The Polysemy of the *Prabandha* – Reading a Premodern Musical Genre

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Abstract

The term *prabandha* simultaneously means very many things in the context of premodern Indian literature and music. The *prabandha* as a musical meta-genre has occupied the attention of musicologists from Mataṅga (8th c. AD?) to Veṅkaṭamakhin (16th c. AD). There is much variety in the number, description and details of the various types of *prabandha* songs found in the musicological sources, and it is fortunate that there are a few examples of *prabandha*-s available, even if they are from the late medieval period. Here, a specific sub-category – the *Śrīraṅga Prabandha* is considered, its genealogy through the musicological literature studied and also an example to understand the life trajectory of the concept of a *prabandha* is examined. By studying the structural, textual and musical content of the two songs, it is tried to sketch the identity of the musical *prabandha vis-à-vis* its literary namesake, its literary sources, and its successors in the history of musical genres. Also, the essay explores the overlapping yet distinct spheres of production, reception and circulation of the musical and literary *prabandha*-s. The available examples are used to discuss the methodological issues of studying genres that straddle the categories of the literary and the performative.

Key words: Genre, Indian Classical Music, Musicology, *Śriraṅga prabandha*, Veṅkaṭamakhin.

1. Introduction

The category *prabandha* abides in many worlds, and all those existences are linked by a Wittgensteinian family likeness. In the domain of Sanskrit literature, it is an old chestnut, and texts ranging from the *Mahābhārata*[1] to Subandhu's *Vāsavadatta*[2] to Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda*[3] identify themselves as being *prabandha*-s. Thus it is clear that the term has a very wide range of significations even within the Sanskrit literary universe. This section discusses the wide range of connotations of the term as well as the concept of the *prabandha*. Tracing the history of the name alone will be a partial, not to say misleading exercise, and the process will be complete only if we also trace the semantics of the other relational predicates of the term.

The *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* (4.6) lists *vāstu* and *rūpaka* as synonyms for the term *prabandha* – the former refers to it being a narrative form, with some importance accorded to the 'textual' content (*vastu* = plot, content), and the latter name reminds us that it is a taxon distinguished by its mereology and other structural features [*rūpa*(*ka*)

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[1] *tribhir varṣair mahābhāgaḥ kṛṣṇadvaipāyanaḥ śubhaḥ |*
  prabandhaṃ *bhāratasy'emaṃ cakāra bhagavān prabhuḥ* || *Mahābhārata* 1.2.236.11||

[2] *sarasvatī-datta-vara-prasādaś'cakre subandhuḥ sujanai'ka-bandhuḥ /*
  *pratyakṣara-śleṣa-maya-***prabandhaṃ** *vinyāsa-vaidagdhya-nidhir nibandham* // 13 //

[3] *vāg-devatā-carita-citrita-citta-sadmā padmāvatī-caraṇa-cāraṇa-cakravartī /*
  śrī-vāsudeva-rati-keli-kathā-sametaṃ etam karoti jayadeva-kaviḥ **prabandhaṃ** // 2//

= form]. The Tamil term for musical composition – *urup'paḍi* encompasses *uru* – form, echoing/ reiterating the onomasiological emphasis founds in names like *prabandha* and *nibandha* (well bound, well formed) and *rūpaka* (*rūpa* = form). In the Tamil literary canon, the *pāṭṭiyal* texts use the term *pirapantam* (= *prabandha*) to describe literary subgenres. It is said that there is the greatest variety in the 'minor' literary genres (*ciṟṟilakkiya-pirapantam),* and that they flourished from the 12th century onwards (Subramanian, 1993, p. 249). Muilwijk discusses at length the different reading of the literary category '*prabandham*' within the Tamil literary scholarship. She concludes the following to be ineluctable features of a text for it to be *prabandham* – it has to poetry, not prose; should have stanzas connected by the narrative content, should be a text of *belles lettres* quality, and is meant for consumption by such an (cognoscenti, literate elite) audience (Muilwijk 1996, pp.210-228).

In Telugu classical literature, the term *prabandha* is used to refer to the genre that roughly corresponds to the '*mahākāvya'* in Sanskrit and Tamil, and the late Vijayanagara period is identified as the '*prabandha yuga'* or *prabandha* age in Telugu literary histories. *Erranna,* one of the contributors to the Telugu Mahābhārata, had the title '*Prabandha-parameśvara'* conferred on him. Krishnaiah (2003) is of the view that the Telugu '*prabandha'* is bound to be a poetic form with the predominance of *śṛṅgāra* (the sensuous sentiment) and is characterized by an ornate (*ālaṅkārika*) and elaborate descriptive style.

2. History of *prabandha* in musicological literature

Bharata doesn't mention *prabandha*-s. However, he describes *dhruvā* songs that were almost exclusively, only to be used as part of theatric productions (Nāṭyaśāstra – Chapter 32). Mataṅga's *Bṛhaddeśi* (henceforth BD) is a significant source, since it is probably one of the earliest and most influential sources after Bharata that took seriously the task of delineating as many as 49 types of '*deśi'* songs. This is a landmark moment since several indigenous and 'minor' forms of song, dance and poetry now come to the attention of the *lakṣaṇakāra*; and others follow in Mataṅga's footsteps.

The beginnings of a serious ethnomusicological attempt can be seen in the BD and the *Abhilaṣitārtha-cintāmaṇi* (*a.k.a. Mānasollāsa,* henceforth *AC*), wherein the genres are not merely described and illustrated, but appended with pertinent details regarding the tune, *tāla*, language(s) as well as social contexts for the presentation/ performance of these songs. This stage is consonant with Todorov's description of genres' relationship with the societies that produce and propagate them – '..Genres communicate indirectly with society through their institutionalization. Genres are the meeting place between general poetics and event-based literary history.[4]' Thus we can 'read' the social spaces of the production, pedagogy and performance into the very *prabandha*-s.

