



# INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF CREATIVE RESEARCH THOUGHTS (IJCRT)

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

## The Concept Of Madhyama Sruti In South Indian Classical Music

**Dr. R. Hemalatha**  
 Assistant Professor  
 Department of Indian Music  
 University of Madras  
 Chennai-600005

### Abstract

In South Indian Classical Music or the Karnāṭak Music, rendering of certain compositions in Madhyama śruti is prevalent and there are references to this concept in the books that came during the later part of the 20th century. This concept is supposed to have come during the 20th century as this concept has not been mentioned in the treatises written before 19th century. Moreover, this concept is quite popular in the present day and this paper traces the evolution of this concept and its application in Vocal and other instrumental practices. The methodology adopted in this paper include historical study, analytical research and the application of the concept in the present day scenario. The examples have been drawn from textual and oral traditions and the observations have been given.

**Keywords:** Karnatak Music, Madhyama sruti, compositions, kirtana, Music history.

### I Introduction

In South Indian Music, a concept of rendering some rāga-s in the Madhyama śruti, where the tonic note is the śuddha madhyama instead of ṣaḍja. This concept seems to have come into practice only during the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are no references to the term ‘madhyama ‘śruti’ in the texts as well as the publications that came before 1940. However, this aspect has become an integral part of the system and this paper tries to explore the application of madhyama śruti in South Indian Music in the present day.

The definition to the term ‘Madhyam śruti’ is first seen in the book ‘South Indian Music – Book III’ authored by Professor P Sambamoorthy. Here, the author gives three different explanations for this term which are as follows:

- The tuning of the strings of the violin as ‘sa pa sa pa’ rather than the traditional method of ‘pa sa pa sa’ is known as madhyama śruti tuning.
- The rendering of the compositions using the śuddha madhyama as the tonic note is also referred to as ‘madhyama śruti’.
- When the compositions are rendered in the madhyama śruti on a Vīṇa, the pañcama string in the tāḷa strings or the ‘pakka sārāṇi’ strings is also tuned to madhyama.
- The rāga-s like Niṣādāntya, Dhaivatāntya and Pañcamāntya are rendered in Madhyama śruti. Moreover, to create effects the compositions and rāga-s are rendered in Madhyama śruti.

Let us explore the above four statements with the background of historical study of rāga-s.

## II The tuning of the violin strings:

In South Indian Music, the strings of the violin are generally tuned as follows:

The string on the right corner of the finger board is referred to as the first string. This is tuned to ‘madhyasthāyi pañcama’.

The string next to that is the second string which is tuned to ‘madhyasthāyi ṣaḍja’

The third string is tuned to Mandrasthāyi pañcama and the fourth string Mandrasthāyi ṣaḍja.

This tuning is generally used for the pitches ‘B’ to ‘A’. If there is a need to tune the violin to the pitch ‘A#’(higher), an alternative method of tuning as mentioned by Professor Sambamoorthy is also being used, which is ‘sa pa sa pa’. This is referred to as madhyama śruti tuning by some even though there is no reference to such term in texts. However, it has to be understood that if the tuning of the strings are changed, then the tuning of the first string would be the fourth note from the second string which was previously tuned to ṣaḍja. Hence, the tradition of referring to this tuning as ‘Madhyama śruti’ would have come into practice.

## III Madhyama śruti in the rendering of the compositions:

The author gives two aspects of madhyama śruti in this. One is, the compositions are rendered in madhyama śruti to give effects and the second aspect is the rendering of the rāga-s with limited range namely Niṣādāntya, dhaivatāntya and pañcamāntya are rendered in Madhyama śruti.

The second aspect is explained first in order to effectively understand the first aspect. In South Indian Music, there are some rāga-s which do not have the aṣṭaka character or the presence of tārasthāyi ṣaḍja. These rāga-s have been classified into three types namely,

- The rāga-s that have the madhya sthāyi niṣāda as the ending note, that are being referred to ‘Niṣādāntya’ rāga-s. Example Nādanāmakriyā, Punnāgavarāḷi
- The rāga-s that have the madhya sthāyi dhaivata as the last note, that are being referred to as ‘dhaivatāntya’ rāga-s. Example, Navarōj
- The rāga-s that have the madhya sthāyi pañcama as the last note, that are being referred to as ‘pañcamāntya’ rāga-s. Example, Kurañji.

This type of classification is first seen in the books authored by the above mentioned author and it is imperative to study the historical background of this classification

This classification based on the range of the rāga-s is not seen in any of the treatises written before 19<sup>th</sup> century. In the Sangīta-sampradāya-pradarśini of Subbarāṇa Dīkṣita, published in the year 1904 also, this classification is not seen. Moreover, this work refers to the rāga-s Punnāgavarāḷi, Nādanāmakriyā and Kurañji as ‘Madhyasthāyi’ rāga-s and not by the terms referred to above. It has to be understood that the term ‘madhyasthāyi’ rāga denotes the range of the rāga as well, that is, a rāga which does not have prayōga-s in the tārasthāyi.

