

The Fabric of Aamad :

A STUDY OF FORM AND FLOW IN HINDUSTANI MUSIC

S. K. Saxena

This Paper¹ is, in the main, an analysis of *aamad*. It seeks to understand what *aamad* 'means' and how it 'works'. As an enquiry after the meaning of a word of musical discourse, the essay is aesthetical²; and as an investigation into *how aamad* works — that is, how it designs itself and bewitches us in actual listening — its concern is with an aspect of musical *technique*. My manner is analytical; and I seek throughout to verify points of theoretical interest in terms of our actual experience of music. Emphasis on verifiability and its passion for details are two important features of Science today.

To ensure close thinking, I have to leave out much that may seem relevant to the concept chosen. Thus, nowhere in the Paper do I say anything about *aamad* from the viewpoint of Kathak dance. The reference throughout is to music alone. But even within this self-imposed limit, no claim is made to any finality of treatment.

On the other hand, I cannot speak of *aamad* merely. An *aamad* never occurs alone. It is always found inlaid in a *bandish* which it at once distinguishes. *Bandish* is our word for 'form' in Hindustani music. *Form*, in turn, is here secured through a *flow* that is not only articulate, but internally organized. A *sthayi* has a form³ (aesthetically) if, when sung, it seems intense and organized; and as embodying⁴ a *raga* and a specific *tala*. As sung, it is a movement or flow traversing *svara*-s in different ways. Its form is occurrent, and is manifest variously: as integration of notes or phrases, in terms of *meend* (or *kanbharna*) or rhythmic grouping, and through its emphases (or *zarab*-s), and manner of movement culminating in an *aamad* which ends at the *sama*. So, in addition to *aamad* — and as related to it, in respect of both theory and practice — I have to speak of the form and flow of our music, and of such concepts as *bandish*, *sthayi*, *tala*, *theka* or rhythm-cycle, *zarab*s and *sama*.

Bandish, I insist, is for us a very important concept. Its exact relation to *raga* and *tala* is to be understood with care. If a *bandish* is to be a true aesthetic form, it must seem not merely placed in a *raga-tala* setting—like some clothes in a box which remains external to them—but as including, building upon, and welding the *raga-tala* in question into an intimate and significant unity. Within the *bandish* the *raga* should be throughout visible, and so should be the rhythm-cycle too⁶,—either through a steady, but simple relation of one-one correspondence between the sections of singing and rhythm-cycle, or through a deliberate and skilful displacement of the emphases of the *bandish* (as sung) from the *zarab-s* of the *theka*. In the latter case, what is avoided seems—because of the very intentional and methodical quality of the act—at once daintily suggested.

What I have just said should make it clear, a little later, why I interpret *aamad* as I do. Literally, the word *aamad* means 'arriving at', 'entry' or 'appearance'. In the context of music, its minimal meaning—not its full aesthetic significance—simply is: arriving at the *sama*. But, in actual music—say, in singing a *sthayi*—the *sama* can be reached in (at least) two clearly distinguishable ways:

a. Either the *sthayi* may be made to move steadily along with, and as parallel to, the set distinctions within the *theka*. Here, when (one *avrti* of) the *sthayi* is completed, the singer reaches the *sama*, and may begin the line anew.

This gives us one meaning of *aamad*: *aamad* or our reaching the *sama* immediately after the completion of one round of the *sthayi*.

The *sama* here appears as the target of the singer, not a self-completion of the *sthayi* itself. It remains a mere point—to be reached admittedly; but it does not appear integral to *sthayi*'s own inner design. It merely comes after, but does not directly seem to consummate the *sthayi*. Rhythm here just envelops or accompanies, but is not assimilated into the singing⁷.

