

The Concept of Raga: An Essay In Understanding*

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Two terms which occur very freely in our talk about music are *raga* and *tala*. I choose to focus, in this essay, on the concept of *raga*. Since the musician, the *rasika* and the critic are all alike concerned with this concept. I will discuss it not only from the viewpoints of creation and contemplation, but from that of critical evaluation too. I expect to make clear what our more insightful critics already know, namely that a musician should not in a recital confine himself to the grammatical identity of *raga* but should attempt also to actualize its aesthetic potential.

Furthermore, we cannot afford to forget that we have a whole traditional philosophy of music; and that, what is more, our theorists have always been vitally concerned with the question of etymology. So, these two viewpoints have also to be borne in mind. I do not, however, suggest that our ancient works on music have been indifferent to the plurality of viewpoints from which this glorious art of *swara* and *laya* may be looked at. At the same time, I see it clearly that quite a few utterances which have been commonly regarded as definitions of *raga* are, in fact, but aspectual characterizations of it from different standpoints. Nor should this look odd to us. Even like Man himself, *raga* is a very complex reality, and if it has been found unavoidable to speak of Man from different angles, how could the same comprehensiveness of concern be objected to in respect of *raga*?

The beginning, of course, has to be made from the etymological point of view. But, first, a note of caution may be sounded. Just as the verbal meaning of an ethical concept like *ahimsa* is not identical with its significance as an organizing principle of conduct as it reveals itself in life by degrees, so the verbal meaning of *raga* is quite transcended, though not left out, by its significance as it appears in the full and methodical practice of music. This will, however, become clear only as we proceed.

Now, the literal meaning of the word *raga* is well-known. Coming from the root '*ranj*' the word means that which charms or colours the mind. But

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at this point a difficulty makes itself felt, and it would help if I put it pointedly, say, as follows:

- A *raga* is essential to all Indian classical music. But the ultimate aim of our music has been said to be liberation, and not mere entertainment (*muktidaayakam na tu ranjakam*)¹.
- How, then, can its merely pleasing quality be said to be the essential mark of a *raga* which provides the essential melodic matrix to all our classical music? Would not such a view of *raga* clash with our conception of the ultimate goal of music which even today we are unwilling to give up?
- Or could it be that a *raga* pleases the listeners or colours their minds in a way which at once facilitates, though it may not guarantee, the intellectual, moral and spiritual growth of man?

At present I can only leave such questions open. But I cannot ignore them; for, they are going to help us in further interpretation. I even feel impelled, here, to mark another difficulty. It relates to the following 'definition' which looks at *raga* from the etymological point of view:

*Ityevam raagasabdasya vyutpattirabhidheeyatey
Ranjanaajjaayatey raago vyutpattihisamudaahrutaha*².

The meaning is here clear. Etymologically, the word *raga* means that which entertains people. But, one may contend, what charms us, and can even leave a more or less permanent impression on our minds, may only be the effective enactment of a love scene on the stage. Yet no one regards such a presentation as *raga*. How, then, can its ability to please us be regarded as a distinguishing characteristic of *raga*?

It seems to us that the 'definition' just cited only emphasizes a necessary requirement of *raga*, and does not specify anything which could be said to be uniquely relevant to *raga*. We must, of course, admit that, whatever be its specific nature, and whoever be the artist presenting it, a *raga*, if it is music at all, must please the listeners. But, here again, a difficulty faces us. Is a *raga* required to please everyone, or only the *rasikas*, that is, listeners who are conversant with the proper technique and aesthetics of the *raga* in question? This question, again, though I do not here answer it, is important. It is going to serve as a theoretical irritant, and lead us on to more comprehensive 'definitions' of *raga*, some of which are given below:

a. *Yosau dhwaniviseshasu swara varna vibhooshitaha.*

*Ranjako janachittaanaam sa cha raaga udaahrutaha.*³

b. *Swaravarnaviseshena dhwanibhedena vaa punaha*

*Rajyatey yena yaha kaschit sa raagaha sammataha sataam.*⁴

c. *Grahaansau taaramandrau cha nyaasopanyasa yeva cha
Alpatvam cha bahutvam cha shaadavaudavitey tathaa.*⁵

The meaning of the first two definitions is almost identical. They simply say that a *raga* is a distinct complex of some specific *swaras* which entertains people. The third definition, on the other hand, lists the elements which go to make a *raga*. This diversity of approach need not surprise us. What a thing appears to be or to do is obviously different from how, or as a consequence of what, it comes into being; and the two must be distinguished. This is indeed done by our theorists even in respect of *rasa*. Thus, phenomenologically, or as a matter of experience, *rasa* is said to be *svaatma paraamarsa svaatma visraanti* and, from the genetic point of view, *rasa* is said to emerge as a result of the integration of the three elements of *vibhava*, *anubhava* and *vyabhichari bhava*.

