

Analysis of rāga Bēhāg in Karnāṭaka Music - with special reference to Tillānā-s of Lalgudi G. Jayaraman and M. Balamuralikrishna

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Abstract:

The rāga repertoire in Karnāṭaka music has developed under multiple influences, with Hindustānī music playing a significant role in this process. Over the centuries, several Hindustānī rāga-s have been assimilated into the Karnāṭaka music tradition. Rāga Bēhāg is one such example. The melodic identity of many rāga-s in karnāṭaka music has been established mainly through compositions, especially the Kṛti form. In certain cases, however, the imported rāga-s have found expression through other composed musical forms such as the Tillānā. Notably, Vid. Lalgudi G. Jayaraman and Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna have contributed to this process by composing Tillānā-s in rāga Bēhāg. Their works present interpretations that differ from the Hindustānī rāga Bihāg while shaping a distinct karnāṭaka version of the rāga. This study undertakes a qualitative examination of these Tillānā-s, with particular attention to the adaptation of rāga phrases in the compositions and performances of the two composers.

Keywords:

balamuralikrishna, behag, lalgudi jayaraman, musicology, thillana

Introduction:

In the 20th century CE, several composers contributed to the popularisation of traditional karnāṭaka rāga-s through their own compositions. Their works extended beyond the performance of already established pieces. Some composers sought to expand the rāga repertoire by introducing rāga-s from other musical traditions, particularly from hindustānī music. These rāga-s were adapted into the karnāṭaka system with careful attention to classical principles, while also reflecting the stylistic

individuality of the composers. Through this process, the form and identity of the *rāga*-s acquired new dimensions within karnāṭaka music. The performance and understanding of these *rāga*-s in the present day, continue to reflect such adaptations.

Several *rāga*-s borrowed from the hindustānī music have retained their structural framework within the karnāṭaka music tradition. Examples include *Candrakauns*, *Bāgēśrī*, *Darbāri Kānhaḍā*, *Dēs*, and *Rāgēśrī*. Even after their adaptation into a different system, these *rāga*-s continue to preserve their characteristic phraseology. Their melodic frameworks remain largely aligned with their hindustānī counterparts.

Minor variations can be observed in the application of *gamaka*-s to align with the stylistic conventions of karnāṭaka music. These changes, however, do not affect the fundamental identity of the *rāga*-s. Composers have consciously ensured the preservation of their essential character. Consequently, listeners familiar with hindustānī music can still recognise the origins of these *rāga*-s, even when they are presented within the karnāṭaka idiom.

In contrast, some *rāga*-s have experienced clear transformations after their incorporation into karnāṭaka music. Some composers have introduced subtle yet significant modifications that shaped a distinct identity for these *rāga*-s. These modifications include shifts in *nyāsa* *svara*-s, variations in the type and use of *gamaka*-s, alterations in *svara* patterns, and reorganisation of phrase structures. Such changes reflect deliberate attempts to integrate the *rāga* into the stylistic and structural framework of karnāṭaka music.

Hamīr Kalyāṇī is a notable example of this adaptive process. Though it draws melodic elements from the hindustānī *rāga*-s *Hamīr* and *Kēdār*, its karnāṭaka music counterpart has developed into an independent *rāga*. It displays distinctive features in its melodic phrase construction, which set it apart from its original melodic framework in the hindustānī idiom. At present, *Hamīr Kalyāṇī* is firmly established in the karnāṭaka music repertoire and is frequently presented in concerts alongside other major *rāga*-s of the tradition.

Karnāṭaka music composers have employed different musical forms to adapt the *rāga*-s. While the *Kṛti* has remained the most widely used form, some musicians have experimented with alternative forms as well. Among them, Vid. Lalgudi G. Jayaraman (LGJ) and Dr. M. Balamuralikrishna (BMK) stand out for their use of the *Tillānā* as a medium to adapt and establish certain *rāga*-s, such as *Bēhāg*, within the karnāṭaka music tradition.

