

Graceful Movements of Sound in Music

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Abstract

The Graceful movements of swaras (Sounds) are called "Gamakas" in Karnatic Music. Gamakas are the important factors which has great role in Indian Music. They represent the Melodic Character of a Raga and create a Musical effect to that Raga. The Ancient Tamil Grammer Tholkaappiam says that Lengthening of a Letter which is originated from the Vocal Chord is Music. In one of the main chapter Ezhuthadikaaram it confirms the sub-division "Asai" forms the Basis for Gamakas. Depending upon the Graceful movements that is Asai in Tamil Gamakas varieties are derived.

Keywords: Gamakas, Movements, Tholkaappiam, Ezhuthaadhikaaram, Asai, Yaapparungala Viruthi, Nerasai, Niraisai, Silappaadhikaaram, Isaikkaranam

Graceful movements is a beautiful term used in Fine arts like dance, painting, music, drawing, sculpture and so on. These movements in the above Arts gives a blissful joy which cannot be explained in terms of words. They are the fine movements which enhances the Arts. It is an ornament which makes the Art more beautiful. For example the fine movements of eyes and brows in dance depicts some rasas; the fine movements of hand in drawing express some inner meaning to the picture, like that the fine graceful movements of sound (Swaras) in music will touch the heart of the human. The graceful movements of swaras are called Gamakas in Karnatic music.

Gamakas

Gamakas forms the vital part in Indian music and they represent the magnetic character of a Raga. They are the back bones of a Raga. Gamakas are not simple movements or oscillation between adjacent notes but they create a musical effect to that Raga. The decoration of every note in South Indian music has its parallel with the delicately carved sculptors adorning the temples of South India. Every inch of a stone is embellished with a delicate artistic carving of a sculpture. According to Bharatha Muni music without Gamakas like a moonless Sky, the river without water, the creeper without flowers, a lady without Ornament and a flower without fragrance. The Gamakas are specific to vocal music and instrumental music. Saranga Deva in his Sangitha Ratnakara speaks about 15 Gamakas. Later it becomes Dasavita Gamakas. (10 Gamakas).

Origin of Gamakas

The treatise in Tolkaappiam dates back to centuries before the birth of Christ. This is the only remaining Tamil grammatical work which deals with the general style and nuances of the Tamil used in earlier text. This work gives us a fair idea of a traditional heritage of Karnataka Music. Tolkaappiam gives us ample testimony to the fact that our music is the earliest and oldest in the world.

Tolkaappiar in the chapter Ezhuthadikaram speaks about

the origin of (Ezhuthu) letter where He explains “agathezhu vali isai” (1: 102) that is the origin of letter itself is music. The (sound) air from Nabi (agam) passes through the heart and Vocal Chord comes out as a letter which is a single Swara. When this sound of the letter is elongated or lengthened it becomes music. Ezhuthadhikaram has six sub divisions. 1) Ezhuthu (letter) 2) Asai 3) Seer 4) Thalai 5) Adi 6) Thodai. He has explained the functional role of the sound of Ezhuthu (Letters) and its significant role of play in the formation of a poetry.

According to “Yapparungala Viruthi”

“Ezhudap paduthalin ehuththe ;
 avvezhutthu asaitthu
 isaikkodalinal asaiye; asai iyaindhu
 seerkola nittralin seere; seer irandu
 thattu nittralin thalaiye; aththalai
 adutthu nadaththalinal adiyey; adi irandu
 thodutthal mudhalaayina thodaiye; aththodai
 paavi nadattalin paave.

Meaning of the Song: Letter comes with writing. Musically shaking or movement of the sound of the letters will lead to Asai. Asai musically combine to match and form Seer. Seer will combine matching two unique measure to form Thalai. Thalai combine to form Adi. Two Adi combines to form Thodai together extend to complete a Song.

Lengthening or Shaking of the Letter: From the above we find that the structure of a Song or Poem is musically defined by “Ehuthu” (Letter) Asai, Seer, Thalai, Adi (line), and Thodai. Here in the above the letter (Swara) when musically shaken it becomes Asai. So musically shaking or moving in terms of sound of the letter leads to “Asai”. A letter when lengthened in grammar is Nedil (Sa.....> Saa) still lengthened it becomes alabedai. (Saa A) “In grammar there is a restriction up to Alabedai but in Music there is no restriction and it is still elongated to form a musical phrase. The Lengthening is also considered to be a movement.

