable.

“Sri Pullela Peri Somayajulu” “Violina Vadya Ratna”, “Head of the Department in Violin Retd, Sri Venkateswara Sangeeta Nritya Kalasala (S.V.Music and Dance college), Tirupati”.

“Sangeeta gnanamu Bhakti vina”
Sanmargamu galade? manasa! ⁴

A Kriti of Saint Tyagaraja in Dhanyasi raga, Meaning: “The knowledge of Music (Sangeeta) bereft of devotion, is valueless and cannot secure salvation”. He explains this further by saying that one can achieve the best of the earthly and the spiritual by combining the two faculties of knowledge of music with devotion. He says that many Bhaktas and Saints like the Trinities of Carnatic music were able to experience the highest regions by using devotional music as a medium. Example: the *Kriti* “*Nadopasana*” in *Begada raag*, “*Nadasudharasambilanu*” in *Aarabhi raga*, “*Nadatanumanisham*” in *Chittaranjani raag*, “*Nadaloludina brahmanandamu pondave! manasa*” in *Kalyana vasanta raag* of Saint Tyagaraja are of *kritis* replete with spiritual content.

Music and Spirituality are inextricably linked into a single whole. Music is the Universal language that leaves no heart untouched. Music impacts all human life and is present even in the mundane situations. E.g.: a mother uses a lullaby to put her child to sleep. Music is also used as a means of inspiration during times of war; it may also relieve stress in times of trouble and suffering. He feels that the opening note of the ragas in the rising tones in Bhageshree raga appears to be a call or direct address to the Lord.

Thereby I signify that Spiritual essence can be attained through rendition of ragas with *bhava* that helps an artist or a devotee to reach the heights of *Anaahata sangeet* to some extent.

Raag Saramati in Carnatic music portrays highly *Bhakti rasa*. Through the *kritis* ‘*Mokshamu galada*’ and ‘*Mari mari ninne*’ composed by saint Tyagaraja, this raag came to known to all in South. There are very rare compositions in *Saramati*. *Raag Saramati* has got an emotional request in it. This raag has complete divine tinge. There aren’t any erotic compositions in this raaga. Listening to Tyagaraja’s compositions itself gives spiritual mood and such the *raaga Saramati* and his compositions in it. This raaga is specially suitable for spiritual compositions.

Example: “*Mari Mari nine*” portrays the spiritual quality and essence in the notes of Saramati raag.

PALLAVI⁶ AADI TAALAM

; S R G M G G S ; | ; S R G , | S ; ; ; ||
MA RI MA RI NI . . NE MO RA LI | DA . . .

; S R G M P D S N D M G S | ; S R G , | S ; N S |
MA RI MA RI NI . . . NE . . . | MO RA LI . | DA NE E

; S R G M ; , P D | N S R G S ; |
MA NA SU NA DA YA | RA . . . DU

N S N D N D M D M G M D||

. ||

S S R G M P D S N D M G S | ; S R G , | S ; N S ||
MA RI MA RI NI . . . NE . . . | MO RA LI | DA NEE

S R G M P D M M P D N N S N D | P D N S R G S |
MA . . . NA . . . SU . . . NA . . . | DA . YA . RA . . . |

N S N D N D M D M G M D ||

DU

S S R G M P S N D M G | ; G S D N | S ; ; ; ||

. MA RI MA RI NI . . NE . . . | | ||

Meaning:⁷ Oh All Pervading one! Though I have been incessantly crying out for you, your mind has not been moved by mercy. What was the reason for your rushing to the rescue of *Gajendra* on the bare hearing of appeal? I have heard of the story of your having presented yourself before *Dhruva* with all love. What was the secret of your having taken the form of *Narasimha* for the sake of *Prahalada*, the son of the enemy of *Devas*? Pray, tell me of the glory of your having blessed *Sugriva* who had been guilty of having forgotten the promises he had made.

It is not possible for me to bear this neglect any more. I shall not hereafter listen (to any reason for such attitude).

Analysis: while singing the lines Mari mari nine moralida.. ni manasuna daya raada??? (Oh All Pervading one! Though I have been incessantly crying out for you, your mind has not been

moved by mercy?) the composition and the note combinations under these moving lines ; S R G M G G S ; | ; S R G , | S ; ; ; and especially while singing ni manasuna daya raada the notes: N S ; S R G M ; , P D | N S R G S ; visualizes an emotional request of a devotee and deep prayers to his Supreme being.

Therefore I feel like ragas are the earthly expression of the unheard, celestial music that resounds in the higher realms. Ragas enhances the thought content or emotion. Ultimately this article highlights the essence of spirituality present in ragas.

The spiritually elevated saints of the past recreated these divine sounds on Earth, by creating musical instruments that produce the worldly articulation of these spiritual sounds. In the words of Param Guru Huzur Maharaj, in Prem Patra part-4, 65th Bachan-

*“ALL THE MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS FOUND IN THE WORLD HAVE BEEN MADE BY YOGIS AND YOGESWARAS, AFTER LISTENING TO THE INTERNAL SOUND AND MUSIC WITHIN THEMSELVES, i.e., THE DIVINE SOUND. UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES HOW GREAT WOULD BE THE CHARM AND SWEETNESS OF THE REAL SOUND WHICH IS ABSOLUTELY SPIRITUAL, i.e., WHICH EMANATES FROM THE CURRENT OF THE SPIRIT AND HOW GREAT WOULD BE THE ECSTASY AND ABSORPTION PRODUCED BY IT WITHIN THE MIND AND THE SPIRIT”.*⁸

- ❖ Ultimately this work highlights the essence of spirituality present in ragas.
- ❖ Man can derive spiritual ecstasy through rendition of ragas performed with deep concentration and with purity of mind.
- ❖ The sublime divine themes of prayer, meditation and spiritual upliftment can be obtained through music to a considerable extent.

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