



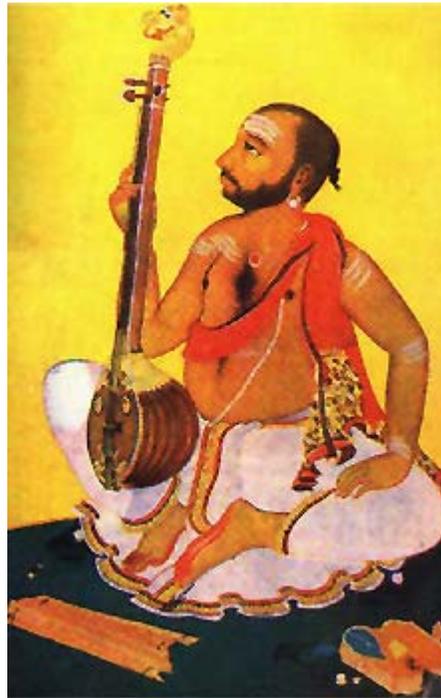
**Carnatic Darbar**  
Musings on Music

## Views

Sri Shyama Shastry's swarajathi ? a primer on Bhairavi  
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This article attempts to study Sri Shyama Shastry's masterpiece swarajathi beginning with the lyrics, "Kamakshi anudinamu...". This composition is set to Misra chapu thalam and has a sedate kala pramanam or tempo. This swarajathi is considered to be one of the most comprehensive compositions in the raagam Bhairavi. A deeper analysis of the swarajathi reveals how it is practically a primer on Bhairavi.

An interesting aspect is the fact that the swarajathi (i.e., the Pallavi) starts in the lower octave. The composer, in the Pallavi, says that the feet of Goddess Kamakshi are his only refuge. Perhaps, the setting of the music in the lower octave is a reflection of his humility and complete surrender to the Goddess!



The swarajathi has eight charanams, which are each rendered in swaram-sahityam format. Yet another fantastic aspect is that the first charanam begins in the note, S; each charanam thereafter begins with the next note in sequential order, with the 8th and final charanam beginning with the S in the higher octave.

The first charanam ends with the words "Thalli rakshimchu" meaning "Oh Mother! Protect me". The swarams for these words are P; D; (Thalli) and N, S r (Rakshimchu). The P and D take up a leisurely 4 aksharams each while N takes up 3, S takes up 2 and R takes up 1. Apart from the obvious mathematical progression, this also reveals how effectively Sri Shyama Shastry urges the Goddess, through his music, to protect him at the earliest. That is perhaps why he speeded up the music when it came to the words, "Protect me!".

In the second charanam, Sri Shyama Shastry continues his in depth description of the Goddess. He concludes this charanam with the lyrics, "Maayamma", meaning "My mother". The swarams used for this word are "N, G r". This is a powerful Bhairavi prayogam and the gamakams that are given to the N and G help accentuate the utmost devotion of the composer to Goddess Kamakshi who he considered as his mother.

The third charanam very beautifully starts in G rendered with gamakams. He describes the Goddess as one whose feet are

adored by Padma Bhava (One who is born of the lotus, a reference to Lord Brahma), Hari (Lord Vishnu) and Shambu (Lord Shiva). The composer has expansively explored different shades of the madhyamam in this charanam, from a delicate throbbing gamakam for the words "Padma bhava" (M ; P G R) to a higher gamakam ending in P for the words "Hari" ( G M) and "Shambu nuta" ( P; D M G)

In the fourth charanam, the Goddess is describes as "Kalpalathika", a wish yielding creeper. Sri Shastry implores the Goddess to bestow boons upon him without delay ("taamasamu"). There is a very beautiful "jaaru" or curve that links the higher octave S to P when the words "Taamasamu seyaka" (P ; D N S P) are rendered. This is yet another example of an outstanding Bhairavi phrase in this composition which makes it a lesson in this raagam for every aspiring musician.

The fifth charanam begins with a commanding swaraksharam (i.e., the syllable or aksharam is the same as the swaram or note). The beginning lyrics, "Paataka mulanu" fall on "P ; D P M G R". The composer asks some rhetoric questions with each question ending sequentially with the same musical notes thus providing a beautiful cascading effect. "Paavanigadaa?" meaning "Are you not the purest one?" (G; M G R S) and "Moravinadaa ?" meaning "Are you deaf to my entreaties?" ( P M G R S).

In the sixth charanam, there is a very unusual link from the S in the Madhyama sthayi (middle octave) to the G in the Taara sthayi (higher octave) for the lyrics "Vedamu" meaning "the vedas" (S, G R). This once again highlights the masterful creativity and genius of Sri Shyama Shastry.

The seventh charanam once again abounds in swaraksharams. Some examples are: Nee Pavana (N ; R S R) and Mada Danuja (M P S N D). This charanam is expansive and explores the higher octave with some mesmerizing sancharams such as G ; M G R S which bring out the beauty of Bhairavi in the higher notes.

The eight charanam begins with the mudra of the composer when he describes Goddess Kamakshi as "Shyama Krishna Sahodari" (sister of Krishna). It very aptly ends with the raga name. The composer launches into an inspired torrent of names for the Goddess such as Siva Shankari (consort of Siva), Parameshwari (supreme Goddess) and Sri Bhairavi (a fierce aspect of the Goddess). The music for the lyrics "Abhimaanamu leda, Naapai Devi ? (Oh Goddess, don't you have affection for me?) very seamlessly moves from the madhyama sthaayi to the taara sthaayi with the swarams being S N S ;, P M P ;, D , N; S, R; G.

Our Carnatic music heritage is indeed a treasure trove and the Bhairavi swarajathi, with its moving lyrics with mellifluous and meditative music, is unquestionably a truly invaluable gem.

#### References:

Smt. Vidya Shankar's Shyama Shastry compositions book  
[Sri Shivkumar Kalyanaraman's online Krithi archive](#)

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