

## Abhinavagupta's Contribution to Musicology

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*Abhinavabharati*, Abhinavagupta's commentary on the *Natyashastra*, is not simply a gloss, supplying interpretations of important words; it is, in fact, full of discussions of important problems of musicology in which Abhinavagupta offers brilliant suggestions, thereby indicating a new orientation to certain concepts of music and contributing towards the solution of difficult problems.

Firstly, let us consider his views on *svara*. In Chapter Twenty-eight of the *Natyashastra*, he discusses the views of some of his predecessors regarding *svara* or a musical note and concludes thus:

वयं तु श्रुतिस्थानाभिधात प्रभवशब्दप्रभावितोऽनुरणनात्मा  
स्निग्धमधुरः शब्द एव स्वर इति वक्ष्यामः।

(N. S. IV, p. 11)

Herein, he makes two points. Like Matanga, he suggests that there are two kinds of *shruti*: *svarashruti* and *antarashruti*. It is only at the position of *svarashruti* that sound explodes into *svara*, not at the intervening *antarashruti*. This is clearly stated in:

श्रुतिस्थानाभिधात प्रभवशब्दप्रभावितो

meaning "that which is *prabhavita*, i.e. made to become or transformed by *shabda* or sound which is produced (*prabhava*) by being struck at the position of its appropriate *shruti*."

His second point is that when the sound is produced at its appropriate *shruti* it becomes

अनुरणनात्मा स्निग्धमधुरः शब्द

'a resonant sweet sound affecting the ear agreeably.' This is *svara* or a musical note.

Western musicologists have defined a musical note in terms of regular, definite number of vibrations per second, that is from the point of view of the physical aspect of sound. Abhinavagupta defines it from the aesthetic point of view, describing its effect upon the mind of the listener.

There are two important words in his definition of *svara*, viz., *anurananatma* and *snigdhmadhurah*. *Anuranana* conveys the physical aspect of the note and *snigdhmadhurah* the aesthetic aspect. *Anuranana* is not simply 'echo' but sound in conformity with a continuous tinkling echo. *Snigdhmadhurah* is the agreeable, sweet sensation in the listener. This definition of Abhinavagupta has been followed by all the later writers on music. Sharngadeva repeats these very words in his *Sangitaratnakara*. But this is not all. Abhinavagupta has made a suggestion in this regard which has never occurred to other musicologists.

The word *svara* is derived from two roots, viz. *svr* of *bhavadigana* (*shabdopatapayoh*, in the sense of *shabda* or sound and *upatapa* or warmth of feeling) and *svara* of *churadigana* (*akshepe*, in the sense of hinting, imposing). Abhinavagupta says that the word *svara*, as used in music, has the implication of both these senses. The reading, as it occurs in the *Natyashastra*, is corrupt. Corrected, it would read thus:

स्वशब्दोपतापयोः स्वर आक्षेप इत्यनयोः स्वरशब्दः तेन  
शब्दस्वभावां चित्तवृत्तिमध्यस्थतारूपस्वास्थ्यवस्था  
परित्याजनेनोपतापयन्तो हृद्यतातिशयवशात्  
स्वतामाक्षिपन्तः स्वविषये अमिधानं कुर्वन्तः स्वरा  
इत्युक्ताः ।

(N.S. IV, pp. 10-11)

"The natural tendency of the mind is only towards plain sound. A musical note or *svara* has the power to obtrude itself on the mind, to set aside its natural tendency towards mere sound, and by its excess of pleasantness to make the mind susceptible to emotion, and thus, imposing itself on it, make its presence felt." This is not a literary *tour de force* on the part of Abhinavagupta. He has drawn our attention to a patent psychic state aroused by a musical note, and in this consists his originality.

*The principle of nishkasa or elimination in the scheme of the shruti-s:*

In the same chapter of the *Natyashastra*, he draws our attention to the principle of *nishkasam* in the scheme of the *shruti-s*. He uses the expression *nishkasam prakramena*, a gradual, systematic elimination of one note in the *shruti-s* for the delineation of *svara-s*.

