



Some insights into the Musicological reconstruction of notations of prabandha-s

K. Srilatha

Jain (Deemed-to-be) University.
Srilathakris1@gmail.com.



1. Introduction

The music manuscripts at the Thanjavur Maharaja Serfoji's Sarasvati Mahal Library, Thanjavur (TMSSML) contain many solfa(sargam) notations of compositions, apparently compiled from the 16th century CE onwards. The musical forms of prabandha, gīta, ālāpa, ṭhāya and sulādiare found in this collection, among others. This subset of manuscripts presents a unique challenge in that most of them do not seem to have an extant oral tradition. Many of them are known today only through their description in musicological treatises, and not through practical, performed examples. An exploratory study by the author on prabandha-s with the signature of Venkatamakhi¹ pointed to the fact that the notations are not sufficiently detailed or self-explanatory and that attempts to reconstruct them are quite challenging. This paper is a continuation of the study and attempts to give some insights into a musicological reconstruction of manuscripts, specifically of prabandha notations.

2. Objectives

To provide insights into the musicological reconstruction of prabandha-s from manuscripts.

To document some advantages and limitations of using lakṣaṇa texts in such a reconstruction.

3. Scope

The study is limited to a small sample of the notations of Prabandha manuscripts² found in TMSSML. The analysis focuses on issues surrounding the structural, melodic and rhythmic aspects of prabandha-s. Reconstruction of lyrics and the performance aspects of prabandha-s are not discussed.

4. Some insights into the prabandha manuscripts in TMSSML

4.1. Structural details in the manuscripts

The 'type' of a prabandha is usually specified in the heading, with varying levels of detail. Examples: Prabandham, kaivāḍaprabandham, saptatālaprabandham, ekatāli, ṣaṭkhaṇḍam. Sections of the composition may also be demarcated, often using regional terms such as jāvaḍa, antari.

Issues: The structural elements, if documented, are often ambiguous. The terms used to describe the dhātu-s are also different from those used in the lakṣaṇa texts.

4.2. Melodic details

The name of a rāga is given at the header of each song, sometimes accompanied by the name of its mela, such as kāmbhōdhimeḷamorgaulameḷam. The tune of the prabandha is given by a simple sargam notation that has only one svāra-akṣara for each tāla-akṣara. In some cases a short note describing a svāra in terms of the svāra of another, presumably well-known, rāga is also seen. A 'bhairavi gāndhāra', for example, may be specified to refer to sādghāraṇa gāndhāra.

Issues: Details of the śruti positions of the svāra-s are not specified in the notations or in the heading. The sthāyi(register) markers are noticeably absent.

4.3. Details of the tāla:

¹ M. Phil thesis submitted to Jain (Deemed-to-be) University in 2019, entitled 'An Analytical Study of Prabandha-s with the Mudrā of Venkatamakhi in Thanjavur Manuscripts'. The thesis analyses the structural issues noted in the śrīraṅga and Umātilakaprabandha-s published in the Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśini. It provides possible explanations by referring to musicological texts for lakṣaṇa, as well as by studying the prabandha notations in TMSSML manuscripts

² Manuscripts which have been identified as prabandha-s from the header or the lyrics



The name of the tāla is specified in the header. Most of the prabandha-s use the sulādisaptatālas.³ Some are set to deśi tāla-s also. Vertical bars (‘|’ or ‘||’) mark the end of an āvarta. Sub-divisions of a tāla are often not marked.

Issues: The details of the laghu ‘jāti’ (the tiśra, catuśra etc.), the tāla-aṅga-s (such as laghu, dhruva) are not seen. The tempo (druta, madhya, vilamba) is not always specified. The notations may also not clearly indicate sections of the composition to be sung without atāla.⁴

4.4. The lyrics:

The lyrics of the prabandha-s are predominantly composed in Sanskrit or bhāṇḍīra-bhāṣā (apabhramśa of Sanskrit). The lyrics may contain the aṅga-spāṭa, tenaka, svara, pada and biruda, as well as the signature of the composer, the name of the prabandha and the name of the patron/extolled.

