
Regulation of Laya on Rāga: Aesthetical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

The music-based research paper aims at unveiling 'laya' as the subtlest and the most abstract imperishable energy that governs all the happenings in the music. This formless all-pervading omnipotent energy is vibrant always independently, flowing in the uniform fashion continuously. However when it combines with the pañcabhūta-s, it 'manifests' in the world in different 'tangible forms' such as nāda, music, life-forms, regulation of all pañcabhūta-s, regulation of the cosmic order, etc. Many thinkers, writers and music-scholars have discussed about laya in length so far as the 'time-interval', 'regulated time' and 'supportive medium in music'. Nevertheless the research paper - concerned for the students, devotees, professionals, connoisseurs and audience of Indian art music (khayāl gāyana specifically) - explores laya conceptually, practically and aesthetically as the 'determinant imperishable energy' rather than as the 'regulated time'; and examines its emotional and intellectual properties through its regulation on rāga, its unique character (rāga-tatva), distinctive nature (rāga-prakriti) and specific temperament (rāga-bhāva) in khayāl gāyana. It thereby helps the concerned community in better aesthetic understanding and appreciation of rāga and khayāl gāyana through the deeper cognizance of laya.

KEYWORDS

laya, rāga-tatva, rāga-prakriti, rāga-bhāva, khayāl-gāyana

[As enumerated by the Publishers of Central Chinmaya Mission Trust (2015), the Devanāgarī characters are transliterated in the English according to the scheme adopted by the International Congress of Orientalists at Athens in 1912, whose tabular figure-1 is given at the appendix.]

Objectives of the Research Article

- Seeking laya as the determinant energy rather than the regulated time;
- Comprehending emotional and intellectual properties of laya in the rāga in khayāl gāyana;
- Understanding the regulation of laya on rāga-tatva (rāga's character), rāga-prakriti (rāga's nature), and rāga-bhāva (rāga's temperament).
- Helping the community of students, devotees, professionals, connoisseurs and audience of khayāl gāyana in better aesthetic understanding and appreciation of rāga and art-music-form through the deeper cognizance of laya.

Old Concepts in New Lenses - Introduction to Laya and Rāga

Indian music is said to be originated from Lord Śiva through Sāmavedā, according to many theories. Since then, the music is constantly changing in its form with time viz. sāmāgāna, jāti gāyana, mārgī-desī saṁgīta, prabandha gāyana, dhruvāda and khayāl gāyana. Also, it is so deep that its concepts are constantly researchable and subject to further inquiries in every century and era with newer ideas, thoughts and views. Prior to the discussion on the relationship between laya and rāga are these terms thus explained and re-interpreted in the following with different lenses at the onset prefatorily -

Laya

A word in the Saṁskṛita can acquire different meanings in the different contexts, so is the term 'laya' too. "Laya is born from the [Saṁskṛita] root Lī. Lī means to cling, stick to, adhere, recline on, settle on, lie, disappear, dissolve".¹ These meanings should not be generalized for all the contexts universally. Sometimes it happens such that a word in the Saṁskṛita (like 'aśva-gaṁdha') may differ in its literal meaning (smell of the horse) from its conventional usage (a medicinal herb). So the meaning of laya also differs from the perspective of music. Laya is defined by different thinkers differently in the context of music, as in the following.

Amarasīma in Amarakośa (6th century AD) defines laya as given below:

"tālaḥ kāla kriyāmānām layaḥ sāmyamathāstriyām |" (Nāṭyavargaḥ 1.7.9.2.3)²
[Uniformity in the time and action of tāla is 'laya'.]

Śārṅgadeva in Tālādhyāya, Saṁgīta Ratnākara (13th century AD) defines laya as -

"kriyānantara viśrāntirīlayaḥ |" (Tālādhyāya, śloka 44).³
[The intervals between the actions make 'laya'.]

