



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

AN ANALYSIS OF A *KṚTI* OF SRI R. VENUGOPAL (SPENCER) IN THE UNCOMMON *RĀGA VITAPI*

¹V. K. Arun Kumar, ²Prof. Dr. S. Subbu Lakshmi

¹PhD Research Scholar, ²Professor and Director

¹School of Music and Fine Arts

¹Vels Institute of Science, Technology and Advanced Studies (VISTAS), Chennai, India

Abstract: South Indian classical Karnatik music is a *rāga*-based system of music. Even though hundreds and thousands of scales can be formed with the seven base notes and their variations, the way of singing these combinations of notes set to an aesthetic, pleasing and soothing form, has been handed over to us by the centuries-old oral tradition and documented in various works. One such scale is the *rāga vitapi*. This *audava*, five-note scale, has been found in texts since the early 20th century. R. Venugopal (Spencer) has given a very classical feel to this scale and made it into a *rāga* with an amazing composition, *sarisamāna* in *desādi tāla*. This composition is taken up for a detailed analysis and discussion in this article.

Index Terms – Karnatik music, *rāga*, raga, scales, notes, aesthetic, *vitapi*, *audava*, *sarisamāna*, *sarisamana*, Spencer, R. Venugopal, Spencer Venugopal, *kṛti*, *kṛiti*, *kṛti*, *ciṭṭai svāra*, *chittai swaras*, *desādi*

I. INTRODUCTION

South Indian Classical Karnatik music is a *rāga*-based system of music, which has a strong foundation in the characteristics of different scales, rather than just the skeleton of the scale¹. The underlying contextual oscillations and connections between the notes in the skeletal scale is termed as *gamaka*. This foundation is further strengthened by the many thousands of compositions created by various *vāggeyakarā*-s over the centuries, which have been passed on mostly by oral tradition, and started documenting in text, during the past century or more. The interpretations of these *rāga*-s, by musicians, teachers and, others who listened to renditions and learnt them by rote memorisation, have led to a very interesting path of evolution, to their form in the present day².

R. Venugopal³ is a present-day contemporary composer, who is well-known to have breathed into life, this concept of *rāga*-based music, into all his compositions. This has taken all his creations to a different plane, with tremendous importance on ‘how’ to sing them; with the utmost aesthetic beauty and refinement. His compositions have been internalized and rendered in concerts, by many musicians of high repute, including the most internationally renowned ‘Bharat Ratna’ ‘Sangita Kalanidhi’ Smt. M.S.Subbulakshmi⁴.

¹ About Karnatik music - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnatic_music

² Oral tradition in Karnatik music - <http://carnatica.in/sangeet/traditionalaspects.htm>

³ Spencer R. Venugopal - the composer - <https://www.karnatik.com/co1064.shtml>

⁴ M.S. Subbulakshmi rendering a *dhanyāsi rāga* composition of R.Venugopal - <https://youtu.be/aVOgDgeNVXY>

In this article, a unique *kṛti* composed by R. Venugopal (Spencer) in the uncommon *rāga vitapi*⁵ is analysed in detail. The structure, lyrics, melody, and rhythm of this *kṛti* are discussed. The bright and vibrant *ciṭṭai svāra*, which is part of this *kṛti*, is also highlighted for its patterns.

1.1 THE RĀGA NAMED VITAPI

Vitapi is the name of the *rāga* of the composition which is being taken up for detailed analysis in this article. The word *vitapi*, literally means a tree, which has branches and twigs.

Vitapi is an *audava rāga*, having five notes in both *ārōhaṇa* and *avarōhaṇa*. This *rāga* is derived from the fourth *melakarta vanaspati*. The *svāra krama* of this *rāga* is given below:

<i>ārōhaṇa</i>	s r m p d ś
<i>avarōhaṇa</i>	ś d p m r s

The *svāra-s* are *shadja*, *suddha rishabha*, *suddha madhyama*, *panchama*, and *chatursruti daivata*. By virtue of just considering the notes, the absence of *gāndhāra* and *nishāda*, makes this scale derivable from either *nātakapriya* (tenth *melakarta*) or *chakravāham* (sixteenth *melakarta*). However, the assignment of this to the fourth *melakarta*, gives a very peaceful and soothing feel, while considering that the parent *rāga* is a *vivādi mela*.

