

The Samaj-gayan Tradition : Transmitting a Musico-Religious System in North India

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The *Samāj-gāyan* Tradition: Transmitting a Musico-Religious System in North India

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Against the spiritual background of *bhakti*, Hindu devotees sing songs for the gods in different styles, languages and repertoires. Hindu religious vocal music has a variety of traditions such as *bhajans*,¹⁾ *kīrtans*,²⁾ *āratīs*,³⁾ and *viṣṇu pads*.⁴⁾ These kinds of vocal music might be generically named *bhakti saṅgīt* (*bhakti* music), although this is not a popular expression in North India.

Samāj-gāyan, a tradition only seen in the Braj area of northern India, is also regarded as one of the *bhakti saṅgīts*. It is noteworthy for the remarkable characteristics of its singing form. It is sung in call-and-response style, with all the processes learned by heart, and the singing form is extremely complicated and systematic. *Samāj-gāyan* is a unique form of Indian musical tradition, both in terms of classical (Hindustani) music and folk music.

This article examines the reasons for the development of such a specific system of singing as *samāj-gāyan* by analyzing its musical aspects and underlying religious thought. For as long as this singing has been practiced, the musical style must have embodied some religious necessity in itself. I conjecture that devotees have gradually developed this style of singing over a period of about 400 years, since the founders started *samāj-gāyan* in their temples, as an inevitable consequence of its religious and spiritual aspects, and that the special style of singing and the musical structure itself consequently functioned as educational and practical devices for handing down the *samāj-gāyan* tradition to the next generation.

What follows is my analysis of the published texts of the songs, musical examples and other materials collected through fieldwork, and interviews with singers and devotees in temples where *samāj-gāyan* has been practiced. Fieldwork in India was conducted for 20 months in 1984 and 1985 and for 3 weeks each in 1986 and 1996.

Samāj-gāyan

The Sanskrit word *samāj* literally means “society” or “gathering,” and *gāyan* denotes “singing.” Taken together, *samāj-gāyan* refers to congregational singing or singing in a group; more specifically, however, it refers to a type of religious singing seen only in the Braj area of North India.

The Braj area (Braj *maṅḍal*), which has a strong connection with Kṛṣṇa mythology, is regarded as one of the most important spiritual and cultural centers of India. The area extends from western Uttar Pradesh to eastern Rajasthan and includes the city of Mathura, where Kṛṣṇa is said to have been born, and the town of Vrindaban, where Kṛṣṇa and his

consort Rādhā are said to have led their married life. Many Kṛṣṇa devotees make pilgrimages in the Braj area to retrace important events in Kṛṣṇa's life (*līlā*), especially around the time of Kṛṣṇa's birthday.⁵⁾ *Samāj-gāyan* is performed by Kṛṣṇa devotees as the core element of sectarian worship and rituals in daily and seasonal gatherings in some Braj temples. The special gatherings in which *samāj-gāyan* plays a central role are called *samāj* in those temples.

After the 16th century, when the Mughal rulers were tolerant of other religions, an increasing number of poet-saints came to Braj on pilgrimage from different parts of India and established a way of worshipping Kṛṣṇa mainly through singing devotional verses in Braj *bhāṣā* (the Braj dialect of Hindi).⁶⁾ They gradually formed groups of their followers and disciples, and established a sect-like tradition called *sampradāy*. The *samāj-gāyan* tradition can only be seen today in several temples belonging to the Haridās, Nimbārka, Rādhāvallabha and Caitanya sects.

The Haridās sect was established in Vrindaban⁷⁾ by Swāmī Haridās⁸⁾ who is known as one of the greatest composers and singers of *dhrupad* in the history of North Indian classical music. The word *dhrupad* is the Hindi form of the Sanskrit *dhruvapada*. *Dhruva* means "fixed" and *pada* means "word or syllable"; so *dhruvapada* means "a composition in which the words are set in a definite pattern" (Srivastava 1980: 1). The Hindi "*dhrupad*" is therefore not only a music style but also a verse form.

Haridās's *dhrupad* compositions are compiled in two anthologies: 110 *dhrupads* in *Kelīmāl* and 18 *dhrupads* in *Shiddhānt ke Pad* ("Pads of principles"). As a musical form, *dhrupad* was in its prime in the 16th and 17th centuries when it was sung in purely classical style, strictly following modal structures of *rāgas* and rhythmic structures and cycles called *tāla*, but it is almost extinct today. Haridās must have sung his compositions himself as solo and in classical music form, and all of *dhrupad* verses in these anthologies had a particular *rāga* name. Many *dhrupad* verses composed by Haridās are sung today in congregational style in *samāj-gāyan* by his religious successors and devotees, rather than in the classical style. It is not rare for a verse by Haridās to have a *rāga* name that is different from that for the same verse included in the anthologies. Śāstri (n.d.: 2) wrote that it was Lalitakiśorīdās, the 8th spiritual leader (*ācārya*)⁹⁾ of the Haridās sect,¹⁰⁾ who fixed the musical form and order of the repertoires for fear of influence by Muslim culture.