The doyen of Agara Gharana Pt. Babanarāo Haladaṅkara discusses of "Vikāsa Laya" or "Developmental Rhythm" - the important entity in contributing for Aesthetics of Khayāl gāyana, "When a lotus which closes at night, gradually opens in the morning, there is an imperceptible and subtle rhythm which governs this natural process. Let us call this developmental rhythm... Similarly, this developmental rhythm in khayāl music is the abstract laya at a high aesthetic level which remains imperceptible to most of the listeners due to its very own abstract nature".⁴

Other modern thinkers like Prof. S. K. Saxena say, "Laya is the musical duration as actively regulated for the sake of effect or expression, or for explicating some artistic form".⁵

Music is the interplay of svara and laya. In the field of music (especially in khayāl gāyana), many research scholars, writers and musicologists have delved in the aesthetics of such practical aspects as rāga, tāla, sāth, saṁgata, baṁdiś, gharānā etc. However, least aesthetical notice is taken so far of laya especially as the 'determinant energy' and 'source of music'; whereas it is more discussed in length as the 'time-interval', 'regulated time' and 'supportive medium in music' by many thinkers and writers. However it should be noted that the man gives the confined concrete spiral forms of cyclic time and tāla, to the free abstract linear laya, to understand the latter better. But this does not

imply that laya is spiral in nature, it neither implies the regulated man-made time. On its contrary, laya is the 'energy' which propagates in linear fashion with no beginning and no terminal points absolutely.

All happenings in the universe are governed by the subtlest and most abstract energy, 'laya'. Laya as the ungraspable imperishable energy is vibrant always independently. It becomes sought to us only when it combines with the pañcabhūta-s (physical elements). Then, it 'manifests' in the world in different 'tangible forms' such as nāda (pure sound), music (āhata nāda or musical / melodic pure sound), life-forms (as in heartbeat), regulation of all pañcabhūta-s (as in cycle of seasons, swash and backwash of sea-waves), regulation of the cosmic order (as in rotation and revolutions of planets around the sun), etc.

From the scientific point-of-view, the ubiquitous energy of laya causes the uniform and continuous vibrations to occur in all the states of matter (including atoms and molecules / cells and tissues); it thereby results in dynamicity and brings life to everything, it so produces nāda, śruti and svara, or music altogether too. From the aesthetical point-of-view in music (in khayāl gāyana particularly), the aesthetic intonation of every svara in the making of the rāga, its prakriti and bhāva; and the well-structured baṁdiś weaved in aesthetic integration of śabda, rāga, ṭhekā, tāla and bhāva - are essentially regulated as well as treated by the 'determinant laya' of svara, rāga, bhāva, ṭhekā and tāla cohesively. Therefore, it is neither the supportive medium of music nor the time interval / regulated time, but it is the source of music, nature and everything in the cosmos.

'Laya can be thus largely thought as the all-pervading imperishable determinant energy flowing in the uniform fashion continuously.'

Rāga

Indian music in its primitive forms comprised of songs (like jāti) based on tunes governed by certain norms and characteristics, which can be found in Sage Bharata's Nāṭyaśāstra (200 BC) in his explanation of jāti gāyana and its ten characteristic features. However the concept of rāga was much later established, coined, introduced and conceptualised for the first time by Sage Mātanga in his Brihaddeśī, through whom the 'rāga-saṁgīta' is prevalent for several aeons, and has become the synonym of Indian music globally. He defines it as -

"svara varṇa viśeṣeṇa dhvanibhedena vā punaḥ
rañjyate yena yaḥ kaścit sa rāgaḥ sammataḥ satām ||" (śloka 280)⁶

[That, which is composed of variant combinations of musical notes in unique, stationary, ascending, descending, and moving values - in the diverse melodic sounds - to please and delight the people and color their hearts - is Rāga.]