Objective:

The primary objective of this study is to qualitatively examine the adaptation of the hindustānī rāga Bihāg into the karnāṭaka music tradition. The focus is specifically on the Tillānā compositions of Lalgudi G. Jayaraman (LGJ) and M. Balamuralikrishna (BMK), who have significantly contributed to shaping the melodic framework of this rāga in karnāṭaka music.

The study seeks to understand how these composers have interpreted rāga Bēhāg and structured it in their Tillānā-s. It analyses the rāga phrases used in these compositions and identifies the stylistic elements that define its unique identity within karnāṭaka music. Special attention is given to the ways in which these adaptations differ from the structure and presentation of rāga Bihāg in hindustānī music.

Methodology:

This study employs a qualitative methodology, combining exploratory and analytical approaches. The primary sources comprise audio and video recordings of concert performances of LGJ and BMK. The secondary sources include a published text and an interview.

Scope:

This study examines the Tillānā-s composed in rāga Bēhāg by LGJ and BMK, based solely on the audio and video recordings of their performances available in the public domain. The analysis is confined to rāga phrases, excluding aspects related to musical form and lyrical content. The scope of the study is further limited by the availability and quality of the selected recordings.

Analysis and Findings:

The lakṣaṇ-s of rāg Bihāg in hindustānī music are as follows (Bhatkhande, 2002, p. 757-759; Jha, 2015, p. 260-267; Subbarao, 1980, p. 110-112):

- The svara-s R2 and D2 are varjya in ārōhaṇa
- The svara-s G3 and N3 are respectively the vādī and samvādī svara-s
- The svara-s G3 and N3 (apart from S and P) are considered as the nyāsa svara-s
- The svara M2 is considered as the anya svara
- Ārōhaṇa - S G3 M1 P N3 Š
- Avarōhaṇa - Š N3 D2 P M1 G3 R2 S

Apart from the linear phrases in accordance with the ārōhaṇa and avarōhaṇa, the other characteristic phrases of rāg Bihāg as it exists in hindustānī music, are as follows (Bhatkhande, 2002, p. 757-759; Jha, 2015, p. 260-267; Subbarao, 1980, p. 110-112):

- G3 M1 P G3 M1 G3 , R2 S
- P G3 M1 P D2 G3 M1 G3

- N3 P N3 S G3 , ^{R2}S
- N3 S M1 G3 P
- G3 M1 P N3 , P
- P N3 Š N3 , D2 P
- M1 P G3 M1 G3 , R2 S
- G3 , ^{R2}G3 M1 P G3 M1 G3
- ^{R2}G3 R2 S
- S M1 G3 P G3 M1 G3
- P ^{M2}P
- P ^{M2}G3 M1 G3
- P ^{M2}P D2 G3 M1 G3
- M2 P D2 M2 P , G3 M1 G3
- M1 G3 M1 , P
- G3 M1 P N3 , ^{D2}N3 D2 P
- G3 M1 P N3 , ^{D2}N3 Š N3
- Š M1 G3 , R2 S N3
- P N3 Š R2 Š
- N3 S G3 M1 D2 P G3 M1 G3

Among the available data in the public domain, eight concert recordings of BMK and six concert recordings of LGJ, have been analysed as a part of this study. Some of the phrases that are unavailable in the hindustānī rāga Bihāg, but observed in the renditions of LGJ are as follows,

- P G3 M1 G3 S
- M2 D2 M2 G3
- Š Š G3 R2
- Š G3 R2 N3 Š N3
- P R2 G3 M1 P M1 G3
- D2 R2 Š N3 P , G3 P M1 G3 S
- P M2 M1 G3
- Š Š G3 R2 M1 G3 Š
- D2 Š N2 D2 P M1 G3
- P R2 G3 M1 D2 M1 G3
- M2 , D2 M2 G3 M1 G3
- P P R2 M1 G3 S
- G3 P N2 , D2 P D2 , P M2 R2 M1 G3