Samāj-gāyan of the Haridās Sect can be heard today in two places in Vrindaban: Taṭiyā Sthān and Haridās Sevā Sansthān (Plate 1). I recorded only the *samāj-gāyan* performances in Haridās Sevā Sansthān,¹¹⁾ because recording was prohibited in Taṭiyā Sthān.

The Nimbārka sect is said to have been established by Nimbārka (1130?-1200?), who was a Telugu Brāhman from the South. As the center of the sect is in Mathura, I had the chance to attend *samāj-gāyan* held in Nimbārka Koṭh in Vrindaban, which belongs to the sect. Recording was prohibited there. Here *samāj-gāyan* was also sung in congregational and antiphonal style, and I noticed some similarities in the repertoire with that of the Haridās sect.

The Rādhāvallabha sect was established by Hit Harivaṃś (1502?-1552?). The hymns included in his anthology *Hit Caurāsī Pad* ("Hit Eighty-four Hymns") were analyzed by an

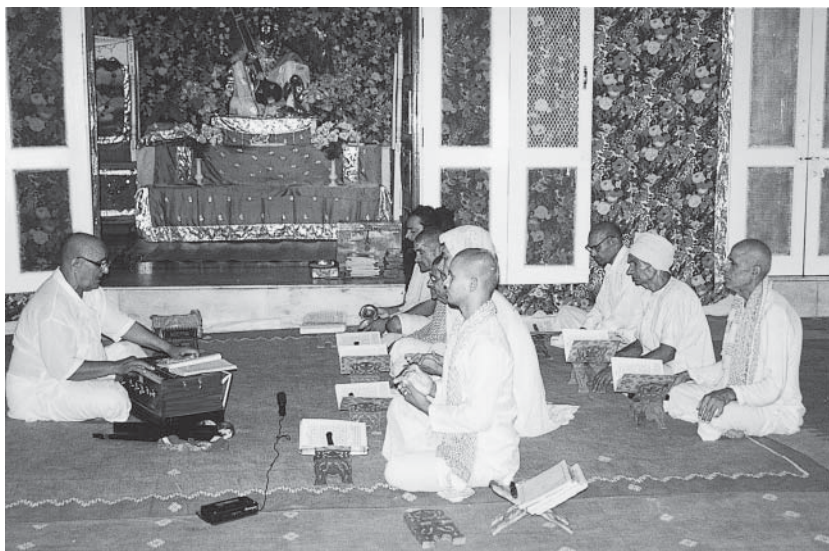


Plate 1 *Samāj-gāyan* in Haridās Sevā Sansthān

English linguist, Rupert Snell, who studied them in detail and also described their musical contents (Snell 1991).

The Caitanya sect was established by Caitanya Mahāprabhū (1486-1533) from Bengal. It is also called the Gauḍiyā sect after Gauḍ, the old name for Bengal. Caitanya is known to have begun the *sañ-kīrtan* style, a simple and congregational style of devotional singing with many repetitions and physical movements, which is practiced by Caitanya followers even in Braj. Among Caitanya-sect temples in Braj, however, *samāj-gāyan* is performed only at the Madan Mohan Temple in the town of Vrindaban. In this article, I will refer to the temple as *Bhaṭṭ jī*, according to local custom. There are two Madan Mohan Temples, big and small, in Vrindaban, and the residents distinguish them by calling the small one *Bhaṭṭ jī kā Mandir*, meaning the temple of Mr. Bhaṭṭ, as the temple is said to have been founded by Gadādhara Bhaṭṭ Gosvāmī in the 16th century and is still maintained by his descendants.

In *Bhaṭṭ jī*, the *sañ-kīrtan* style of music is absent and only the *samāj-gāyan* style is performed. This is probably because the founder, Gadādhara Bhaṭṭ, was a Tailang Brāhman who came to Braj from the South and became a follower of Jīva Gosvāmī, a disciple of Caitanya (Kapur 1984: 360). According to Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Bhaṭṭ, the *ācārya* of *Bhaṭṭ jī*, the founder Gadādhara abandoned the southern style of culture, and learned the Braj *bhāṣā* and the Braj way of worship.¹²⁾ He stressed that the *samāj-gāyan* tradition was purely a Braj way of worshipping that had no relationship with the Caitanya sect, which is based on Bengali culture.

Musical Characteristics of *Samāj-gāyan*

All the *samāj-gāyan* traditions share similar characteristics (congregational and antiphonal), but differ from each other when analyzed in detail. Here I will discuss the musical characteristics of *samāj-gāyan* performance, based on the analysis of the examples performed at *Bhaṭṭ jī* belonging to the Caitanya sect.

Samāj-gāyan as a Ritual

Samāj-gāyan is sung by several singers, accompanied by a harmonium (portable reed-organ), several *jhāñjhs* (small cymbals) and a *pakhāvaj* (barrel-shaped drum). In this temple, most singers are family members of *Bhaṭṭ jī*, and they sometimes hire a professional *pakhāvaj* player on special occasions.

