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www.easpublisher.com**Short Communication****Romanticism versus Classicism: the debate I once had with Dr. Vanamala Parvatkar****Dr. Soubhik Chakraborty**

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Abstract: The note gives the author's hot debate on romanticism versus classicism with a veteran Hindustani vocalist of the Banaras Gharana. The author himself is a leading figure in the field of computational musicology and has written the first book on the topic in the context of Hindustani music.

Keywords: Romanticism; classicism; raga; probability

Introduction:

The link between raga⁵ and probability is quite interesting. With respect to any raga, a given musical note can be either *Vadi* if it is the most important note in the raga; *Samvadi* if it is the second most important; *Anuvadi* if it is an important note in the raga but not *Vadi* or *Samvadi*; *Alpvadi* if it is an unimportant but permissible note; *Vivadi* if it is not permissible in the raga. The probability varies accordingly. For example, notes that are *Vadi*, *Samvadi* or *Anuvadi* will have higher probabilities. An *Alpvadi* note will have a low probability and a *Vivadi* note will have a theoretical zero probability². A note with low probability will, however, carry greater surprise when it occurs. Similarly, a note with theoretical zero probability can, in fact, occur practically and generate an electric feeling! This may happen in two ways: first, by mistake and this not the case that will be discussed here. It is the second way it can happen which is our interest and this is the case when an expert artist deliberately breaks a raga rule but increases the beauty of the performance. In Hindustani music, the latter is called romanticism or unrestricted beautification as opposed to classicism or disciplined beautification.

- 1. The genesis of the debate:** Since art is good only when it is beautiful¹, followers of romanticism are of the view that breaking a musical grammar should be allowed so long as it adds to the beauty of the performance. Followers of classicism, however, are of the view that, if it is classical music, beautification should be allowed within the discipline of the classical art genre, that is to say, maintaining the do's and do not's strictly. Improvisations are welcome but these must not violate the grammar seriously. *It is important to note here*

that using a Vivadi note in a raga is a serious violation of the raga grammar. That is why doing the same in a way that enhances the beauty of the raga is a classic example of romanticism.

I had a serious debate on the aforesaid topic with Dr. Ms. Vanamala Parvatkar⁴. She expressed the view that *if every artist is allowed to do whatever he/she wishes under the umbrella of beautification then the "shastra" (classical element) of "shastriyasangeet" (classical music) will perish*. I pointed out to her that the legendary sarod maestro Baba Allaaddin Khan did opt for romanticism in the last few years of his life and that even my own grandfather Suresh Chandra Chakraborty (a renowned musicologist who served All India Radio Kolkata as a music producer) has advocated romanticism in his book *Raga Rupayan*⁷.

At this point, the debate took a serious turn, and after a long discussion, Dr. Parvatkar finally clarified that she is not completely against romanticism but is of the view that certain minimum conditions should be made mandatory to ensure protection of any classical art such as Hindustani music. So that led to the question: what are these *minimum mandatory conditions* according to Dr. Parvatkar which followers of romanticism should adhere to?

For the benefit of the music enthusiasts, I outline below the three minimum mandatory conditions laid down by Dr. Parvatkar which practitioners of romanticism should follow (she has also given me the logic behind these conditions which I have not forgotten to include):

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2. A few grains of salt: Parvatkar's three minimum mandatory conditions to be satisfied while attempting romanticism:-

Condition 1: *Romanticism should not be attempted by an inexpert.*

Logic: Only an expert artist knows how or where to break a musical rule that adds to the beauty of the performance. An inexpert will have simply no idea and is likely to make a mess of the performance leading to serious de-beautification, not to speak of the indiscipline committed.

Condition 2: *Romanticism should be extempore and not pre-planned.*

Logic: If it is pre-planned the surprise element is lost. It is definitely lost for the artist and even if it is new for the listeners it is unlikely to bring the electric feeling which it is supposed to.

Condition 3: *Romanticism should be attempted only once or twice but not frequently in one concert.*

Logic: If it is attempted frequently, the surprise element vanishes.

3. My final comment:

I conclude this note giving my personal view on the debate combining with those of Dr. Parvatkar:-

- (1) I have never read any book or an article which says that art is good only when it is disciplined! Thus, given that it is only the beautiful art that makes good art¹, *romanticism should be allowed.*
- (2) *The three mandatory conditions laid down by Dr. Parvatkar are, however, quite logical I feel and they are not too stringent on the musicians either.* Therefore the musicians should not have any objection in adhering to these while attempting romanticism. Although the debate was in the context of Hindustani music, the conditions are fairly general and apply for other music genres as well such as western art music (WAM).
- (3) A musical note or phrase that creates romanticism need not be an important note or phrase but is definitely one that carries a lot of surprise. *An important note, statistically speaking, is one which has a high probability and maintains it over the instances of its realization.* This concept of statistical pitch stability is different from the concept of psychological pitch stability based on note duration. *An important note psychologically speaking is a stress note carrying high average note duration with low standard deviation.*³ Since romanticism is associated with surprise, I recommend an entropy

analysis^{2,6} for its quantification.
[Concluded]

NOTES AND REFERENCES

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3. Datta, A. K., Solanki, S. S., Sengupta, R., Chakraborty, S., Mahto, K., & Patranabis, A. (2017), Signal analysis of Hindustani classical music. *Singapore: Springer*.
4. Dr. Ms. Vanamala Parvatkar is a renowned Hindustani vocalist of the Banaras Gharana. She is a formerly Head (vocal) of the Faculty of Performing Arts at Banaras Hindu University, Varanasi, India.
5. Indian Classical music can be North Indian (Hindustani) or South Indian (Carnatic). The nucleus in either form is the raga. *A raga is a melodic structure with fixed notes and a set of rules that characterize a particular mood conveyed by performance.*
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