

Sankeerna Ragas – A Brief Study

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Abstract

Categorization refers to the process of classifying objects, ideas, or phenomena into distinct groups or categories based on shared characteristics or properties. It plays a crucial role in various aspects of human understanding, knowledge organization, and communication and it also serves as a tool or method to understand changes that have occurred throughout history. Scholars of Indian Classical Music have also utilized the method of classification to categorize ragas and make their understanding easier. From the ancient to medieval period, and from medieval to the modern period, there have been changes in thought, ideas, perception, and the overall outlook on how one understands raga in Hindustani Classical Music and also how each epoch categorized raga. The categorization of ragas under three heads i.e., Shuddh, Chayalag, and Sankeerna is an ancient raga classification system and of which, Sankeerna raga classification is the focus of this research paper. The aim is to understand the meaning and concept of sankeerna ragas. How are ragas mixed? What aspects should be taken care of while mixing ragas? How does one name a raga that has properties of a mixed form? How are different types of sankeerna ragas classified?



Keywords: Raga, Classification, Sankeerna, Mixture, Jod

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Introduction:

Jati was a form of *gayan* that was prevalent before the *raga gayan* system, and is considered the foundation for subsequent classifications that followed, including the *gram murchana jati* classification. It was Matang Muni, the author of *Brihaddesi* who is credited to have defined *Raga*. He in his treatise defined *Raga* as-

योऽसौ ध्वनिविशेषस्तु स्वरवर्णविभूषितः।
रंजको जनचित्तानां स च राग उदाहृतः॥¹

¹ Brihaddesi, Matang Muni, IGNCA, p. 76

From the above shloka, it is clear that the sound, decorated with *svaras* and *varnas*, which tinges on the mind of a listener, is called *Raga*. It is the powerfully pleasing quality of sound that evokes a distinctive and strong emotional experience.

Raga Classification refers to the practice of categorizing *ragas* into several heads based on similar features and nature of *ragas*. From ancient to medieval and from medieval to modern, all phases of time classified *ragas* according to the prevailing structure or norms in those times. The three categories and their subcategories into which *ragas* have been divided from the ancient period to the modern period are given below:

A) Ancient Period

- a) Gram murchana jati
- b) Ratnakar's Raga Classification
- c) *Shuddh* Chayalag Sankerna Classification

B) Medieval Period

- a) Raga-Ragini Classification
- b) Mela Raga Classification

C) Modern Period

- a) Thata Raga Classification
- b) Raganga Classification

Sankeerna Raga:

Shuddh, *chayalag* and *sankeerna raga* classification is an ancient system of classifying *Ragas* which was also in vogue during the medieval period and a specific form still exists in the modern era. When two or more than two *ragas* are mixed in such a manner that a fundamental and new form is achieved, then the raga formed is called a *Sankeerna Raga*.

यदाद्युपक्रमेणैव रागः शुद्ध उदाहृतः।
 उपक्रम्य यदा रागो मेलनं सम्मिश्रकम्॥
 पुनस्तनमार्गगमकं रागरंगं प्रकीर्तितः।
 संकीर्णरागमिश्राणां रागः संकीर्ण उच्यते।²

The above shloka is from Sangeet Makrand, a treatise by Narad. Here *Shuddh ragas* are defined

² Sangeet Makrand, Narad, p. 23-24

as the *Ragas* that follow the *shashtra*. *Shuddh Ragas* are independent in nature. *Chayalag ragas* have a resemblance to other *ragas* or as given above are a mixture of two *Ragas* and *Sankeerna ragas* are a mixture of *shuddh* and *chayalag ragas*.

संकीर्णरागत्वं नाम शुद्धछायालगमिश्रत्वेन रक्तिहेतुत्वम्³

A beautiful entity is established when *shuddh* and *sankeerna ragas* are mixed. And this new entity is called a *sankeerna raga*.