The 13th century *Saṅgīta-Ratnākara* of Śārṅgadeva [The Ocean-treasure of Musical gems, henceforth *SR*] is a crucial text that brought much clarity into our understanding of the parts and the classification of the *deśya prabandha*-s. The *Abhilaṣitārtha-cintāmani* (henceforth *AC*) also known as the [Rāja] *Mānasollāsa* [Delighter of the Royal mind] is a 11th century encyclopaedia by the Kalyāna Cālukya king Bhūlokamalla Somadeva, which has chapters on poetry, song, instrumental music and dance. The very organization of the *gīta-vinoda and vādya-vinoda* chapter is instructive *vis-à-vis* the relation between metres and musical forms.

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4   Genres in Discourse, trans. Catherine Porter, pp. 19-20

As Sathyanarayana notes, there is a serious lacuna in the history of the extant classical genres of Indian music[5] and any connections to the *prabandha*-s and other genres described in the musicological texts. Texts from as recent as the 17th century (Tulaja and Shahaji) parrot sections on genre from the *SR*, and fail to explain the provenance of any of the more contemporary genres. (Sathyanarayana, 2004, pp 163-164).

However it is possible to glean two continuities – one between the *belles lettres* metric poetry and contemporaneous musical forms, and the other between the archaic musical genres described in texts such as the *Mānasollāsa* and the current musical forms. Charting both these lineages is a desideratum for writing a history of the musico-dance modes and genres that have prevailed in India.

2.1. The *Prabandha Puruṣa* – Histology or Anatomy?

Just as the *Puruṣa sūkta* discusses the cosmos as an anthropomorphized body, the *SR* discusses the *aṅga*-s [components/ limbs] of the musical-metric *prabandha* along the analogy of a person and his limbs/parts. This is in keeping with a recurrent mereological trope in the Indian *vidyā*-s – see the *Vāstu-puruṣa* of the *śilpa* and architecture texts[6], and the *Kāvyapuruṣa* invoked by Rājaśekhara[7].

The *SR* makes a principled distinction between *gīta* and *prabandha*. The former is given as being of the *gāndharva* class of music, and the latter belongs to *gāna*. The *SR's* description of *prabandha* gives us the impression that at this stage, '*prabandha*' refers to the composition – marked by distinct segments – the *aṅga*-s, and

each of these has some or all of a set of elements termed *dhātu*-s. The signal contribution of the *SR* is in bringing clarity *vis-à-vis* the nature of the *dhātu*-s and *aṅga*-s, as well as their various permutations in each particular *prabandha* subcategory (Ramanathan, 1999).

Śārṅgadeva may have got the idea of the *dhātu*-s and *aṅgas* from the ontological domain of Āyurveda. He discusses the *aṅga*-s and *dhātu*-s in a rare poetic moment as follows –

> *aṅgāni ṣaṭ tasya[8] svaraś'ca birudam padaṃ*||12||
>
> *tenakaṃ pāṭa-tālau ca prabandha-puruṣasya te* |
>
> *bhavanty'aṅgavad'aṅgāni maṅgalā'-rtha'prakāśake* || 13||
>
> *tatra tena-pade netre staḥ pāṭa-birude karau* |
>
> *karābhyām'udbhavāt   kārye kāraṇatvo'pacārataḥ* || 14||

"It (the *Prabandha*) has six *aṅga*-s (parts/ components) - *svara*, *biruda*, *pada*, *tena*, *pāṭa*, *tāla*(12). The *tena* and the *pāṭa – tāla* combination constitute the parts of the *prabandha-puruṣa* [the song-person], like shapely limbs add beauty to a person's body (13). The *tena-pada* combinations are like its eyes - conferring charm and auspiciousness, and the *pāṭa-biruda* combinations are its arms. The *pāṭa-biruda* aspects are designated as the *prabandha*-person's arms by synecdoche [a conflation of the effect and the instrumental cause], since they are produced by actions of the hands.*"

2.1.2. The *Prabandha* in 17th Century Tanjore

Rājacūḍāmaṇi Dīkṣita (17th Century AD) in the *prastāvana* of his '*Ānanda-rāghava-nāṭaka'*

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[5] Forms such as the *varṇa, svarajati, pada, kṛti, kīrtana, jāvali* and *tillana* in South Indian Classical music; and the *khyāl, dhrupad, ṭappa, ṭhumri, tarānā* and *dādra* in North Indian music.

[6] Varāhamihira's *Bṛhatsaṃhitā* Chapter 53; *Ajitāgama* VIII.1-4 quoted in *Kalātattvakośa* Vol 1 p. 45.

[7] Kavirahasya Chapter 3 *Kāvyapuruṣotpatti*.

[8] This faulty verse can be emended to read *aṅgāny'amūni ṣaṭ tasya*, or *aṅgāny'etāni ṣaṭ tasya*; or *aṅgāni ṣaṭ syur'etasya*, without distorting the meaning. An examination of the original manuscript sources will help to clinch one of these as the suitable reading.

calls his patron Raghunātha Nāyaka as the 'Prabandha-Parameśvara'[9]. Given that Raghunātha was a musicologist as well as poet; this epithet, deliberately or unconsciously gives us a pun that reflects the many registers/ significations of the *prabandha*.