The style of the *Bhaṭṭ jī* temple is called *havelī*, which means “residence,” because the building was apparently constructed not as a temple but as a residence for secular people in the middle ages. Its quadrangular structure, with a central court without a roof (Figures 1 and Plate 2), is quite different from that of the traditional Hindu temples seen in South India. The God Kṛṣṇa and his consort Rādhā sit in the east side of the room facing west. Although the *samāj-gāyan* performance could occur at any of three places (shown as A to C in Figure 1; see also Plate 3), the participants’ positions in each location are almost identical. The *mukhiyā* (first or primary singer) sits in the south with the harmonium, and other singers called *jhelā* (responsive or secondary singers) sit with *jhāñjha* facing north. This means that the *mukhiyā* and *jhelā* always face each other. Only the *pakhāvaj* drummer faces east in the direction of the God. All the participants who appear in the *samāj* are called *samājīs*.

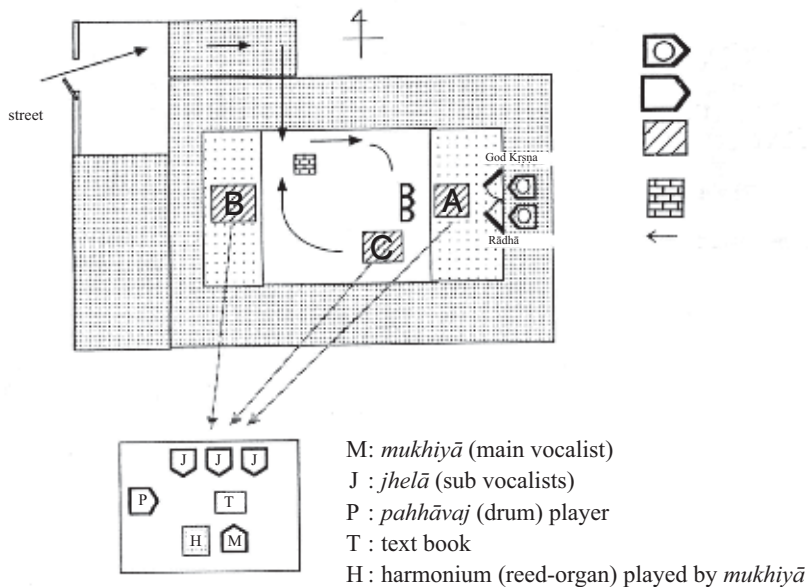


Figure 1 Location and direction of the *samāj-gāyan* performance

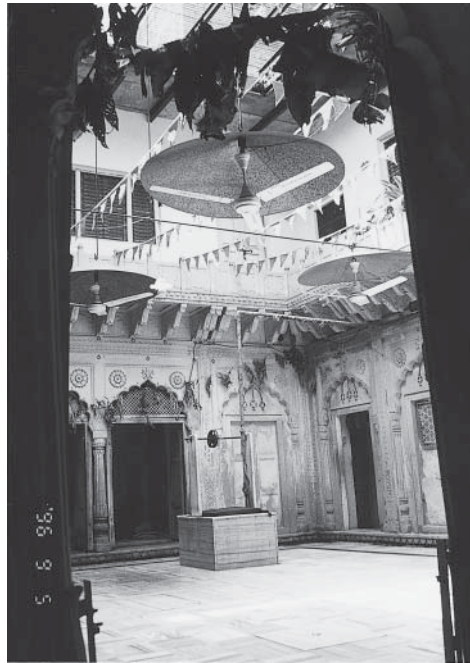


Plate 2 The *havelī* style of *Bhaṭṭ jī*'s temple



Plate 3 *Samāj-gāyan* performance in *Bhaṭṭ jī*'s temple
(at B in Figure 1)

Because *samāj-gāyan* is not supposed to be performed outside the ritual context, *samājīs* have no opportunity for practice other than actually participating in the *samāj* rituals. The time and occasion for singing each verse are strictly prescribed in *samāj-gāyan*, and normally there are therefore no rehearsals. Singing in *samāj-gāyan* is also technically difficult due to the extremely complicated structures of the performances. So it is amazing that *samājīs* can perform each annual *samāj-gāyan* accurately without any musical notation.

Each sect has a large number of textual repertoires of *samāj-gāyan* of its own. Most of the verses sung in *samāj* are usually chosen from compositions by sectarian poets, but some verses are common and popular among all the Kṛṣṇa devotees of Braj beyond sectarian boundaries, while the first verse sung in each *samāj* is usually a composition by the founder of the sect.