In the present-day context, we perceive *shuddh ragas* as independent *ragas i.e.* the Ten Thatas and their *Janak ragas*. *Chayalag ragas* are shadowed *ragas*. For example, shadow or shade of Raga Durga in Jaldhar Kedar, Sarang in Meghmalhar, Bhairavi in bilaskhani todi. *Sankeerna ragas* are a mixture of two or more *ragas* like ahir bhairav (kafi + Bhairav), jayant malhar (Jijavanti + Malhar), etc.

The reference of *sankeerna ragas* is found in many treatises like Sangeet Samyasaar, Sangeet Darpan, and Mankautuhal. Pt. Shubhakar in his treatise has mentioned fourteen *sankeerna ragas*. During Akbar's reign, many *sankeerna ragas* were conceived from Mishra Thata's. In Pt. Bhavabhatt's treatise, Anoop sangeet vilas, *ragas*, and their respective Bhedas are given and these bhedas indicate Raganga as the basis for their formation. Pt. Bhatkhane in kramik pustak malika described *sankeerna ragas* as a mixture of two *ragas* and this mixture should have properties parent thata of both the *ragas*. Thus, we see that from the ancient to the modern period, various scholars in their respective treatises have described and some have also analyzed the concept of *sankeerna ragas*.

It is also important to mention that in raga sangeet, the word *sankeerna* has been used to define various musical terms such as *sankeerna jati*, *sankeerna sthaya*, *sankeerna raga*, *sankeerna taal* etc. There is always a follow up when one talks about the singular state of a musical element. Every independent entity is followed by a mixed form. Various mixed jati talas can be formed by combining a tisa jati tala and a chatushra jati tala. The four gitis i.e. *shuddha*, *bhinna*, *gaudi*, and *Vesara* when combined give rise to sadharani giti. Sthayi varna, arohi varna, and avrohi varna when mixed, form *sanchari varna*. All these examples show that musical entities of some form or the other when combined give rise to a mixed form, and this mixed form holds mixed properties of all elements used. ⁴

After getting an idea of the different categories under which *ragas* are placed, one might wonder about or question the norms or rules that are followed while creating a *Sankeerna Raga*. What technical aspects should be kept in mind while performing or creating a *sankeerna raga*? Can any raga be mixed with any raga? Types of *Sankeerna Ragas*? How are *Sankeerna Ragas* named?

³ Sangeet Ratnakar, Vol.II, Sharangdeva, Edited by Pandit S. Subrahmanya Sastri, Revised by Pandit V. Krishnamacharya, Adhyar Lib., p. 133

⁴ Hindustani Sangeet Mai Shuddh-Chayalag evam Sankeerna Raga, Bharati Sharma, p. 82-83

One must have a good command over the constituent *ragas* that make up *sankeerna* raga and also be able to tactfully and effectively amalgamate constituent *ragas*. A situation of a fruitful amalgamation will be reached once there is a good grip over the constituent *ragas*.

While creating new *ragas*, a few points should be kept in mind:

a. Not only technical but also emotional aspects - Bhava or emotion is an integral part of the music. While performing a raga or creating a new raga or melody emotions cannot be compromised.⁵ Another very important aspect related to *raga mishran* is that *ragas* to be mixed should be compatible in nature. When constituent *ragas* of a *Sankeerna* raga complement each other, “Rasa Nishpatti” or “Rasa Realization” the most basic yet the most integral factor of Hindustani music is achieved with ease.

b. *Ragas* to be mixed should have the capacity to tinge the listeners' minds. Here the audience aspect comes into play. If the audience has no knowledge of the *ragas* being mixed then the amount to which they might enjoy the presentation depends on their state of mind at that given moment.