*Shadja* is of four *shruti-s*, *rishabha* is of three *shruti-s*, *gandhara* is of two *shruti-s*. *Madhyama* occupies the central position and divides the *saptaka* or heptad into two equal parts. The other three notes, viz., *panchama*, *dhaivata* and *nishada* have the same number of *shruti-s*, viz., 4, 3, 2 with a gradual elimination of one *shruti* in each case.

Truly speaking, Abhinavagupta says, there are only three notes. As he puts it:

तेन परमार्थतः त्रय एव स्वराः

(N. S. IV, p. 14)

The *svara-s* are really three, viz. *sa*, *re*, *ga*; *pa*, *dha*, *ni* are the same *svara-s* at a higher level of utterance. The difference is only due to *urdhva sparsha* and *mandra sparsha*.

*Correspondence of the Vedic and Laukika svara-s:*

Owing to a misinterpretation of the *shiksha grantha-s*, many musicologists thought that *shadja*, *madhyama* and *panchama* correspond to *svarita* of the

Vedic note, *gandhara* and *rishabha* to *udatta*, and *nishada* and *dhaivata* to *anudatta*. But the rationale given by Abhinavagupta sets these theories at naught. He says:

चतुःश्रुतिरुदात्तः उच्चत्वात् द्विःश्रुतिरनुदात्तः नीचैस्त्वात् ।  
त्रिःश्रुतिः स्वरितः मध्यवर्तितया समाहारत्वात् ।

(N. S. IV, p. 14)

*Udatta* means the highest; therefore those *svara*-s which have four *shruti*-s i.e. *sa*, *ma* and *pa* are *udatta*. *Anudatta* means the lowest; therefore, those *svara*-s which have the lowest number of *shruti*-s i.e. those which have only two *shruti*-s, namely *ga* and *ni* are *anudatta*. *Svarita svara*-s are so called because of *samahara*. *Samahara*, in this context, means conjunction or meeting point. Therefore, *svarita svara*-s are those which lie in-between (*madhyavartina*) the *udatta* of four *shruti*-s and the *anudatta* of two *shruti*-s i.e. *svara*-s of three *shruti*-s, namely, *re* and *dha*.

*The indispensability of Madhyama note:*

Both Vedic and Gandharva music maintain that the note *madhyama* is *avinashi* i.e. it cannot be omitted in any scale, or in pentatonic or hexatonic forms. Neither the Vedas nor Bharata have advanced any reason for this position of *madhyama*.

Abhinavagupta clarifies this point at two places. He says,

तेन परमार्थतः त्रय एव स्वराः -सरिगाः, पधनयः ।  
मध्यमस्तु ध्रुवकस्यानीयो मध्यमत्वादेव ।

(N. S. IV, p. 14)

"Because *madhyama* occupies a pivotal position, lying as it does in the very centre of the *saptaka* or heptad, it is *dhruva* or fixed, constant and immovable." It should be borne in mind that the concept of a scale in Indian music is that of *saptaka* or heptad, not of an *ashtaka* or octave. A *saptaka* consists only of seven *svara*-s. *Madhyama* occupies the central position and divides the other notes of the *saptaka* into two equal halves, as indicated above. It is the pivot. But this alone is not enough to explain the indispensability of *madhyama*. There is a far deeper reason which involves the philosophy of *madhya* or *madhyama*. Abhinavagupta hints at this in his preliminary verse in Chapter Twenty-eight of the *Natyashastra*.

मध्यमस्वरमुशन्ति यद्दशान्नादषड्मुदितं श्रुतिक्रमात् ।  
सोऽपि यद्विलसितं कलात्मकतं नमामि शिशिरांशुमण्डनम् ॥

(N.S. IV, p. 1)

"The gods are fond of the *madhyama* note, through the power of which arises the group of six notes in accordance with the arrangement of *shruti*-s. I bow to him, Shiva, who is adorned with the moon, who has *Kala* as one of his *tattva*-s and through whom even *madhyama* gleams (as the central note)".

In Shaiva philosophy, the central reality is said to be *madhya*. As *Pratyabhijnahridayam* (pp. 80-81) puts it:

सर्वान्तरतमत्वेन वर्तमानत्वात्तदिभक्तिलग्नतां  
विना च कस्यचित् अपि स्वरूपानुपपत्तेःसंविदेव  
भगवती 'मध्यम्' ।

"The exalted *samvit* or universal consciousness itself is the centre inasmuch as it is present as the innermost reality of all and inasmuch as the form or nature of anything whatsoever cannot be possible without its being attached to it as the ground or support."