Samāj is carried out in accordance with the calendar of each sect and Kṛṣṇa's daily activities and life cycle. For example, *samāj-gāyan* is performed seven times a day in the Rādhāvallabha sect, and the ritual procedures and attitudes of devotees derive from the imagined activities of the deity throughout the day, such as his eating, resting, and wandering with cows in the bush. At the *Bhaṭṭ jī*, *samāj* is performed seasonally according to the Hindu calendar (see Figure 2). *Samāj-gāyan* is performed on 13 ritual occasions, and it is performed daily for 40 days between the *Vasant-pañcamī*¹³⁾ and the *Holī*.¹⁴⁾ This means that *samāj-gāyan* is performed on a total of about 50 days a year.

Śṛṅkhilā of textual units

The behavior of Kṛṣṇa is the most important factor for Kṛṣṇa devotees and they denote the divine sports as *līlā*.¹⁵⁾ The number of the verses sung in each ritual and their sequence

Name of ritual	Date in Hindu calendar	Time of <i>samāj-gāyan</i>
Rāmanavami	Caitra S.9	00:00-01:00
Kāmdā-ekādasī	Caitra S.11	19:30-21:30
Akṣay-tṛtīyā	Vaiśāk S.3	11:30-12:30
Jyeṣṭhabhiśeka	Āṣāḍha K.1	07:00-
Rathayātra	Āṣāḍha S.2	13:30-16:00
Lakṣābandan	Śrāvaṇ S.3	19:30-20:30
Kṛṣṇajammāṣṭamī	Bhādrapad K.8	02:30-05:00
Nandamahotsav	Bhādrapad K.9	06:00-10:00
Rādhāṣṭami	Bhādrapad S.8	00:30-01:30
Śaradapūrṇimā	Āśvin S.15	19:00-22:00
Annākūṭa	Kārtik K.30	03:00-06:00
Vasant-pañcamī	Māgh S.5	14:30-16:00
	↓ (daily)	
Holī mahotsava	Phālgun S.15	02:00-05:00

Figure 2 Performance schedule of *samāj-gāyan* of *Bhaṭṭ jī*

have been strictly observed in accordance with the Kṛṣṇa *līlās*. Among the 13 rituals in Figure 2, *Kṛṣṇa-jammāṣṭamī* (the birthday of Kṛṣṇa), *Nand-mahotsav*¹⁶⁾ (Plate 4), *Vasant-pañcamī*¹⁷⁾ and *Holī* are particularly important.

The *samāj-gāyan* participants sometimes use manuscripts and published anthologies of the verses (*padas*). *Śṛṅgār Ras Sāgar: Śrī Rādhāvallabha jī kau Varśotsav* (published in 1956 to 1962, in 4 volumes) is an anthology of more than 5,000 verses sung in the *samāj* of Rādhāvallabha *sampradāy*. According to the preface, the anthology is the product of the editor Bābā Tulsīdās, who endeavored to compile the rich treasure of the verses in the Braj dialect sung in the temples not only of his sect but also of various other sects. He collected as many important verses as possible from various manuscripts with the help of Govardhanlāl Bhaṭṭ (1900-1963) of the *Bhaṭṭ jī*.

This anthology contains a series of verses under the title of *śṛṅkhlā*. For example there are some verses under the name of *śṛṅkhlā* of the *Vasant-pancamī* of the *Bhaṭṭ jī*, while others are *śṛṅkhlā* of the *Holī* Festival of the *Bhaṭṭ jī*. All the verses under a single title are not always sung in full in the actual *samāj* performance. However, *śṛṅkhlā* is the most important concept for understanding the structure of the *samāj* as a ritual and *samāj-gāyan* as a musical performance. The usage of the word *śṛṅkhlā* is not limited to the *Bhaṭṭ jī*'s tradition. The anthology of verses sung in the *samāj* of the Haridās sect, published by the *Śrī Svāmī Haridās Sevā Sansthān* in 1981, is also titled *Samāj Śṛṅkhlā*.

Sometimes the name of the *rāga* (but rarely the name of the *tāla*) is indicated at the top of the verses. Other information, such as the order of the verses sung in the *samāj-gāyan*,



Plate 4 *Nand-mahotsav*

arrangements of the original *paḍs* in the ritual, and the method of singing are not mentioned in the anthologies. Such practical knowledge can be learned only from the experiences of singing in the rituals with senior singers.

One of the most remarkable characteristics of the *samāj-gāyan* text is the complex way in which so many different verses are combined. The *Bhaṭṭ jī*'s family refers to the series of verses in each ritual as *śṛṅkhilā*, a Braj word derived from Sanskrit literally meaning “chain” or “sequence.” For example, a series of verses sung in the *Nand-mahotsav* is called a *śṛṅkhilā* of *Nand-mahotsav*.