So, if a *sthayi* is required to have (or to be) a form, and if—as only seems proper—artistic form be taken to stand for a deep inner cohesion of elements, such a simple arrival at the *sama*, as presents it merely as the immediate sequel to—not as the direct consummation of—a process, cannot be regarded as the true (aesthetic) meaning of *aamad*.

b. Alternatively, and this is its second meaning which I accept throughout this Paper, *aamad* may be understood as:

that identifiable section of the flowing form of a *sthayi* (or *gat*), in and through which the flow seems to activate or regulate itself perceptibly at a particular point of the rhythm-cycle, and therefrom to move towards,

and attain the *sama* in a well-designed way; which attainment at once seems a *self-completion* of the entire *bandish* as a dynamic design.^{7a}

But, I hasten to add that, though admittedly identifiable as distinct, an *aamad* cannot be separated from the complete *bandish* without loss of beauty. Aesthetically, the *aamad* determines, and is determined by its entire embedment in the *bandish*.

To facilitate understanding, I may now break up what I have said on the subject into simple, individual points. It is these that I regard as the *necessary*⁸ features of a good *aamad*; and it is precisely these that I propose to 'illustrate' in terms of actual singing:

1. It should:
 - a *Begin distinctly*; and
 - b *Continue to appear* distinct, say, even after the execution of the *antara* or a rhythmic pattern. (CLEAR EMANATION)
- 2 May also appear, if possible, *to activate or gather itself* for onward movement. (SELF-ACTIVATION).
- 3 Must seem clearly *to move towards*⁹ the *sama* (CLEAR ORIENTATION). This is possible only if the *aamad* is not too brief or quick.
- 4 Such movement, moreover, should be striking and well-designed, —
 - a either by employing some distinct excellence of singing,
 - b Or by virtue of a deft manipulation of rhythm. (BEAUTY OF DESIGN)¹⁰.
- 5 Finally, the *aamad* as such should touch — not necessarily stop at — the *sama* not only (in every case) correctly, but likeably. The demand can be met variously:
 - a Say, be just fondling or caressing — yet, without eclipsing — the *sama* with a gentle sway of the voice;
 - b By including it, as a mere suggestion in a flowing continuity, so that its second (distinct) arrival delights us because of the very fact of its having been withheld for some time.
 - c Or, above all, by making the *sama* appear as the natural culmination of a self-evolving pattern of clearly marked accents; in which case the *sama* seems to *emerge*, not merely to come. (TERMINAL PROPRIETY).

To sum up, the more important features of a good *aamad*, in my view, are

Clear Emanation
Self-Activation
Clear Orientation
Beauty of Design
Terminal Propriety.

In brief, how the *aamad* bestirs itself and takes shape; how it blooms or proceeds or unwinds itself; and how it consummates itself by embracing the *sama*, — it is to details such as these that I seek to invite attention.

Besides these *features* that should distinguish an *aamad*, I may also consider, again with the help of some 'illustrations' the following problems that arise in our attempt to understand or create it.

- 6 How can *aamad* be made (and kept) *distinct* in a rhythm-cycle of brief compass, say *sool tala*?
 (I answer: by enlivening the point of its origin, or by making it striking because of its contrast, euphonic or positional, with its setting).
- 7 How is the effect of an *aamad* determined by its context — say, by the quality of the *bol*-s or patterns that precede or follow it immediately?
- 8 How does an *aamad* determine, by virtue of the way it touches the *sama* — as the end of a vigorous flow, or with the sharpness of a pointer — the character or design of what follows it?
- 9 Above all, how is *aamad* related to the text of the song?

This, again, may be considered as the relation of *aamad*:

- a either to the euphonic or merely *formal character* of language,
- b or to the *meaning* of words.

As for the 'illustrations', I propose to use *tarana*-s liberally; and this for some clear reasons. In so far as they make only a sparing use of language, they offer a fine field for studying matters of mere structure. What is more, they permit a very easy view of the contrast and interplay of such formal features of music as continuity and flow; discreetness and successiveness; and buoyancy and artistic abandon. Above all, their relation to the fabric of rhythm is throughout clearly perceivable, largely because of their employment of *bol*-s as *zarab*-s.

