

The maha melaragamalika (part 2)

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In this article, which is the second in the series on the *Melaragamalika* of Maha Vaidyanatha Sivan, let us focus on the lyrical features of this masterpiece.

As mentioned in the September issue of *Sruti*, the language employed in this ragamalika is Sanskrit. The sahitya for each raga section extends to two avartas of Adi tala. The name of each of the 72 melakarta ragas is embedded very skillfully and beautifully in the respective sahitya portions.

The lyrical features and excellences in this composition can be studied with reference to two fundamental aspects of sahitya—namely *sabda* or word, and *artha* or meaning, and sometimes as a combination of both.

Let us first take up the sabda aspect. Among the embellishments or alankaras of sabda that are commonly used in our musical literature, *prasa* (also commonly referred to as dviteeyakshara prasa), and *antyaprasa* (denoting the repetition of specific letters at particular intervals of the sahitya portions) are extensively employed. Apart from enhancing the verbal aesthetic, they help in the blending of sahitya and melody apart from showcasing the skill of the author-composer and his mastery over the language. In Sanskrit literature, there is *anuprasa* which also involves repetition of letters, but there is no rigid regulation for the repetition.

The usage of muhanaa, prasa and antyaprasa are quite common in Carnatic music compositions. *Muhanaa* refers to repetition or concordance of letters at the beginning of the avarta. Repetition of a group of letters is known as *yamaka*. Examples of all these—muhanaa, prasa, antyaprasa and yamaka can be found throughout the *Melaragamalika*. One of these is definitely used in each of the 72 sahitya portions, while sometimes two or more of these occur even in a single sahitya segment. Normally the letter concordance is found in each of the avartas in the two-avarta sahitya portion of the ragamalika.

Examples

(The symbol ‘|’ indicates the beginning of the second avarta; the letters in bold are the prasa letters)

Of prasa: *gaanamurtiriti ghanashastra | maanamurdhanyair gaditosi*

Of muhanaa: *ratnaangyaa dharmasamvardhanyaa | ramana maam paripaalaya*

Of antyaprasa: *purahara haimavatimanohara | hara rakshita suranikara*. In this sahitya verse we also find prasa (*pura – hara*) and yamaka in the multiple repetition of the word ‘hara’.

It is to be noted that Maha Vaidyanatha Sivan has rarely used antyaprasa in the melaragamalika, while he has frequently employed muhanaa, prasa and yamaka.



Maha Vaidyanatha Sivan

A combination of sabda and artha aspects are found in the use of what is called *saabhipraaya viseshana* — adjectives that are appropriate to the context and also denote an implied sense additionally, which justifies the use of that particular adjective instead of others that would give the same meaning contextually. In the case of the *Melaragamalika*, these kinds of adjectives are employed mostly to incorporate the name of the raga. For example, the use of the adjective ‘*kanakangi*’ (meaning ‘one with limbs that are as resplendent as gold’) for Goddess Lakshmi in the verse *kanakangyaa ramayaa poojita*, is purposefully done to imply the name of the raga Kanakangi. This also justifies the use of ‘*kanakangyaa*’ instead of ‘*suvarnangyaa*’. Some more examples of the use of *saabhipraaya viseshana* are – ‘*kharaharapriya*’ to describe Shatrughna in *kharaharapriyam aalokya paraatpara hara*,

and ‘*maarananjani*’ as an epithet to Manmatha’s wife Rati in *maarananjaniavarada nirahankaarajanaa*.

In many sahitya verses we can observe the amazing skill of the author in coming up with a *pada rachana* or arrangement of words which reproduce the raga name when two or more words are uttered continuously; and sometimes as a part of a bigger compound word. An example of the former is in the Charukesi raga sahitya: **charu ke sivalingam anaarchya merudhanvan sukhamaanuvanti** (the letters in bold when uttered together will give the raga name).

An example of the latter occurs in the Vagadheeswari raga sahitya: **vaagadheeshavarishriyau yadanga sambhave bhogamokshadaa jagadambaa** (the word in bold, which is a part of the compound word gives the raga name).

The numerous facets of the artha aspect of this *Maharagamalika* are a source of perennial wonder. The allusions in the sahitya include anecdotes from the Vedas, agamas, puranas, itihisas (*Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*), Tamil literature like *Tiruvilaiyadal* puranam, and literary works like *Kumarasambhava* of Kalidasa. It shows how well-versed Vaidyanatha Sivan was with the whole expanse of both Sanskrit and Tamil literature. There is a Tamil commentary for this *Maharagamalika*, named *Sivapriya* written by V.S.V. Guruswamy Sastrigal, which is of great value in understanding some of the difficult, complex and roundabout sahitya meanings.

Examples

The following are some examples of literary works referred to in the sahitya.

Vedas

srivanaspatidala samarchanena....

This refers to the vilva tree appearing from the penance of Goddess Lakshmi or Sree which is also called ‘vanaspati’ as found in the *Sree sukta* mantra *adityavarne tapasodhijaato vanaspatistava vrkshotha bilvah*.

Agama

Sadaya shadvidhamaargini manuje....

Here the six-fold worship prescribed in Saiva agama practices is referred to.

Purana

Sritagajavadana....

This is an allusion to an anecdote in the *Ganesa Purana* where Siva prays to Lord Ganesa to rid the obstacles troubling him during the war with Tripurasura.

Itihasa

kailaasaachalanaatanakrdbhuja | sailadandaka charanaangushtha

This describes the incident of Siva punishing Ravana when he tried to lift Mount Kailasa.

Tamil literature

siva nakkeeravaanivashaga....

It describes the story of how the Tamil poet Nakkirar dared to object to an idea proposed by Lord Siva in his poem, how he was subject to His wrath and was then blessed by the Lord himself.

Kalidasa’s Kumarasambhava

sritagajavadana gaangeyabhooshaneekrtabhujanga natasurakadamba

Here the word *gaangeyabhooshaneekrtabhujanga* reflects a very beautiful thought found in the *Kumarasambhava* wherein Kalidasa says that at the time of the marriage of Siva and Parvati, when everyone was wondering how Siva would adorn himself like a bridegroom, he made the serpents on his body transform themselves into suitable golden ornaments.

These examples give us a glimpse of the scholarship of Maha Vaidyanatha Sivan.

There are a few more striking features in the sahitya of the *Melaragamalika*. It is noteworthy as to how the composer has incorporated raga names, many of them being feminine gender words, in a lyric that essentially glorifies a male deity.

Similarly, he has also used a technique usually found in literary works where, two or more verses convey a single continuous idea, and hence the meaning would be complete only when the verses are taken together. When such a group consists of two verses it is called *yugmaka* and when it has five verses it is called a *kulaka*. We find two examples of *yugmaka* and one example of *kulaka* in the *Melaragamalika*. The *kulaka* example is used in the first five ragas of the 11th chakra beginning with *Kantamani* and ending with *Mechakalyani*.

The sahitya of the *melaragamalika* is a glorification of Lord Siva in his form of *Pranatarthihara* who is enshrined in *Tiruvaiyaru*. The number of epithets used for the Lord, like *purahara*, *gaanamoorti*, *paratpara*, *haridambara*, *neepavanasundara*, *merudhanvan*, to name a few, are incredible.

We will deliberate upon the melodic aspect of the *Melaragamalika* of Maha Vaidyanatha Sivan in the third and concluding part of this series.

(to be continued)

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