Mahārāṇa Kumbhā (15th century AD) further elaborates its definition in Saṁgīta Rāja as given in Pāṭhyaratnakośa III Parikṣāṇa -

"vicitra varṇālaṁkāro viśeṣe (ṣo) yo dhvaneriha |
grahādi svarasaṁdarbho rañjako rāga ucyate ||" (p. 24)⁷

[The composition of unique melodic embellishments adorned on the contextual basis of Graha and other svara-s, to please and delight the people - is Rāga.]

However for a rāga to be capable of pleasing and delighting us, there should be a faculty of its own specific musical character, nature and temperament that makes it able to share its deepest emotions with us, thereby draw everyone of us towards itself. The exponent of Agarr Gāyaki Kaikiṇī explains, "A rāga is the arrangement of notes into a defined form. It is like a personality, having likes and dislikes, salient characteristics and features... Musicianship lies in the ability to capture and maintain the essential spirit of the rāga while creatively varying the approach to avoid monotony".⁸

Also, a rāga with same or different scales can be differentiated based on - not only the unique melodic combinations of notes and their embellishments - but also based on the unique aesthetic touch and pronunciation of every inclusive svara in the rāga which speak of its character. Thus, in much deeper sense, rāga can be described today as follows -

'Rāga in Indian music refers to the creative revelation of the specific musical character, its temperament and nature through the unity of diverse syntactical melodies and motifs adorned and produced with apt aesthetic touch and pronunciation of every inclusive svara.'

On Laya and Rāga-Prakriti

In Indian music, every rāga has independent aesthetic status because of the distinct character (tatva), nature (prakriti) and temperament (bhāva) involved in itself. Rāgas are like the different streams of water-bodies such as brooklets and rivers joining the sea in 'oneness'. Though the characteristic temperament or rāga-bhāva involved in every rāga is different, all finally lead to the evocation of bhakti-bhāva and form one music, rāga-saṁgīta in India.

Musicianship lives in understanding these concepts and merging them with one's own personal character, emotions and feelings in 'aesthetic balance', 'sensitivity', 'sensibility' and 'harmony' with each other. The rāga-prakriti can be classified broadly into 'gaṁbhīra prakriti', 'ardha-gaṁbhīra prakriti' and 'caṁcala prakriti'.

Rāga-s of Gaṁbhīra Prakriti

In the rāga-s of gaṁbhīra prakriti as in rāgas Darabārī Kānaḍā, Bhairava, Miyān ki Toḍī, etc., following salient features can be observed -

- The distribution of the energy of laya in the rāga-s occurs in relatively slower fashion;
- The rāga-s are more voluminous, royal and majestic in their character;
- Heavy embellishments like gamaka, āṁdolana, mīmḍa, ghasīṭa and pukāra are employed to adorn the rāga's character;
- The constituents like ālapa / nom-tom, bol-bāṁta (more than bol-layakārī) in khayāl gāyana are rendered in relatively slower pace that aid in producing vibrant grandeur colors of the rāga.

Rāga Darabārī Kānaḍā. In the pūrvārdha (fore-sect) of the rāga Darabārī Kānaḍā of majestic grandeur character, the ārohī āṁdolana of 'lower' komala gāṁdhāra (which is often called 'utarā huā komala gāṁdhāra' in the Hīṁdī) with the apt aesthetic touch of śuddha rishabha and other microtones or śruti-s that come along the way from śuddha rishabha to komala gāṁdhāra marks the characteristic feature of the rāga. In its uttarārdha (aft-sect), the avarohī āṁdolana of 'higher' komala dhaivata (which is called 'chaḍhā huā komala dhaivata') with the proper aesthetic touch of śuddha niṣada and śruti-s that come along the way from śuddha niṣada to komala dhaivata denote another important characteristic feature of the rāga.