However, my main purpose, here, is to pay a little close attention to the first two definitions without, of course, forgetting the requisite comprehensiveness of concern. Quite generally, our music has been said to be *nadasadhana* or a disciplined and discriminating fellowship with the world of sound so as to come closer to the ultimate goal of life. But this, in turn, demands that we pay sustained attention to the world in question. Nothing, however, can become an effective object of attention unless it combines within itself some differences in a more or less orderly and interesting way. This is exactly what the definitions in question suggest. A *raga* is a distinct, but just as necessarily a pleasing combination of some select *swaras*; and as thus regarded, it can draw and hold the attention of listeners with the definiteness of a physical object; here, the importance of the two words *dhwani* and *ranjana* which our first two 'definitions' share.

Indeed, the two most obvious ideas in the 'definitions' that we have picked for attention are, first, that the material of *raga* is *dhwani*, and, second, that the *raga* pervades or suffuses the minds of the listeners. Now, interestingness or charm in the way of winsome and pervasive influence is not the same thing as mere momentary appeal. As we all know, the charm of a *raga* is not just a peck of delight, as is sometimes the very first sip of a rare blend of wine or tea. It is seen to abide, if only for an hour or so. This is, however, possible not only because the *swaras* are (in principle) sweet, but because they make an integrated complex of inner differences. How, otherwise, I repeat, could they grip our attention, instead of just drawing it for a mere moment?

Incidentally, it is interesting to see how it is distinctive of sound to meet the requirement of a complex singleness. Smells of different kinds can, of course, be presented to a person one after the other, and they may also quickly remind him of various delicacies; but they do not as a rule, make a

single object. On the other hand, as in the case of the *swaras* of a *raga*, different sounds can easily make for a complex that is perceived as a single and undivided unity. In other words, discrimination, or the perception of differences and relations, is easily possible in the region of sound. This is why, however intense be the spell-binding quality of the beauty of a *raga* as it unfolds its canvas ever more fully, the appeal here is never quite unintelligent.

This is true even of the musician at work. He is, of course quite conversant with the grammatical form of the *raga* before he sets out to translate it into actual singing; and, as the music develops and takes effect, his mind may well come to be suffused with the form of the *raga* being sung; but this too is just as true that in thus experiencing the bliss of music he cannot, for a moment, slacken his attention in respect of keeping the character of the *raga* unsullied by suggestion of its aesthetic neighbours. In other words, the pervasive charm of a *raga* is always, in part, intellectual.

One should indeed not underestimate the role of intelligence in musical listening and creation. Even the *rasika's* experience, as he feels captivated by a *raga's* variform beauty, is no mere abandonment to a quite nebulous relish, as when we give ourselves up to the taste of a richly spiced delicacy the constituent flavours of which we may not be able to distinguish. What he here enjoys is not only a *raga's* sensuous sweetness, but its intellectual arrangements, say those which project the different notes as subserving the requisite dominance of the *vadi-samvadi*⁶ relation.

Here, it can of course be contended that the field of the eye—or space—also easily admits of the perception of relations and distinctions both within and between objects. But to this our rejoinder would be that the medium of sound, as music utilizes it, is possessed of a remarkable extra element. What we have in music is not mere sound, but the passage of sound, say, from one note to another, and at a particular pace. In other words, the sound is here at once a rhythmic advance; and insofar as movement or flux seems to be the very essence of life as lived, the regulated passage of music is at once a locus of lifelike appeal. Indeed, whereas things and spaces in the outer world compel attention only if they are unusually striking, in the region of music, on the other hand, even a brief and tender glide may coerce attention, and continue to haunt the listeners' imagination for quite some time. And because, as already pointed out, the various *swaras* are easily perceived as distinct, though their grammatical character may be discerned only by the *rasika*, the rhythmical advance of the *raga* is more a matter of our following, or moving along with, its form than its moving us into sympathy. And as we grow in the art of following the flowing form of a *raga*, it soon becomes obvious that its spell-binding quality is not

the insistent appeal of a single *swara*, nor even the merely additive effect of many *swaras*, but the emergent charm of the individual *swara* as they act upon one another in respect of temporal order and sensuous effect.

