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### Colours of Kalyani – Film Music

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**Abstract:** This work is an attempt to appreciate and understand the musicality of Raga Kalyani and tamil Film Music. It is an effort to get the essence of Kalyani raga and its usage in different moods of the film music. Kalyani is the 65th Melakarta raga in the Carnatic music system (72 Melakarta ragas). Its *shuddha madhyama* equivalent is Sankarabharanam, and its Hindustani counterpart is Yaman. In Western classical music its equivalent is the Lydian scale.

**Keywords:** Kalyani Raga, Film Music, Songs, varieties, MSV, Ilaiyaraaja, KVM

#### *Introduction*

Kalyani is a Rakthi Raga. A raga whose characteristics is apparent in aalapana and thanam is called a Rakthi raga.

Evening. The time between four in the evening and eight in the night, that is, the time between evening and the night before. It is the time when people, after working hard during the day and returning home, are happy with their wives and children. /During this time, some people spend their time happily listening to musical concerts. The ragas sung at this time will be composed of ragas with slow, medium and fast tempos that everyone will enjoy listening to, and ragas that give room for manodharmam. Shankaraparanm, Kalyani, Kamboji, Bhairavi, Thodi, Karaharapriya, Pandhuvarali are some ragas that will find a place at this time. It is a time to listen with peace and quiet.

#### *Characteristic feature of Kalyani*

- Devotion (Bhakti) – deep reverence and calmness
- Happiness & Bliss – bright, uplifting sound
- Maternal Love (Vātsalyam) – gentle, nurturing warmth
- Romantic Love (Śṛṅgāram) – longing and tenderness
- Contemplation – introspective, thoughtful mood
- Majesty & Grandeur – regal, expansive melodic space
- Wide presence in classical, semi-classical, devotional, and film music.

Graha Bhedam of Kalyani yields 5 other Melakartas namely Hanumatodi, Sankarabharanam, Natabhairavi, Kharaharapriya, Harikambhoji. Popular janya ragas from Kalyani include Hamir Kalyani, Mohanakalyani, Saranga, Sunadavinodini, Yamunakalyani.

#### *Key Phrases of Kalyani*

The following are the key phrases of the Kalyani used in film and Carnatic Music

- gmp (Ga Ma Pa)
- ddpmgr (Dha Dha Pa Ma Ga Ri)



- nrgmpmgr (Ni Ri Ga Ma Pa Ma Ga Ri)
- pmgrs (Pa Ma Ga Ri Sa)
- snsrgsrnd
- mdr'ndpmgr
- nrgmgr
- p m g r s r
- g m p m g r s r

Jiva Swaras Ri, Ga, Ni . Often singers avoid Sa and Pa temporarily to heighten emotional expectation.

Due to the characteristics Kalyani is widely used in film music for decades, following are the list of songs based on Kalyani raga and we will discuss in detail about the characteristic of the raga in some of the songs listed below.

### Some popular Tamil songs in Kalyani Ragam

	Song	Movie Name	Music Director	Singers
1	Chindanai sei maname	Ambikapathi (1957)	G. Ramanathan	T. M. Sounderarajan
2	Mannavan vanthanadi	Thiruvarutselvar (1967)	K. V. Mahadevan	P. Susheela
3	Isai ketal poovi	Thavapudhalavan (1972)	M.S. Viswanathan	T.M. Soundararajan
4	Thensinduthu vanam unnai	Ponnuku Thanga Manasu 1973	G.K. Venkatesh	SPB and S. Janaki
5	Veenai adi nee enakku	Ezhavathu Manithan 1981	Unni Menon	KJ Yesudas
6	Vellai pura ondr	Puthu Kavithai (1982)	Ilaiyaraaja	K. J. Yesudas and S. Janaki (Duet version)
7	Janani Janani	Thaai Mookambikai (1982)	Ilaiyaraaja	Ilaiyaraaja
8	Nathiyil adum povanam	Kaadhal Oviyam (1983)	Ilaiyaraaja	S.P. Balasubrahmanyam, S. Janaki, Deepan Chakravarthy
9	Vizhikal meeno mozhikal theno	Raagangal Maaruvathillai 1983	Ilaiyaraaja	S.P. Balasubrahmanyam
10	Devan thanthan veenai	Unnai Naan Santhithen 1984	Ilaiyaraaja	S. Janaki and P. Jayachandran
11	Manatheile oru pattu	Dhayam Onnu (1984)	G. Ramanathan	S. P. Balasubrahmanyam and P. Susheela
12	Kalai vaniye	Sindhu Bhairavi 1985	Ilaiyaraaja	K. J. Yesudas
13	Vanthal Mahalakshmi	Uyarndha Ullam (1985)	Ilaiyaraaja	S. P. Balasubrahmanyam
14	Adisaiya nadamidum	Sirayil Pootha Chinna Malar 1990	Ilaiyaraaja	K. J. Yesudas and K. S. Chithra



