



Importance of Gītas in Learning Carnatic Classical Music Vid. Malini Ramasubramanya

11

Introduction:

Indian music is a typical example of Rāga based music. Rāga is the key concept of Indian music. The whole structure of Indian music is built on the base Rāga. The beauties underlying a rāga are very subtle and delicate.

yōsau dhwaniviśēṣastu swaravarṇa vibhūṣitaḥ |
rañjakō janacittānām sa rāgaḥ kathitō budhaiḥi ||

These beauties are expressed through musical forms. Hence compositions are the concrete forms of an abstract rāga. This gave rise to the creation of varieties of musical forms. Musical forms in Carnatic music falls under two heads:

- (1) Manodharma Sangeetha - performer sings or performs his own improvised music
- (2) kalpita Sangeetha - performer sings the musical compositions already created or composed by other composers. In Carnatic Classical music, musical compositions can also be classified as abhyāsagāna and sabhāgāna compositions. For ex: Gītas, Jatiswara, Swarajati ...are abhyāsagāna compositions and Varna, Kriti, Kirtana, Pada, Ragamalika, Javali, ... are sabhāgāna compositions. Studies have already been done in the domain of musical forms for ex: chronology of musical forms, improvement of mathematical ability in children through musical forms,

Purpose :

This topic has been chosen as a common question that arises in the mind of every learner: what is the use of learning all these compositions? Many learners after learning a few varnas and kritis start thinking that they need not practice beginning lessons any more. To become a performer, proper base comes from these lessons. To develop manōdharma sangīta, musical forms like gīta, jatiswara, swarajati, varna , kriti, ...become important. This study mainly concentrates on the beauty, planning and purpose of musical forms from the point of view of a learner. Hence it is very important for every learner to know about these musical forms in detail.

Scope of study:

Study mainly concentrates on the significance of learning Gītas in the perspective of a learner.

Methodology employed: Analytical

Analysis:

In the journey of learning music, a learner acquires training in different forms of music. As a toddler the learner will start his learning abhyāsagāna compositions like swarāvaḷis and alankārās. These swara exercises are meant for slow perfection in singing sapta swaras s r g m p d n, rhythm, breath control – that is singing several swaras in one breath, traversing through octaves – d n ś r ḡ r ś r , skipping swaras – ss mm gg rr , s m g r , ... voice culturing, ... These vocal exercises serve a specific technical purpose and help students to acquire proficiency in the techniques of rendering vocal or instrumental music. This provides a perfect base to construct a building. Now with this proper base learner starts learning Ekāṇḍa form that is gīta.

Gītas:

“Gīyate iti gītaḥa”

Gītas are the simplest among all compositions . The word gīta literally means a ‘song’ but in music it refers to a type of composition.

“Dhātu mātu smāyuktam gītamityucyate budhaiḥi”

The union of dhātu and mātu is Gīta. The music of gīta is a simple melodic extension of rāga - that is with no intricate combinations of swaras nor terse sanchāras, no saṅgatis, very simple sāhitya. For ex:

“vara veeṇa mṛdu pāṇi vanarūhalōcana rāṇi”

Its tempo is uniform and medium. For each dhātu there will be a syllable of mātu.

For ex:



It doesn't have sections like Pallavi, anupallavi and charana. The whole gīta is sung without repetition from beginning till end. Some gītas have two/three sections called khandikas. Even though the music is simple, it brings out rāga swarūpa very well. Sāhitya is devotional except for the gīta "Gāna vidyā durandhara" in rāga Nāṭa where Paidāla Gurumūrthy śāstry praises his guru Veñkaṭasubbayya. Sometimes meaningless phrases like a iya, ti iya, ... are found. This reminds us of the syllables of Sāma gāna. In gītas, the number of swaras present in an āvarta is equal to the number of aksharas in that āvarta. The ḍirghākshara will be considered as two swaras.