The distribution of the energy of laya occurs in slow pace in this rāga in order to maintain its 'dignity' (which is often called 'bojha' in the Hīṁdī) and treat it accordingly. Here, slow pace does 'not' mean that every svara assumes longer pronunciation individually. It should be noted that a svara can be pronounced musically in diverse ways attune with different musical contexts, which mean different melodic phrases and motifs within a rāga. This is why every svara embodies different laya in such different contexts. Thus accordingly, the melodic phrases also carry certain laya in them, which need to be produced in apt aesthetic proportions through whose flow, other aesthetically melodic patterns are woven and united to form one whole called 'rāga'. In Darabārī Kānaḍā, every āṁdolana, gamaka, mīmṇḍa (viz. mīmṇḍa from āṁdolita gāṁdhāra to āṁdolita dhaivata) and every melodic phrase has its own emotion, expression and laya in respect of its energy-flow, uniformity, continuousness, imperishability, etc. which not only contribute to the science or syntax of the rāga, but contribute more in enhancing its aesthetic value and conveying its emotions or rāga-bhāva (viz. eliciting bhakti bhāva through karuṇa and viraha śrīṅgāra bhāva). However, laya spreads itself in the rāga in little slower pace relatively to express the rāga's character efficiently. This is why it is ideal to sing those elements with deployment of specific embellishments in the khayāl, that suit the character of the rāga. For instance, in this rāga, singing ālāpa / nom-tom, bol-baṁṭa and gamaka-based tāna in relatively slower vilāmbita / druta ṭhekā / tāla with heavy embellishments like gamaka, āṁdolana, mīmṇḍa, ghasiṭa, pukāra, are 'more appropriate and ideal' than singing layakāri, tāna of lightning speed, etc. in faster vilāmbita / ati-druta ṭhekā / tāla with lighter embellishments like khaṭkā, murkī, firat, etc.

'Laya therefore plays crucial role in the making of music; construction of the rāga; expression of emotions and temperament; and maintaining the dignity of the rāga, its character and nature.'

Rāga-s of Caṁcala Prakriti

In the rāga-s of caṁcala prakriti as in rāgas Alhaiyā Bilāvala, Aḍānā, Sohīnī, etc., following salient features can be observed -

- The distribution of the energy of laya in the rāga-s occurs relatively in faster fashion;
- The rāga-s are more agile and light in their character;
- Lighter embellishments like bahalāvā, khaṭkā, murkī, firat, etc. are employed to adorn the rāga's character;
- The constituents like ālāpa / nom-tom, different kinds of layakāri, tāna, etc. in khayāl gāyana are rendered in relatively faster pace that aid in the agile flow of the rāga.

Rāga Alhaiyā Bilāvala. This rāga, being a rāgāṅga rāga, is multi-dimensional though it is a vakra rāga. However, its characteristic gait is agile with madhura-śrngāra bhāva (ultimately leading to bhakti bhāva), therefore the distribution of the energy of laya occurs in faster pace. Since the mīmḍa, ghasīṭa, gamaka, and āṁdolana such heavy embellishments suit the rāgas with majestic character, they do not suit the rāgas with completely agile character like Alhaiyā Bilāvala. Thus, the lighter embellishments like bahalāvā, khaākā, murkī, firat, etc., with more of fast-paced ālāpa, layakārī and tāna - which accelerate the distribution of the energy of laya - are deployed in the rāgas of caṁcala prakriti. So they are rendered in relatively faster vilāmbita / druta ṭhekā / tāla.

One of the reasons for rāga Alhaiyā Bilāvala to be so caṁcala in its prakriti or agile could be because: the slower we render some of the melodic phrases and motifs of this rāga, the more it could create a platform for confusions with the homoscalar rāga-s like Gauḍa Malhāra, Bihāga, Devagiri Bilāvala, etc. Also, another reason is definitely the 'uniqueness' of every rāga and its character that makes its gait, pronunciation and touch of every svāra 'specifically unique'. For instance, the phrase like Ṇ S R G P M G is sung in both Gauḍa Malhāra and Alhaiyā Bilāvala, however the gait of these svāra-s and each of their pronunciation and touch in the phrase differ. Similarly, the more we stretch śuddha niṣada in Alhaiyā Bilāvala, it may sound like śuddha niṣada of Bihāga portraying serious sombre property. Thus, in the former rāga, it should be rendered short and crisp along-with the touch of śuddha dhaivata - this marks it distinct from Bihāga in accordance to the rāga's temperament. So, it can be said that,

'Laya of every svāra, and its emotional and intellectual properties differ with different musical contexts.'