	abinaya			
15	Yamunai atrile kanna	Thalapathi (1991)	Ilaiyaraaja	S.P. Balasubrahmanyam and Minmini
16	Sundari Kannal Oru Sethi	Thalapathi (released in 1991)	Ilaiyaraaja	S. P. Balasubrahmanyam and S. Janaki
17	Azhagu Nilave	<i>Pavithra 1994</i>	A.R. Rahman	Chitra / Unni Krishnan
18	Yen penendru piranthai	Love Today -1997	Shiva C	Udit Narayan and Kavita Krishnamurthy
19	Mudal mudalil parthen kadal vand	Aahaa (1997)	Deva	Hariharan and K.S. Chithra
20	Nirpathuve nadappathuve	Bharathi (2000)	Ilaiyaraaja	Harish Raghavendra
21	Nirpathuve nadappathuve	Bharathi (2000)	Ilaiyaraaja	Harish Raghavendra
22	Katril varum geethame	Oru Naal Oru Kanavu 2005	Ilaiyaraaja	Hariharan, Shreya Ghoshal, and Sadhana Sargam

### Summarisation

#### 1. *Mannavan Vandhanadi* – Thiruvartselvar

The film opens with a devadasi's dance for a king; through this dance and song, she first captivates him and then helps him realise the insignificance of sensual pleasures, turning his attention towards the stories of the Nayanmars and devotion to Shiva.

The court dancer sings this song with a classical bharatanatyam . Through her beauty and the meaningful lyrics of the song, she tries to make him interested into spirituality. And she uses the lives of nayanmars and their devotion to Lord Shiva to stress her point of view to the King.

- Kalyani is considered an auspicious or "mangalam" raga and is often performed at the beginning of concerts or on special occasions like weddings. This inherently positive and majestic quality of the raga aligns well with the devotional and reverent mood of "Mannavan vanthanadi", which is a song of praise and welcome.

G<sub>3</sub> M<sub>2</sub> D<sub>2</sub> N<sub>3</sub> S – S N<sub>3</sub> D<sub>2</sub> M<sub>2</sub> G<sub>3</sub> R<sub>2</sub> S A classical Kalyani ascent → descent , Used prominently in the opening “Mannavan vandhanadi”.

R<sub>2</sub> G<sub>3</sub> M<sub>2</sub> – M<sub>2</sub> G<sub>3</sub> R<sub>2</sub> S Classic Carnatic Kalyani glide. M<sub>2</sub> D<sub>2</sub> N<sub>3</sub> S The bright upper-octave sweep.

- The raga is known for its ability to evoke a wide range of emotions (bhava), from light-heartedness to deep, emotional expression. In this song, the raga's potential is used to convey devotion and a sense of grandeur as the "mannavan" (king/deity) arrives.
- The distinct characteristic of Kalyani is the use of the *prati madhyamam* (M2) swara (note), which gives it a bright, expansive, and unique flavor compared to other major ragas. This specific note is central to the melody of "Mannavan vanthanadi," shaping its identifiable sound and contributing to its overall impact.



- The song effectively utilizes the full scale of the raga (a *sampurna* raga, meaning it has all seven notes in its ascending and descending scales) to explore various melodic phrases and movements, showcasing the richness of the raga without explicitly stating the swaras in the lyrics (unlike some other songs).

## 2. *Isai Ketal Poovi – Thavapudhalavan*

Pure Kalyani, Blends classical depth with devotional aesthetics strong gamakas and emotional upliftment.