This is why a *raga* can easily become an object of aesthetic contemplation. As sung or played, a *raga* is not, as we know, a mere concept, but a directed, yet rich and free experience; and this experience is made possible by the very inherent possibilities of sound. Here, because of their relevance to the point I am seeking to make, the following remarks of George Santayana may be cited from his well-known work, the *Sense of Beauty*:

...Sounds are also measurable in their own category; they have comparable pitches and durations, and definite and recognizable combinations of those sensuous elements are as truly objects as chairs and tables. Not that a musical composition exists in any mystical way, as a portion of the music of the spheres, which no one is hearing; but that, for a critical philosophy, visible objects are also nothing but possibilities of sensation. The real world is merely the shadow of that assurance of eventual experience which accompanies sanity. This objectivity can accrue to any mental figment that has enough cohesion, content, and individuality to be describable and recognizable, and these qualities belong no less to audible than to spatial ideas.⁷

I may here point out that its overall unity and inner diversity are both alike essential for an object effectively to compel our attention. Form in art is always the unity of a manifold. Here, again, I think it necessary to quote Santayana:

...A form is an aggregation, it must have elements, and the manner in which the elements are combined constitutes the character of the form. A perfectly simple perception, in which there was no consciousness of the distinction and relation of parts, would not be a preception of form, it would be a sensation.⁸

The interesting quality of the form of a *raga*, however, is due not only to its overall unity and inner diversity, but also to the intrinsic charm of its elements. A *raga* comprises *swaras*; and a *swara*, by definition, is something which is beautiful in itself (*swameva rajate*). This prepares the way to a discussion of the individual meanings of the key words that our 'definitions' comprise.

To begin with, the thought that a *swara* is something beautiful in itself only means that it would sound sweet to the ear. This is, indeed, the basic and requisite character of a note in music. In the definitions we are discussing, however, what is spoken of is not *swara* alone, but *swaravarna vibhooshitaha*. And this seems unavoidable. We cannot confine ourselves to the thought that a *raga* is *dhwani viseshastu* or a distinct sound. It is true that every *raga* has a distinct individuality perceivable by the ear. But, it may be pointed out, even two noises can be utterly unlike each other. The

noise produced by the impact of some china cups as they fall on the floor is obviously different from the roar of an aeroplane engine. Yet neither of them can be said to be a *raga*. The *sloka*, therefore, adds that a *raga* is only such a distinct sound as is embellished with *swara-varna*.

The word *varna*, however, poses a problem and calls for some close thinking. What does it really mean? It has been freely taken to signify *sthayi*, *arohi*, *avarohi* and *sanchari*. But, in such interpreting what seems to have been ignored is the fact that the word *varna* here qualifies *swara*, not *raga*. In other words, the definitions (b & c) speak of the *varna* of *swara*, not of *raga*. The full exposition of a *raga* may well be said to include *sthayi*, *arohi*, *avarohi*, and *sanchari*. Even the bare indication of the character of a *raga* to a pupil may be said to emphasize *aroha* and *avaroha*, besides of course, the *vadi-samvadi*. But, how can we, and do we ever, speak of the *aroha* and *avaroha* or *sanchari* of a *swara*? It just does not make sense to speak thus, and in ordinary musical discourse no one, in fact, speaks thus. So I suggest that the word *swara-varna*, or rather *varna*, has to be interpreted differently.