Gītas are of two types: (1) Sāmānya gīta and (2) Lakṣhaṇa gīta

Sāmānya gīta:

It is the ordinary gīta, which is also called Sādhāraṇa, Lakshya or sancāri gīta. The features of a gīta mentioned above hold good in case of a sāmānya gīta. Usually, it will be sacred in nature wherein sāhitya is in the praise of God. A few sanchāri gītas are available in uncommon ragas like Sāḷanganāṭa, Mēcabhauḷi, Nārāyanagaḷa, ...

Lakṣhaṇa gīta:

It is a type of gīta which has a slightly elaborated sāhitya describing the lakṣhaṇa of the raga in which it is composed. There are two types of lakṣhaṇa gītas.

They are: (1) Janya rāga lakṣhaṇa gīta

(2) Rāgāṅga rāga lakṣhaṇa gīta

Janya rāga lakṣhaṇa gīta gives description of the rāga in terms of its vakra or varjya swaras, graha, nyāsa, amśa swaras, audava, śāḍava or sampūrṇa character, its parent rāga and lastly the anya swaras if it is a bhāṣāṅga rāga lakṣhaṇa gīta. There are lakṣhaṇa gītas for almost all the current rāgas and also for a few obsolete rāgas. In olden days when printing was not known, Lakṣhaṇa gītas were of great help to understand the lakṣhaṇa of the rāgas.

Rāgāṅga rāga lakṣhaṇa gīta : These gītas consist of three sections or khaṇḍas namely : Sūtra khaṇḍa, Upāṅga khaṇḍa and Bhāṣāṅga khaṇḍa. In sūtra khaṇḍa beginning few syllables of sāhitya give the clue to the types of swaras taken by the rāga.

For ex: **Lakṣhaṇa gīta of Venkaṭamakhi in rāga Nārīritigaḷa set to Maṭya tāḷa**

the initial syllables of the first section of the lakṣhaṇa gīta in Nārīritigaḷa rāga are : ri gi ma pa da ni . From this it can be inferred that the notes taken by the rāga are catuśṛti riṣabha, sadhāraṇa gāṇḍhāra, śudha madhyama, śudha dhaivata, kaiśiki niśāda besides śaḍja and paṇcama. Further the phrase Vēda - Śrī cakra gives the clue that it is the 2nd rāga in the Vēda that is 4th cakra and its serial number is 20. The next two sections give the list of Upāṅga rāgas namely: Hiṇḍōḷa, Nāgagāṇḍhāri, Ānaṇḍabhairavi, Ghaṇṭārava, Mārgahiṇḍōḷa, Hiṇḍōḷa vasaṇṭa, Abhēri. This codified list of rāgas can help in determining the history of the rāgas. Some rāgas appearing in the upāṅga rāga later on might have become bhāṣāṅga rāgas. Also a few rāgas mentioned in the gītas may not be in current use. Rāgāṅga rāga lakṣhaṇa gītas have historical value.

Lakṣhaṇa gītas belonging to those rāgāṅga rāgas , which do not have appreciable number of janya rāgas, may not have three sections. Their structure will be like ordinary gīta. For ex: Chāyāvati that is Sūryakāṇṭa. The mnemonics for śudha vikṛta swaras figure in. Lakṣhaṇa gītas are there for all 72 janaka rāgas and these are printed in the "Sangraha cūḍāmaṇi" of Goviṇḍācārya. The older confusing nomenclature of paṇcaśṛuti dhaivata and paṇcaśṛuti riṣabha are replaced by current names catuśṛuti dhaivata and catuśṛuti riṣabha respectively.

Purandara dāsa, Paidāla Gurumurthy Śāstry, Rāmāmatya have composed many gītas. Purandara dāsa's gītas in praise of Vighneshwara, Maheshwara and Vishṇu in rāga Malahari are collectively called Piḷḷāri gītas. Paidāla Gurumurthy śāstry is a prolific composer of gītas after Purandara dāsa. Govinda dīkṣitar and Venkaṭamakhi have composed many lakṣhaṇa gītas. Paidāla Gurumurthy śāstry has composed ghana rāga gītas in ghana rāgas like nāṭa, gaḷa. ārabhi, vaṛāḷi and śrī. Rāgamālā gīta is a miniature



rāgamālika in gīta format. The tamil Isai Karuvooalm of the late sangīta kalānidhi Tanjāvur K. Ponnaiah Pillai contains a few lakṣaṇa gītas in Tamil.