The Tamil song "Isai Kettal Poovi Asinthandum" is from the 1972 film "Thavapudhalvan." The song was composed by the legendary music director M. S. Viswanathan, with lyrics by the famous poet Kannadasan, and sung by T. M. Soundararajan. The film stars Sivaji Ganesan and K. R. Vijaya, and it was directed by Muktha Srinivasan.

S R<sub>2</sub> G<sub>3</sub> M<sub>2</sub> | M<sub>2</sub> G<sub>3</sub> R<sub>2</sub> S G<sub>3</sub> M<sub>2</sub> D<sub>2</sub> Ś | Ś N<sub>3</sub> D<sub>2</sub> M<sub>2</sub> and M<sub>2</sub> D<sub>2</sub> N<sub>3</sub> Ś | Ś N<sub>3</sub> D<sub>2</sub> M<sub>2</sub> G<sub>3</sub> M<sub>2</sub> G<sub>3</sub> R<sub>2</sub> | R<sub>2</sub> S are the smooth Kalyani phrases in the song.

Gliding phrases M<sub>2</sub> G<sub>3</sub> R<sub>2</sub> | S R<sub>2</sub> G<sub>3</sub> M<sub>2</sub> D<sub>2</sub> M<sub>2</sub> G<sub>3</sub> R<sub>2</sub>. These gives the evidence of the song is set to raga Kalyani.

- Emotion (Bhava): It is associated with courage (Veera), happiness, and a sense of completeness. It is a versatile raga that can be explored at length, often forming the centerpiece of a Carnatic concert.
- Therapeutic Effects: In music therapy, Kalyani is believed to have healing benefits, such as helping to dispel fear, release dopamine (the "happy drug"), and induce a peaceful state of mind in anxiety patients.
- Aesthetic Quality: The raga has a rich, all-encompassing feel, often associated with a maternal instinct and the dispelling of darkness.
- Compositional Use: Nearly every significant Carnatic composer has used Kalyani. In film music, as seen in "Isai Kettal Puvi," it is used to create a melodious and impactful listening experience.
- The character talks about the famous poet Thansen in Akbar's kingdom and so the composer MSV starts the song with a Hindustani style aalap. So it sets the mood.
- The instruments predominantly used are violins, sitar, flute, thabala and bells.
- This is a dream sequence song. The song situation is this: The queen is gravely ill and it is believed that this man Thansen can make her alright with his singing. And he sings this song. It is expected that the lights will come on automatically once he starts singing as a sign of divine intervention. But nothing happens. So close to the end of the song, the singer increases the tempo as a sign of desperation and finally it happens. The lights come on and the queen becomes awake and gets up healthy.
- So in the end before the lights come on, the sitar comes in again to close it with Kalyani raga. And at that point we know that by using Kalyani raga, the composer signifies that the end is going to be good.
- Powerful lyrics by Kannadasan complements MSV's soulful composition. And he explores the full healing power of raga Kalyani. And the divine power o kalyani to remove diseases is in full flow in this song.



### **3. Kalai Vaniye – Sindhu Bhairavi**

Uses only Arohana pattern,,Uplifting, bright, creatively crafted. Ilaiyaraaja composed a song with the ascending notes only in keeping with the sequence in the movie where a Musician after touching the nadir gets a new life and rises again.

"Kalai Vaniye" melodically explores the beauty and auspiciousness of Kalyani, often starting with Ga or Pa and creating a confident, motherly and devotional atmosphere. The raga also typically includes phrases moving through the octaves, both the lower (mandra) and upper (tara) registers, which "Kalai Vaniye" skillfully employs.

Thus, the key phrases of Kalyani in "Kalai Vaniye" exemplify the raga's character: auspicious, pleasing, confidence-boosting, and emotionally expressive through distinctive melodic patterns and gamakas anchored around specific notes and phrase.

The Pallavi itself is so thoughtfully conceived and elegantly put through. It has a total of thirteen words with each one sounding different from one another (different combinations of Swaras with a very limited scope for exposition.

The voice (K. J. Yesudas) is the main focus. The orchestration is built to support his singing, not to compete with it. His lines clearly outline the raga with graceful gamakas (ornaments), so the feeling of Kalyani is always strong.