The term ‘niṣādāntya’ is first seen in the book ‘Ādi Śrī Tyāgarāja Hṛdayamu’ of K V Śrīnivāsa Aiyangār, published in the year 1922, while giving the lakṣaṇa of the rāga ‘Nādanāmakriyā’. However, this term is not used while giving the lakṣaṇa of the rāga Punnāgavarāḷi, where it has only been stated that the range of the rāga is from mandra sthāyi niṣāda to madhya sthāyi niṣāda. Thus, this does not seem to refer to the classification of rāga-s based on the range. Thus, it can be said that the classification of rāga-s into Niṣādāntya, Dhaivatāntya and Pañcamāntya would have been a creation of Professor Sambamoorthy himself.

Since the range of the rāga-s is limited, these rāga-s are rendered in the Madhyama śruti, which is also ascertained by the author.

This aspect has to be elaborated with examples from modern practice. In the present day, the rāga-s like Yamunākalyāṇi are also rendered in the Madhyama śruti. In the history of music, it is seen that the rāga Yamunākalyāṇi is a trishthāyi rāga as seen in the kīrtana ‘Jambūpatē’ of Muttusvāmi Dīkṣita. In this kīrtana, the sañcāra-s in the tārasthāyi especially the gāndhāra are considered to be the jīva or the prominent sañcāra-s of this rāga and it is seen that these phrases are not seen in the other compositions set in this rāga. Moreover, the range of the rāga has been limited to tārasthāyi ṣaḍja with occasional movement to tārasthāyi ṛṣabha. Hence, the practice of rendering this rāga in the madhyama śruti would have come into vogue. It has to be remembered, the Hindustāni equivalent of this rāga, namely ‘Yaman’ has a range covering three octaves and the concept of rendering of this rāga in Madhyama śruti is not seen in this system.

Now, the first aspect mentioned by the author is taken up for study, where the author states that the compositions are rendered in Madhyama śruti, to create an effect. For this, a classical example, is the rendering of the kīrtana Māmava Paṭṭābhirāma of Muttusvāmi Dīkṣita in the rāga Mañiraṅgu in the Madhyama śruti. The rāga Mañiraṅgu does not have a limited range like the other rāga-s mentioned above, but this composition is being rendered in the Madhyama śruti despite the fact there are sañcāra-s upto tārasthāyi ṛṣabha. But, the overall range of the kīrtana is between mandrasthāyi madhyama and madhyasthāyi niṣāda and only in two

places the tārasthāyi ṣaḍja and ṛṣabha are present. Thus, it can be said that to create an effect, the composition is rendered in madhyama śruti, even though there are no textual references.

The above point can be explained with a few more examples in the present day. In the present day, the application of madhyama śruti is extended to the rāga-s even though they do not have a limited range.

In the present day, many compositions are tuned as 'rāgamālika-s', where more than one rāga is present.

While tuning these compositions, it is seen that the rāgamālika-s have a mixture of rāga-s that are generally rendered in the sama śruti. For instance, a taraṅgam of Nārāyaṇa Tīrtha, 'Nanda nandana gōpāla' rendered by Bombay Sisters (Smts Saroja and Lalitha). This composition is a rāgamālika featuring the rāga-s Valaji, Dvijāvanti, Kalyāṇavasantam and Śrīrāga.

In this composition, the first rāga Valaji when rendered in the madhyama śruti initially sounds like the rāga Ābhōgi in Sama śruti, but when the next three rāga-s are rendered in the madhyama śruti, it can be ascertained that the first rāga is not Ābhōgi and instead it is Valaji in madhyama śruti. This suggests that the composition has been tuned in the madhyama śruti restricting the range of the rāga-s. The restriction in the range of the rāga is not obvious since the composition is rendered in the madhyama śruti.

Another example, is the Purandara Dāsa Pada 'Kṣīrābdi Kannigē', which is also a rāgamālika set to the rāga-s Kurañji, Yamunākalyāni, Darbāri Kānaḍā, Sindubhairavi and Mañiraṅgu. In the above rāga-s, the rāga-s Kurañji and Yamunākalyāni are generally rendered in the madhyama śruti, however the other three rāga-s have also been included restricting their range. However, there are sañcāra-s till tārasthāyi ṣaḍja which is also rendered as an extended note in the rāga-s Darbāri kānaḍā, Sindubhairavi and Mañiraṅgu. In the rāga Yamunākalyāni, the tārasthāyi ṣaḍja is present in only one phrase. It is also interesting to note that in the rāga-s Darbāri kānaḍā and Mañiraṅgu, the tārasthāyi ṛṣabha is also present.

Thus, these compositions support the fact stated by Professor Sambamoorthy that some compositions are rendered in Madhyama śruti to create an effect.