Just as central reality or universal consciousness is the ground or support of everything, even so the note *madhyama* is the pivotal point, the ground or support of the entire heptad. Just as it is the *madhya* or central reality from which arises everything in the universe even so it is the *madhyama* note from which arise all the other notes of the heptad-

यद्भ्रान्नादषट्कमुदितं श्रुतिक्रमात् ।

Gandharva, which was mostly ritualistic music could not, therefore, drop *madhyama* in any case.

*The exposition of Kutapa:*

Bharata calls orchestral stage music *kutapa*. *Kutapa* ordinarily means 'noonday heat.' Bharata does not explain his use of the word *kutapa*. Abhinavagupta elaborates:

कुं च रङ्गं तपत्युज्ज्वलयति (वा) ।

(N. S. IV, p. 2)

*Kutapa* is that which highlights the stage. It is the orchestral stage music which makes it glow and attract the attention of spectators.

*The distinction between Gandharva and Gana or Deshi-raga-s:*

Some of our best musicologists think that Gandharva music was the only classical music of our country, that the scales, *Shadja grama* and *Madhyama grama*, adopted by it according to certain fixed division of *shruti-s*, were the only standard scales of our music and that they changed suddenly under the influence of Iranian music and with the advent of the Muslims in India.

The words *Gandharva* and *Gana* have been used in two senses in our musical literature, in a *samanya* or general sense, and in a *vishesha* or technical sense. In a general sense, music as such was known as *Gandharva* or *Gandharva shastra*; in a technical sense, only that was known as *Gandharva* which has been

described by Bharata in the *Natyashastra* or by Dattila in *Dattilam*. So also, the word *Gana* was used in two senses by Bharata himself in the *Natyashastra*. In a general way, he has used the word *Gana* in the sense of any song; in the technical sense, the word *Gana* is used in connection with *dhruva*-s, in the sense of *grama raga*-s, *bhasha*, *vibhasha* etc. that is, in the sense of *Deshi raga*-s.

Many musicologists seem to be labouring under the misapprehension that since *Gandharva* music was the only classical music of our country, *Deshi* music did not exist during the time of Bharata, and that, when it became classicized, it adopted exactly the scale and *shruti* pattern of Bharata and later abandoned the original scale and *shruti* pattern under the influence of Iranian music with the advent of the Muslims.

Abhinavagupta's comments can demolish this delusion in clear and unambiguous terms. Throughout his commentary on the *Natyashastra*, he has shown that *Gandharva* and *Gana* or *Deshi* music flourished side by side, and that the aim of *Deshi* music was different from that of *Gandharva*. He has drawn a clear-cut and detailed distinction between *Gandharva* and *Gana* music in his commentary on Chapter Thirty-three of the *Natyashastra*.

गान्धर्वस्य किं लक्षणमुक्तमध्यायचतुष्टयेषु मुनिना । तथाप्यनुसन्धानवन्ध्यो  
महामो (भा)गं बोधयितुमनुसन्धीयते । स्वरनालपदविशेषात्मकं प्रवृत्ति  
निवृत्ति प्रधान दृष्टादृष्टफल सामवेद प्रभवमनादिकालनिवृत्तभन्योन्यो परस्मिन्  
शुणत्ताविहीनं गान्धर्वमिति स्वरूपफलात् कालाद् धर्माच्च भिद्यमाना (नम)  
वश्यं गानवैलक्षण्यं भेदैकसम्पादनम् ।

(N. S. IV, p. 394)

Bharata in the first four chapters of *Geyadhikara* has already given the characteristics of *Gandharva*. Still, it is being investigated here for the sake of those who are destitute of the spirit of investigation. There are four-fold distinctions between *Gandharva* and *Gana* (or *Deshi* music).

- (1) They differ in *svarupa*, that is in formal structure; in other words, in *svara*, *pada* and *tala*.
- (2) They differ in *phala*, that is regarding the end they serve and, therefore, in the resulting reward or *phala*.
- (3) They differ in respect of *kala*, that is in respect of the occasion on which they are to be used.
- (4) They differ in respect of *dharma*, that is in respect of their distinct functions.