Now, some of the important meanings of the word which appear plausible at first sight may be listed thus: (a) a musical sound or note; (b) sound, vowel, syllables; (c) class, kind, sort; (d) outward appearance, exterior form and shape; (e) lustre, beauty or complexion; (f) character or quality. But, if *varna* is taken to mean (a), it would just be a meaningless repetition, for the word *swara* already conveys the meaning of sound. Nor would (b) add anything significant to the meaning of *swara*. As for (c) and (d), they do not even throw a hint as to the expressive or aesthetic character of *swaras*. Notes may indeed be classified as *suddha* and *komal* (flat). But, this does not at all cover the possibility that a *swara* may seem to be yearning or majestically self-assertive. And if we speak of the outward appearance or exterior of a *swara*, the awkward question will arise as to what could possibly be the interior of a *swara*. Nor does it seem natural to speak of the form or shape of a *swara*. We are thus left with but one option, that is, to interpret *varna* as character or quality. And this indeed seems to be the intended and desirable meaning of the word in the 'definitions' in question; I say desirable too, because if the word '*varna*' is taken in the sense of character or quality it would cover, if but generally, all that is said in the third definition which is commonly regarded as an exhaustive listing of the essential features of a *raga* (or *jaati*), and also go well with our traditional conception of the ultimate aim of music. But, I must explain why I say so.

The quality or character of a note is what distinguishes it from other notes. Now, this distinguishing feature of a *swara* may be any one of the

following: its being a prominent point of repeated return and a moment of repose (*vadi* or *amsa*)⁹, its placement in *mandra*, *madhya* or *taar* (*taar-mandrau*); its terminal character, either as the destiny (*nyasa*)¹⁰ or the beginning of a musical passage (*graha*)¹¹; its being infrequent and brief or recurrent and prolonged (*alpatva* & *bahutva*); or above all, its appearing to be tender or energetic, luminous or faint, richly sensuous or a little other-worldly. In other words, if we interpret *swara-varna* as the character or quality of a *swara*, provision will at once be made not only for the grammatical exposition of the nature of a *raga*, but also for the aesthetic, ethical and even spiritual suggestiveness of *swaras* which can in no way be ignored if we really mean to hold on to the traditional Indian conception of the ultimate goal of music.

What is more, even the pictorial representation of the nature of a *raga* would gain some warrant from our interpretation of *swara-varna* as the quality of *swara*. It is true that one admitted meaning of the word *varna* is good colour or complexion. Nor can we deny that it may, in a sense, be meaningful to speak of the colour of notes. If we are allowed to speak of the rhythm of colours, as we obviously are, how can one object to the idea that a note may seem to be colourless or colourful? There is even some scientific basis for speaking of colours and notes in the same breath. A sound is sweet in itself—or is a musical note—only if “the pulsations of the air by which it is produced recur at regular intervals. If there is no regular recurrence of waves, it is a noise. The rapidity of these regular beats determines the pitch of tones”¹². Now, from this point of view, there seems to be a clear affinity between colours and tones; and “we need not be surprised that the high rate of vibration which yields a sharp note to the ear should involve somewhat the same feeling that is produced by the high rate of vibration which, to the eye, yields a violet colour”¹³. Our traditional musicology seems to favour the affinity we are talking of. Thus, the absence of *panchama* (*pa*) from *raga Lalit* is explained on the ground that insofar as the colour of this note is that of bright sunshine, it cannot be given a place in a *raga* which is meant for early morning. Further, in our everyday talk about music we often admire a particular singer's *akara* as being bright and luminous (or as *roushan akara*); and the *taans* of a master musician of old may be acclaimed on the ground that at the *taar shadja*, instead of appearing cramped or colourless, they would seem to sparkle and bloom in the way of an *anaar* (a cracker that is used in fireworks).

But, noteworthy though they all are, facts such as these do not throw any doubt on our interpretation of ‘*varna*’ as quality; for a *swara*'s appearing bright or effulgent is no less a quality of it than, say, its basic requisite sweetness.

However, in spite of all that may be said in favour of our interpretation, a final question is still possible. It may be agreed that a note can appear as possessed of different qualities; and that, for example, *suddha rishabha* generally expresses strength and self-assertion¹⁴, just as, along with the basic *sa*, the *panchama* of Ramkali (as *vadi*, *samvadi*) suggests activity. But, one may ask, is every listener expected to perceive these qualities of *swaras*? If not, how are we to explain the words *ranjako janachittaanaam*? This question has to be answered with care. I choose to do it thus:

- The qualities of *swaras* may be classified as immediate and mediate. The immediate or primary quality of a *swara*—‘primary’, we may say, because it is implicit in the very definition of a musical note—is its sweetness. Other qualities, such as the seeming tenderness or dignity of a *swara*, may be said to be mediate in the sense that their perception depends on, or is the grasp of a cultivated taste. It is obvious that many more people (that is, even *kanrasiyas*¹⁵, as distinguished from *rasikas*) may be expected to perceive the basic or immediate quality, as against the mediate ones.