- Behind the voice, there is a soft bed of strings and gentle synthesizers/keyboard. These hold long notes (sustained lines) that outline the raga and create a glowing, "divine" aura around the melody. It feels like a halo of sound around the singer.

- The rhythm section is very restrained. The basic beat is simple and steady, with soft drum patterns that keep time but never dominate. The idea is to preserve the prayer-like mood rather than drive a dance feel.

- In between the vocal lines, instrumental interludes use violins, flute and sometimes synthesizer leads to highlight classic Kalyani phrases. Often the violins start low and gradually climb upwards, matching the emotional rise in the lyrics – like a musical "lifting up" towards the goddess of art.

- Although the base is pure Carnatic raga, Ilaiyaraaja quietly adds a touch of Western-style harmony in the background strings/keys. These chords are chosen so they do not disturb the raga, but they thicken the sound and give it a rich, cinematic feel.

- Overall, the orchestration is gentle but grand: no loud or busy arrangement, yet a strong sense of dignity and devotion. It supports the scene of praying to the goddess of arts, combining concert-like classical depth with the emotional immediacy of cinema.

The instruments used in this song are violin, veena, flute and keyboard and rhythm pads and traditional mirudangam.

### **3. Janani Janani – Thaaai Mookambigai**

This is one of Ilaiyaraaja's most iconic devotional compositions, set in the Carnatic raga Kalyani and written by lyricist Vaali. It is a simple prayer to Goddess with a rich orchestration.

The instruments used are violins, flute, veena, mirudhangam, tabla and keyboards.

This is for solo male voice and chorus and composer Ilaiyaraaja himself is the solo male singer.

Song overview and raga

- The main tune is easy to follow, but every phrase still carries the raga's characteristic gamakas.



- Both the composition and the lead vocal are by Ilaiyaraaja himself, with Deepan Chakravarthy and others supporting in some versions; the melody moves mostly in a slow, dignified gait that matches the mood of worship to the divine mother.
- The pallavi “Janani Janani” is built on steady, long-held notes, allowing the listener to “rest” in the raga and feel its bhakti (devotional) colour. Ilaiyaraaja avoids excessive melodic twists here, making the opening almost like a simple bhajan.
- As the song progresses into the anupallavi and charanam, the phrases become slightly more elaborate, touching more of Kalyani’s range and using gentle gamakas, but never turning into heavy classical improvisation. This balance keeps the song devotional and cinematic at the same time.

### Orchestration

The string section is central to the orchestration. Violins and lower strings often play long, sustained chords and slow-moving lines that follow the raga while also suggesting Western-style harmony. These chords thicken the sound and give the song its majestic, cinematic weight.

- A choir (or multi-tracked ensemble) joins on key words like “Janani” and in some refrains, doubling or harmonising the main tune. This choral writing makes the prayer feel collective, as if an entire congregation is singing to the goddess, not just a solo devotee.

### Rhythm and percussion

- The underlying tala can be felt as a slow, even 2/4-type devotional pulse; the percussion is very restrained, usually soft drums or pads that mark the beat without drawing attention. There are no aggressive fills or complex rhythmic tricks – the priority is serenity and reverence.
- Occasionally, cymbal swells and subtle timpani or bass drum strokes are used to underline climactic lines, giving a sense of grandeur and “temple bell” impact at emotional high points.

### Instrumental interludes and build-up

- Between vocal sections, Ilaiyaraaja uses brief instrumental passages where violins, flute or solo violin restate or develop the main Kalyani motif. These passages allow the music to “breathe” and deepen the meditative feel.
- Across the song, there is a gradual build-up: it begins intimately, then adds more layers – fuller strings, louder choir, broader harmony – so that by the later repetitions of “Janani Janani,” the piece feels like a full-blown symphonic hymn.

### Emotional and cinematic effect

- The combination of a simple, direct raga-based melody, Ilaiyaraaja’s earnest vocal delivery, temple-like choir, and symphonic strings creates a powerful sense of surrender and awe towards the divine mother.
- In the context of “Thaai Mookaambikai,” the orchestration supports the film’s devotional theme: it sounds simultaneously like a Carnatic-based prayer, a film song, and a Western-style hymn, bridging classical tradition, cinema, and spiritual emotion in one composition.