The *rishabha* is sung with an oscillation from *shadja*, as is the case with most *rāga-s* with this combination. The *madhyama* is mostly handled in a plain way. Some contextual stress, or *nokku gamaka* is employed for the *madhyama*, in case of phrases like p m p , or, m p d ś. The *daivata* is sung with a slight stress from the *panchama* or *shadja*, depending on if it is an upward-moving phrase or downward-moving phrase respectively.

Panchama and *shadja* are *achala svāra-s* which are sung without any ornamentation.

II. STRUCTURAL AND LYRICAL ANALYSIS

The composition being analysed in this article is a *kṛti*⁶. This is the most famous compositional form in Karnatik music. The general format of a *kṛti*, consists of three parts, namely, *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and *charanam*. While *pallavi* and *anupallavi* sections occur only once, there might be multiple *charanam-s* in a *kṛti*. *Sarisamāna* follows this structure of a *kṛti*, consisting of *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, and one *charanam*.

The composers have always had their choice and prerogative to write lyrics of the compositions in whichever language they might be comfortable with or, which they consider could be apt for their creations. R. Venugopal (Spencer), has written his *sāhitya-s* in Sanskrit, Telugu, and Tamil as well. The language of the composition taken up here is in Telugu.

The *pallavi* is given below:

sari samāna deivamu lēdani

sārasāksha ninne sharaṇaṇṭini

The opening lines of the song brings out the theme of the composition, which is on a deity - *deivamu*. The composer says that there is no one like you, while addressing the deity. He further says that the eyes of the deity are like the lotus, and that he prostrates before the deity. We can notice the rhyming of 'ni' at the end - called *antya prāsa*, one of the many prosodical beauties.

⁵ List of *janya rāga-s - vitapi* is seen under fourth *melakarta* - <https://www.karnatik.com/janyalist2.shtml>

⁶ What is a *kṛti* - its form, features and structure - [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kṛti_\(music\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kṛti_(music))

The *anupallavi* is given below:

varadarāja needu charaṇa vārijamu

mari mari sadā poojinche nannu brōva

The deity's name is given at the beginning of the *anupallavi* - namely, *varadarāja*. The composer says that he always worships the lotus feet of *varadarāja*, and that He should protect him. It is apt to note that lotus is referred with two different words - *sārasāksha* for the eyes, *vārijamu* for the feet. *Poojinche* is used for worship; this can also be interpreted as the lotus flower is being used to worship the deity.

The *charaṇam* is given below:

chira kānchipura nagara nilaya chintitārtha prada sadaya hrudaya

vara khaga turanga karuṇāntaranga vadana kamala madana kōti sundarānga

The location of the deity, *kānchipura*⁷, begins the *charaṇam*. The composer says that whoever even thinks of the lord with all their heart, who lives in *kānchipura*, receives all that they desire. He drips with mercy to whoever that come to Him. He rides the king of all birds, namely the eagle *garuda* as his *vāhana*. His lotus face, bringing another word to describe the lotus - *kamala*, and his body (*anga*) are as beautiful (*sundara*) as crores of cupids - *madana kōti*.

While the *pallavi* and *anupallavi* have two lines of *sāhitya* each, the *charaṇam* has four lines. This is in accordance with the general structure of such a composition, as handed over to us by the previous masters across multiple generations. Many compositions of the widely sung trinity of Karnatik music, follow this format to the dot. This shows that R. Venugopal upholds and celebrates tradition and walks in the path laid out to us over the great history of this art form.

The lyrics are so simple, yet brimming with poetic content and meaning. The usage of three different words to denote lotus, one each for eyes, feet and face, brings out the composer's command of the language. The *prāsa* highlights like *nilaya/hrudaya*, *karuṇāntaranga/kōti sundarānga*, shows us the innate musicality of the lyrics as well.