- In principle, everybody can perceive even the ‘mediate’ qualities provided he trains himself suitably, that is, if he becomes a *rasika*.

- But, as a matter of fact, everybody does not seem to be capable of perceiving perhaps even the most obvious qualities of *swara*. Some training of the ear, along with some acquaintance with the particular form or tradition of music attended to, seems to be necessary for perceiving even the intrinsic, requisite sweetness of individual notes.

- Therefore, the words *janachittaanaam* cannot be taken to mean ‘the mind of every individual’. I suggest that the word *jana* here simply means ‘people collectively’¹⁶. In other words, the delight which is evoked by a *raga*, as a complex of *swaras* of specific qualities, is not a private, but a shareable experience. This is indeed the point in Bharata’s view that, like the eye, the ear is an aesthetic sense. I here feel tempted to make an additional remark by way of bringing out the meaning of *janachittaanaam*. Insofar as, in contrast to (say) works of literary art, music can appeal even to the lowly and the unlettered because of its (basic) sweetness, it may be acknowledged as an art of the people.

It would, however, be wrong to underestimate the aesthetic sensitiveness of the average man by supposing that he can respond only to the obvious physical sweetness of music. He can also be readily affected by the progression and descension of a *raga* without, of course distinguishing its constituent *swaras* from the viewpoint of musical grammar. The up-and-

down contour of music is, in fact, a very easily noticeable feature. Again, hardly anyone can fail to be struck by such features as the width and majesty of a vocalist's *akara*, the depth of the Veena tones in the *mandra*, or the quiver of emotion in a female singer's projection of the *antara* of a Bhajan set in a *raga*. It has even been noticed that listeners who are quite in conversant with the grammar of a *raga* respond with the appropriate emotions of wonder and awe to moments of exceptional spaciousness and grandeur in *alap* of the Dhruvapada (Dhruvad) manner¹⁷.

Indeed, though music is intrinsically the most abstract of all the arts because it does not directly refer to anything in the outer world, it can as easily project, and provide an objective image of an emotion as an actual situation of fighting or love. This is why our *ragas* are so eminently relevant to all intense occasions—to prayer and partings, and to the festivity of a marriage or childbirth. What is more there is another subtler reason because of which our *ragas* can readily appeal to the common man without, of course, his being able to see this reason or to identify the nature of the *raga*. The droop of despair, the surge of vitality and hope, nimbleness and cheer, the act of sharing or dividing in equal halves—these are all very familiar experiences of life; and they all freely appear in our *raga* music which builds as much upon variations of aesthetic pace as upon the notes in the three registers (*saptaks*).

All this has to be kept in mind in determining what a *raga* really is. We have also to provide not only for the elements of truth contained in the definitions already cited, but for the individuality of those persons who make or relish music, as also for the possibility that our traditional conception of the final goal of music may, after all, be tenable. I therefore, propose to define a *raga* as follows:

A *raga* is a specific melodic form which serves to permit and determine, as a matrix, the creation and contemplation of music on the basis of the quality, emphases and relatedness of tones and rhythmic abidance or passage, with an eye to evoking the appropriate *rasa*, and inevitably in accordance with one's individual capacities for technical grasp and aesthetic sensitiveness.

The meaning of this definition of *raga* may now be brought out by explaining its key concepts.

To begin with, a *raga* is a specific melodic form. This means, first, that a *raga* is a form, or an integration of its constituent *swaras*. It is an integration—not a mere putting together—of notes because, though none of them can be allowed to suffer in respect of grammatical accuracy and sweetness, they are all, in general, to be so built upon that they may not seem to usurp the requisite aesthetic dominance of the *vadi-samvadi*

relation. It is indeed important to remember that a *raga* is not an integration of its *swaras* in the sense of attaching equal importance to the different *swaras* that go to make it. It is common knowledge that some of these notes are to be given lesser emphasis (*alpatva*) than others. No note can of course be allowed to appear quite indistinct or even a little off-key; but, on the other hand, emphasis cannot be equally distributed over every *swara* of the *raga*. In other words, the *raga*-form is a unity of regulated emphases. It is not to be regarded as a rosary of even beads; and where a fluent *taan* seems to treat every note evenly, the question may indeed be put if it is able to preserve the character of the *raga*.