In summary, “Janani Janani” is crafted so that:



- Kalyani's auspicious, motherly character is always clear in the melody.
- The orchestration (strings, choir, soft percussion, gentle harmony) amplifies the feeling of grand, collective worship.
- The song grows from quiet devotion to majestic praise, making it one of Ilaiyaraaja's most enduring devotional film compositions.

### **Different Moods of Kalyani,**

The Kalyani raga is generally associate with the shades like Joy & Auspiciousness, Devotion (Bhakti), Gratitude , Calmness Maternal Love & Kindness (Vatsalyam) which are the very common flavours. However, some of the genius music directors used this for other forms like Melancholy, competitive spirit, dialogue like conversation or even folk tune also. Let us discuss few rare use of Kalyani raga in film music from this aspect.

### **Competitive Spirit - Sangeetham Pada kelvi or dialogue**

"Sangeetham Paada" is a duet song from the 1988 Tamil film Idhu Namma Aalu (also spelled Ethu Namma Aalu), directed by Balakumaran and starring K. Bhagyaraj and Shobana. Sung by S. P. Balasubrahmanyam and Vani Jayaram, with lyrics by Vaali and music composed by K. Bhagyaraj.

This is not just a normal duet rather the competition of a very learnt Carnatic female vocalist with a normal ordinary person. The picturisation was so amazing that we would get involved into the song and moves the audience to the edge of the seat to know who wins the competition. Female singer or heroine opens with setting a challenging tone in the raga Kalyani, While male retorts using metaphors like fish in the sea for immersion in music.

This song has an alapana portion in Kalyani , swaram and jathi to consider like a full concert. However, since the hero is a normal person he would try to take the strand of lyrics to help his little knowledge. The brilliance of the Music director and the singers and very vivid in every line and raga Kalyani was given to its crux. The genius singers Vani Jayaram and SP Balasubramaniyam has mesmerized the listeners with the tempo and lyrics.

We do not find any such competition or dialogue kind of songs in Tamil music in the Ragam Kalyani. There are many songs in different ragas or raga maligai or in other short ragas like Surya ( Isai Arasi ) but not the sampurna scale Kalyani.

### **Thalayam Poomidithu Tadam Pathu – Folk**

This song is a romantic duet from the 1959 Tamil film Bhaaga Pirivinai, sung by T. M. Soundararajan and P. Leela, with lyrics by Kannadasan and music by Viswanathan–Ramamoorthy.

The mood or shades of the Kalyani is already declared in the above paragraph where it is generally spread the flavour of devotion , joy , etc but not the tune of the folk. Punnaga varali, kavadi chindu, nada namakriya, anandha Bhairavi , maandu are some of the popular ragas used to incorporate the mood of folk in Tamil Film music. However Kalyani was not generally used for this purpose however great music director like vishwanatha – Ramamoorthy used this for the folk tune too.

The beauty of the song , that it is tuned in Kalyani and also it is a folk with dialogue between the hero and heroine. In the opening itself the tune of the song is set in the jathi as Thanthana Thanathantha (தந்ததான தானதந்தா) . This humming by the composer MS Viswanathan in a rural fold melody style establishes the song atmosphere. A rhythm instrument sounding like a Urumi Melam is used predominatly. Through out the song it is maintained and the lyrics was written in this meter. Composed in a folk-inspired melody blending carnatic elements, it features



a lilting rhythm The opening preludes, emphasizing swaras like gentle oscillations on ga and ma for emotional warmth. The structure repeats key phrases in the first line like plantain leave to shows the intimacy, supported by simple instrumentation highlighting melody over complexity

### **Vizhigal Meeno Mozhigal Theyno -- Raagangal Maaruvathillai**

This song is from the film Raagangal Maaruvathillai, composed by Ilaiyaraaja and sung by S.P. Balasubrahmanyam, derives its captivating beauty from Kalyani raga. Many intricate aspects of Kalyani is employed in the song . Let us discuss about this.