Issues: The compositions are copied by professional scribes, who were not necessarily educated in musicology or languages. Sometimes notations were subject to the interpretation of ‘intermediate’ musicians before being written down⁵. Thus, the lyrics are not always reliable. Mistakes in the lyrics are observed in many prabandha-s.

5. A lakṣaṇa-centric approach to reconstruction

The above discussion shows that the structural, melodic, and rhythmic details of prabandha-s are not all discernible from the manuscripts. While a scholar may rightly expect the musicological treatises to be of value in this search for missing details, the texts on Indian musicology reveal that the fundamental aspects of music were constantly being redefined and renamed. Quite often, we may find conflicting information on the same topic in different texts. Reconstruction of the songs based on the texts, therefore, is not a straightforward task. Nevertheless, in the absence of any other sources of information, the scholar must still depend on the lakṣaṇa texts to fill up the gaps in information, fully aware of the limitations of such an approach. The following section gives some insights into how a structured approach to the reconstruction of songs using lakṣaṇa texts may be undertaken.

5.1. Determining the sources of lakṣaṇa for a prabandha

Svara, śruti, mela, rāga, tāla and prabandha are described differently in different eras, regions, musical lineages and lakṣaṇa texts. The possible lakṣaṇa sources for a given prabandha manuscript⁶ must first be identified. This may be done by identifying the composer, whose signature or nom de plume is usually woven into the lyrics, in the ābhoga (closing) section.

Example: For prabandha-s with the mudrā of Venkatamakhi⁷, the main text of reference is likely to be the Caturdaṇḍīprakāśikā (CDP), whose author is Venkatamakhi (VM). Texts that are sources for CDP (such as the Saṅgītaratnākara), and texts that refer to the CDP (such as the Saṅgītasāramṛta) will also be references. Lakṣaṇa texts for the reconstruction of prabandha-s with the mudrā of Venkatamakhi may be determined as follows:

References for Prabandha lakṣaṇa: The prabandha chapter in CDP (circa 1650 CE) is influenced by Saṅgītakalānidhi (16th cent CE), which, in turn, is a commentary on Saṅgītaratnākara (13th century CE). Therefore, to reconstruct the structure of a prabandha with the mudrā of VM, the CDP, the Saṅgītakalānidhi and the Saṅgītaratnākara, all need to be consulted.

³The ragaṇa maṭhya, dhruva rūpaka or rūpaka dhruva are also seen, but predominantly in the compositions of type ‘trikhaṇḍam’ (which have been classified as ‘gīta-s’ in SSP)

⁴In some manuscripts, the vertical bars even seem to indicate end of ‘phrases’ in lyrics or pauses in singing - Review comments by Dr. V. Premalatha.

⁵Review comments by Dr. V. Premalatha, made during the presentation of this paper at the conference conducted by the Dept. of Music and Performing Arts, Jain (Deemed-to-be) University, in Jan 2020

⁶The term ‘Manuscript(s)’, when used without any qualifiers in this paper, refers to ‘Notations of prabandha-s in the palm-leaf manuscripts of TMSSM Library’

⁷Venkatamakhi’s name appears in conjunction with those of his parents, Gōvindamakhi and Nāgamamba



References for Rāga/mela: The rāga, mela references in CDP are influenced by Saṅgītasudhā(circa 1614 CE). Later texts such as Rāgalakṣaṇamu (Sahaji, 1684-1711 CE), Rāgalakṣaṇa (Muddu Venkatamakhi, early 18th cent. CE), Saṅgītasāramṛta (Tulaja), which refer to the CDP, must also be consulted.

