



Swaranjali Music School

स्वरंजली संगीत शाला

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Visharad Pratham Theory

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Theory: Written Exam Paper # 1:

Chapter 5: Aalaap: Modern and Ancient Methods

1. Ancient aalaap singing:

Singing some swar clusters from a raag in a slow, unhurried tempo according to rules of raag is called aalaap. This concept of aalaap exists since ancient times. *Bharat muni* (A sage named Bharat) wrote a treatise 'Natyashastra' and in it, he called aalaap 'Upohan'. He said ' Before singing a song, a singer uses some meaningless words interlocked with swar, and then starts the song. This use of meaningless words is called 'Upohan'. Famous play writer Kaalidaas also mentioned that before starting a song in a play, singer performs 'Upohan' or 'Upavahan'.

'Sangeet Ratnaakar' is a well known treatise about classical music. It describes two forms of songs – 1. traditional 'Gaandharva' performed by celestial singers – Gandharva and 2. 'Gaan' – popular form of music created in local raag for entertaining the masses. It had two types of songs – Nibaddha (with swar and taal) and Anibaddha (free from constraints of taal). Anibaddha songs predominantly aalaap based songs.

There were clear rules stated in these old books about how aalaap should be performed. The rules include: 1. There are four steps for singing aalaap. They depend upon which swar to use in each step. 2. Vaadi swar (also called Anshas war) is important in a raag. Fourth, eighth swar from vaadi and 5th, 6th, 7th swar from vaadi are used as bench marks. 3. In the first step, aalaap uses swar below fourth swar. 4. In second step, singer uses the fourth swar from vaadi. 5. In the third step, 5th, 6th and 7th swar from vaadi are used and 6. in fourth step, all swar upto and including 8th swar from vaadi are used. All these aalaap were required to end on sthaayee swar. Aalaap made use of Gamak appropriate to the raag.

All these discussions about aalaap in old treatises indicate that music scholars and performers studied aalaap in detail. A musician Kallinaath described Aalaap, Aalaapan and Aalaapti where Aalaap was equivalent to today's Aavirbhaav, Aalaapan was 'Tirobhaav' and Aalaapti was between these two. Hence it is obvious that aalaap singing included aavirbhaav, tirobhaav.

2. Modren aalaap singing:

Music concepts undergoes substantial change over centuries. Aalaap concept is no exception. Anibaddha (without constraints of taal) singing or playing instrument is performed before Dhrupad, Dhamaar and khyaal begins with taal. During these introductory aalaap, there is no accompaniment from percussion instruments like Tabla, Mrudang or Pakhaavaj.

In today's classical or semi-classical performances, singer sings introductory aalaap to show glimpse of a raag before starting the song with lyrics. Sometimes, voice is held steady on Shadja and then other swar clusters are used to end the aalaap. One specialty is that aalaap are performed after badaa and chhotaa khyaal start with taal. Sometimes the lyrics are intertwined with the aalaap's swar.

These are called 'Bol-aalaap'. This mixes the lyrics of the song (Bandish) and swar of raag and audience can enjoy the presentation. Tempo of aalaap increases gradually and changes into taan and boltaan. Because of the difference in tempo between aalaap and taan, aalaap have more emotional impact and taan is more cerebral. Area between these two is called 'Behalaavaa'.

Aalaap with 'Nom Tom'

Dhrupad and Dhamaar (which emulates Dhrupad), were developed during middle ages. Aalaap performed at the beginning of these two is called 'Nom Tom Aalaap'. It does not have accompaniment from percussion instruments. Instead of words, letters like Na, Ta, Ree, Ra, Nom, Tom are used. Some scholars think these letters originate from phrases 'Om Ananta Naaraayan' or 'Toohi Ananta Hari Om'. In these introductory aalaap, four parts of song are reflected: Sthaayee, Antaraa, Sanchaaree and Aabhog.

Singer sings aalaap after the song and taal starts in a similar manner. After one cycle of aalaap is finished, the 'Sam' is shown on Shadja of Madhya saptak. Percussionist shows the 'Sam' by loudly striking the drum. This is also called "Nom Tom's Sam". In the first part, singer goes towards mandra saptak. In second part, singer starts to move toward antaraa. Taar shadja of Madhya saptak is approached in variety of ways in various aalaap. In the third part, return journey begins and in fourth part (Aabhog improvisation), aalaap are freely performed in all three saptak. Singer uses Meend, Gamak spontaneously whole time. Starting with slow tempo, and gradually increasing tempo, in the end singer according to his capacity finishes with fast flurry of taan. It can be called a climax. This gradual increment of tempo is very attractive. Daagar brothers, Gundecha Brothers, Siyaaraam Tiwaaree, Uday Bhavaalkar are famous for their excellent 'Nom Tom aalaap'.

Instrumental Aalaap:

Aalaap are performed in a similar manner on instruments. Although instrumentalists can play ultra mandra saptak too. It creates a very serious mood. While playing Sanchaaree, 'Jod aalaap' are played. Connecting small pieces of raag-swar consistently are called 'Jod aalaap'. Aalaap in drut lay are called 'Jhaalaa'. The climax includes a very fast tempo performance and it mesmerizes the audience. String instruments typically have aalaap style like this. Instruments resembling human voice (Violin, Harmonium, Flute) also play similar aalaap as singers. Mixture of two styles is also observed.