The Politics of Musical Identity: The Case of *Bade* and *Chote Ragas* of Hindustani Classical Music

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Abstract: Music is not innocent of hegemony. Power relations, ego, hierarchy, discrimination, and social structures of empowerment can either extrinsically regulate musical text/performance or can be embedded in musical structures or performance 'practices.' This paper attempts to focus on the concept of *bade* (big) and *chote* (small) *ragas* (musical modes) that have come down through the tradition of Hindustani classical music. *Bade ragas* are considered big in terms of their range, versatility, and explorability as opposed to *chote ragas*. However, strict classifications do not exist, and often the same *raga* is interpreted differently by different exponents, systems, or *gharanas*. A close examination of this tradition reveals both structural and socio-cultural components that determine the *raga* identity. 'Identity' here is a key concept since Hindustani classical music, since the medieval ages, ascribes 'personhood' and identities to *ragas*. This paper, while examining the different categories of *bade-chote ragas*, attempts to establish the relation of identity of *ragas* to hegemonic practices.

Keywords: *Bade*-big, *Chote*-small, Hindustani classical music, Musical identity, Politics

1. Preliminaries

All musical traditions embed elements of hegemony, hierarchy, and other elements of power relation in their classification of categories, subcategories, and musical modes[1]. Histories, especially of longer traditions, indicate a shift in the importance or exploration of genres and modes, not only based structural components but also on the basis of various non-musical socio-cultural factors that always affect the evolution of music histories. The way these differences, inequalities, pushes, and pulls operate vary from tradition to tradition. When one looks at the Indian classical musical tradition, and in the present context, the Hindustani classical music (HCM) tradition, certain distinctive forces are seen to operate, which seem very unique, generally not observable in many other musical traditions. The first of this, strongly linked to emotions and gender[2], is personhood. While it is not the primary focus of this study, it is strongly linked to many of the other components discussed below and perhaps unique to the Indian tradition, and hence needs due attention. The second one, the primary focus of this work, is the concept of *bade* (large) or *chote* (small) in terms of the potential for exploration or elaboration of *raga*. Structural and hegemonic forces both operate in defining them, often in complex interrelation (between musical and extra-musical forces) and will be elaborated below.

Interestingly, in the Indian context, music being essentially an oral and continuous tradition, many of its significant features are often obliquely hinted at in musical texts but never elaborated. One such feature is the dimension of the *raga* – big or small – is implicitly hinted at[3] in texts as old as the 8th century CE[4] – *Brihadesi* and *Sangita Makaranda* – but even now is hardly elaborated in musicological

literature, though handed down to contemporary disciples in the *guru-sisya* tradition. Interestingly, a closer look at the dimension of a *raga* makes one realize that there are a number of other binaries at work here, along with big/small – male/female, superior/inferior, complex/simple, *margi / desi*, pure/ mixed, spiritual/secular– that not only capture structural features of musical modes but also bring in various extra-musical elements like gender, social considerations, geographies, religion, and politics into play. So, an attempt to answer the apparently technical question – what are the rules or guide-lines that determine the dimension of a *raga* – can only be answered by examining the elements mentioned above and their complex interrelationships. In this paper, we attempt to open up and problematize the concept of big or small *ragas* – generally considered a consequence of certain structural components of *ragas* – and illustrate how they are defined by complex socio-cultural forces along with technical aspects, thus exposing the delicate stability of these concepts.

In order to do so, this short exploration is divided into four sections. In the first section, we briefly outline the nature of *raga* as something more than a musical mode and establish the notion of the personhood of *raga*. In the second section, hegemonic tendencies are linked to the binaries discussed above, with special focus on the *raga-ragini* tradition. The third section focuses on the diverse classifications of *bade-chote ragas* and the forces at work in defining them– both technical and socio-cultural. The final section attempts to justify the relevance of such an exploration in terms of extra-musical contexts, parallel traditions, and changing settings.