For sheer *stateliness* of *aamad*, however, one has to turn to *dhammar-s* of the right variety. Nor can *dhruvapad-s* be wholly ignored. In fact, to consider the question as to how *aamad* can at all be made visible in a *theka* of brief compass, I will have to refer to such compositions as *dhruvapad-s*¹¹ in *sool tala*.

I must openly admit the possibility of many inadequacies in my entire presentation. Some of these I now myself see quite clearly. For instance, I have *not* distinguished *aamad* from what is called *pakarh ki taan*. Nor have I said anything about the delightful possibility of incorporating within the *bandish* a *subsidiary* movement, itself resembling an *aamad*, which ends immediately before the beginning of the regular *aamad*¹². The *sama*, too, *which-completes and caps the aamad*, should have been dealt with not only as the destiny of the *sthai*, but also as a stimulus to further creation. The idea of *sama as stimulus* is clearly different to that of *sama as destiny*.

Let me add however — that in spite of these limitations, I do expect my Paper to realize two clear ends, if but incompletely:

First, to show how detailed aesthetical thinking is both possible and necessary — without much dependence on the ancient works on music — with regard to our music *today*; and

Secondly, to suggest that Hindustani music — which alone I happen to know — is very systematic, without of course being pent up within any closed or final system.

Notes and References:

- (1) Its present form differs, though only in respect of some minor details, from the Paper distributed to the participants. This is so because it now includes some new points that emerged in the oral summary I attempted by way of introducing the Paper, and during the discussions which followed the presentation of the vocal 'illustrations'.
- (2) 'Aesthetical', according to the modern view, that — considered as a branch of *philosophy* — aesthetics is the study of our *talk* about art.
- (3) Admittedly, *alapa* too can be said to have a 'form'. But it has nothing to do with a *rhythm-cycle*, an important element of our music. Nor does it employ *aamad* as generally understood. Hence, my emphasis on *sthai-s*.

A question is here possible. Why should we speak of *form* at all in relation to music? My ready answer to this would run as follows: Music, we all agree, is a major art; so, it seems reasonable to say that it must exhibit the common features which are thought to characterise all good art as such. One such feature is the possession of *form*.