We shall now consider these four distinctions:

- (A) Difference in *svarupa* or formal structure:

Under this head come (a) *svara*, (b) *tala* and (c) *pada*. In *Gandharva*, the *svara*-s or musical notes were employed at fixed intervals or *shruti*-s e.g. *rishabha* was on the third *shruti* above *shadja*, *gandhara* was on the second *shruti* above

*rishabha* etc. in *Shadja-grama*. The *shruti* intervals were absolutely fixed. No change was permitted in these intervals. Abhinavagupta says that the rigidity of *shruti* intervals was not observed in *Gana* or *Deshi* music, and he points to actual practice current in his time. He says,

उक्तमपि च प्रतीतमनुचिन्ना (त्री)यते । प्रतीतानामप्यलक्षणज्ञानां  
बालविज्ञानवद वेद्यम् ।

(N. S. IV, p. 394)

"I am only elaborating what is *pratita* i.e. what is generally recognized by musicologists. For those who do not know the *lakshana*-s, that is the science or theory of music, even facts known from direct experience can remain unrelated, just as facts are known to the child, but their scientific rationale is not known to him."

Abhinava cites practical examples:

स्वराणां मालवकैशिके चतुश्श्रुतिकाङ्क्ष्यदर्शनात् कियद्द्वारागभाषा  
विभाषादेशी मार्गादिगतानां स्वराणां श्रुतिवैचित्र्यं ब्रूमः ।

(N.S. IV, p. 394)

"In Malava-kaishika, there is a greater number of *svara*-s with four-*shruti* interval than is permitted in *Gandharva*. I say there is a great diversity in the use of *shruti*-s in the *svara*-s employed in several *raga*-s, *bhasha*, *vibhasha*, *deshi*, *marga* etc." He adds,

किं चान्तरालनियमोऽन्तःप्रमाणस्थानस्वरकालांशवधान्न (शाद) सारतथा  
गान्धर्वेऽवश्यसंवेद्यः । न त्वेवं गाने ।

(N.S. IV, p. 394)

"The rule regarding *shruti*-intervals has to be strictly observed in *Gandharva* music, not so in *Gana*."

Again he says,

लोपोऽपि नियतगान्धर्वे दर्शितो ग्रामद्वयभेदेन च जात्यंशभेदेन  
दर्शितः । गाने तु रक्त्यनुसारेण प्रवेन्ते (वृत्ते) रसावनियतः ।  
तथापि गान्धर्वे यस्मादनादित्वमेव समर्थितं तस्यापि मध्यमस्य  
भिन्नषड्जकालिन्यां लोपो दृश्य ।

(N.S. IV, p. 394)

"Dropping of notes in the two *Grama*-s and on the basis of *amsha* notes in each *jati* was governed by definite rules in *Gandharva*. For instance, *dhaivata* was indispensable in the *jati*-s of *Shadja-grama*, and, in the *jati*-s of *Madhyama-grama*, *panchama* could never be dropped; *madhyama* could never be dropped from any *jati* of either *Grama*; but, in *Gana*, any note could be dropped in order to bring about a particular aesthetic effect. Even *madhyama* which is considered to be indispensable in *Gandharva* is dropped in *Bhinnashadja* in *Gana*."

In Chapter Twenty-eight of the *Natyashastra*, Abhinavagupta quotes Vriddha, that is senior Kashyapa, as saying:

काकल्यन्तरयोगेन चतुस्त्रिद्वये कतः श्रुतीन् ।  
स्वरान्सर्वान्प्रयुञ्जीत रागभाषासु सर्वथा ॥

(N. S. IV, p. 34)

"In *raga*-s and *bhasha*-s, all the *kakali* and *antara* notes can be used, and all notes whether with a four-*shruti* interval, or a three-*shruti* interval or a two-*shruti* interval, or even with one-*shruti* interval can always be employed."

Even in such a distant age as that of the senior Kashyapa, the use of *kakali nishada* and *antara gandhara* was allowed freely in *raga* and *bhasha* i.e. in *Deshi* music, whereas their use was allowed only in a few *jati*-s in *Gandharva* music and similar freedom was allowed in the use of notes with different *shruti* values.