2. Is *Bhairav* always Serious? Identity and Personhood in Hindustani Classical Music

Music invariably evokes emotions along with other expressive features. Studies on music expressivity (Istók et al., 2009; Langer, 1957; Zentner et al., 2008) suggest that listeners can discern a wide range of features such as emotions (happy, sad, romantic, etc.), judgment (good, bad, etc.), gender (masculine, feminine), texture (rough, delicate, etc.), intensity (fast, energetic, etc.) and so on from music. Interest-ingly, if one looks at human personality, almost all the features indicated above can be attributed to it. While polyphonic music with multiple voices is resistant to singular identity, monophonic music that focuses on a single voice/instrument, along with subsidiary accompaniments, lends itself to the possibility of being conceived of in terms of both identity and personality. Though these – identity and personhood – may not be of great significance in many other monophonic traditions, HCM tradition, with its special focus on *raga*, almost entirely focusses on these aspects.

While a comparative exploration of this phenomenon is not within the scope of this paper, we attempt a brief examination of the history of personhood in HCM here. For this, the concept of *raga* needs a brief exposition. Since the times of *Natya Sastra* (Ghosh, 1950), Indian musicology seems obsessed with classification of music.[5] The concept of *raga* of HCM seems to have been consolidated between 9th – 13th C CE, with the first mention of *raga* in the *Natya Sastra* (1st BC – 4th C CE), the elaboration of the concept in *Brihaddesi* (6th-8th C CE), and the distinction between *raga* (male) and *ragini* (female) by the time of *Sangita Makaranda*. (5th-11th C CE). Based on musicological texts from the 13th to 19th C CE, Bhatkhande's (1934) classification of HCM *ragas* into ten *thaats* is used today, though the logic of classification has been challenged by *rag-ang* tradition and some contemporary critics (Chaudhuri, 2021). *Thaats* can be compared to Greek modes, as they use a set of notes for each mode – Ionic with *Bilawal*, Dorian with *Kafi*, Ludian with *Yaman,* and so on (Das). Under each *thaat*/mode, a number of *ragas* are classified. These can be pentatonic, hexatonic, or heptatonic (complete) but involve a set of more complex rules for their presentation. While the history of Indian music, unfortunately, leaves a lot of gaps so that for many of the older *ragas* mentioned between the 13th and 19th C CE, we don't even have the notations. Many have been transformed. But since *Brihaddesi,* certain approaches to music – dominant and subdominant notes, specific rules of ascent and descent, identifying phrases, etc., continue to this date. We quote Gangoly's definition, which is fairly comprehensive (Gangoly, 1935):

Literally, *raga* is something that colours or tinges the mind with some definite feeling – a wave of passion or emotion. In a special sense, a *raga* is a tonal composition of musical notes (*svaras*) having a sequence, form, or structure of a peculiar significance. Some of its component notes stand in a significant relationship to one another to give a *character* (emphasis mine) to the *raga*, …. The *amsa* (predominant note) is of great importance. It is also called the *vadi*… the note which indicates, manifests, or expresses the peculiar *character* (emphasis mine) of the *raga*, and receives the greatest emphasis …. Also called *the jiva or the soul* (emphasis mine) of the *raga*…. Every *raga* has its special types of a serial of notes for ascent (aroha) and descent (*avroha*), which determines its structure or that. The degree of insistence or importance of particular notes lends flesh, blood, colour, and life (emphasis mine) to the scale and creates a *Raga*. (pp. 1-2)

On the other hand, Chaudhuri, as a contemporary critic and exponent, defines the *raga* by negation:

What is a *raga*?
To answer this question, we must first acquire a sense of what it isn't. It isn't a composition, through compositions are set to *ragas*. It isn't a melody, in that, a melody can be sung without *preoccupations to do with form and shape* (italics mine); with the *raga*, the emergence during *its exposition of its rupa* (italics mine)– the features and shape that make it recognisable for what it is …. A *raga* is not a scale. It's notes ascend and descend, but not in the linear manner in which a scale's does. The *raga* is not the sum total of its notes. You may know the notes of a *raga* but have little idea of what it is. (Chaudhuri, 2021)