For ex: **Gīta in Mohana Rāga – set to Rūpaka tāla**

g g | p - p - || d p | ś - ś - || r ś | d d p - || d p | g g r - ||
va ra | vī - ṇa - || mṛ du | pa - ṇi - || va na | ru ha lō - || ca na | rā - ṇi - ||
g p | d ś d - || d p | g g r - || g g | d p g r || p g | g r s - ||
su ru | ci ra bam || ba ra | vē - ṇi - || su ra | nu ta kal- || lyā - | - - ṇi - ||

In the starting phrase g g | p - p - || shows how to start a rāga alāpana. Next d d | ś - ś - || r ś | d d p - || d p | g g r - || g g | d p g r || p g | g r s - || In these phrases, swaras d and g are repeated many times. This shows that they are the jīva swaras of Mohana rāga. Phrases d ḡ | r ḡ r ś || g g | d p g r || show dāṭu prayōgas which elevates rāga bhāva. Phrases g g | p - p - || d p | ś - ś - || shows swaras s and p are vādi - samvādi swaras.

Learners can be introduced to singing in three speeds easily with gītas as the sāhitya is very simple.

For ex: **Malahari gīta set to Rūpaka tāla**

s r | m - | g r || s r | g r | s - || r m | p d | m p || d p | m g | r s || - 1st speed
Lam | bō - | da ra || la ku | mi ka | ra - || am - | bā - | su ta || a ma | ra vi | nu ta ||

s r m - | g r s r | g r s - || r m p d | m p d p m g r s || - 2nd speed
Lam bō - | da ra laku | mi kara - || am - bā - | su ta a ma ra vi nu ta ||

s r m - g r s r | g r s - r m p d | m p d p m g r s || - 3rd speed
Lam bō - dara laku | mi kara – am- bā - | su ta ama ra vi nu ta ||

s r m - | g r s r m - | g r s r g r s - ||
Lam bō - | dara lam bo - | daralakumikara - ||
r m p d | m p r m p d | m p d p m g r s ||
Am - bā - | suta am- ba - | su ta a ma ra vi nuta || - mix of 2nd and 3rd speeds

Gītas can also be sung in triśra – 3 speeds

For ex: **Ānaṇḍabhairavi rāga set to ādi tāla**

n - - - d - - - n - - - ś - - - | ś - - - - - - ś - - - ś - - - ||
ka ma la su | lō - ca na ||

ḡ - - - r̄ - - - ś - - - n - - - | n - - - d - - - p - - - m - - - ||
vi ma la ta | ṭā - ki ni || - 1st speed caturaśra

n - - d - - n - - - | ś - - - ś - - - - - - ||
ka ma la | su lō ||

ś - - - ś - - - n - - - | d - - - n - - - ś - - - ||
ca na ka | ma la su ||

ś - - - - - - ś - - - | ś - - - n - - - d - - - ||
lō ca | na ka ma ||



n - - - ś - - - ś - - - | - - - - ś - - - ś - - - ||
la su lō | ca na || - 1st triśra

n - d - n - ś - ś - - - ś - ś - | ġ - ř - ś - n - n - d - p - m - ||
ka ma la su lō ca na | vi ma la ta t̄ā - ki ni || - 2nd speed
caturaśra

n - d - n - ś - ś - - - ś - ś - ġ - ř - ś - n - |
ka ma la su lō ca na vi ma la ta |

n - d - p - m - n - d - n - ś - ś - - - ś - ś - ||
t̄ā - ki ni ka ma la su lō ca na ||