- (4) Why I say 'embodying', and not merely 'conforming to' will be clarified in the next para.
It may here be mentioned in passing that, in a very recent work, embodiment, rather than expression, has been regarded as the key aesthetical concept. See: L.A. Reid, *Meaning in the Arts* (George Allen & Unwin Ltd., London, 1969).
- (5) *Zarab* may be distinguished from *matra*. A *matra* merely *measures*; and enables us to *count*. A *zarab* stands for how, or for the fact that an accent—may be a *matra* itself, or a *bol* occurring at, or is placed from a *matra*—*asserts itself* in, or against, the flow of rhythm. A *matra* stands for one as merely making a series or an act of counting. A *zarab* stands also for the *impact* of the one on a flowing continuity.
- (6) This requirement cannot be, easily met by a *sthayi* that is sung *very* slowly. In such singing, the form of the *theka* is not visible to the singer himself, and he depends entirely on the drummer, *not on the structure of the sthayi itself*. The (relatively) *vilambit* compositions of the late Ustad Aman Ali Khan, on the other hand, do *not* suffer from this defect.
- (7)a. If it is understood in this comprehensive sense, *aamad* cannot be translated as mere 'resolution of tension' — a phrase to which my attention was invited by Professor Lobo after the discussion. Nor do I know of any work which has already discussed *aamad* as I here define it. My argument here is that the meaning of a word depends on, and changes along with, its linguistic usage; and that in so far as the ancient, Sanskrit texts were not concerned with discourse relating to *khyal*-singing and Kathak dance — the two areas in which the word *aamad* is today mainly used—they could not possibly be concerned with *aamad* as I understand it, *in the light of our arts today*. Words like *ateet* and *anagat* refer only to the relation that obtains — in such cases — between the musical ending and the *sama*. They say nothing about what I later speak of as 'clear emanation', 'self-activation' and 'clear-orientation'.
- (7)b. This is exactly what happens in the case of *sthayi*-s that extend from *sama* to *sama* without employing any *aamad* as I understand it. I did not, however, explain this quite clearly when, during discussion, Pt. Vinaychandra invited my attention to such *sthayi*-s. Again, as Sri K.K. Varma rightly pointed out after the discussion, though my emphasis (in the oral summary) on the attributes of a good *aamad* was throughout clear, I did not lay enough *positive* stress on the view — which I so far regard unchallengeable—that we just cannot have a good *bandish* without a properly structured *aamad*.
- (8) Necessary, but not all.
- (9) 'Moving towards' calls for *aroha*, *avaroha*: hence, their importance for musical structure. Such movement can be easily seen in the *leisurely* flow of *dhamar tala*; hence, the striking character of the *aamad* of a *dhamar*.
- (10) In the absence of any one of these four features, an *aamad* cannot seem to approach us clearly from a 'distance', a remark which, I gratefully remember, was made and explained by Ustad Chand Khan during the course of a talk I had with him, about twenty years ago.
The fact that Ustad Chand Khan is an eminent *vocalist* at once answers the protests, made during the discussions, that *aamad* is heard of only in the context of dance, never in that of vocal music, — a statement which surprised me.
- (11) For my familiarity with the structure and imagery of *dhrupad*-s and *damar*-s, I am deeply indebted to Padma Bhushan Ustad A. Rahimuddin Khan Dagur. *Aamad* is, however, just as essential for, and possible in *khyal*-singing as in the case of *tarana*-s. The fact that, during illustrative singing, I did not produce any *khyal* was a clear deficiency of the presentation. But I still believe in the validity of the reason, here advanced, as to why I prefer *tarana*-s to *khyal*-s in speaking of the details of musical structure.
- (12) I did, however, produce an instance of this while singing, by way of "illustration", a *dhamar* in *raga Hindol*.

The following material was used as Illustrations

Compositions	Points to be illustrated
1. <i>Bhairava, dhruvpad; 10 matra-s</i>	Terminal propriety. How to make <i>aamad</i> clearly visible in a clear of brief compass. <i>Aamad</i> , as determined by its context. <i>Aamad</i> , as related to the formal or euphonic character of language.
2. <i>Gujri todi, tarana; 16</i> „	How <i>aamad</i> is kept distinct, even as implicit in the <i>antara</i> . Beauty of Design; Terminal Propriety. <i>Aamad</i> as determined by its context.
3. Another <i>Gujri tarana; 16</i> „	Terminal propriety. A gentle swaying movement of voice seems to caress the <i>sama</i> , investing it with a suggestion of tenderness. Clear emanation, even after the <i>antara</i> . But, here, the beauty of the <i>aamad</i> is clearly determined by its positional contrast with what comes before it. Clear orientation, through rhythmic grouping (of the second line, before the <i>antara</i>).
4. Same raga, <i>dhamar, 14 matra-s</i>	Clear orientation. Moving towards the <i>sama</i> . Clear emanation. How the distinctness of the <i>aamad</i> is maintained even after the <i>antara</i> . and (may be) even after a rhythmic variation. <i>Aamad determined</i> by the way in which a preceding rhythmic variation ends.
5. <i>Hindol, dhamar, 14</i>	Beauty of design, because of accents. <i>Aamad</i> as related to the meaning of words. Clear emanation, maintained even after <i>antara</i> and rhythmic variations.
6. <i>Sohni, tarana, 11</i> „	Clear emanation, maintained even after the <i>antara</i> . How the beauty of <i>aamad</i> is determined by its contrast, in respect of manner of movement, with its context.

Note: Vocal and rhythmic assistance was provided (respectively) by Shri Raj Kumar and Prof. Sudhir Kumar Saxena from the College of Music, Baroda University to the illustrations sung by Dr. S.K. Saxena.