Raghunātha is important for our consideration, since he was the patron of Veṅkaṭamakhin, who produced the *Catur'daṇḍi-prakāśikā* [henceforth *CDP*] as well as the *Śriraṅga prabandha* that we take up for study in this essay. S. Seetha notes that there as several '*caturdaṇḍi* pieces' with *svara* notation available in the Sarasvati Mahal Manuscript library, and opines that these were produced in the court of Raghunātha Nāyaka, possibly by the Nāyaka himself (Seetha, 1981/2001).

2.2. The Difference between *Gīta* and *Prabandha*

In the *Prabandha-prakaraṇam* (Chapter 8) Veṅkaṭamakhin gives the sparse difference between the *gīta* and the *prabandha*. He points out how, while both refer to musical etudes or compositional forms, by a semantic convention (*rūḍhi*), the *sālaga-sūḍa* type of *prabandha* alone is called *gīta*(*ka*). This is a long way from the *SR's* separation of *gīta* and *prabandha* into the *gāndharva* and *gāna* modes of divine and mundane music. Structurally there appears to be a certain consistency in the segments of a *prabandha* composition. From the 10th century AC to the CDP (c 17th AD), the *gīta* and *prabandha* are seen to have the same *khaṇḍa-s* – the *udgrāha*, *melāpaka*, *ābhoga* and a refrain termed *dhruva*[10].

By Veṅkaṭamakhin's time, the difference between the *prabandha* and the *gīta* seems to be fast vanishing. More importantly both the *gītas* and the *prabandha*-s must have become obsolete, as the forms such as the *svarajati-varṇa* and *kṛti-kīrtana-pada* gained currency. The

rāgakadambaka and *tālārṇava* were absorbed and incorporated into the *rāgamālika* and *tālamālika* forms. The *svarā*(r)tha/ *svarāṅka* remained as a marginal curiosity feature, only to be recast into the *pada* or *varṇa* formats. The rare, sparse examples of the Umātilaka, Kaivāḍa and Śriraṅga *prabandha*-s that are purportedly of the same provenance as Veṅkamamakhin's *CDP*, seem to be pedantic, conscious attempts to reconstruct or resuscitate these genres, rather than illustrations of a practiced, much performed, flourishing repertoire. It is noteworthy that these examples often do not conform to the *lakṣaṇa* (grammar) elucidated for the subgenre in Veṅkaṭamakhin's own treatise.

2.3. Examining the *Śriraṅga Prabandha*

From our inspection of the names of *prabandha*-s, as found in several texts, we can see how there is an overlap of the set of *prabandha*-s with the *vṛttas* [metrical forms], and with the names of *deśi tālas*. The continuity of the indigenous genre of *prabandha* over the dramatic, musical and literary sub-genres is only reiterated by these observations.

Thus it becomes the unenviable, yet inescapable task of a musicologist interested in studying the *prabandha*-s, to see them in light of the allied and contiguous domains – the domain of *tāla* and *chandas*. An admirable beginning has been made by R. Sathyanarayana (1995) in his discussion of the *ela prabandha*-s enumerated in the *BD*, wherein he conducts a prosopography the various prosodic forms (*vṛtta*-s) in relation to the *ela prabandha*-s that they constitute. However, much remains to be done, in tracing the emergence of the musical *kṛti-kirtana pada* and other genres, from a stage that was dominated by moric poetry – be it of the tight-knit *akṣara vṛtta*-s that came from Sanskrit or the more fluid *mātra chanda*-s from the *Prakṛt-s* and the *Apabhraṁsa-s*.

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[9] For the Telugu poet *Erranna*'s identical title, see introduction section
[10] Though, in the *sālaga-sūḍa* type of composition, a unit termed *antarā* takes up the role of the earlier *melāpaka*.

3. The Srīraṅga *Prabandha* in theory and practice

The *AC* of Somadeva (also Someśvara), which has a chapter on poetry, music and dance makes a distinction between the *prabandha* and the *gīta*, listing both as separate genres, albeit in the same chapter, and one after the other. However it appears that by the time of the *Caturdaṇḍi prakāśikā* [A Beacon to the four pillared pavilion (of music), 17th century AD], the distinction meant little, and the *CDP* has a half-hearted account of *gīta* and *prabandha* as being distinct forms. Veṅkaṭamakhin even goes so far as to say that the only reason he describes *gīta* and *prabandha* as distinct, is to save face on Gopāla Nāyaka's behalf (*CDP* 9.2-9.5). This appears like a step to retain the balance and symmetry of the older four-pillared principle of music (which would become a tripod if he conflated *gīta* and *prabandha*).

3.1. A Biography of the Śrīraṅga *Prabandha*

As we saw in the previous section, the *prabandha*-s are inextricably and organically connected to the worlds of *tāla* (rhythm) and *chandas* (metric prosody). And the connection is more than a set of shared names. Our investigation in the trail of the Śrīraṅga *Prabandha* will have to be a prosopography of this family of Śrīraṅga-s – the eponymous *deśi tāla*, the normative descriptions of the Śrīraṅga *Prabandha* from different *lakṣaṇa* texts, and the song(s) given as an example of this genre.

The Bṛhaddeśi with its elaborate, if obscure account of the many *deśya prabandha*-s, doesn't mention the Śrīraṅga *Prabandha*. It is probably first mentioned in Cālukya Someśvara's

AC as one of a quintet of *prabandha*-s, whose *lakṣaṇa*-s are described in terms of each other. Jagadekamalla's text mentions it in the *prabandha-prakaraṇam*, but no details are forthcoming in the version of the text available to us[11].

The 13th century *SR* of Śārṅgadeva borrows extensively from the *BD* and the *AC*, redacting and collimating material from these texts (more often than not) with discernment and tact. Śārṅgadeva is also honest enough to mention Someśvara and Jagadekamalla among his sources[12]. The *SR* introduces, probably for the first time a division of *prabandha*-s into the *sūḍa, āli* and *viprakīrṇa* types, with *śuddha* and *chāyālaga* variants of the *sūḍa*. This is an elaboration and improvement on the classification found in Someśvara's *AC*.