Figure 3 shows the combination of the verses sung in *samāj-gāyan* performance for *Nand-mahotsav*. The entire *samāj-gāyan* performance consists of different verses, each of which has a melody (music). Frequently, verses composed by famous saints or music compositions are not performed in their entirety. Having analyzed many *samāj-gāyan* performances, I find that units of verses and musical/melodic units exist in large numbers

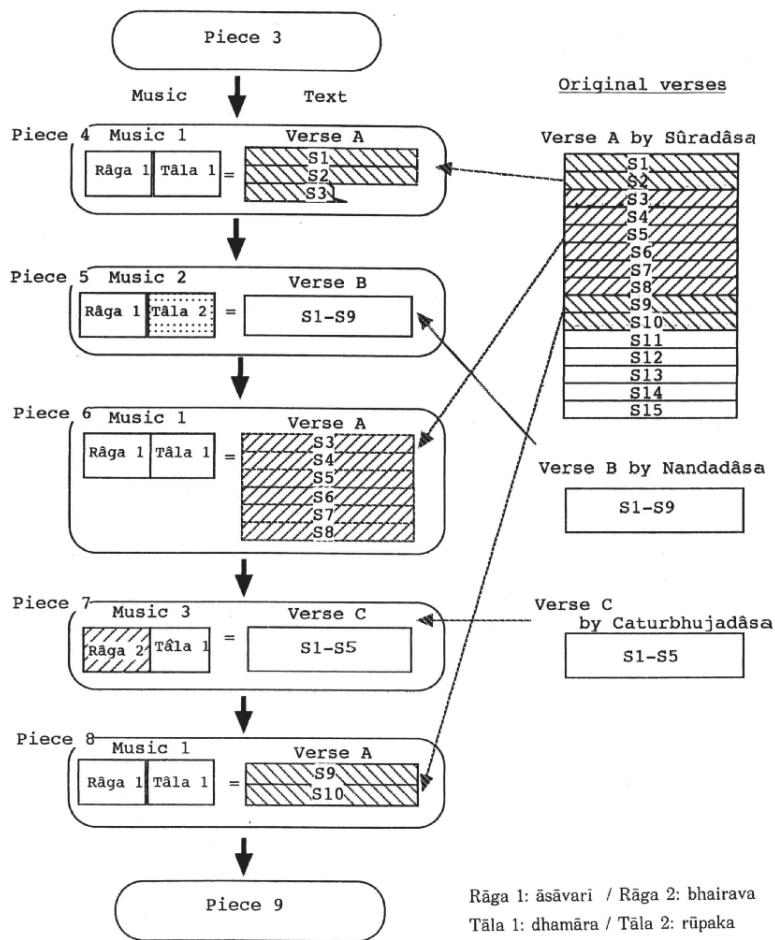


Figure 3 Structure of the combination of the verses in *samāj-gāyan* performance; *śṛṅkhilā* for the *Nand-mahotsav*

and they are combined in performance in a highly complicated manner that is fixed traditionally.

For the sake of analysis, I divide the whole *samāj-gāyan* performance for *Nand-mahotsav* into 14 pieces of music (from Piece 1 to 14) paying attention to the short intermissions during the performances. Figure 3 shows the structure from Piece 4 to Piece 8 in detail. From a textual perspective, the performance is made up of units taken from 11 different verses, as the texts of Piece 4, Piece 6, and Piece 8 are different stanzas taken from the same Verse A composed by Sūrdās.¹⁸ The original verse composed by Sūrdās (Verse A) consists of fifteen stanzas (S1 to S15) of four lines each. In *samāj-gāyan* performance, they select stanzas from the original verse A for three pieces in the performance: they sing two and a half stanzas (from S1 to the first half of S3) in Piece 4, six stanzas (from S3 to S8) in Piece 6 and two stanzas (from S9 to S10) in Piece 8, without completing the entire 15 stanzas of verse A. In between the pieces, two complete verses (B and C) composed by other poet-saints are sung as Piece 5 and Piece 7.

A closer look at the contents and contexts will reveal that they are not brought together randomly but are “recomposed” into a totally new composition of Kṛṣṇa *līlās* using the units of existing verses as raw materials. In Verse A, Sūrdās describes the happy villagers of Gokul who learn that their king Nand has now become the father of a newborn baby, and the dressed-up ladies rushing to the palace to greet the baby. Verse B depicts the Braj ladies absorbed in gazing at the divine baby Kṛṣṇa and blessing him at Nand’s palace. Verse C describes the beauty and virtue of the baby, and the villagers and ladies decorating the palace and singing songs of blessing. By combining the parts of these verses, the fortuitous birth of the divine baby is made more impressive by describing it from different aspects and perspectives.

Above all, *śṛṅkhilā* is regarded as the most important concept, found only in Braj, consisting of literary and ritual components to make the *samāj-gāyan* unique according to the sect’s rules.

Combining Musical and Textual Units

From the musical perspective, the performance also has a chain-like (*śṛṅkhilā*) structure. In Figure 3, Pieces 4, 6, and 8 have musical similarities as they are sung in the same *rāga* (*āsāvarī*) and in the same *tāla* (*dhamāra*) while the *tāla* is changed to *rūpak* with the *rāga* remaining the same in Piece 5, and the *rāga* is changed to *bhairava* with the *tāla* remaining the same in Piece 7. So from a purely musical point of view, some common elements are retained throughout the sequence from Piece 4 to Piece 8. There is no way of knowing exactly who reconstructed or recomposed the work, but it was probably the people who took part in *samāj-gāyan*, especially *mukhiyās*, who made additions and changes over the 400-year period since the school was established by Gadādhara Bhaṭṭ and the *samāj-gāyan* tradition started.