Before we start discussions on the elements of personhood, a third definition, from a Western perspective – Clements quoted in Gangoly, 1935 – may clarify the nature of *raga* further:

The name of the *Raga* connotes a scale bearing a fixed relationship to the drone, with its harmonic structure determined by a *Vadi* and *Samvadi*, a chief note … occurring more frequently than others … certain characteristic turns of melody, recurring with frequency, certain rules regarding the employment of embellishments, and a stated time of the day for its performance. It is a common practice, after singing an air in a *Raga*, to *improvise a series of free fantasia passages* (italics mine), each returning in due course to the characteristic snatch of the melody … The whole performance must be "within the *Raga*," that is, without transgression of the elaborate rules governing its structure. (pp. 4-5)

The definitions above serve two purposes – familiarization of the reader to the nature of *raga* and emphasis on key characteristics that have been handed down to contemporary times that hark back to the 'personhood' of *raga*. Let's elaborate the second point. Gangoly talks of 'giving character to the *raga'* and later 'soul' of the *raga,* indicative of metaphors of personhood. Chaudhury suggests 'an exposition of its *rupa'* that can be translated as its character or identity. Clements talks of another essential feature of the *raga*, 'improvisation' that is non-recurrent, ever changing, and yet following the norms so that the performance is 'within the *raga*' – the 'identity' of *raga* is never lost.

These vague references to 'character,' 'soul,' 'identity,' non-'transgression' all refer back to a continuous tradition where the soul and personality of a *raga* were explicitly mentioned and considered a reality. Even today, many distinguished exponents of HCM refer to *ragas* as if they have soul and personality[6].

Mythically, *ragas* were deities or persons. Narada, the divine wandering musician, we are told in the *Linga Purana* (Rajendran), once encountered celestial damsels with unusually twisted limbs. On expressing concern, he was informed by them that they were *raginis* (female form of *ragas*) and their distorted condition was a result of Narada's mishandling of them in the act of singing them. Ebeling, in his *Ragamala Painting*, writes:

To capture and comprehend the divine qualities of music, its practitioners believed each melody to have beside a sound-form also a personified or deified form…. *Raga Sagar*, by Dattila or Narada, either 2nd or 8th century, supplies us with the earliest *dhyanas*, or prayer formulas, which depict a *raga* in a personified or deified form. p. 28.

The Indic imagination and felt experience went further so that by the 16th C. CE, in Mesakarna's *Raga*mala, we have not only the mention of six *ragas*, each with five *raginis* (wives) but also *ragaputras* or sons (Ebeling,1973).

The culmination of this tradition comes when the *ragas* (or *raginis*) not only have verse descriptions of their personality, but also have their portraits painted – the *ragamala* paintings. The two miniatures reproduced below, as well as the schematic diagram, illustrate the points made above. Note a brief *dhyansloka* penned on the top of the image of *raga Hindola*.

Raga Hindola and *Ragini Bhairavi* (1550-1650 CE, Wikipedia Commons)

A full study can be made of the notion of personhood in Indian *raga* tradition. But a pertinent question that comes up and which will be addressed briefly here is, why personhood? *Sangita Makaranda* talks of the mythical origin of the *ragas*:

> According to legend, the *ragas* are said to have been derived from the union of *Siva* and *Sakti* (female energy), *Parvati*, or *Giri-jaya*. From the five faces of Siva at the beginning of his dance (*nartta-rambhe*) came the five *ragas*: - *Sri-raga, Vasanta, Bhairava, Pancama*, and *Megha*, while the sixth *raga*, *Nata-narayana* come out of the mouth of Parvati…. (Gangoly, 1935)

Ragas are 'born,' have embodied identities, which Narada Muni could mutilate because of his mistakes, have emotions that they communicate to their listeners and have the ability of marrying their consorts – *raginis* – and giving birth, thorough them, to their children – *ragaputras*.