3.1.1. *Śrīraṅga* as a *Tāla*

The first mention of the Śrīraṅga in the *SR* is not as a type of *viprakīrṇa prabandha*, but as a *deśi tala*[13]. Raghunātha Nāyaka (17th century AD) in his *Vālmiki Caritra*, gives some technical details pertaining to dance, while describing the competition between Ūrvaśi and Rambhā. The Śrīraṅga *tāla* features in a list of *tālas* that Śrvaśi danced to (Seeta, 1981/2001). Here it may be pertinent to mention that Śrīraṅga is mentioned as a type of *tāla* [#19, scheme ||S|S] mentioned by Veṅkaṭasundarasāni as being used for the *tāla-rūpaka kvāḍa*[14] [It is puzzling to note that there is a significant overlap between the list of names of *deśya tālas* (rhythmic beat cycles), *vṛtta*-s (poetic metres) and *prabandha*-s (musico-dance compositions). While in some cases, the

[11] *śrīraṅgo gaditas'tasmād' umātilaka-namakaḥ |*
syāc'chrīvilasa-śarabhalīlo'nyas'simhalīlakaḥ ||32 || GOS edition pp. 5 ||
[12] *'parāmardī ca someśo jagadekamahīpatiḥ'* || Sr 1.1.18 ||
[13] *raṅgaḥ śrīraṅga-caccaryau pratyaṅgo yati-lagnakaḥ |*
gajalīlo hamsalīlo varṇabhinnas' tribhinnakaḥ ||241 ||
Saṅgita Ratnākara volume III, 5.239-254, Adyar Library series (1951/1981)
[14] R. Sathyanarayana, *Nartana-Nirṇaya* Vol III pp 310. 1996

connections are apparent [eg *toṭaka prabandha* and *āryā/ kanda prabandha*-s use as part of the *mātu* (lyric) a verse set in those respective metres – *toṭaka* and *āryā* in *AC*], the connections aren't as readily available in other cases. The connection between *Śrīraṅga* the *prabandha*, prescribed to have four sections each with a different *tāla*, and *Śrīraṅga* which is a *deśya tāla*, is matter for further investigation.

3.2. *Śrīraṅga* as a type of (*viprakīrṇa*) *Prabandha*

Now we move on to the discussion of *Śrīraṅga* as a genre of *prabandha* in the various musicological texts. The first text taken here is the *SR*. It lists the Śrīraṅga as the first of the 36 *viprakīrṇa prabandha*-s and gives its *lakṣaṇa* as follows –

> *tato'nye viprakīrṇāns'tān prasiddhān katicid bruve |*
>
> *śrīraṅgo śrīvilāsaś'ca syād[15]'pancabh-aṅgir'ataḥ param || 28||*
>
> *tālair rāgaiścaturbhis'syāt śrīraṅgo'nte padānvitaḥ || 4th Prakaraṇa ||*

The *Svara-mela-kalānidhi*(*SMK*) of Rāmāmātya (1550 AD) mentions the *Śrīraṅga prabandha* in its list of 32 *sūḍa prabandha*-s, along with *ela*, *svarāṅka* and *śrīvilāsa* in the introductory chapter [*upodghāta-prakaraṇam* 1.20-22,]. Rāmāmātya is believed to be the grandson of Kallinātha – an authoritative commentator on the *SR*, and mostly derives his material from the *SR*. Since the *prabandha-prakaraṇa* of the *SMK* is missing, the *lakṣaṇa* of the *Śrīraṅga Prabandha* is unavailable. However the mention is noteworthy.

The next text we consider is the *Nartana-Nirṇaya* (*NN*) [The last word on Dance] a text written in the 1570s, by Paṇḍarīka Viṭṭhala, who claims to have been in Akbar's court. We know for certain that Paṇḍarīka Viṭṭhala was familiar with forms such as the *dhrupad*. He also notes the

presence of a segment (*dhātu*) called the *antarā*, found between the *dhruva* and the *ābhoga*. This is an element that has persisted in modern/ later musical forms such as the *khyal bandish*, and is noticeable in Ibrahim Adil Shah's *dhrupad* compositions in the *Kitāb-i-Nauras*. (Ahmed, 1956)

The *NN* lists the quintet comprising of the Śrīraṅga, Śrīvilāsa, Pañcabhaṅgi, Pañcānana and the Umātilaka –

> *tālair'rāgair'caturbhiś'ca dalair'ante padānvitaḥ|*
>
> *śrīraṅgo medinīvāṅś'ca śeṣas'syāt rāgapuñjavat|| 3.2.189 ||*

'With four segments (petals), each in a different *rāga* and *tāla*; the *Śrīraṅga* is a medinī type *prabandha*, with the *pada* element in the last section. The rest of its features are like the *rāgakadamba*.'

Clearly, the verse is paraphrase of the *SR* definition of the *Śrīraṅga prabandha*. We will next look at how Veṅkaṭamakhin [c17th AD] has described the *Śrīraṅga prabandha*. It is most apposite to consider his treatment, since we also have an illustration of the *Śrīraṅga-prabandha*, attributed to him; given with musical notation in the *SSP* of Subbarāma Dīkṣita (1904).