So far, we have discussed the distinction in *svara* with respect to *Gandharva* and *Deshi* music. Let us now see their distinction with regard to *tala*.

Abhinava says:

तालोऽपि गान्धर्वे नियतत्वेन संख्यापरिमाणं भ(र)ञ्जनं  
परिच्छेदोपायं यतिस्वरैर्वृत्तिमेव मेलनमातोद्ययोगमङ्गाङ्गिभाव  
व्यावरुध्यमानः साम्यमात्रफलमिति ।

(N.S. IV, p. 394)

In *Gandharva*, *tala* was also governed by rigid rules which measured time through a fixed number of demarcations. It occupied a secondary position (*angangibhava*) to *svara*. Its main aim was to establish *samya* or equipoise.

In *Gana*, *tala* was flexible. It could improvise patterns to bring out aesthetic pleasure. In *Gandharva*, no deviation was allowed from the set pattern.

There was a distinction between *Gandharva* and *Gana* in respect of *pada* also. In *Gana*, *pada* was more predominant than *svara* or *tala*. In *Gandharva*, however, *svara* and *tala* were primary and *pada* occupied a subsidiary position. Bharata himself says in Chapter Thirty-two, Verse 27.

गान्धर्वं यन् मया प्रोक्तं स्वरतालपदात्मकम् ।  
पदं तस्य भवेद् वस्तु स्वरतालानुभावकम् ॥

(N.S. IV, p. 301)

"I have already said that *Gandharva* consists of *svara*, *tala* and *pada*. In this, *pada* is used only as an aid to project *svara* and *tala*." Unfortunately, this has been misinterpreted by some musicologists. Abhinava's commentary on this

clarifies what Bharata intended to convey. He says,

किन्त्वन्यथा तस्य गाने प्राधान्यमन्यथाच  
गान्धर्वे । तत्र हि स्वरतालौ प्रधानम् । तौ  
चानाधारौ न शक्यौ प्रयोक्तुमित्या धारतया  
यदुपयोगि तदाह । स्वरतालानुभावकमिति॥

(N.S. IV, p. 301)

The role of *pada* is different in *Gana* and *Gandharva*. In *Gandharva*, primacy is given to *svara* and *tala*. But *svara* and *tala* cannot be used without the base of *pada*. Therefore, *pada* is useful only as a base for *svara* and *tala*.

Abhinava has clearly shown the difference between *Gandharva* and *Deshi raga*-s in respect of *svarupa* i.e. in respect of *svara*, *tala* and *pada*. Let us see how they differ in respect of *phala* or the end they serve.

(B) Their difference in respect of *Phala*:

Bharata himself, while defining *Gandharva*, says:

अत्यर्थमिष्टं देवानां तथा प्रीतिकरं पुनः ।  
गन्धर्वाणां च यस्माद्धि तस्माद्गन्धर्वमुच्यते ॥

(N.S. IV, p. 6)

"Because it is extremely desired by the gods and gives great pleasure to the *gandharva*-s, therefore, is it called *Gandharva*." Commenting on this, Abhinava says,

अनादित्वाददृष्टादृष्टफलत्वाच्च प्रधानं गान्धर्वं ।  
गानं हि केवलं प्रीतिकार्यं वर्तते ।  
तेन तादात्म्यं तावदयुक्तम् ।

(N.S. IV, p. 6)

"*Gandharva* has been used from time immemorial. It has both *drishtha* and *adrishtha phala* i.e. it is both pleasant (which is evident) and lays in store merit for the future according to which one earns liberation or is given a place in heaven which is not evident (*adrishtha*). But *Gana* is used only for its pleasant or aesthetic effect. It is, therefore, unjust to identify the two."

(C) The difference between *Gandharva* and *Gana* in respect of *Kala*:

Abhinava indicates the distinction between the two in respect of *Kala* (or occasion when each is to be employed) with reference to drama. He says that *Gandharva* could be used only in the *Purvaranga* (a kind of ritual prologue to the drama). In the actual play itself, only *dhruva*-s could be sung in *Grama raga*-s and other forms of *Deshi* music.