3. Are *Raginis* always Diminutive and Playful? Hegemony and Power in Indian Music

Music can be hegemonic. In different traditions, hegemonies can be traced to different sources. However, in case of HCM, we see hegemony and power through the lens of personhood. This is not to argue that hegemony arises 'because' of personhood, but rather that in personhood dominated concept of music, it is reflected 'through' personhood.

Power is evident in most human creations and transactions. Music is no exception. In the Indian context, even in the *Natya Sastra*, music embeds discrimination in the concept of *margi-desi* (Khalsa, 2017) translated variously as pure-mixed, classical-folk, serious-popular, rule bound-rule flexible, it also connotes superiority and inferiority. While most music traditions indicate many such structures, what is interesting is to find them embedded within the concept of personhood in case of HCM.

While the origin of the concept of personality, and the possible reasons for it do not fit into this paper, Narada's *Sangita Markanda*, mentions *raga-ragini* (masculine-feminine) division for the first

time. "In fact, Narada gives three classifications, viz, Masculine melodies (*pumlinga-ragah*), Feminine melodies (*stri-ragah*) and Neuter melodies (*napumsaka-ragah*)" (Gangoly, 1935). This discrimination is based on *rasa* (emotions) or feelings of passion, admiration, heroism for masculine, love, humour and sorrow for feminine, terror, abhorrence and peace for neuter melodies (Ganguly, 22-23). This concurs with the *Natya Sastra* which prescribes appropriate dominant emotions for males and females, indicting the connection of emotions, personality (gender) and musical appropriateness that later helps personify music. Mythically, *ragas* were 'born' from the five faces of Siva, thus, attaining personhood (Ganguly, 2017). *Pancama-sara-samhita* is the first treatise (date indeterminate) to mention the minor or derivative *ragas* or the 'wives' of the *ragas*, where for the first time, the word '*ragini*' is used (Gangoly, 1935). So, between 13th and 19th century, we have a number of treatises that classify *ragas* based on *raga-ragini* tradition, culminating in a few that also mention sons – *raga*-putras (Ebeling 1973; Gangoly, 1935). An illustrative example from Ebling would help discuss the key points:

Ragas	Raginis				
Bhairava	Madhyamadi or Madhumadhavi	Bhairavi	Bangali	Varati (Bairadi)	Saindhavi
Malkos	Todi	Khambavati	Gauri	Gunakiri	Kakubha
Hindol	Vilaval	Ramakiri	Desakh	Patmanjiri	Lalita
Dipak	Kedari	Kanada	Desi	Kamodi	Nat
Sri	Vasant	Maru or Malavi	Malashri	Dhanasika	Asavari
Megha	Mallar	Desakiri	Bhupali	Gurjari	Tanka

Table1: Example of *Raga-Ragini* Classification (Source: *Raga*mala Paintings, Ebling, p. 18.

While technically, derivative *raginis* are paired with the respective *ragas* based on notes, emphasis and resemblance, interesting social and hierarchical relationships are also established. The source is male and the derived is female. By inference, the source is bigger/complete that the derived which is less complete. In a patriarchal system, each male can have multiple wives. Thus, the elements of family based on gender, indicative of their magnitude/size/dimension, socio-cultural status within patriarchy, and complexity or simplicity mixed with 'appropriate' emotion-driven personalities are derived. The next logical extension is the child, where priority is given to the son – *raga-putra*. Here are a few dhyana-slokas to indicate the significant differences between the *ragas* and *raginis* that emerge.

The iconography of *raga Bhairava* is distinct. The deity represented is Lord Shiva. Body smeared with ashes, skulls, all refer to the burning ghat, the abode of Shiva. It is also indicative of the sombre and serious mood of renunciation. The third *dhyana* talks of the status of the deity – the hero, the source of life, etc. – and establishes a superior position. In contrast, *ragini Gouri* is markedly feminine, indicated in different ways in the different *dhyanas* – like the watery cloud, voice like cuckoo, body fair of colour – but distinctively beautiful. It is expected that the *dhyanas* are representative of the character of the *ragas*, and anchor the *ragas* in the closest human embodiment.