Secondly, the suggestion that a *raga* is a melodic form means that its different *swaras* follow a before-after order. This order in the region of music is necessarily a series of the higher and the lower; therefore, progression and descension or *aroha* and *avaroha* are integral movements in the being of a *raga*.

Thirdly, by saying that a *raga* is a specific melodic form we only mean that every *raga* has a distinct and identifiable perceptual character. It strikes the ear differently from another *raga*. But insofar as two different *ragas* may employ exactly the same notes, if in different ways, the perception of the precise character of a *raga* may call for a finely trained ear on the part of the *rasika*. In other words, a *raga* as heard is not merely received, but is often at once an exercise in discrimination on the part of the listener.

Further, I have chosen to speak of a *raga* as a matrix of melody, and not as a melodic type. A type is the concept of a class. It certainly covers or is applicable to all things of the same kind; but it certainly does not make or enter into the substance of these things. The concept-word 'Dashehri' is certainly no part of the pulp of the (kind of) luscious mangoes which it admittedly covers. But a *raga* on the other hand is the substance or material of the melodic whole which is named after it. It has been freely regarded, I know, as a melodic type because many compositions can be created in the same *raga*. But my point is that these compositions are also made out of, and bring out the nature of, the same *raga*. Therefore, a *raga* may be said to be a matrix in the sense of being a ground-mass which is at once the necessary and pervasive condition, the material, and the regulative and individualizing principle, of musical creation. Further, though it is true that whatever is seen to appear in the treatment of a *raga*, must not transgress its grammatical character, and that one cannot here draw upon anything which lies beyond the limits of the *raga*, yet, within these ultimate limits, there is such infinite room for the creation of ever newer beauty and effects that all the musicians, along with their entire repertoire of compositions, cannot be said to exhaust the aesthetic possibilities of even a single *raga*. From this

point of view, a *raga* is infinite and exhaustless in spite of its being *saguna* or possessed of a specific individuality.

It is also necessary to see, at some length, how the *raga*-matrix functions. An analogy would here help. Just as the bed and the banks of a river facilitate, determine and contain the seamless flow of its waters, similarly, by virtue of its compass and character, a *raga* provides both freedom and direction to the contemplation and creation of music. Again like the river bed which leaves the waters free to ripple or to eddy, or to simply flow noiselessly, a *raga* too, apart from the norm of accordance with its grammatical structure and the classical idiom generally, offers infinite freedom for musical expression and embellishment. But, of course, the analogy is by no means absolute. The bed of the river is clearly not a constituent of its billows and ripples, but a *raga*, on the other hand, by virtue of the *swaras* it builds upon, is the very material of its musical filling.

But, one may press the point, how exactly does a *raga* do what it does? The answer can only be, by working on 'the quality, emphases and relatedness of tones and rhythmic abidance or passage'. But to say so is to mean a great deal, and the implications must be distinguished. A *swara*'s quality may be taken to cover the following: its being high or low, by virtue of its placement in the *mandra*, *madhya* or *taar saptak*; its thinness or richness, tangentiality, penetratingness, which respectively mean how brief or how long is the abidance of voice at a particular *swara*; and above all, its expressiveness, maybe gaiety, a sad and yearning intenseness, or a simple soulful quality. Variations of aesthetic pace can also lend a look of repose or impulsiveness to a tone; but their effect is also freely that of abandon, easy confluence, decorativeness and winsome grouping.

The words 'relatedness of tones' (*upanyasa*)¹⁸ require some separate comment. They may be taken to cover the various formal graces—such as *soot*, *meend*, *gamak* and *lahak*—for which our music is known, and which mostly embrace more notes than one.

