

**Appreciating Hindustani Music**  
**Dr.Lakshmi Sreeram**  
**Department of Humanities and Social Sciences**  
**Indian Institute of Technology, Madras**

**Lecture 42**  
**Dhrupad - Aalaap**

The role of aalaap in Dhrupad, as we all know that in the Dhrupad genre aalaap is an integral part of Dhrupad. So, when we talk about Dhrupad, it is aalaap and Dhrupad taken together, they are clubbed together. But aalaap, I always say, is an independent melodic and musical system, because all that we explore in music from the beginning to the end encircles and is pivoted around aalaap.

So, the term aalaap, the ancient references come from the alapti we have the term aalapti, aalaap, alapanam, according to the need of the raga, have all been described in the ancient texts. So, when we talk about aalaap, aalaap is introducing the raga, that is gradually unfolding and exploring the raga with all the nuances. The nuances that you highlight, you manifest and also the subtle nuances that are hidden, they are also explored with all the finesse.

So, aalaap forms the major part of the art of improvisation. It is very important to understand what improvisation is and that is possible through the aalaap. The ancient texts also talk about Gaan and Gaan is of two types - the Anibaddha and the Nibaddha. So, Anibaddha Gaan is alapti basically and this could be in rhythm or without rhythm, satal and atal - both are possible improvisation.

So, alapti when we say there are two types of alapti, the ragaalapti is exploring the raga, the rhythm is the tala is not important there is of course, the rhythm the laya, but taal is not important in ragaalapti. When we talk about the rupakaalapti, it is improvising the song text. After the song is sung, then again there is the element of improvisation.

So, what happens in aalaap? We have the melodic expansion and then the rhythmic intensification, both have very important roles in aalaap. In Dhrupad aalaap, we use syllables because in any music the tonal and the syllabic content is very important, the swaraathmak and the varnaatmak both are important and both lead to the nadaatmak the the realisation of the absolute nada.

So, sur and laya, the sur and the varna also the syllabic content ah is very important when we sing the aalaap. And in the Dhrupad tradition these are the sacred syllables, Hari Om Narayana Tarana Taarana Anantha Hari Om, these syllables are broken up into many other syllables that follow. So, like Hari becomes Ri, Narayan becomes Na, ra Na, Om becomes noom and so on.

So, aalaap is a language of music in itself. It is this language of the sound, is the language of the syllables how we combine the sound and the syllables. And here we get all the possibilities that go into shaping the different styles of singing also. It is through this Varna and Nada that you get all the different shapes, in the aalaap rendering.

So, I will be illustrating very briefly what happens in Dhrupad aalaap. It starts very slowly, that is called aalaap, then you have the second stage where there is a pulse, you can feel the regular pulse that is the jor. So, the speed is almost doubled, the laya is doubled and then you have rapid pulsations the jhala that follows at the end.

So, alaap, jor, jhala all put together is also the system of alaap and that makes the Dhrupad genre so beautiful because you are exploring the raga completely, with all the nuances. I will just spell out some interesting observations about the alaap. Dhrupad aalaap assiduously explores the unexplored in unfolding the raga and establishes the musical autonomy of sound and rhythm, to the deepest subtlest and most profound realm of experiencing music. Dhrupad aalaap is an unending journey into the mysteries of hidden sounds, sensuous, wondrous, unpredictable, every emotion unleashed, churning the yearnings of life and finally, experiencing tranquillity and pure joy in exuding Shanta Rasa. I will sing a brief alaap in Raag Bihag, and since aalaap is a huge canvas it is not just what we sing without taal. Because after you sing the Bandish with Dhrupad, we improvise it - that is the Roopkalapti. So, when I sing Raag Bihag there will be a short composition and some improvisation that I will be presenting in the illustration. [Music]. In the Dagar tradition we begin the aalaap with an akar, that establishes the tonic followed by the dagar - the path of the raga and then many born nuances and gamakas that follow in the process of unfolding the raga. [Music]. I am just giving you the essence. It is not possible to unfold the entire raga. [Music].