References for śruti: CDP

References for sulādītāla-s: CDP

References for deśītāla: CDP->Saṅgītaratnākara

Challenges: Such instances of attribution of the same person to lakṣaṇa texts and musical compositions are extremely rare. More complex and ingenious approaches are warranted if the composer is unknown, or if the lakṣaṇa references of a composition are undocumented. Apart from Sanskrit treatises, texts in regional languages will also need to be studied.⁸

5.2. Determining the Structure of a prabandha

The structure of a prabandha as seen in the manuscript must first be documented in terms of its opening, middle, concluding sections and a refrain (if any). The order of the aṅga-s (svara, pāṭa, tena, biruda, pada and tāla) appearing in the prabandha must also be documented. Next, a schema of the structure as seen in the manuscripts is drawn. Ideally, this schema must be based on an analysis of multiple samples of the specific type of prabandha. This step may also involve identifying the textual equivalents of non-textual/regional terms seen in the manuscripts, such as jāvaḍa, antari, khaṇḍa, and ālāpacāri.

Next, the 'type' of the prabandha must be obtained from either the header of the manuscript or from the prabandha mudrā embedded in the lyrics. For example, the lyrics 'kaivāḍa prabandhamavadhārāya deva' (kumbhaghṛṇe) implies that the composition is of type 'kaivāḍa prabandha'. If the prabandha mudrā does not occur in the lyrics, a careful analysis of the structural features (the aṅga-s, dhātus, lyrics) and comparing them with the textual prescriptions may help identify the type of the prabandha. Once the type of a prabandha is identified, a schema of its structure as seen in lakṣaṇa texts is prepared, noting the presence or absence of all other prescriptive details such as the rāga, tāla, chandas.

The schema as per the lakṣaṇa is then compared with the schema derived from the notations and differences between the two analysed. Figure 1 shows the differences between the structure of Venkatamakhi's Umātilakaprabandha in manuscript (Notation) and lakṣaṇa. It is seen that the structure of the three manuscript titled 'Umātilaka prabandha' (tillevanakalita, daśaratharāma, viditapparamata)⁹ resemble the lakṣaṇa of the last khaṇḍikā of a Umātilaka prabandha¹⁰. When the notation differs considerably from the lakṣaṇa, more samples of this prabandha from primary sources must be

⁸Review comments by Dr. V. Premalatha

⁹Tillevanakalita and daśaratharāma have also been published in Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśini

¹⁰An Umātilaka prabandha, per lakṣaṇa, is a medinī jāti prabandha composed in three khaṇḍikā-s, each set to a different rāga and tāla, and each ending in the biruda.

studied to explain or reconcile the variance.