III. MELODIC AND RHYTHMIC ANALYSIS

Although being an uncommon *rāga* in the compositional and concert platforms, *vitapi*'s handling by R. Venugopal brings out its association with the fourth *melakartā* in the first phrase of the composition itself. A more popular *rāga*, *manōranjani*, even though derived from the fifth *melakarta mānavati*, has all the notes of *vitapi*, along with the addition of *nishāda* in both ascending and descending scales, and the *vivādi svāra*, *suddha gāndhāra*, in the descending scale only. The starting phrase of this *kṛti* in *vitapi* with s r m (or) s r s m (or) a *sangati* up to s r m p d, might mislead us to this more popular *rāga*.

The *pallavi* of this song commences in the normal Sa, reaches up to Pa in the first *sangati*, and goes up to the higher Sa and Ri in the subsequent *sangati*-s. This feature reminds us of many popular *kṛti*-s of Tyagaraja, one of the most famous of the trinity of Karnatik music. The *pallavi*, literally, gives us a complete view of the contours of the *rāga*, across a full octave and more.

The *anupallavi*, again, as found in many *kṛti*-s of Tyagaraja and other famous composers, begins from the middle octave, reaching the pinnacle in the higher octave phrases. At the end of this section, the song reaches the normal octave, and leads on to the *ciṭṭai svāra*, which has been discussed in the next section.

⁷ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Varadharaja_Perumal_Temple,_Kanchipuram

As per the design of such songs, the *charanam*'s first two lines begin in the lower part of the octave, covering up to the middle range. The second two lines' tune and *sangati*-s, mimic that of the *anupallavi*, hence leading on to the *ciṭṭai svāra* to be presented again.

The concept of *svārākshara*, where the *svāra* and *sāhitya* have the same syllables is a unique, but popular concept in Karnatik music. This has been employed very beautifully in this composition, in the first four syllabus itself, as shown below:

<i>pallavi</i> - beginning
, , , , , s r , s m , , , m , sa ri sa mā na

Another place where the *svārākshara* shines majestically is in the second line of *anupallavi*. There is such amazing play of the words to match the *svārā*-s.

<i>anupallavi</i> - line 2
, , , , , ṁ ṛ , , , ṁ ṛ , ś , d , , , ma ri ma ri sa dā

This composition is set in the *desādi tāla* structure, which is the basic *ādi tāla*, with the starting point at six notes after the beginning, in second speed. The way the composer has envisioned and provided the notation with thirty-two *svārā*-s per *āvarta*, shows us clearly that this song is set to be rendered in a relatively slow to medium tempo, rather than a high-speed *kṛti*.

The *eduppu* is maintained throughout the song. Every *sāhitya* line ends beautifully with medium-paced *sangati*-s, to land on to the *eduppu*. While the *pallavi* gets back to itself, the other two sections lead on to the *ciṭṭai svāra*, which then brings it back to the *pallavi*. The rhythmic beauty of this *kṛti* has been further enhanced by the enchanting *ciṭṭai svāra* passage.

IV. CIṬṬAI SVARA

This section is a fantastic blend of melody and rhythm, which the composer has presented in a fabulous manner. The commencing phrase itself brings out a clear picture of the *ārōhaṇa* and the fact that the *jantai svāra*-s form an important part of highlighting the *rāga svārūpa*.

The *ciṭṭai svāra* starts with

, , , , , s r , s m , s p , s d , , , d p p m r , p m r r s ḍ

The second line fully uses the concept of *āhata gamaka*. This also provides a bright and cheery picture of the *rāga*.

s r r m - m p p d - d ś ś ṛ

The finale of this section finds a beautiful combination *poruttam*, to lead on to the *pallavi*. Instead of the conventional three sets of fives or sevens, etc., the composer has chosen to use an aesthetic combination of notes in a set of three, which further embellishes this *kṛti*, while maintain the rhythmic impact.