The pallavi opens with "Vizhigal meeno mozhigal thaeno" using Kalyani's signature ; m p d , n , SA , n , d p m phrase, emphasizing madhyama-pa-chathusrutidaivatham-ni transitions for a yearning ascent that mirrors the lyrics' romantic thirst. This evolves into ga3 ri2 ga3 ri2 ga3 ; sa ;, a varja pattern omitting pa-da-ni, creating gamaka-laden oscillations on ga-ri for hypnotic intimacy.

This song has phrases without sa and pa which are considered as genius idea of Ilaiyaraaja. Even in Carnatic concert they generally leave pa while they sing Kalpana swaram and keep the audience to wait to sing the Pa. Same way in this song he omits both Sa and Pa and creates different version of Kalyani raga.

Ilaiyaraaja employs kampita gamakas on ga3 and ni3, alongside jaru slides from ma2 to pa, in swaras like ; m d , SA , r g m p d , n SA, heightening Kalyani's bhakti-shringara blend—distinct from pure classical by rhythmic sync with film choreography.

### **Vanthal Mahalakshmiye from Uyarndha Ullam**

“Vanthal Mahalakshmiye” from *Uyarndha Ullam* (1985) is a classic Ilaiyaraaja composition in the Carnatic raga Kalyani, sung by S. P. Balasubrahmanyam with lyrics by Vaali. It is both a light devotional song to the goddess Lakshmi and a showcase of how pure raga music can be made accessible in cinema without losing its classical identity.

This is a pure Kalyani song using the full scale. There is no excessive gamakas.

There is not much ornamentation and so the melody becomes very prominent.

It is a comic situation song but still the purity of Kalyani is not diluted.

Singer SP Balasubrahmaniam does full justice to the song. And he is closely followed and supported by violins and other instruments.

### **General Kalyani Raga Prayogams.**

Kalyani raga is extensively used in Tamil cinema songs due to its majestic, auspicious, and versatile nature. The raga's prayogams (signature phrase combinations) are woven skilfully by composers to evoke emotions like devotion, romance, and serenity.

Common Kalyani raga Prayogams frequently seen in cinema songs include:

- Ga Ma Pa — a strong uplifting phrase establishing the raga's identity.
- Dha Ni Dha Ga Ri — a descending phrase that adds emotional depth.
- Ni Ri Ga Ma Pa Ma Ga Ri — a graceful phrase often oscillated with gamakas.
- Pa Ma Ga Ri Sa — a phrase that concludes melodic explorations, often anchoring on Sa.
- Sa Ni Sa Ri Ga Ri Sa Ni Dha — a complex phrase elaborating melodic contours.

Kalyani raga is widely used in Tamil film songs because of its majestic, bright, and versatile nature, making it ideal for conveying a range of emotions from devotion to romance and grandeur. Its adaptability allows composers to create songs that are both classical in essence and appealing to a broad audience.



## **Key ways Kalyani raga is used in Tamil film songs:**

- Emotional versatility: Kalyani raga expresses auspiciousness, devotion, romantic love, and calmness, allowing songs to suit many themes such as love, bhakti, hope, and serenity.
- Characteristic phrases: Songs incorporate signature Kalyani prayogams like Ga Ma Pa, Dha Ni Dha Ga Ri, and Ni Ri Ga Ma Pa Ma Ga Ri with distinct gamakas (ornamentations), which give the songs their classical feel.
- Melodic scope across octaves: Tamil film songs in Kalyani often utilize phrases moving through both the lower and upper octaves, creating expansive and expressive melodies.
- Fusion of classical and cinematic styles: Composers skilfully blend classical raga phrases with contemporary arrangements and rhythms, making the raga accessible while retaining its classical integrity.
- Popular thematic usage: Kalyani is often chosen for songs about devotion, divine love, heroine's romantic longing, and uplifting moments due to its emotionally rich and sonorous qualities.

Examples of Tamil film songs featuring Kalyani raga prominently includes the list given in the page above like Then Sindhudhe Vaanam, Vizhigal Meeno Mozhigal, and Nirpathuve Nadappathuve. These songs highlight how Kalyani's traditional prayogams and ornamentations are adapted melodically and rhythmically for cinematic expression.

In summary, Kalyani raga's esteemed place in Tamil film music owes to its emotional expressiveness, melodic richness, and its ability to straddle classical tradition and popular appeal seamlessly

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