Asai: The next step in this grammar is the smallest division of a line in a song from the point of view of its syllabic sound of the letters is called Asai in Tamil. Asai means (asaidhal in Tamil) movement. From the point of view of musical sound one or

more letters join to form an Asai. The role of musical sounding in the formation of Asai from letters was explained in an ancient Tamil Grammar text Yapparungala Viruthi

“Ezhutthu asaitthu isaik kodalin asaiye”

Meaning: Ezhuthu is letter. asaitthu referred to the shaking or moving. isai is music. Kodalin is referred to the above mentioned act of sound of the letter becoming music. So isai is formed by the movement of the letters musically. So a single sound (swara or letter) by movement or oscillation form a musical phrase of swaras which is called a sanchara in karnatic music becomes to gamaka. **Therefore asai forms the basic unit for Gamaka and asai itself a Gamaka.** In grammar asai are of two kinds 1) Nerasai 2) Niraiasai. In Nerasai a single sound (swara) directly oscillate and gives Gamaka. Best example is Kampita Gamaka. In Kampita gamaka a single swara will oscillate to give the raga swarupa. For example In Raga Danyasi the specific movements of swaras G and N is Kampita gamaka. In Raga Sahana - the movement of swara Ris Kampita gamaka. In Raga Atana – The movement of swaras G and D is Kampita gamaka. In Niraiasai (nirai is row or order) a set of swaras oscillate and give the specific effect of the Raga. Examples are 1) Jaru gamaka – gliding from S to P ascending glide. Depending upon the movements of the swaras varieties are created.

Gamakas seen in karnatic music for Vocal Music

1. Nokku – stressing a particular swara
2. Spurita – seen in Jantai swaras (double)
3. Kambita – shaking
4. Leena – diminishing
5. Andola – swinging
6. Jaru – ascending & descending glide
7. Tripuchcha-Triplets

Other than this there are some gamakas which enriches the technical playing of the Instruments. Particularly Stringed Instruments. They are mentioned in Silappadhikaram of the 2nd Century. This is seen in the Seventh Chapter – Kaanal Vari. Gamakas mentioned in Silappadhikaram for Instrumental Music: “Vaardhal Vadittha lundha lurazhdal seeruda nurutta lerutta lallal Erudai pattadaiyena visaiyor vaguttha ettuvagaiyi nisai kkara natthu

Thus the details proceed. In this the eight aspects namely Vaardhal, Vaditthal, Undhal, Urazhdhal, Uruttal, Theruttal, Allal, Pattadai, are called “Isai Karanam.” All these are playing techniques in Yazh which are later called gamakas.

Panchmarabu : The same eight terms Vaardhal, Vaditthal, Undhal, Urazhdhal, Uruttal, Theruttal, Allal, Pattadai are found mentioned in the chapter “Isai Marabu” under section Yazh Marabu in the form of verse in Pancha Marabu.

Vanmai padavaardhal vaditthaludanundhal
thanni lurazhdha luruttale - yennith
theruttale yallal thiralpatta daiyum
maruttaadu vaitthuk kolal

In the commentary these are specified as the eight techniques pertaining to the Yazh.

Sangam Literature

The Porunar Aatrupadai belongs to Sangam Period also mentions these techniques. Vaariyum vadittum Undhiyum Urazhdum (Por. Atru 23). Out of eight playing technique only 4 has been mentioned. But we can come to a conclusion that the “Paanars” of Sangam Period are well versed in these Yazh playing techniques. So gamakas are seen from early Sangam Period.

Conclusion

Gamakas are called Grace- Notes in western Music. The Graceful movements of swaras are called Gamakas in Karnatic Music. The Ezhuthadhikaram, one of the main divisions of Tholkaappiam has 6 sub-divisions. They are Ezhuthu, Asai, Seer, Thalai, Adi, Thodai. Asai seems to be the basis for the formation of Gamakas in Karnatic Music. Depending upon the Graceful movements Gamaka Varieties are derived.

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