Rāga-s of Ardha-Gāmbhāra Prakriti

In the rāga-s of ardha-gāmbhāra prakriti, which are of ardha-caṁcala prakriti also, as in rāgas Śyāma Kalyāṇa, Yamana, Multānī, etc., following salient features can be observed -

- The distribution of the energy of laya in the rāga-s occurs relatively in steadfast fashion;
- The rāga-s carry both heavy and light features in their character;
- All kinds of embellishments are used to adorn the rāga;
- All the constituents of khayāl gāyana are rendered uniformly, as such rāga-s are expressive of both heavy and agile traits.

Rāga Śyāma Kalyāṇa. In this rāga, which is made in the combination of Kāmoda and Kalyāṇa rāgāṅga-s, the gāmbhāra prakriti is reflected in the melodic phrases in the rāga's pūrvārdha like R m P—^mM G, G M R S. Here, the avarohī mīmḍa from pañcama to śuddha gāmbhāra with aesthetic touch of both tīvra madhyama and śudhha madhyama in the first phrase, as well as the return from śudhha madhyama to śuddha rishabha in the second phrase with the distribution of the energy of laya in slower pace mark the rāga's gāmbhāra prakriti. Faster P G M R S sung without deploying mīmḍa, more it inclines towards rāga Kāmoda and does not remain as Śyāma Kalyāṇa anymore. This is why, while singing it in vilāmbita laya, one must be careful in understanding the aesthetic proportions of every svāra that laya regulates, to express the rāga's aesthetic character appropriately. And while singing tāna, one must be aware of using the melodic prefixes and suffixes

to certain phrases that may give rise to confusions. For instance, instead of singing DPGMRS in tāna which may sound like a tāna of rāga Kāmōda, one can sing RmPDPPGMRS or RDmPGMRS, etc. in rāga Śyāma Kalyāṇa.

Its caṁcala prakṛiti is reflected in the melodic phrases in rāga's uttarārdha like R m P N \curvearrowright ND P, wherein the ārohī portion of this phrase as well as the avarohī mīmṇa from tāra ṣadja to śudhha dhaivata with aesthetic touch of śuddha niṣāda are sung with the distribution of laya in the faster pace. More the niṣāda is stretched, more it creates a platform for confusion with the homoscalar rāga Śuddha Sāraṁga as niṣāda is bahutva in the latter, while it is alpatva in the former.

Rāga Śyāma Kalyāṇa, being the rāga of ardha-gaṁbhīra prakṛiti, both heavy and lighter embellishments are used to adorn the rāga with close attention towards the laya of every svāra and melodic phrase, and their emotional and intellectual properties in speaking of or expressing the rāga's character. The usage of mīmṇa is observed in the above paragraphs. The lighter embellishments in the phrases like: R m P \curvearrowright G (M) R S, bahalāvā can be employed, and murki can be sung in the place of śuddha madhyama. The rāga carrying both gaṁbhīra and caṁcala prakṛiti can therefore be rendered with uniform emphasis to all the constituents of khayāl gāyana, albeit it cannot be sung in relatively slower vilāmbita ṭhekā / tāla but it ought to be sung in the relatively faster pace as it is ardha-caṁcala also in its nature, besides being ardha-gaṁbhīra. We can therefore infer that -

'The melodic embellishments to adorn the rāga depend on the rāga's character, nature and temperament, which in-turn depend on the regulation of laya on every svāra, melodic phrase and motifs.'