3.3. Veṅkamamakhin's account of the *Śrīraṅga prabandha*

The *lakṣaṇa* of the *Śrīraṅga prabandha* is as follows –

> *śrīraṅgasya prabandhasya catasraḥ khaṇḍikāḥ smṛtāḥ |*
>
> *pratikhaṇḍikam'ekaiko rāgas'tālaś'ca vāñchitaḥ || 71 ||*
>
> *pratikhaṇḍikam'apy'ante prayojyam niyamat'padam|*
>
> *tad'anyāni svarādīni pañcāṅgany' aicchika-kramāt || 72 ||*
>
> *prayojyānyatra cādyārdhaṃ pratikha-ṇḍikam'asti yat |*

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[15]After Shringy and Sharma, 1978. Verse is metrically faulty, syād can be dropped

sa udgrāho dvitīyārdham dhruva ityeṣa nirṇayaḥ ||73||

na sto melāpakā'bhogāv' ābhogavirahe' pi ca |

turīyāyāḥ khaṇḍikāyā ante nāmaṅkanam padaiḥ || 74 ||

gātṛ-netṛ-prabandhanām kāryam tena dvidhātukaḥ |

prabandho'yam bhavecchandastālā–dyaniyamena ca || 75 ||

nibaddhatvād'aniryukta iti śrīraṅg alakṣaṇam | 76a ||

'(The *Śrīraṅga prabandha*) is known to have four segments (*khaṇḍikā*-s). Each of these segments is to have a distinct *rāga* and *tāla* ||71|| At the end of each *khaṇḍikā*, it should surely have the *pada* (lyric/text).The other 5 *aṅga*-s (such as *svara*) may be present or not, it is left to one's will|| 72|| The first *khaṇḍikā* is designated the *udgrāha*, and its latter half is termed the *dhruva* || 73|| The *melāpaka* and *ābhoga*, or just the *ābhoga* can be left out, if desired. However the fourth *khaṇḍikā* must be signed with the names of…. ||74||The singer/poet, the patron/deity and the genre. The song should have sections with two distinct tunes (?), and is classified as *aniryukta*, since it is framed by the constraints of rhythm (*tāla*) and metre (*chandas*). These are the features of the Śrīraṅga *prabandha*. || 75 & 76a||

3.4. The Textual Trail of the *Śrīraṅga Prabandha*

As we saw in section 2, the *prabandha* has a range of connotations - literary genre, musical composition for vocal, instrumental and dance performance. Thus it straddles and toggles across the categories of genre and the Aristotelian performative 'mode'. This polysemy of the *prabandha* is magnified in the case of the *Śrīraṅga prabandha* – the researcher is compelled to investigate the relation between *Śrīraṅga* as a *deśi tāla*, as a 'genre' described variously in the *lakṣaṇa*

texts, and the available exemplars. The descriptions from the musicological texts appear to be in consonance; and the *AC* definition, expanded in the *SR* is paraphrased in all subsequent grammars.

Having seen the treatment of the genre at hand by the musicologists across half a millennium, we can now study the *lakṣya* examples, and examine their relation to the description in the *lakṣaṇa* treatises.

4. THE *LAKṢYA* EXAMPLES OF THE *ŚRĪRAṄGA PRABANDHA*

Here we take up an example of the *Śrīraṅga prabandha* attributed to Veṅkaṭamakhin, but in all likelihood composed by Muddu-Veṅkaṭamakhin. The exemplar is taken from the *Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśini* of Subbarāma Dīkṣita (1904). It is given with notation set in the *raga Baulī*, and *Eka tāla* (pp 253-254).

4.1. The Mereology of the Song

The composition is not seen to have 4 sections each with different *rāga*-s and *tāla*-s, as is warranted by the *lakṣaṇa* texts. Instead it has 2(?) sections, all in the same *raga – Baulī*, and in one *tāla - Eka* . The composition is however conforming to the rule of being a *medinī jāti prabandha*, since it has all the 6 *aṅga*-s (features) - *svara, pada, tāla, biruda, pāṭa,* and *tenaka*.

4.2. The Text of the Song

The song, in all likeliness, is in the recondite '*Bhāṇḍīra Bhāṣā*'[16] (Sathyanarayana, 2004). Little is known about this language, which must be a late *apabhraṁsa*, almost exclusively used for producing songs. It is claimed that the Sarasvati Mahal Library has a grammar of *Bhāṇḍīra*, authored by a certain *Kṛṣṇa Kavi*[17]. The only defence for the use of this *Bhāṇḍīra* in the