ś - ṁ ṁ ṛ ṛ ś d , - p - ś ś d d p m , - s - m m r r s d (sarisamāna)

V. OTHER COMPOSITIONS AND LITERATURE AVAILABLE

While researching for this article, the scholar, initially thinking that this composition might be an *ēka rāga kṛti* (a single composition of its kind in this *rāga*), found a set of other compositions available to listen, learn and practice. A couple of them have been composed specifically for dance performances, possibly because of the pleasing and soothing effect of the melody of the *rāga*. These compositions found, are listed below:

- *sārideno ninna - ādi* - Vadiraja Swami⁸
- *ikshudandadhara*⁹ - composition on Lord Ganesha presented as invocation in dance performances - Dr. N. Raghu
- *pillaikari undavanai*¹⁰ - *ādi* - D. Pattammal
- *upāsanaī seidāl*¹¹ - *ādi* - Papanasam Rukmini Ramani
- *jatisvara*¹² and other compositions performed in dance recitals

VI. PERFORMANCES AND CONCERT PRESENTATION

This *rāga vitapi*, can be considered as being like many popular *rāga*-s, with slight differentiating factors. One such is *suddha sāveri*; *Vitapi* is *suddha sāveri* with small Ri - or *suddha rishabha*. This highly distinguishing factor, completely changes the mood of the rendition of *vitapi*, compared to the oft-sung *suddha sāveri*. There are many recordings available online, of musicians performing different compositions in *vitapi*, with *manōdharmā* features like *ālāpana* and *kalpana svāra*-s. Some of these have been included in the footnotes at the respective places as applicable, in this article¹³.

VII. CONCLUSION

Even though a lot of musicians and scholars have been documenting *rāga*-s, its features, its scale, etc. since the 13th century, *rāga vitapi* finds a clear mention in the work of Nathamuni Pandithar, ‘Sangeetha Swara Prasthara Sagaramu’ in Telugu, published in 1906. This has been brought forth in the encyclopedia compilation work ‘Raga Pravaham - an index to Carnatic ragas’, by Dr. M.N.Dhandapani and D.Pattammal, published in the 20th century, giving the scales of all available *rāgas* at that time.

R. Venugopal (Spencer)’s *sarisamāna* is a masterpiece composition in this *rāga*. This song highlights a very highly aesthetically pleasing version of the song, having all the features required to showcase such a unique *rāga*. This composition has also been performed by many musicians of repute in the current generation, including *manōdharmā* aspects.

This composition is truly a wonderful addition to the repertoire of any musician and Karnatic music student as a composition that teaches the *rāga vitapi*.

⁸ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RjntXJBmj98>

<https://dasasahitya.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/saarideno-naa-ninna-venkataranna.jpg>

⁹ <https://youtu.be/gI5M07Ei6IM>

¹⁰ http://www.dpattammal.com/downloads/jrk_song_53.pdf

¹¹ https://youtu.be/Jcxcv_8HoMM

¹² <https://youtu.be/z1qY8BKJHaU>

¹³ https://youtu.be/kxJ5JKZZ6_s

Smt. Neela Ramgopal - compositions of Spencer R. Venugopal - *vitapi* with *manōdharmā* starts at 01:08:10

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vV-1Bji0U_o

VIII. NOTATION

The complete notation of this composition is given in the images below for the reference of students.

Pallavi

1. , , , , , S R , S M , , , M , | P , , , , , P P | M , R , , , R , ||
Sa ri sa mā na | Dei va | mu lē da ||
2. R S S , , , S R , S M , , , M , | P , M P D , Ś D | P , MEP, M R R , ||
ni Sa ri sa mā na | Dei va | mu lē da ||
3. SMR , RS S , S R , S M , , , M , | P , M P D , Ř Ś | D , Ś D P M D P ||
ni Sa ri sa mā na | Dei va | mu lē da ||
P M R R S ढ RSS ढ ढ , S , , S , | R , , R , , P M | P D Ś D P M R , ||
ni Sā ra sāk sha | Nin nē Sha | ra Na n ti ||
M R M R S ढ | | ||
ni | | ||

(Sarisamāna)