On Rāga-Tatva and Rāga-Bhāva

Rāga-bhāva depends on many factors such as baṁdiś and its meaning, musician's involvement and persona, laya of baṁdiś, gharānā and its aesthetics, etc., besides depending on the rāga's character or rāga-tatva originally - because music becomes expressive through a musician. There could be multiple rāga-bhāva-s elicited in a rāga by the musician. Still, every rāga carries its own original characteristic emotion and personality. It is similar to our personalities in daily lives. We do express every emotion, but a particular emotion(s) may strongly spread within us so much that it becomes the carrier of our specific personality. For instance, we may become angry, worried or sad at times, but above all, if we face everything patiently 'most of the times' being self-composed with courage and confidence, then 'strength' becomes our personality. On the contrary, if we are expressive of 'every emotion' 'equally', then it would definitely mean that we are psychologically ill, and we need to be properly treated by a well-trained and experienced psychologist. Similarly, a rāga too has its own characteristic rāga-bhāva. For example, rāga Lalita 'originally' elicits karuṇā bhāva; rāga Bhūpa originally produces śrīṅgāra bhāva; rāga Durgā originally evokes vīra bhāva; and so on. The musician, being creative, rational and emotional social being, may employ some more of his personal emotions in addition to the characteristic rāga-bhāva. Nonetheless it should be always remembered that the musician should be subservient to music, therefore, he must concentrate on the actual rāga-bhāva at first, hence 'harmonize' his emotions in such a way that they do not disturb the rāga's original character, nature and temperament. And, as noted above, rāga-bhāva is

evoked through the apt aesthetic intonation of every svāra, melodic phrase and motif in accordance to the musical context within the rāga - which is regulated by laya and its imperishable energy.

Understanding laya, its regulation on the rāga and its construction, its character, nature and temperament is therefore necessary for absorbing and appreciating the aesthetics of the rāga-saṁgīta better.

Conclusion

After having sought the pivotal role of laya, it can be thus averred that laya is the determinant imperishable energy, and source of music and everything in the universe - rather than the regulated time. It regulates the rāga, its character, nature and temperament: therefore, it is the most contributing factor for music-making through its emotional, intellectual and regulative properties.

The research paper therefore hopes in being instrumental for the community of students, devotees, professionals, connoisseurs and audience of khayāl gāyana in better aesthetic understanding and appreciation of rāga through laya's deeper cognizance.

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Devanagari	Transliteration	Words Like	Devanagari	Transliteration	Words Like
अ	a	open	इ	ih	affection
आ	ā	father	ऋ	ṛ	urdu*
इ	i	different	ॠ	ṛi	urdu*
उ	u	had	ऌ	ḷ	urdu*
ऊ	ū	full	ॡ	ḷi	urdu*
ऋ	ṛ	hour	ॢ	ḷi	urdu*
ॠ	ṛi	rhythm*	ॣ	ḷi	urdu*
ॡ	ḷi	**	।	ḷi	urdu*
ॢ	ḷi	**	॥	ph	gharoon*
ॣ	ḷi	evade	०	b	hour
।	ai	delight	१	ih	urdu*
॥	o	ogre	२	m	urdu*
०	au	now	३	y	urdu*
१	k	calm	४	r	urdu*
२	kh	khan	५	i	urdu*
३	g	gate	६	v	urdu*
४	gh	ghose	७	s	urdu*
५	n	ankle*	८	s	sugar
६	c	chuckle	९	s	simple
७	ch	witch*	१०	h	happy
८	j	justice	११	m	improviser
९	jh	jhansi	१२	b	**
१०	n	banjan	१३	ko	action
११	t	tank	१४	tr	three*
१२	th	**	१५	jh	ghose
१३	d	dog	१६	'	a silent 'd'

* These letters don't have an exact English equivalent. An approximation is given here.
** These sounds cannot be approximated in English words.