(D) The difference between *Gandharva* and *Gana* in respect of *Dharma*:

It is not clear what exactly Abhinavagupta means by *Dharma* as he has not elaborated upon it in his commentary. Dr. Mukund Lath thinks that by *Dharma* Abhinava means 'function.' The function of *Gana* or *Deshi* music was aesthetic pleasure, to please the listeners; the function of *Gandharva* was only to please the gods.

I have dwelt somewhat at length on the distinction between *Gandharva* and *Gana*, because I feel that this is a very important contribution made by Abhinavagupta towards the solution of a very major problem of Indian music.

Musicologists have tried to describe *Deshi raga*-s in terms of Bharata's *shruti* scheme but, nevertheless, a wide gulf has been created between theory and practice in the *grantha*-s on music.

Certainly, our *Deshi raga*-s borrowed many principles from *Gandharva* music. The sources of many of the *raga*-s were *jati*-s. But *Deshi* music did not adhere strictly to all the principles of *Gandharva* music. *Gandharva* music could not countenance any change whatsoever in its principles, but *Deshi* music made many changes in the interest of aesthetic pleasure, even in *Grama raga*-s which were based on *Gandharva* music and thus formed a link between *Gandharva* and *Deshi raga*-s. Sharngadeva remarks in Part Two of *Sangitaratnakara* that "some of the famous *Grama raga*-s have come under the category of *Deshi raga*-s."

Many of our musicologists believe that Bharata's *Gandharva* music was the only standard classical music of India, that *Deshi* music did not exist in the time of Bharata, but was developed later through borrowing the *shruti* scheme and other principles of *Gandharva*. Instead of the nine *svara* scheme of Bharata (seven *shuddha* and two *vikrita*), *Deshi* music, according to them, adopted the twelve *svara* scheme of the Muslims and was changed completely.

In his article, *Bhairava Raga Abharatiya Hain* published in *Sangita* of Hathras and included in the second edition of his *Sangita Chintamani*, the late Acharya Kailasa Chandradeva Brihaspati, one of our best musicologists, argues that both Bhairava and Malavagauda *raga*-s are non-Indian. He reasons:— (1) The *svara*-s of Bhairava do not fit in with the *shruti* scheme of Bharata and (2) Bhairava as given in *Sangitaratnakara* is quite different from the one in vogue at present.

Abhinavagupta's views regarding the distinction between *Gandharva* and *Gana* will clarify the position considerably. He indicates that *Gandharva* and *Gana* existed side by side, that even Bharata advised the use of *Gana* or *Deshi raga*-s

in *dhruva*-s. Further, that though *Deshi raga*-s adopted certain principles of *Gandharva*, they did not always adhere to the *shruti* scheme of Bharata. He quotes Vriddha Kashyapa, an ancient authority, to show that changes in the *shruti* scheme of Bharata were freely made in *Deshi raga*-s. He even cites practical examples current in his time and says categorically:

कियद्द्वारागभाषा विभाषादेशी मार्गादिगतानां स्वराणां  
श्रुतिवैचित्र्यं ब्रूमः ।

So Bhairava *raga* cannot be ruled out on the basis of *shruti vaichitrya*. If Bharata's scheme of *shruti* and *murchchhana* is to be accepted as the basis of all *Deshi raga*-s, then not only Bhairava but many other *raga*-s, such as Marwa, Purvi, Vasanta, Puriya Dhanashri etc. will have to be ruled out as non-Indian.

Nor is Acharya Brihaspati's other reason — that there is sufficient difference between the structure of Bhairava as described in *Sangitaratnakara* and the one in vogue today—a valid one for declaring Bhairava as non-Indian. *Deshi* music has never been rigid like *Gandharva*. There is sufficient difference between ancient Malava-kaishika and the modern Malkauns. That does not prove that Malkauns is non-Indian. The very premise that what is not according to Bharata is not Bharatiya is untenable. No doubt, Indian music has been influenced by Iranian music, but that influence came in much later around the thirteenth century.

Prior to that, many changes were made periodically in *Deshi* music. Abhinavagupta's discussion of this problem is a very great contribution towards the clarification of the distinction between *Gandharva* and *Deshi* music and sheds light on the internal changes taking place in *Deshi* music.

All the references are from *Natyashastra* of Bharatamuni with the commentary *Abhinavabharati*, Volume IV, Oriental Institute, Baroda, 1963.