

ITC-SRA seminar

“Reconsidering Fundamental Issues in Indian Art Music ”

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The Making of Raga

Umakant Ramakant Gundecha
Translated by Mrs. Nancy Kulkarni (A cello Player)

This is an era of the consumer and I ask pardon in case our concerns do not prove useful to some.

I'll begin with a short story: A boy asks his father to give him a car. But the father can not afford to buy a car, and the boy is not mature enough to drive. So the father goes to the store to buy a toy car, and gives it to the boy. Yet, the boy is happy with this “artificial” car. He sees other children playing with the same cars, and feels content that he also has one.

One day the boy sees a car, looks like as he has, driving on the road. He asks his father about it, and the father replies, "Son, that car is “Be-car” (useless).

Thakur Jaidev Singh once told us that “ The soul of Indian music is in the raag, and the soul of raag is embodied in the alap. Alap is an improvised melody which is (a-nibaddha) not a composition.

In order to learn and sing a raag, one must first hear the correct and natural position of each note in the raag. He should know the correct pitches of the raga and should follow them in proper ascending and descending order of the raga. It is necessary for the music student to study this aspect carefully. This learning process is based on careful listening.

Before we attempt to learn and sing Raga , one must become an excellent listener.

In order to properly understand the raag system, the following conditions apply:

One must become deeply connected with the raag. One must be able to hear the fine gradations within one pitch itself.

One must be able to hear perfect consonances, based on the tonic or SA of the Raga.

One must not use the pitches for Raga available in the tempered scale of the harmonium.

One must realize that Sa and Pa, like other notes , are also movable.

One must not rely on a familiar melody in order to remember a particular raag.

One must not rely only on notation to understand a raag.

Otherwise, you need an “artificial mechanism” to learn Raga. The present available theory of Raga in our music teaching system fulfill the need of this required artificial mechanism.

Vadi, Samvadi, upper-register (Uttarang), lower-register (Poorwang) , (Pakad) catch-phrases, (Swar Samooh) sets of notes, clusters of notes, typical phrases, (Chalan) fix movement, (That) families of raga and many more technicalities make the content of such an artificial mechanism. To nobody's wonder, we have started listening, thinking and perceiving the ragas through this vision. We have reduced the experience of ragas in to the mere tunes.

"Fake currency makes the real one fake"! This famous theory of economics holds true in the realm of music too.

Based on this mechanistic theory of music, we have made our

raga music into a common-man's (untrained listener) music. We have transformed our heavenly classical music into worldly music.

By losing the ability to differentiate pitch, we are unable to hear the true consonance of the tanpura. Since our notation system and harmonium is unable to show the Re of Yaman, the Dha of Bhairw and the Ga of Bihag, we forget these exact shades of pitch. Since we only hear the false pitches of the harmonium, and we are unable to locate the exact pitches in raga being responded by Tanpura . we use familiar songs to remember the ragas.

By putting together a set of notes, we are under the illusion that we have created a raag. And we are happy to understand raag music in this false context. We have become diverted from the natural and proper intonation of our raags. We are unable to understand any tuning beyond the tempered scale. We have almost completely forgotten the important difference between the Re of Yaman and Hansadwani, and between the Ga of Darbari and Malhar. We are purposefully choosing not to hear these differences. Our harmonium is not allowing us to do so.

The famous Hindi poet Shreekant Verma correctly stated, "That which I have not experienced is not in my world."

So the scientific way of learning and executing raga is –

One should first develop the listening the fine differences within the same pitch.

One must hear correctly the notes of raga being played in harmonium to realize its faulty samvad with the Tonic of the Raga.

One should study the proper position of the *Swara* in raga by making proper *Samwad* consonance with *Tanpura* and

Shadaj of the Raga . It is evident only when you stay on the note (*swara*) properly and do not let it move or shake.

One must not rely on the Harmonium to study Raga's Swar-Sthan (position of the notes) and should understand that there is a possibility of fine gradation within every note (Swara) and so is true with SA and PA also.

One should understand that the different RASA-BHAV appear in different ragas only because of their Swara's different position.

One should understand that there is no other way to learn the Raga but by listening and memorizing it's Swar-Sthan from your teacher.