

Appreciating Hindustani Music
Dr.Lakshmi Sreeram
Department of Humanities and Social Sciences
Indian Institute of Technology, Madras
Lecture 18
Classification of Ragas- Raga Ragini System

[Music].

That was a composition in Raag Yaman and in Teen Taal. And this composition is really part of the compilation called Kramik Pustakmala, a celebrated series of books by Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande. Now, this composition addresses Lord Ganesha right. He Ganaraja maharaja Gajanana vidya Jagadeesha. The composition addresses Lord Ganesha as the lord of Vidya, that is learning and of the world.

And then in the next part of the song, if you had noticed it says Gaon bajaoon raga aru raagini putra vadhoo sana chatteesa. So, here this raga-ragini, the meaning of the text is that I will sing of course, with his grace Raga and Ragini and their sons and the daughters-in-law. So, this is very raga-ragini Paddhati. Raga-ragini system of classification was very is found in many of the medieval texts on of music, there is raga are male and raginis are female. So, basically families of raga and raginis were created.

So, every head of the family would be the raga and he would, the raga would have 5 or 6 raginis and then there would be sons and maybe daughters-in-law, even maids and attendants. So, this is a very quaint to a to the modern mind at least it is very it is a very quaint classification system that, but that was very very you know widely prevalent in the medieval text. It held its ground from nearly 15-16 century to the 19th century.

As a classification system the raga-ragini Paddhati is quite obsolete nobody uses it. It is not only of historical interest, but also it is interest, it is of significance. It is significant because the world of raga-ragini is also the world of ragas who are you know given personalities literally, iconographic personalities. it is a world where ragas were supposed to have a devata maya swarupa, that is a deific, a transcendent form.

They have melodic form of course, in terms of the swaras and the various rules grammar, but there was also devata maya that is a transcendent form and it is also raga-ragini world is also the world of ragamala paintings, these paintings seek to depict ragas and raginis. So, being such a fascinating period at that time and such fascinating ideas, raga-ragini cannot be dismissed and it is it is well worth a look and which is what we will do in this lesson. So, the first text to refer to male and female ragas of Hindustani music is, the late 16th or early 17th century by Pundarika Vittala, Ragamala and Nartana Nirnaya. These are two texts important texts. They describe 6 ragas emanating from the 5 faces of Shiva. Lord Shiva is supposed to have 5 faces and the 6th raga emanates from the face of his consort Girija. And then each of these ragas has 5 or 6 as I said depending there are way different differing numbers in the various texts. So there is a great deal of difference amongst in the various texts about this raga-ragini system

beginning from the number of course, how many ragas are there, how many raginis are there whether a raga is a raga or a ragini and a ragini is associated with which raga and so on. Whether they have sons, some texts talk about sons, some text talk about daughters-in-law as well and so on.

So, there is great divergence here and here you have one such schema of raga-ragini. So, you know interestingly the the main ragas were associated with the 6 season. So, you have 6 ragas in Indian, Sanskrit traditions we speak about Shad Ritu- right, 6 seasons. And we have 6 ragas corresponding to each of the seasons. So, as a classification system it exercised considerable hold on the writers of the 16th to 19th centuries and but we also find mela system. The mela Paddhati also promulgated simultaneously, these texts talk about raga-ragini [Sanskrit Word] and also of melas. But you know the problem is it is hard to discern any principle on the basis of which this raga-ragini classification was undertaken, why is something a raga why is a raga a raga not a ragini, why is a particular ragini a concert of one raga not another raga and so on. So, as I said, today the system is not used at all and even the word ragini is very rarely used in music, ragini is actually a very very popular name for girls. But ragini is in a rarely prefixed to any raga. So, even though we have (Refer Time: 12:20) Bhairavi, very popular raga we still talk about Raag Bhairavi, though you know tradition it is ragini Ragini Bhairavi again you have Ragini Gauri and so on.

But today we only speak of ragas. So, even the word ragini is obsolete. But as I said the raga ragini system is a significant chapter in the evolution of this music because it also that world also includes enchanting ideas and practices, such as the devata maya rupa of the raga or the deified form of ragas.