I attempted to construct a model of the singing process and structure of one complete “piece” of music performed for eight minutes at *Bhaṭṭ jī* in Figure 4. It is one of the pieces sung in the *samāj-gāyan* performances on the day to celebrate Kṛṣṇa’s birth

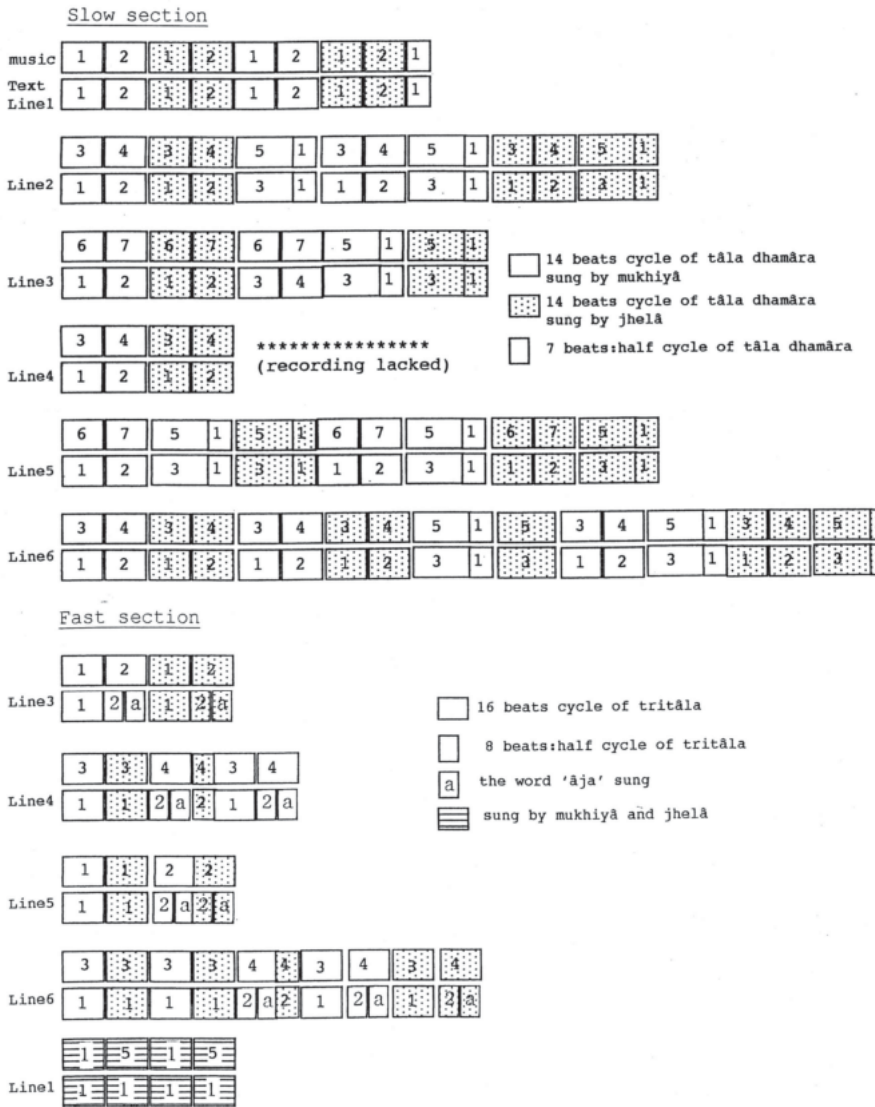


Figure 4 Structure of a piece; the chain-like combination of musical and textual units

(*Kṛṣṇajammāṣṭamī*) and it is also called a part of its *śṛṅkhilās*. The whole piece is divided into slow and fast sections, in which the same rhythmic cycle (*tāla*) is maintained. Rich variation and occasional alternation between slow and fast sections, sometimes even including a medium tempo, within a single piece of music is a noteworthy characteristic of the rhythmic aspects of *samāj-gāyan* at *Bhaṭṭ jī*.