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[16] Songs in many languages were sung in various regions – Kannada, Telugu, Tamil, Lata, Prakrt, Sanskrit etc. A special sonorous language was evolved for composing songs (*bhandirabhasa)* – R.Sathyanarayana in 'Karnatic Music as Aesthetic form' (2004)p 164
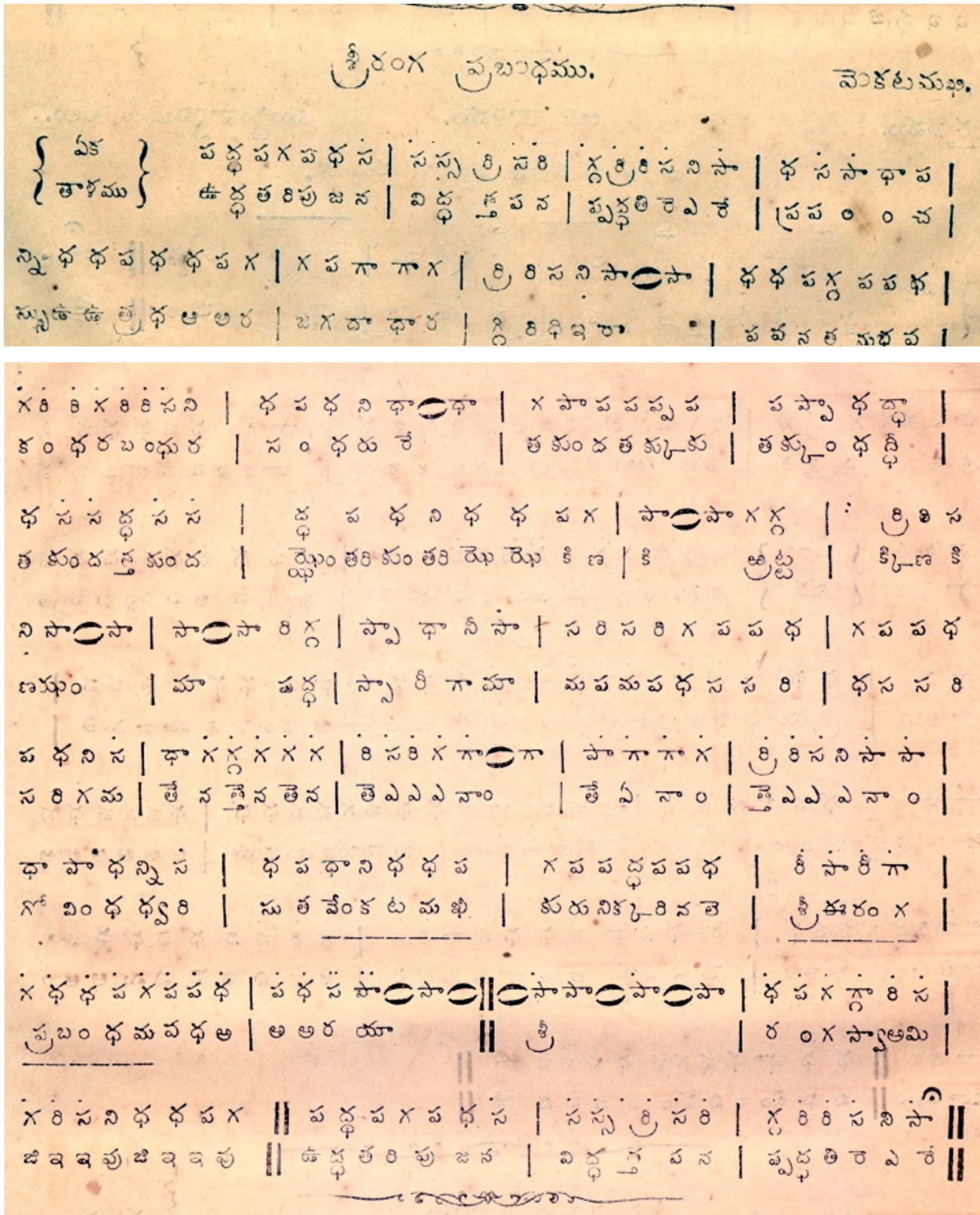
Fig. 1. The notation of the *Śrīraṅga prabandha* in *Baulī rāga, from SSP (1904)*

songs of Veṅkaṭamakhin, is probably that it was uniformly (un)intelligible to the different peoples that inhabited Tanjāvūr at the time of its composition and performance, and hence didn't privilege any one community in the audience.

The remoteness of the language may also have conferred/ invested a special stature on the songs, making it difficult for subsequent performers to tamper with the textual content. A similar phenomenon may be seen in the case of magico-ritual incantations in the Vedic, Buddhist and other cultures, wherein seeming unintelligible strings of words garner (spi)ritual significance as matter for recitation or contemplation. Any grammatical solecisms or unidiomatic expressions add to the mystique and 'archaic' nature of the text – it transcends any mundane prescriptions of grammar and style, and the ambiguity underscores the ineffability of the divine that is being described, and how it eluded description in mere mortal language [Bronkhorst, 2001].

The emphasis in such situations is almost always on the correct reception/ initiation into the chant, and the right enunciation/ performance of the chant in a suitable state of mind. The '*Bhāṇḍīra*' employed in this and other songs attributed to VM, amply satisfies such conditions. While it is claimed that Purandaradāsa and other haridāsa-s composed in *Bhāṇḍīra*, the statement remains unsubstantiated. The so called *Bhāṇḍīra* is difficult to study and understand, for want of enough illustrations.

H. Tieken (2008) discusses how the linguistic register of musical examples from Sanskrit *Kāvya* literature was distinct from even the recognized Prākrits – Śauraseni and Mahārastri (that were used for prose and poetry/songs respectively). He suggests that a new Prākrit was fashioned out of the material of popular songs of the time. The emergence of this *Bhāṇḍīra bhāṣā* found in the *gītas* and *prabandha*-s of

Veṅkaṭamakhin and his successors is very likely a recapitulation of the same phenomenon; produced at the intersections of the highly multilingual Tanjavūr court and street. Hence we can treat it is a late, 'artificial' *apabhramśa*.

4.2.1. Liberation by Libretto

The text of the song is given below –

| *uddhata-ripu-jana-viddha-(t)tapana-paddhati re re!* |

prapañca-sūtra-dhara ! giridhīra ||

| *pavana(t)-tanubhava- kandhara-bandhura-sandharu re re!* || etc..