Audiences that have some knowledge or knowledge of any part of the constituent raga will respond differently. Here the curious audience might try and exercise the brain and concentrate more on the performance.

c. Some scholars are of the thought that one raga of the constituent *ragas* is always predominant or *prabal* and the other is used as an accessory or less than the predominant raga.⁶

Keeping the identity of the dominant raga intact is an important factor. Some intellectuals believe that equal weightage should be given to *ragas* that are being mixed. *Ragas* must intertwine in such a fashion that a whole new identity is formed. No one raga should overshadow or dominate the other *ragas*.

d. A carefully crafted *chalan*, which is the movement of notes to elaborate the raga, gives stability to the mixed raga. Haphazard patterns will sound forced and unplanned and will jeopardize the entire process of forming a mixed raga. Therefore, a well-structured *chalan* is also a prerequisite for a *sankeerna* raga.

Types of *Sankeerna Ragas*:

Sankeerna Ragas can be broadly classified into the given categories:

a. In the first category, we take those *ragas* in which flashes of many *ragas* can be traced. Svarawali or Raganga of two or more *ragas* knotted in such a fashion that a whole new raga is created. Bahaduri Todi is one such raga where swarawalis of Raga asawari, Raga Desi, flashes of

⁵ Raga Vigyaan Vol 5, Pt Vinayakrao Patwardhan, p. 15

⁶ Raga Vigyaan Vol 5, Pt Vinayakrao Patwardhan, p. 11-12

raga bilaskhani todi are mixed with the prominent Todi phrase i.e. r g r S. Another raga, raga khat⁷ as explained by Pt. Vinayakrao Patvardhan in Raga Vigyan volume 5, is combination of six *ragas*, which are raga Suha, raga Kangada, raga Sarang, raga Desi, raga Gandhari and raga Sughrui. As we see that raga Khat is composed of various *ragas*, making it a highly intricate composition that demands an extensive understanding of each individual raga involved.

b. The second category is the *Jod Ragas* also called Compound *Ragas*. Bhairav Bahar, Basant Bahar, Lalit Bhatiyar, and Hindol Bahar are some examples of *Jod Raga*. There are two points of view regarding the dominance of constituent *ragas* in a *Jod Raga*. Some scholars stress the predominance of one raga in compound Raga and others believe that both *ragas* are equally significant.

c. The third category is a sub-division of *Jod Raga*. Here one raga occupies a place in the *poorvanga* and one in the *uttaranga*. Ahir Bhairav is a classic example of this category, where Bhairav dominates the *poorvanga* and Kafi holds the *uttaranga*. Nat Bhairav is another example where nat anga beautifies the *poorvanga* and bhairav anga the *uttaranga*.

When it comes to the naming of a *Sankeerna Raga*, it is preferred that *ragas* be named after or around the names of the constituent *ragas*. Doing so reduces the risk of misinterpretation. Most of the *Sankeerna Ragas* of the Malhar clan, Bhairav, Bahar, and Kanada families can easily be traced because of their nomenclature. *Jod ragas* are perfect examples of good nomenclature.

Conclusion:

The concept of mixing *ragas* within the framework of rules laid down by eminent scholars is an interesting and aesthetically bound thought. A proper study of the *ragas*, keeping in mind the norms that are to be followed while creating a *sankeerna raga* is a prerequisite. We see that *ragas* to be mixed must qualify certain parameters. They must complement each other, and must fuse in such a fashion that “*rasa nishpatti*” is easily achieved by an initiated listener. To summarize, having a comprehensive understanding of basic *ragas* serves as a strong base for comprehending and performing intricate *ragas*. It enables musicians to cultivate a deep comprehension of the melodic structures, improvisation methods, and tonal connections that are vital for achieving expertise in Indian classical music. Therefore, we see that the concept of *Sankeerna ragas* which was prevalent in some form or the other since the ancient period has a deep influence on Hindustani Classical Music. And as our music is the manifestation of imagination and aesthetic thought, this influence will continue to bear fruits for future generations to come.

⁷ Raga Vigyaan Vol 5, Pt Vinayakrao Patwardhan, p. 48-49

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