

# Ravikiran's rules of raga development

P.K. Doraiswamy

During a recent lecdem titled *Development of Raga*, held under the auspices of the Music Forum, Chitravina Ravikiran prefaced it with the following 'rules':

❖ Every phrase should have the chhaya of the raga

❖ There should be no phrase with the chhaya of another raga

Giving examples of how some individual swaras and phrases common to different ragas should be sung slightly differently to reflect the chhaya of each raga, Ravikiran said these subtle nuances represented the distinct glory of Carnatic music. For example, when starting Sankarabharanam and Kalyani with antara gandhara, he showed how the *ga* should be intoned differently. How *ga ma dha* in Kanada should be sung with an emphasis on *ga*.

Subtle, beautiful and scholarly as these rules sound in short examples, are they practically feasible in an actual elaborate presentation? Are they a *sine qua non* for a correct delineation of the raga swaropas or a reasonably knowledgeable listener's enjoyment of a raga?

There is an established concept of chhayalaga ragas which have slight traces of other ragas built into their swaropas structure, namely, Ghanta with traces of Punnavarali, Dwijavanti with traces of Yadukulakambhoji and Sahana. Should you make a conscious effort, while singing these ragas, to 'bowdlerise' them and clean up traces of other ragas? Will this not change the established swaropas of these ragas? During a lecdem on Bhairavi and Manji, T.N. Krishnan said that every phrase in Manji was admissible in Bhairavi but not vice versa. In other words, Manji, as a subset of Bhairavi, has to avoid certain sancharas of Bhairavi, whereas

Bhairavi, as the mother set, was under no such constraint in regard to its subset Manji.

Shatsruti rishabha is the only note which distinguishes the Vagadeeswari scale from the Harikambhoji scale. If one were to go on singing sancharas containing only *ga, ma, pa, dha* and *ni* omitting *ri*, it may be difficult sometimes to guess whether Vagadeeswari is being sung or Harikambhoji. Lalgudi in one of his lecdems, gave the example of Latangi and Kalyani and pointed out how, if in Latangi one sang phrases without the suddha dhaivata for long, it would sound like Kalyani which was a more dominant raga. He, therefore, suggested that in such cases one should touch the differentiating note frequently, if only in passing, to keep the identity of Latangi alive. Frequently, but not necessarily always. Lalgudi pointed out that when a typically bhava-reflective phrase of a raga is sung, the ambient effect of the raga bhava persists for a minute or two. During this interval, one could sing other creative phrases in the scale which may not be so raga-reflective or which are common to other ragas without diluting or compromising the overall identity of the main raga; even a *sa* would sound as if it belonged to the raga! (In fact, this is what enables a musician to sing even rakti ragas elaborately in spite of certain stock phrases occurring repeatedly in such ragas). But the typical phrases of the raga have to be sung before this transient, golden interval is over so that the identity of the raga is kept alive. Thus, in order to preserve the overall chhaya of a raga, every phrase does not have to be a long, rakti phrase; short 'neutral' phrases are also permissible.

While ragas like Kambhoji or Todi may have signature phrases which 'fix' them, slightly esoteric ragas like Pavani and Kosalam do not have such phrases. These can be identified only when you listen to the whole octave and also possess some swara gnanam. Shorter

phrases in such ragas may be common to other ragas and, therefore, cannot 'fix' them.

Some musicians like to play hide-and-seek with the audience with regard to the identity of the raga by not singing rakti prayogas for some time. Once during a concert by a Sangita Kalanidhi, during an alapana I asked another Sangita Kalanidhi sitting next to me whether the raga being sung was Bhavapriya. He said, "Let us wait and see". If the hide-and-seek is resorted to by an established and accomplished musician and forms only a small portion of the alapana which otherwise is of high quality, it would seem like a bonus quiz which many knowledgeable listeners enjoy.

Gamakas are the soul of a raga. They can be seen in their full glory only in slow or in madhyama kala when one dwells on the notes. But today's music is characterised, if not dominated, by a preference for acceleration and arithmetic which crowd out the gamakas. The subtle nuances pointed out by Ravikiran may have been possible in M.D. Ramanathan's music but in today's concert tsunami, they are likely to be simply swept away. Moreover, they are noticeable more in vocal music than in instrumental.

Once, Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer and Prof. P. Sambamoorthy were sharing the stage. During his presidential speech, Sambamoorthy pointed out how musicians were not always following the prescribed lakshanas of ragas and appealed to senior musicians to set an example in this regard. In response to this Maharajapuram, in his speech, said, "Professor is a great scholar and has put forth very learned suggestions. However, if I were to follow his advice, no one would invite me to give a concert. I would be invited only to preside over meetings."

(The author is a retired civil servant and connoisseur of music)