The first *khaṇḍikā* of the song isn't fully comprehensible, and has disjointed phrases and vocatives in praise of Viṣṇu. The terminal gemminations such as *viddhat-tapana* in this '*Bhāṇḍīra*' song betray a strong Tamil influence. It is interesting to compare the first line of the *prabandha* with the following *āryā-gīti* (*kanda*) verse from the Telugu poet Bhaṭṭumūrti's *mahākāvya Vasucaritramu* –

uddhata-ripu-viddha tapana

paddhati   kari-bhavanad-avani-paṭad'ambudhi sam-

pad'dharaṇa samuddharaṇa sa-

middha'raṇa-rajó vrajódyad-ibha-mada-sṛtikin || *Vasucaritramu* 1.89 ||

Bhaṭṭumūrti, also known as Rāmarāja-bhūṣaṇuḍu, lived in the 15th century and was an important poet of the Vijayanagara court. His *Vasu-caritramu* is one of the *pañca-mahākāvyas* of Telugu, and is noted for its layers of meanings and profuse use of literary conceits such as *śleṣa* (pun) and *yamaka* (alliteration). The verse is a *ṣaṣṭyanta* panegyric in praise of a king -

"His foes pierced the sun's orb, as they fared their way to the heaven of heroes. (The heat of his valour) dried up the ocean-garment of Dame Earth, which he replaced with the resplendent robes that

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are the clouds of dust raised in the battle field and the ichor streaming from the battle- elephants."

It is clear on inspection that the first half-couplet of Bhaṭṭumūrti is the source for Veṅkaṭamakhin's *udgrāha*. We know from Subbārama's Dīkṣita's (1904) autobiographical note that the *Vasucaritram* was an important part of a classical education in his time, and Dīkṣita himself was trained in the *Manucaritram* and *Vasucaritram*. Dīkṣita quotes another passage from the *Vasucaritram*, while discussing the *rāga-lakṣaṇa* of the *rāga Vasanta*. Hence, it appears that Bhaṭṭumūrti's status as a '*Saṅgīta-rahasya-vidyā-nidhi*' was taken quite seriously, and his verse with an oblique reference to the *rāga*, while punning on the spring season (*vasanta*) is taken as episteme for defining the *raga*[18].

However popular be the *Vasucaritram*, a Telugu *mahākāvya* is likely to have had limited circulation in 17th-18th century Tañjāvūr – among the literary-literate elite in courts, colleges and salons. This recycling/recasting of a hemistich from a *mahākāvya* into a musical genre marks an animation and expansion of the reach of the verse. A new textuality emerges - text as lyric, inseparable from its musical setting, with greater license and possibilities for performance and interpretation in a musico-dance setting.

Further research is bound to show up many more patterns of intertextual overlaps across poetic and performative genres. For instance, the 10th century Kannada poet Ranna borrows artistic material liberally from the Sanskrit poets Bhāsa and Bhaṭṭa Nārāyaṇa, and most blatantly from his predecessor in the Kannada poetic tradition Pampa. Coming to the musical genres, Kanakadāsa's poems have many resonances with the didactic epigrams of Sarvajña, and the inspiration that Tyāgarāja drew from Kṣétrayya (Rao, 1981) or the influence of Upaniṣad

Brahmendra Yogin on Muttusvāmi Dīkṣita (Raghavan, 2007) can't be dismissed as coincidences.

4.3.1. Describing the Patron, Inscribing the Poet

The *Śrīraṅga prabandha* has several signatures – all warranted by the prescriptive grammar of the genre, and some a product of the composer's creative strategies[19]. It gives the composer's names, along with his father's, that of the subject of the song (in this case the deity Raṅganātha) as well as the sub-genre of the song i.e '*Śrīraṅga prabandha*'.

The practice of poets using one or the other kind of signature is not unknown - Kālidāsa and Vātsyāyana speak of songs that encrypt a lover's name in the lyric. Tieken (2010) identifies the *bhaṇitā*-s in the *dhruva* songs of Jagatprakāśamalla's play (17th century) as emanating from an earlier practice enshrined in the songs such as the *caryā-gīti*-s of Bengal, Vidyāpati's Maithili *padāvali* songs and Jayadeva's *Gītagovinda*. He sees a continuity of this practice in the *dhruvā/daru* songs found in Tamil plays from the last two centuries. He rightly notes that the *bhaṇitā* type signatory [self-identificatory] verse or stanza is found in the Tamil Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava devotional literature from the 8-9th centuries .

However, this practice of inscribing oneself into the song is not merely the poet-vāggeyakāra's stake on authorship. Nor is the poet's assertion of her authorship reified merely through embedding their name or a standard *nom-de plume*.

The various types of signatures described by Sambamoorthy (1966), all have examples in the Indian musical and *kāvya* compositions of the last millennium. The *vīraśaiva* poets were known to compose in a 'subversive' genre that discarded/

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[18]'*arigā pañcamamévagiñci*' and *vasantamu mahāsampūrṇa-bhāvónnatin* , *Saṅgīta Sampradāya Pradarśini* (1904) pp 349].
[19]'*nāmāṅkanaṃ padaih || gātṛ-netṛ-prabandhānāṃ* etc. - CDP 9.74-75

eschewed all shackles of moraic poetry, deliberately flouting any use of the *ādiprāsa* alliteration, so essential to all Dravidian classical poetry. Nonetheless, they persisted in the use of the '*aṅkita*' signature, and these became increasingly important elements of establishing provenance and 'authenticity' of the *vacana* songs as they were getting integrated and organized into a canonical corpus for the *vīraśaiva* movement.

Many of the *vacana* poets used a *devatā-mudrā*, i.e. the name of the deity as a signature. We see the same practice in the 15th century telugu poet Annamācārya, who used the name of his *iṣṭa-daiva* [favourite deity] Veṅkaṭéśvara as his *mudrā* [signature] in his songs; and Aruṇagirinātha who dedicated all his songs to Muruga, whom he addresses (curiously) as 'Perumāle!'. This practice was consolidated by the *Haridāsa* poets singing in Kannada, and the other major musician-poets of the South Indian tradition, such as Kṣétrayya, Sāraṅgapāṇi and Tyāgarāja who composed in Telugu, and Muttusvāmi Dīkṣita and Svāti Tirunal who composed in Sanskrit.