Anupallavi

1. , , , , , M P , D Ś , , , Ś D | Ś , , Ś , , Ř Ř | , Ř Ř , , , Ř , ||
Va ra da rā ja | Ni du Chāa | na vā ri ||
2. Ś Ř M ŘŚ Ś , M P , D ŘŚŚ D , D , | PDŚ , Ś , , Ř Ř | , Ř Ř , , , Ř , ||
ja mu Va ra da rā ja | Ni du Chāa | na vā ri ||
3. Ś Ř , M , , M P , D ŘŚŚ D , D , | PDŚ , Ś , , Ř Ř | , Ř Ř , , , Ř , ||
ja mu Va ra da rā ja | Ni du Chāa | na vā ri ||
- (i) Ś Ř M Ř M , M , Ř , , M Ř , Ś , | D , , , , , D Ś | Ś D , P , , D D ||
ja mu Ma ri Ma ri Sa | dā Pu | jin che Nan ||
- (ii) P P M R R S M , Ř , , M Ř , Ś , | Ř Ś Ś D , , D Ś | Ś D , P , , D D ||
nu Bro va Ma ri Ma ri Sa | dā Pu | jin che Nan ||
- (iii) P P M R R S M , Ř , , M Ř , Ś , | Ś D P D ŚŘŚŚ D | DŚD , P , , D D ||
nu Bro va Ma ri Ma ri Sa | dā Pu | jin che Nan ||
P P M R R S | | ||
nu Bro va | | ||

Cittai svara

- S R , S M , S P , S | D , , , D P P M | R , P M R R S ढ ||
S R R M M P P D D Ś Ś Ř D Ś Ř Ś | M M Ř Ř Ś D , P | Ś Ś D D P M , S ||
M M R R S ढ | | ||

(Sarisamāna)

Charanam

1. , , , , , S , S , S , , , R , | S R , R , , R , | M , P M R , R , ||
Chi ra Kān chi | Pu ra Na | ga ra Ni ||
2. S , R S S Ḍ S , S , R , , , R , | Ḍ S R S R , P M | P D Ś D P M R R ||
la ya Chi ra Kān chi | Pu ra Na | ga ra Ni ||
M R R , S , Ḍ , Ḍ , S , , Ḍ , , | S , , S , , R , | R , M , , , M R ||
la ya Chin ti thār tha | Pra da Sa | da ya Hru ||
- (i) P , D PM M , P M P , D , Ś , D , | Ś , , Ś , , Ṛ , | Ṛ , Ṛ , , , Ṛ , ||
da ya Va ra Kha ga Tu | ran ga Ka | ru nān ta ||
- (ii) Ś , , Ś , , P M P , D , Ś , Ś D | PDŚ , Ś , , Ṛ , | Ṛ , Ṛ , , , Ṛ , ||
ran ga Va ra Kha ga Tu | ran ga Ka | ru nān ta ||
1. Ś Ṛ Ṙ Ṛ Ṙ Ṙ , Ṙ Ṛ Ṙ Ṛ Ṙ Ṙ Ṙ Ṛ , Ś , | D P D , , , Ṛ Ś | D P , M , , D P ||
ran ga Va da na Ka ma la | Ma da na Kō | ti Su n da ||
2. P M R S , , Ṙ Ṛ , Ś Ṛ , Ś , Ś , | D P D Ś ṚŚ,ṚŚ D | D P , P M , D D ||
rā n ga Va da na Ka ma la | Ma da na Kō | ti Su n da ||
3. P M R R S , Ṙ Ṛ , Ṙ Ṙ Ṙ Ṛ , Ś , | D P , D , , Ṛ Ś | D , Ś D P M D D ||
rā n ga Va da na Ka ma la | Ma da na Kō | ti Su n da ||
- P M R R S Ḍ
rā n ga

(Repeat Cittai svara)
(Sarisamāna)

REFERENCES

- Ramaswamy, Maragatham (2022), Athishaya Vara Prasadini: Lyrics and Detailed Notation in English for 50 Carnatic Music Songs of 24 Composers
- Venugopal, R. (2002), Kirtana Mala, Compositions notated by Sripada Pinakapani, Tamil
- Venugopal, R., Kirtana Mala, Compositions notated by Padmavathy Ananthagopalan, Tamil
- Venugopal, R., Hand-written notation manuscripts, Tamil
- Pattammal, D. Raga Pravaham - Index of Carnatic ragas
- Other Internet searches and relevant YouTube recordings provided in footnotes throughout the article