Now, the last aspect stated by the author is taken up for discussion.

The 'pakka sāraṇi' string of the Vīṇa are tuned to ṣaḍja, śuddha madhyama and tārasthāyi ṣaḍja, if a composition is rendered in the madhyama śruti. This is done in order to avoid the sounding of the pañcama string which would sound like 'catuśruti ṛṣabha' when the ādhāra ṣaḍja is changed to madhyama. For example, the rāga-s Punnāgavarāli and Nādanāmakriyā have śuddha ṛṣabha and hence the sounding of the pañcama (catuśruti ṛṣabha) would be out of pitch while rendering these rāga-s.

This aspect is also seen in the tuning of Violin, while performing the above said rāga-s for the above said reasons. Thus, in this case, the entire tuning of the violin is not changed whereas, the playing string alone is tuned to madhyama especially the mandra sthāyi pañcama (3<sup>rd</sup> string).

The tuning of the pakka sāraṇi string is also extended in the application of madhyama śruti on a Vīṇa.

In the present day, the Vīṇa artistes also use the concept of madhyama śruti, when they accompany vocalists who sing in the pitch G# or A. The strings of the Vīṇa are generally tuned to the pitch D# or E and while playing in the higher pitches, the artiste tend to use the madhyama as the ādhāra ṣaḍja, as generally the strings are not available for a higher śruti. Since the range of a string in a Vīṇa is approximately 2 ½ octaves they are able to use this aspect very well.

This aspect is also extended to Tamburā, where the pañcama string is tuned to madhyama, while rendering compositions in madhyama śruti. Some performers ask the Tambura Players to leave out the pañcama and use only the other three strings tuned to ṣaḍja.

Thus, it can be said that the application of this madhyama śruti is seen extensively in the stringed instruments.

#### **IV Madhyama śruti in Wind instruments**

This aspect is not much seen in the wind instruments like Nāgasvaram and Flute, where only a few rāga-s are rendered in madhyama śruti, especially those with catuśruti ṛṣabha and antara gāndhāra as it is difficult to produce the sound of śuddha ṛṣabha from the śuddha madhyama sthāna. Hence, the application of madhyama śruti is effectively seen only in the stringed instruments.

In the present day, the tuning of the pañcama string of the tambura to madhyama is also seen for rendering the rāga-s that omit pañcama. For example, while rendering the rāga-s Lailtha, Hindōla, Vasanta, some of the musicians change the pañcama on the electronic tambura to madhyama while others switch off the pañcama. However, this does not seem to be correct as when madhyama is sounded, it gives an impression of ādhāra śruti and because of which the other svāra-s change correspondingly and while rendering a ālāpana it creates a confusion among the listeners. However, when the composition is rendered, because of the familiarity of the composition it does not create a negative impact on the listeners.

For instance, if the pañcama is changed to madhyama for rendering the rāga Lalithā, the rāga would sound like Madhuvanti in the phrase 'ma dha ni śa' which would be 'sa ga ma pa' with sādharmaṇa gāndhāra and prati madhyama when rendered in Madhyama śruti. Another interesting aspect is the rāga Rōhini, a creation of M

Balamuralikrishna, where the ālāpāna, when heard sounds like Kāmavardhini rendered in Madhyama śruti, but the rāga is actually Rōhiṇi. This rāga has both śuddha and prati Madhyama-s omitting pañcama and having the svara-s śuddha ṛṣabha, antara gāndhāra and catuśruti dhaivata. This rāga is rendered in sama śruti, but the ālāpāna alone suggests the rāga Kamavardhini being rendered in Madhyama śruti.

Thus, the application of madhyama śruti is being extended to many rāga-s in the present day for creating an effect. In the stringed instruments, in order to adapt to various pitches, the concept of madhyama śruti is being used by the performers.

Finally, a concept that has not been mentioned in the treatises has become an integral part of South Indian Music and as seen earlier to create an effect the range of the rāga-s are also being restricted and rendered in the madhyama śruti.

### Referneces:

1. Sambamoorthy P, South Indian Music- Book 3, The Karnatic Music Book Centre, Chennai, Revised edition 2008.
2. Aiyāngār Śrīnivāsa K V, Ādi Tyāgarāja Hṛdayamu, M Adi & Company, 1922.
3. Dīkṣīta Subbarāma, Saṅgīta-sampradāya-pradarsīni, Vidya Vilasini Press, Eṭṭayapuram, 1904.

### Audio References:

1. [https://youtu.be/RYhze1jVzxA?si=T\\_1J3Zf213pUWbfa](https://youtu.be/RYhze1jVzxA?si=T_1J3Zf213pUWbfa)
2. <https://youtu.be/rpdYWv-Y4Ns?si=sU71pDpQW16RVDTt>
3. <https://youtu.be/wr7zhBSJCio?si=k6bNtqEPkw6reVce>