Raga dhyana sloka that is verses, that are meant to meditate upon the form of the raga and ragamala paintings. Now, devata maya rupa that is the the transcendent, or the deific form of the raga. It is a term that is first found in Ragavibodha of Somanatha which I have referred to earlier, this is the early 17th century. So, in this text he first describes ragas in terms of their melodic features.

But then after that he also says that those are the naadamayarupa, the sound form but beyond that there is also the devatamaya or the the deific or the form of God. So, ragas are on power with Gods in that sense, there is its ragas are conceived as having a divine form who might graze, the ragas might graze a performer if when you are performing we do look to the grace of raga.

So, in that sense even today the idea that raga is not something that you can evoke at your whim, but it is always, there is always the element of uncertainty and we speak of it as a grace of the Raga Devata whether or not he or she wants to manifest themselves. So, that idea continues in practice today and this devata maya rupa of various ragas are described in these texts.

And they include many features such as the complexion or the colour of the God . So, it could be white or it could be red and the dress or the costume the kind of weapons that they hold and other details. And you have to contemplate upon this form in order to perform the raga. And you

have raga dhyana shlokas which are aids to these this contemplation.

So, you have raga-ragini, raga-ragini, and in this world also we have the idea of the devata maya rupa of ragas, that is the deified form or you can say transcendent form of ragas; that they are transcend the mere sound aspect of the raga. And these devata maya rupa they have iconography attributed to them and to contemplate on them you have raga dhyana shlokas. Shloka is a verse verse form really and raga dhyana that is you have to meditate upon the raga.

So, dhyana shlokas are found in other areas as well, for instance sculpture notably before the sculptor actually undertakes the work of sculpting a God's figure he or she supposed to meditate upon the form. And for that you have dhyana shlokas, even before say reciting any major hymn right like Vishnu Sahasranama or Lalitha Sahasranama you have dhyana shlokas in which you are supposed to meditate upon the form of that God or Goddess and then you start the actual Sahasranama.

So, raga dhyana shloka, you have Bhairava for instance is an ancient and very important argument today we have Bhairav and then the verse on Bhairav in Sangeetha Darpana of Chatura Damodara there is again in 1600 it runs thus. hm Gangadhara, who bears the Ganga, the crescent moon and the third eye on the forehead. One whose body is decorated by snakes and hide of the elephant; one whose hands shine with the trident; one who wears the bodies of human beings; whose complexion is white - He is Bhairava, the ancient Raga. So, as a verse the musician is supposed to meditate upon it as a dhyana shloka and then perform may be evoke the grace of the raga. Another raga dhyana shloka is of Hindola which is another ancient and important raga. Hindola is a masculine it is a raga . He is gaura in complexion, that is he is fair; dressed in yellow clothes, sporting on a swing in a flower-garden, surrounded by women and wears a crown, wristlets and strings of pearls; he moves about in the mornings of the spring season. And this raga is born of the Vamadeva face of lord Shiva. So, Hindola is associated with spring season and that is also included in the raga dhyana shloka. Now, ragamala painting is another fascinating chapter in this musical tradition ragamala. These are paintings mostly miniatures and we have various schools of this, but ragamala paintings typically will carry- they all depict a raga or a ragini.

And so, you will have a Ragini Todi in which typically there is a woman singing alone in a you know forest with a veena in hand and maybe a deer with her. So, that is a typical imagery for Ragini Todi. Hindol or something as was described it could be a male sitting on a swing, surrounded in spring surrounded by maybe with his consort and surrounded by attendants and so on.

So, ragamala paintings depict ragas and raginis and they have inscribed upon them the raga dhyana shloka of that particular raga that they are depicting. So as i said, raga Ragini as a system of classification, is as I said not relevant anymore, but these ideas of raga dhyana of raga having a personality of, raga having a transcendent form which is really not at the back end command of even the most accomplished musician with a raga you know half has to bestow grace and descend.

You know these ideas that really belong to the same world as raga ragini and of course, we

have this beautiful world of ragamala paintings. So, all these other aspects of that world of raga-ragini make it hard for us to dismiss raga-ragini. So, though as a classification system raga-ragan Paddhati is not relevant, but still its world has also given us some enduring ideas that continue to inform today's performance world of Hindustani music.