- P M2 R2 G3 M1 P M1 G3
- G3 R2 G3 S
- M2 , D2 M2 R2 M1 G3
- P M2 P M2 G3 M1 G3
- G3 M1 R2 G3 , G3 M1 N3 D2
- Š N2 D2 P M1 G3 R2 S
- S N3 S M2 S N3 S M1 S N3 S G3
- G3 M1 N3 D2 P
- N3 R2 N2 D2 P M2 P
- N3 Š D2 N2 P D2 M2 P G3 M1 R2 G3 S

Some of the phrases that are unavailable in the hindustānī rāga Bihāg, but observed in the renditions of BMK are as follows,

- P P D2 N3 Š
- Š Š N3 D2 N3 P
- R2 G3 S
- P M2 N2 D2 M1 G3 P S
- Š N3 Š D2 , N3 Š N3 P ,
- M2 P D2 M1 G3
- N3 D2 N3 D2 P
- G3 R2 G3 R2 Š
- N3 N3 Š D2 D2 N3 P P D2 M2 M2 P
- D2 Š N2 D2 P M2 P D2
- G3 M1 P N3 D2 Š Š
- G3 M1 P G3 R2 Š
- R2 Š N2 P
- Š N2 D2 P M2 P M1 G3 G3 P P
- Š Š M1 G3 R2 G3 S
- P Š D2 M1 G3
- N3 N3 D2 M1 G3
- N3 N3 R2 N3 N3 Š N3 D2 N3 Š N3 M2 P
- M2 P N3 M1 G3
- D2 N3 Š D2 N3 Š D2 N3 Š

Summary:

LGJ and BMK, through their distinct compositional styles, have explored *rāga Bēhāg* by presenting different shades of its melodic identity. Although the basic framework of *rāga Bēhāg* is derived from the *hindustānī rāga Bihāg*, the *Tillānā-s* composed by these artistes introduce several additional phrases not found in the original *hindustānī* version. These phrases create a unique melodic structure, giving *rāga Bēhāg* an independent identity within the *karnāṭaka* music tradition.

In the December 2024 season at the Madras Music Academy, the adaptation of *hindustānī rāga-s* into *karnāṭaka* music was discussed. A key point that emerged from the deliberations held by Sundareswaran, Rama, Parthasarathy, and Krishna, was the need to preserve distinctiveness in the process of adaptation. One notable remark from the session emphasised, “Let’s be open towards the melodies and *rāga-s* of all genres. But while importing them into *karnāṭaka* music, let us all be thoughtful of having the structure of the adapted *rāga* unique to *karnāṭaka* music.” (Madras 2024)

This principle is reflected in the works of LGJ and BMK. Instead of replicating *rāga Bihāg* as found in *hindustānī* music, these composers restructured it with originality, shaping a version that fits within the *karnāṭaka* music repertoire. Such conscious adaptation may explain why their *Tillānā-s* in *rāga Bēhāg* have remained relevant and continue to be performed across generations. These compositions now serve as one among the standard references for *rāga Bēhāg* in *karnāṭaka* music.

Future scope:

The scope of future research may be extended to the melodic analysis of other *Tillānā-s* composed by LGJ and BMK in *hindustānī*-derived *rāga-s*. Such an inquiry can assess whether these compositions preserve the original *hindustānī* identity or exhibit a distinct *karnāṭaka* music adaptation. This line of study would provide a broader perspective on their approach to incorporating non-native *rāga-s* into the *karnāṭaka* music framework.

Further, examining *Tillānā-s* in *rāga Bēhāg* composed by other musicians may reveal additional influences that have shaped its melodic structure over time. Such exploration can help identify multiple factors that have contributed to the present-day identity of *rāga Bēhāg* in *karnāṭaka* music.

Glossary:

- *Ārōhaṇa*: Depicts the upward movement of svara-s; ascending from lower pitch to higher.
- *Avarōhaṇa*: Depicts the downward movement of svara-s; descending from lower pitch to higher.
- *Anu-svara*: An embellishment to a svara that involves a subtle touch (grace) of another note.
- *Anya svara*: An additional visiting svara employed in a *rāga*, usually in a particular phrase to beautify the *rāga*.

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