ġ - ř - ś - n - n - d - p - m - n - d - n - ś - |
vi ma la ta t̄ā - ki ni ka ma la su |

ś - - - ś - ś - ġ - ř - ś - n - n - d - p - m - ||
lō ca na vi ma la ta t̄ā - ki ni || - 2nd triśra

n d n ś ś - ś ś ġ ř ś n n d p m |
ka ma la su lō - ca na vi ma la ta t̄ā - ki ni |

n d n ś ś - ś ś | ġ ř ś n n d p m ||
ka ma la su lō - ca na | vi ma la ta t̄ā - ki ni || - 3rd speed caturaśra

n d n ś ś - ś ś ġ ř ś n n d p m n d
ka ma la su lō - ca na vi ma la ta t̄ā - ki ni ka ma

n ś ś - ś ś | ġ ř ś n n d p m n d n ś
la su lō - ca na | vi ma la ta t̄ā - ki ni ka ma la su

ś - ś ś ġ ř ś n n d p m ||
lō - ca na vi ma la ta t̄ā - ki ni || - 3rd triśra

Similarly, in **Paidāla gurumūrthy śastry's Ārabhi rāga lakṣaṇa gīta**, first few avartas bring out almost complete essence of the rāga. It is set to Mishra Jhampe taala.

ḍ s s r - s r | m | g r || p m g r m g r | r | s s || s - s r - s r | m | g r || s s r s r m g | r | r - ||
s s r s r m g | r | r - || d d p m p m g | r | r s || Here in these avartas, ḍ s s r - s r m g r shows how to begin rāgālāpāna, phrases r m g r , r p m g r , r d d p m g r shows samvāditva between s - p, r - p, r - m, r - d. In all these āvartas swaras are moving between s and d, which is helpful for a learner to create various patterns using a few swaras while doing swara prastāra.

Next the learner can be taught **rāgamālā gīta set to caturaśra maṭhya tāla** where rāga changes for each āvarta

Nāṭa rāga Kāmbhoji
p p - m | p m | m - m r || m g p d | s - | n d d p ||
kar ṇā - - | ta - | koṅ - ka ṇa || va ra sa kām | bō - | dhi śa ya na ||
Gauḷa rāga Bhūpāla



s - s - | r r | m r r s || g p d r̄ | s d | s d d p ||
gau - lā - | di dē | - - - śa || va ra bhū - | - pā | - - la ka ||

At this stage splitting of words such that the meaning of the composition is not spoiled can be concentrated as the sāhitya is simple, which helps the learner when he starts singing vilamba kāla kritis and pañcharatna kritis. Usually, while learning Ānañdabhairavi gīta, students sing sāhitya like : kamalasu lōcana vimalata tākini where word splitting is not proper . It has to be corrected as kamala sulōcana Vimala taṭākini

Inferences drawn:

1. First of all, learners will be introduced to swara - sāhitya form. Since the musical structure and the lyrics are simple in nature, learners can easily grasp this form soon after vocal training exercises. It will be interesting for a learner as it involves sāhitya.
2. Before introducing a learner to second and third speeds in varnas, if the same concept is taught through gītas then the learner might find it much easier and interesting since gītas are much simpler in structure compared to varnas.
3. Introduction a e i o u kāras and little gamakas can be done.
4. With the small phrases of gītas, learners can be introduced to brief rāga ālāpana which is a manodharma concept. It can outline the rāga structure in an easy way.
5. Through the composition Vādi - Samvādi swaras and jēva swaras can be explored.
6. With Lakṣaṇa gītas, learner can be taught to identify the rāga lakṣaṇas through the composition. Learners might feel comfortable while rendering brief rāgālapana as the composition will give a glance of graha, nyāsa, amśa and jeeva swaras.
7. Since the format of gīta is small and simple a kāra sādhanā can be done with this composition also together with swarāvalis to increase the speed of singing.
8. With some lakṣaṇa gītas, learner can be taught to create patterns with 3-4 swaras which will be helpful in swaraprastāra which is another manodharma concept.

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