There are examples of songs which use a mortal patron's name as the signature, as in the compositions of the 18th century musicians Ponnayya and Cinnaya, that refer to various rulers of Tanjore, Mysore, and Travancore. This shouldn't be read as simple courtly dedication or ritual sycophancy. The ostensible reference to a deity or a king, often serves to underscore and consolidate the poet's identity, much as the *takkhallus* did in the case of the 10th century *qasida* or *ghazal* (Sharma, 2002, pp.102-104).

Thus, there is a gamut of rhetorical devices available to the *vāggeyakāra*, to inscribe herself into the song, besides using a *bhaṇitā* stanza, or explicitly invoking his name, which could be perceived as an immodest act, inviting effacement. The *Śrīraṅga prabandha* is a rare example of several types of signatory elements converging in a single song, flagging different aspects of the literary-performative culture that produced the song.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Our study of the *Śrīraṅga prabandha* is a single instance of the possibilities of genre criticism and the study of the literary and performative compositional types of premodern India. As we noticed, there is a complicated relationship between the normative rules formulated by the grammarian-musicologist (*lākṣaṇika*) and the songs that are produced and performed (*lakṣya*), even in this case where the musicologist and composer are the same person.

This examination of the divergence between the emic and etic material can be expanded further, say to study the other *prabandha*-s and '*caturdaṇḍi*' compositions that are available. A simplistic conclusion based on the difference would be that the song and the *CDP* weren't composed by the same author. A different explanation is that Veṅkaṭamakhin was subscribing to *different prescriptive traditions* for the formulation of his musicological treatise (*lakṣaṇa grantha*) and for the composition of his *prabandha* and *gīta* songs.

We see a similar tension and dissonance in the writing of Subbarāma Dīkṣita, whose anxieties towards being fidelious to Veṅkaṭamakhin's *lakṣaṇa* tradition, while also representing the performed realities of *rāga* identities that were extant in his time, are apparent in his *Pradarśini*. This anxiety of scholars to reconcile the insights of their intellectual lineage and its textual tradition, with the contemporary expression and articulation in the practice of an art or discipline, is a recurrent leitmotif in the prescriptive literature, and is well exemplified by the case study of the *Śrīraṅga prabandha*. There is scope to extend this investigation to the other example of *Śrīraṅga prabandha* found in the same source i.e. Subbarāma Dīkṣita, and also to expand

the story to other compositions such as the *Umātilaka*, *Kaivāḍa* and such *prabandha*-s.

Looking at the many *avatāra*-s of the *Śrīraṅga – tāla* name, *prabandha* type, and the actual songs; all of which have very little to do with one another, we can conclude that these are heterologous entities that merely share a signifier. It would be a strained exercise, misleading even, to try and stitch a continuity or homology between the śāstric, etic accounts and the 17th and 18th century compositions. This dissonance between the theoretical injunction and practical example, ostensibly from the same source, also points to an important methodological caveat for the historian.

Maṅgalam

In our mapping of the genealogy of the generic *prabandha*, and the *Śrīraṅga* species of that genre, we are reminded of the various disciplines one has to draw on, to study genres that are constantly straddling multiple forms of presentation and articulation. This act of plotting out the cognitive polysemiosis of the genre is crucial for writing an intellectual history of the genre and the literature it constitutes. A close reading of the lyrical content and the developmental history of the songs holds the possibilities of being a potential tool to map the overlapping circuits of music, dance, poetry, literature, ritual and kingship.

Musical compositions and genres have hitherto been the exclusive preserve of the traditional musicologist, but by reading them as historical-cultural artifacts, they are amenable for very different analyses. The picture that emerges from the current study is a set of genres that are simultaneously textual and performative – they took material from the confines of codices and manuscripts and animated them, by releasing them into the performative domain, where it is much more multisemiotic, and was accessible to a much more diverse audience, as compared to when the same content was present as high literature.

The musical verses of the Śaiva *tevaram* corpus, the songs of the *Vaiṣṇava prabandha* anthologies; and a good 500 years later, the songs of Aruṇagirinātha and Kṣétrayya; all have a couple of things in common – they all had a music setting; they were almost never recited in a *śuṣka-karkaśa* (dry, harsh) monotone; and they all have various signatory elements in them. Except Kṣétrayya, all the others have a strong near-compulsory sense of marking and naming the geographical locus of the shrine or deity they praise. All their songs are marked by a *nom-de-plume* that identifies the poet-singer and the human or divine patron being praised. Sāraṅgapāṇi (17th century AD) has a *padam* exclusively devoted to place names, including some places quite far from his domicile, and Shahaji's opera – the Devendra kuravañji has a well-travelled gypsy woman describing important cities from six continents. These songs are now markers of sacred, or otherwise culturally significant geographies.

Prabandha-s need to be studied as such – at the bustling, noisy intersection of these material and these fields. There is more literary and cultural history revealed in their spilling over generic boundaries than there is in their (rare) staying within the boundaries of genres.

Further, the continuity between the *svarā(r)tha prabandha* described by Someśvara (and others) and the *svarākṣara* compositions of Rāmasvāmi Dīkṣita and Sāraṅgapāṇi is yet another type of example that needs to be explored. These are exercises of musico-literary gymnastics similar to the palindromic and other *carmina figurata* type *citra-kāvya* that was a frequent concomitant of Indic courtly culture. Similarly the *pedda varnam* of Karveṭinagaram Govindasāmayya, which utilized a suite of Telugu verses set in *deśya* metres for its *ettugaḍa svaras* represents an important point in this cline between metre-bound verse and rhythm-bound lyric. These merit a fuller exposition and will be discussed elsewhere.

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