In Figure 4, the upper and lower lines indicate the musical and textual sequences, respectively. The smallest unit of the melody is mostly one rhythmic cycle (*āvarta*) long.¹⁹⁾

Original verse

राग सारङ्ग—आज वधाई कौ दिन नीकौ । नंद घरनि
जसुमति जायौ है लाल भँवतौ जीकौ ॥१॥ पंच शब्द वाजे
वाजत घर घर तें आयौ टीकौ । मंगल कलश लिये ब्रज सुंदरि
ग्वाल वनावत छीकौ ॥२॥ देति असीस सकल ब्रज सुंदरि
जीवौ कोटि वरीसौ । परमानंद दास कौ ठाकुर गोप वेष
जगदीसौ ॥३॥६५॥

Transliteration

rāga sārāṅga — (Line 1) āja vadhāi kau; dina nīkau |
[1] [2]
(Line 2) nanda gharani jasu : -mati jāyau hai : lāla bhānvatau jīkau || 1 ||
[1] [2] [3]
(Line 3) pañca śabda vā : -je vājata ghara : ghara tē āyau ṭīkau |
[1] [2] [3]
(Line 4) maṅgala kalaśa li : -yē vraja sundari; gvāla vanāvata chīkau || 2 ||
[1] [2] [3]
(Line 5) deti asīsa sa : -kala braja sundari : jīvau koṭi varīsai |
[1] [2] [3]
(Line 6) paramānanda : dāsa kau ṭhākura : gopa veṣa jagadīsau || 3 ||
[1] [2] [3]

Figure 5 The original verse and its transliteration

Music 1
Line1[1] ā ja va dhā - - - i kau

Music 2
Line1 [2] - di na - - - nī - kau - - -

Music 3
Line2[1] na - nda gha ra ni - ja su - - -
Line4[1] ma ṅa ga la ka la - śa - - - li
Line6[1] pa ra mā - na - - - nda - - -

Music 4
Line2 [2] ma ti jā - yau - - - - ha - i
Line4 [2] yē - vra ja sun - - - - da ri -
Line6 [2] dā sa kau - ṭhā - - - - ku ra -

Figure 6 The correlation between the musical and textual units

In this piece, the rhythmic cycles (*tāla*) known as *dhamāra* (fourteen beats or *mātrās* per cycle) and *tritāl* (sixteen beats) are used in slow and fast sections, respectively. I have assigned numbers in squares to each melodic unit of fourteen beats in the slow section and each unit of sixteen beats in the fast section. In practice the performers sometimes sing only half of the cycle, but the two halves are combined to make one complete whole.

Figure 5 is the original verse sung in this piece, composed by Parmānandadās. The transliteration is provided below. The indications such as Line 1 [1] are mine. The verse consists of three stanzas of couplets, six lines in total (Lines 1 to 6). Each line is divided into two or three units as determined by the rhythmic cycle. Consequently, I have divided each line into three units ([1] to [3]) with the exception of the first short line, taking melodic units into consideration. Figure 6 shows the correlation between the musical units (Music 1 to 4) and textual units (Line 1 [1][2], Line 2 [1][2], Line 3 [1][2], Line 6 [1][2]) at the beginning of the slow section in staff notation.

Figure 4 shows how the musical unit and textual unit are combined and go together with many repetitions in the piece. Seven musical units (Music 1 to 7) appear in the slow section and five (Music 1 to 5) in the fast section. In textual terms, they sing the six lines (Lines 1 to 6) one by one in a complicated order and complete the verse in the slow section, repeat the last four lines (Lines 3 to 6), and finish by repeating the first half ([1]) of the Line 1. Specific textual units are not always sung to the same musical unit, and vice versa.

White units were sung by the *mukhiyā* while the dotted units were sung by the *jhelās*. This clearly shows the antiphonal structure of the piece, but the manner of repetitions is not always symmetrical. This is perhaps because the *mukhiyā* has the responsibility of deciding whether to repeat or to proceed to a new musical or textual unit.

Conclusion

Based upon the analysis above, I have identified the following characteristics of the *samāj-gāyan* singing form as vocal music.

1. *Samāj-gāyan* singing is basically antiphonal. The structure is not simple, however, with asymmetrical calls-and-responses between senior singer *mukhiyā* and less experienced *jhelā*. This means that even the *jhelā* cannot sing without a complete understanding of the entire piece, and *samāj-gāyan* always requires the singers to pay attention to the correct choice of musical and textual units. The *mukhiyā* is always responsible for deciding whether or not to proceed to a new line or unit, from both a musical and text-based perspective.
2. Each *samāj-gāyan* piece consists of musical and textual units as well as the *mukhiyā*'s and *jhelā*'s parts. A *samāj-gāyan* performance consists of different verses and musical pieces. To sing in a *samāj-gāyan*, performers must connect units to make a sequence, which is extremely complicated. Variations are possible, but basically this is far from improvisation or accidental singing. The performance practice of *samāj-gāyan* is transmitted orally, but fixed through long tradition.

Although these are the common characteristics of *samāj-gāyan* singing, musical factors (like melodies, the *rāgas* and *tālas*) and textual factors (such as the number of units

and the lines of verses and their combinations) are largely different between the pieces. The total musical repertoire is huge, and we can guess how difficult it must be for new devotees to participate in *samāj-gāyan* singing.