It is by bearing all this in mind, along with the apt choice of words and their proper articulation in the case of vocal music—excluding, of course, *alap* of the Dhruvapad manner—that a musician can make a *raga* evoke or project its appropriate *rasa*. But this *rasa*, be it noted, is no more emotion conveyed by, or expressed through the form of the *raga*; it is the feeling appearance of the *raga-roopa* itself, provided this form has been evoked by means of an apt selection of the elements and their proper integration. The language used in a specific composition set in a *raga-tala* frame is, of course, no integral part of the *raga-tala* twosome but it can surely be made to help or prevent the emergence of the requisite emotive character of the *raga*. Another noteworthy point is that the filling of decorative frills and regular

patterns that a recital normally comprises is never to be allowed to dim or disrupt the unity of *raga*-form. This, in turn, would demand, in the case of a *khayal*¹⁹ recital, that the *sthayi*²⁰, which is supposed to clearly embody the *raga*-form in its aspect of unity and identity, be projected after every brief bout of pattern-weaving; and that the eminence of *vadi* and *samvadi* be kept clear even during the execution of fluent *taans*. In the case of Dhruvapada-singing the analogous requirement would be that hectic and random *layakari*²¹ is not allowed to dissipate the expansiveness and dignity of the *raga*-form.

It is important to see how the various elements of our present day classical music contribute differently to the evocation of the full aesthetic form of a *raga*. *Alap* of the older kind brings out the spaciousness, repose and dignity that are implicit in a *raga*; and, what is more, even its power to elevate and encompass us in the way of a rarefied atmosphere. A good *bandish*²², be it a *Khayal* or Dhruvapada one, projects the *raga* as a single and identifiable wholeness. The *taans* of the *Khayal*-singer manifest how a *raga* is as open to a close and varied filling of vivacious and decorative patterns as to the reposeful stretches of *alap*. In other words, as the dominant form of our music, a *raga* is neither a mere arrangement of *aroha* and *avaroha*, and of *vadi* and *samvadi*, nor a skeletal fixture to which the music has only to conform, but a rich and integrated wholeness of implicit depth, accommodativeness, repose and vitality, and variform expressiveness. That is why our master musicians freely speak of a *raga*'s personality. Indeed, just as a man's personality is an actualization of his determinate potentialities, so is the form of a *raga* a realization of its aesthetic potential within the limits, and on the basis of its grammatical structure. In thus interpreting *raga*-form I am not only encouraged by Aristotle's view that an immanent form "explains a thing's development, [that] it is the intelligible structure that a thing has when fully developed, and [that] the growth of the thing is [to be] regarded as a striving to make actual its form"²³, but also by the evidence of our actual musical practice and discourse.

Yet it would be of help if we argue why the form of a *raga* cannot be regarded as the grammatical skeleton of *aroha-avaroha* and *vadi-samvadi*, etc. The point may be argued as follows:

Every *raga* is supposed to evoke a *rasa*, but mere indication of *aroha-avaroha* and *vadi-samvadi* is never taken to generate *rasa*. *Lakshana geetas* admittedly reveal the grammatical identity of a *raga*, but never its aesthetic form or personality. Further, to say that a *raga* entertains people at large and suffuses their minds with its colour naturally means that it is developed and treated for a sufficient length of time, and suchwise that its hidden beauty may be brought out. Otherwise, how would it keep the

listeners interested? What is more, if a *raga* is a '*dhwani visesha*', it must appear as a distinct individuality. This, in turn, requires that the *raga* be given the form of a composition with the aid of words and rhythm. But, if this is done, we clearly go beyond a mere indication of *aroha-avaroha*, *vadi-samvadi*, because rhythm and words are now brought in.

But, one may here wonder, what then shall we say of Dhruvapada *alap*? Does it not bring out the *raga-roopa*? It certainly does, I rejoin; but, as it is here brought out, the *raga*-form cannot be said to interest people at large—a fact which lends point to our earlier suggestion that a *raga* is not supposed to actually interest everyone. Nor can the form of a *raga* be identified with its appearance as embodied in a rhythmically organized composition, for here, though the *raga*'s identity is clearly indicated, its dimensions—that is, its depth and compass, and the possibility it provides for ever newer creation, are never brought out, because the *taar* and the *mandra*, and so quite a few qualities of *swaras*, are here not quite exploited. It may be noted that *aroha-avaroha/vadi-samvadi*, and the *bandish* are already prefixed—and given to, or found by, the artist—at the very outset. The form of the *raga*, on the other hand, is to be brought out or evoked by realizing the various qualities of the notes and the possible (and permissible) diversity of their relations in different *saptaks* and at varying pace. The *raga* thus comes to reveal its (abstract) vitality and depth, its heavenward reaches, freedom of operation within the embrace of a determinate musical complex, and its ability to serve as the locus of different emotions. This is why, I repeat, the more insightful of our older musicians prefer to think of a *raga* as a living something.