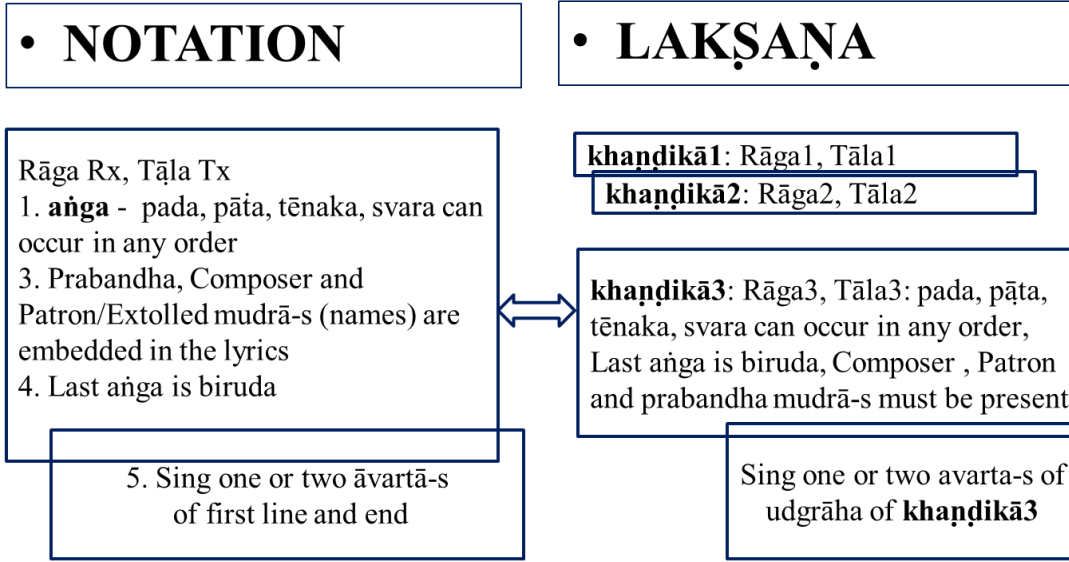


Figure 1 Comparison of the structure of Umātilaka prabandha as seen in notations and as described in lakṣaṇa derived from Saṅgītakalānidhi and CDP

Limitations: Not all structural details can be reconstructed using this approach. In the above example, the end of the udgrāha section could not be determined. Instances of the notation not strictly adhering to the lakṣaṇa are also found.

5.3. Determining the details of the tāla

The name of the tāla is usually specified in the header of the prabandha, although without the details of the laghu-jāti and the aṅga-s of the tāla. The notations contain a vertical bar ‘|’ or ‘||’ to indicate the end of anāvarta. The details of the tāla must be determined from lakṣaṇa texts.

The lakṣaṇa texts may also specify the points in a composition where ālāparūpa¹¹ singing is expected. The notation of the ābhoga section of the kaivāḍa prabandha in rāga Nārāyaṇagaṇa (kumbhaghōṇe) has such an ālāparūpa section.

5.4. Determining the details of the rāga

It is known that the same rāga name may have different lakṣaṇa in different treatises.¹² If the complete rāgalakṣaṇa (details such as the śruti values of its svāra-s (or its mela), graha, nyāsa, amśa, the sancāra-s) is not specified for a rāga along with the prabandha, then the lakṣaṇa must be determined from appropriate textual sources, based on the composer identified earlier. Consider the umātilaka prabandha in rāga mecabauli (tillevanakalita). Mecabauli is not defined in CDP, but is described in its antecedent, the Saṅgītasudhā (Ramanathan 873), as well as in the later text Rāgalakṣaṇamu of Shahaji (Ramanathan 878). An analysis of the rāga may be undertaken based not only on the definition in treatises, but also by comparing with the usages seen in contemporary compositions in the same rāga. In case the rāgalakṣaṇa is not found in treatises or if the reference texts cannot be determined for a given composer, then the rāgalakṣaṇa may be gleaned from the notations. It may then be compared with the lakṣaṇa in different treatises to determine a possible textual source.

5.5. Documenting the reconstructed notation

¹¹singing lyrics without the tāla. Such notations are sometimes marked by a profusion of vowel extensions



It is recommended that the notation of the prabandha be rewritten incorporating all the structural, melodic and rhythmic details reconstructed in the previous steps, but in a contemporary notation scheme. The header must include the rāga name, its mela, svāra-s (with śruti names), name of the tāla (with its reconstructed āṅga-s, jāti, mārga), name of the composer and the type of prabandha. The lyrics and the rāgasāñcāra-smay also be presented separately.