The English word “chain” literally means “a series of links or rings connected or fitted into one another” and this definition provides a fitting image for the structure of *samāj-gāyan*. Even though the use of *śṛṅkhilā* by *Bhaṭṭ jī* performers was seen only in its textual and liturgical aspect, the singing form consisted of a series of connected musical and textual units that reminds me of the *śṛṅkhilā* of music. *Samāj-gāyan* can be seen as music with a chain-like structure in both musical and textual terms. It can also be observed as a sequence of lines and stanzas, slow and fast sections, main singer *mukhiyā* and secondary singer *jhelā*. On a higher level, it is a sequence of verses corresponding to the sequence of Kṛṣṇa’s *līlā*. *Śṛṅkhilā* denotes all the combinations of the texts, divine sports and musical factors sung in each *samāj* ritual. This doctrine, which I would call the “*śṛṅkhilā* system,” makes their *samāj* tradition unique among the sects of Kṛṣṇa devotees in Braj.

The chain-like construction of the music helps performers to learn how to sing during the *samāj* ritual. It is the only method whereby they can master the singing style, as they are allowed to sing the verses only during the *samāj-gāyan* and must sing without any notation or written instructions about the music (with the exception of the series of verses which should be sung in the *samāj*). In order to master the *samāj-gāyan* singing they must sit in *samāj*, listen to the antiphonal singing of *mukhiyā* and *jhelās*, and sing as one of the *jhelās* according to the musical indications made by the *mukhiyā*, who is the leader responsible for the whole *samāj-gāyan* process. They must retain the manner of singing in their memory musically and textually through their vocal and bodily experience. The chain-like system of singing is helpful for internalizing the entire *samāj-gāyan*. In addition, the antiphonal and asymmetrical character of the singing keeps the form from being monotonous and helps participants stay alert and attentive, following the singing and directions of the *mukhiyā*.

Many ordinary people come to the temple to see Kṛṣṇa and listen to the *samāj-gāyan* during the festival. They enjoy the *samāj-gāyan* as music in front of the deity, and learn the Kṛṣṇa myths naturally word by word through their repetition in the music, which also serves to increase the feeling of devotion. One may conclude that *samāj-gāyan* is above all the medium whereby the devotees of Kṛṣṇa are educated about and realize the existence of Kṛṣṇa through temple rituals. While the musical form itself is the most practical tool for devotees of these sects to learn how to sing the correct texts as well as the way of thinking, doing it as a part of their religious practice during temple rituals, it is never permitted to sing *samāj-gāyan* outside the temple merely in order to learn the music.

Notes

- 1) The original meaning of the word is “worship” or “adoration,” but it is also sometimes used to refer to “devotional songs” of all types.
- 2) The original meaning of the word is “praising” gods, and it is sometimes applied to “group singing to praise gods.”
- 3) A ceremony performed with a holly lamp held in front of the gods and the singing of hymns.

- 4) Literally meaning “songs for Viṣṇu,” *pads* are the songs for his incarnation Kṛṣṇa sung in a classical style in the Braj dialect.
- 5) Kṛṣṇa’s birthday, known as *Kṛṣṇa-jammāṣṭamī*, is celebrated in the 8th lunar month *Bhādrapad*, which comes around in the beginning of September.
- 6) *Braj-bhāṣā*, literally meaning “the language of Braj,” is regarded as one of the culturally most important languages of India and the most beautiful poetic language of all the Hindi dialects.
- 7) Vṛndāban is the most famous and important town in the forest area for the followers of Kṛṣṇa. It is regarded as one of the holiest places in India, where Kṛṣṇa spent his boyhood.
- 8) There are many conflicting views about the biographical dates of his life. Rosenstain writes, “It seems most likely that Haridās’s life spanned the last three quarters of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century” (1997: 26).
- 9) Historically there were 8 *ācāryas* called *aṣṭācārya* in Haridās sect.
- 10) He occupied the throne as eighth *ācārya* from v.s. 1758 to 1823, i.e. from C.E. 1701 to 1766 (Datta 1976: 61). Most Mughal rulers were religiously tolerant and allowed the various Hindu activities, with the exception of the Emperor Aurangzeb (reigned C.E. 1658-1707).
- 11) Some recordings are available in two compact discs published by Nihon Victor (Tanaka 1992).
- 12) An interview with Kṛṣṇa Caitanya Bhaṭṭ (July 31, 1984).
- 13) The 5th day of spring, when the beginning of the spring season is celebrated.
- 14) The spring festival, in which people celebrate spring by pouring colored powder or water over each other.
- 15) Divine sports, or deeds of god. Any literary or dramatic presentation of such a deed.
- 16) Literally the big festival of King Nand, the festival held on the day following the birthday to show Nand’s joy.
- 17) The spring festival meaning “Spring fifth.”
- 18) One of the most famous of the poet-saints of Braj, who was blind and belonged to the Vallabha sect.
- 19) A more detailed discussion of the relationship between rhythmic structure and verse according to the ideas of *mātrā* and *āvarta* is provided by English linguist Rupert Snell (1991: 284-303).

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