A *raga* is a living form not merely in the sense which Susanne Langer gives to this concept—that is, a kind of organism in respect of the life of which we cannot determine the exact individual contribution of each organ²⁴—but essentially because it reveals the dynamic features of life, say, animation and vitality, the self-gathering of a discipline, depth and repose, and varying and regulated pursuit of an end, here the evocation of a *rasa*.

To conclude, the *raga*-form is a distinct and identifiable melodic wholeness. It is not a limited shape or a mere outline. It is what or how the grammatical character of a *raga* comes to appear as a result of the musician's actualization of the creative possibilities that it offers. The *rasika* and the critic have to follow this process of actualization and to gather its successive moments through a constructive use of their sympathetic imagination.

Yet, insofar as the *raga*-form is not the only content of a classical music recital, no *raga*, as projected in music, has a rigidly identical look for every musician, critic, or *rasika*. Our capacities and preferences differ; and so

whereas a *khayaliya* may look upon a *raga* as a chartered region of freedom for the creation of ever newer compositions and *taans*, the *alapiya* may think of it as an immense, if determinate, compass for evoking effects of depth and grandeur, sublimity and seamlessness. The *rasika* or the critic too, depending on whether he inclines more to grammar and musicology or to aesthetic relish, may look upon a *raga* as an adroit manipulation of some specific *swaras* or as the potent locus or spring of a particular *rasa*. □

NOTES

1. *Sangeeta Ratnakara*.
2. Matanga Muni, *Brihaddesi*, Sangeet Karyalaya, Hathras, 1976, p. 29, *sloka* 283.
3. *Ibid*, *sloka* 281.
4. *Ibid*, *sloka* 280.
5. Bharata's *Natya Sastra*, edited by Pandit Kedarnath, second edition (Bombay, Nirnayasagar, 1943), *sloka* 74, chapter 28.
6. *Vadi* is the dominant note of a *raga*; *samvad* is the *swara* which is taken to add noticeably to the effect of the *vadi*. *Samvad* is the relation of aesthetic accordance.
7. George Santayana: *The Sense of Beauty*, Dover Publications, 1955, p. 44.
8. *Ibid*, p. 61.
9. Swami Prajnananda: *A Historical Study of Indian Music*, Ananddhara Prakashan, Calcutta, 1965, p. 135.
10. Monier-Williams: *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, Oriental Publishers, Delhi, 1899, p. 572.
11. *A Historical Study of Indian Music*, p. 135.
12. Santayana: *The Sense of Beauty*, p. 45.
13. *Ibid*, p. 47.
14. Alain Danielou: *North Indian Music*, Volume II, Halcyon Press, London, 1954, p. ix.
15. A *kanrasiya* is a person who looks on music as a mere titillation of the ear. A *rasika*, on the other hand, is one whose response to a work of art is duly sensitive and discriminating.

16. Monier-Williams: *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 410.
17. Such *alap* is singing without words and also without beat-measured rhythm. Dhruvpad is the rhythmically organized song which follows the *alap*. For a simple account of the aesthetic nature and function of *alap* see my essay. 'Alapa in Dhruvapada Gayaki', *Sangeet Natak*, July—December 1986.
18. Monier-Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 201.
19. Khayal is the more popular form of north Indian vocal music. It is commonly believed to offer greater scope for imaginative and decorative work than Dhruvpad.
20. *Sthayi* is generally regarded as the first line of a song. In actual singing, however, it also serves as the stable ground against which the decorative and varying quality of the patterns is heightened.
21. *Layakari* in *sangeet* is a performer's attempt to explore evermore the creative possibilities inherent in *laya* or aesthetic pace—which, as measured with the help of beats, is rhythm—by resorting to: changes in tempo, manner of flow, and syllabic filling; proper segmentation of *bols* or mnemonic syllables and their bunches; and regulation of emphases suchwise that the relation of the rhythmic variations to the basic pace may also remain perceivable, in principle.
22. *Bandish*: A rhythmically organized composition which clearly embodies a *raga* and a *tala*.
23. Antony Flew. *A Dictionary of Philosophy*, Pan Books, 1979, p. 123.
24. S.K. Langer. *Problems of Art*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1957, pp. 134—135.