6. Some limitations of musicological texts

- 6.1. In the Indian tradition, lakṣya, the practice of music, precedes its documentation in lakṣaṇa. Because of this, we may find that details of a rāga used in a prabandha are documented in later texts. An example is that of a umātilaka prabandha with the mudrā of Venkatamakhi (daśaratharāma). It is set to the rāgaHuśāni, which is not documented in CDP, but in a later musicological text, Shahaji's Rāgalakṣaṇamu (Ramanathan 560). This makes it difficult to ascertain the attribution of the prabandha¹³ to Venkatamakhi.
- 6.2. The nuances of technical terms seen in texts may be lost to the reader due to passage of time. These terms may also get reinterpreted or become polysemous over time. Example: the description of a 'gīta' is different in the Saṅgītaratnākara and the CDP.
- 6.3. Citations may not exist or if they do, they may not all be reliable. (Sathyanarayana 2002, 67-77)
- 6.4. Musical concepts become obsolete. For example, the Caturdaṇḍīprakāśikā refers to the existence of a tenth chapter on deśitāla-s, while also documenting that these tāla-s were not in contemporary use.
- 6.5. A text may have internal contradictions. For example, a contradiction is noted between the definition of the sulādi tāla-s in the svaraprakaraṇa chapter of CDP and its corresponding svāra-alaṅkāra-s (Chaudhary 1997, 123).
- 6.6. All the aspects of a prabandha may not be documented to the same level of detail. Some aspects may not be discussed at all. For example, the number of āvarta-s for each dhātu/section is not specified for many prabandha-s.
- 6.7. New, undocumented types of prabandha-s may exist. Example: A 'saptatālaprabandham' (jayajayamahādeva), with the signature of Muddu Venkatamakhi. The tāla is not specified, and the end-of-āvarta markers are ambiguous in the manuscripts. Such a prabandha is not documented in CDP or its precedents. Its lakṣaṇa is inferred only from a modern text, the Saṅgītakalpadrumam, which declares that a saptatālagīta can be sung to any of the sulādisaptatāla-s (Bhagavata 270).

7. Conclusion

Scribal errors, use of non-standard terms, insufficient documentation, and many other issues are noted in manuscripts. Not all of these can be resolved satisfactorily. Each type of prabandha and each manuscript may pose a different kind of challenge, making it impossible to give a generalised approach to reconstruction. However, a diligent scholar may get more satisfactory answers to such challenges by consulting appropriate sources of lakṣaṇa and equally importantly, critical editions of the lakṣaṇa texts. Such an approach, when combined with an analysis of prabandha compositions from primary sources (such as the manuscripts in TMSSML), is expected to provide a deeper understanding on the connection between lakṣya¹⁴ and lakṣaṇa, as well as the connections between lakṣaṇa texts themselves.

References

- Bhagavata, Mutthaia L. *Saṅgītakalpadrumam*. Tiruvananthapuram: Govt. of Kerala, 1977.
- Chaudhary, Subhadra. *Time Measure and Compositional Types in Indian Music*. New Delhi: Aditya Prakashan, 1997.
- Dīkṣitulu, Subbarāma. *Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśini*. Ettayapuram, 1904.
- Ramanathan, Hema. *Rāga Lakṣaṇa Saṅgraha*. N. Ramanathan, 2004.

¹³Sathyanarayana (2006, 569) terms this an anomaly

¹⁴ Although notations are not strictly lakṣya, in the absence of an oral tradition, they may be considered close approximations of lakṣya



PRANAV JOURNAL OF FINE ARTS

ISSN: 2582-9513

Sathyannarayana, R. *Caturdaṇḍī Prakāśikā of Veṅkaṭamakḥin*. New Delhi: IGNC A and Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2002.

— . *Caturdaṇḍī Prakāśikā of Veṅkaṭamakḥin, Volume II, Makḥihṛdaya, A critical study*. New Delhi: IGNC A and Motilal Banarsidass Publishers Pvt. Ltd, 2006.

Microfilms

ayastambhagambhīra, *TMSSML collection*, Microfilm, IGNC A RC, Bengaluru, Roll No. 417, Record No. 4863, Folio 1b-3

tillevanakalita, *TMSSML collection*, Microfilm, IGNC A RC, Bengaluru, Roll No. 417, Record No. 4863, Folio 61-b

daśaratharāma, *TMSSML collection*, Microfilm, IGNC A RC, Bengaluru, Roll No. 417, Record No. 4863, Folio 97b-99

kumbhaghoṇe *TMSSML collection*, Microfilm, IGNC A RC, Bengaluru, Roll No. 417, Record No. 4863, Folio 123

viditapparamata, *TMSSML collection*, Microfilm, IGNC A RC, Bengaluru, Roll No. 417, Record No. 4863, Folio 79b

jayajayamahādeva, *TMSSML collection*, Microfilm, IGNC A RC, Bengaluru, Roll No. 417, Record No. 4863, Folio 35