This section establishes two important points, the link of music to the masculine and feminine personalities of the *ragas*, and the potential of non-technical components to determine the size and complexity of a *raga*. The ups and downs that the *ragas* go through in history, sometimes considered source, sometimes derivative (see footnote 1), are illustrative of this second point where the technical components remaining the same, status changes.

Raga	Dhyana	Ragini	Dhyana
Bhairava (Vijayalakshmi, 2007)	Smeared with ash all over the beautiful body, a trident in hand is *Bhairava* who is seated on the bull according to the sage Narada.	*Gouri* (Vijayalakshmi, 2007)	*Gauri* has a form like the watery cloud. She is bold and dignified. Possessing a resonant sound. She has a lovable voice of a juicy throat charming the people.
Bhairva, (Vijayalakshmi, 2007)	His limbs smeared with ashes (that lovely body), his brow lustrous with the cool rays of the moon, trident in hand and mounted on a bull, such is *Bhairava*, and so the sages tell.	*Gouri* (Pandit, 1975)	Gauri has dark complexion and is wearing mango flowers on her ears as an ornament. She has a sweet voice like a cuckoo and when she sings honey drops from her mouth. Her voice is soft and tender.
Bhairava, (Ebeling, 1973)	We praise *Bhairava*, the hero, the source of life, the measure of rhythm, pervading the ocean of notes and intervals. A skull in his hand, the crescent moon upon his matted hair, he worships Shiva, Lord of Sleep. His body is smeared with sandal paste.	Gouri (Ebeling, 1973)	With body fair of colour like a *Champaka* flower, she tarries in the garden, confused of mind. In her hand she takes a cluster of wishing tree flowers. In beauty she is *urvasi*; no companion is with her.

Table 2: Illustrations of some *Dhyanaslokas* of *Raga Bhairava* and *Ragini Gouri*

In the next section we elaborate these.

4. Who is big and who is small? Competence vs influence

Ragas and *raginis*, husband, wife, father and son (*ragaputra*) have been established in the earlier section. As tradition progresses, though the *raga* family classification continues till the late 18th century (Gangoly, 1935), the focus shifts to *thaat* classification. None the less, the emphasis on male-female persists and by early 20th century, something new emerges – the emphasis on a *raga* being big or small.

The concept, as understood on the basis of various definitions identified (see table 3) can finally be translated into performance duration. However, it is here that a number of challenges come up. Hegemony and rule-driven features apparently go hand in hand and often get muddled up. In this section, we will attempt to bring to light some of the challenges and issues in defining *bade* and *chote ragas* and try to suggest that behind the veil of technical points, a number of socio-cultural norms and shifts in norms seem to play a key role.

What are *bade ragas*? They are large, complex, with a lot of potential for expansion, with wide range and variety, never monotonous, popular in *Khayal* and *Dhrupad* traditions, and traditionally considered superior in stature than small (*chote*) *ragas*. While *guru-sishysa* oral tradition emphasizes these points and makes a distinction of what can be or cannot be sung as *Khayal* or *Thumri*[7], traditional literature on this is scarce. In this section we make an attempt to classify *bade-chote ragas* based on books, documented talks by musicians as well as oral *guru-sishya* tradition.

Bade (large) *ragas* are usually *Janak ragas*, serious in nature, lower-tetrachord dominant, slow paced, with potential for elaboration in all the three octaves, and in some cases, *ragas* borrowed from the South[8]. *Janak ragas* are source *ragas*, from which other *ragas* are born. Serious *ragas*, like *Bhairava*, dominantly communicate features such as seriousness, reflectiveness, calm and sadness. Both these features – the ability to give birth to other *ragas*, and serious personality show a strong link to the tradition of *raga* personhood discussed above. Slow paced is linked to such a visage as well. On the

	Based on features	Definitions	Examples	Sources
Chote Ragas	Dhun ragas (Sa based)	Ragas generated from folk tunes	Khamaj, Tilang, Kalingda	Madhyamik Sangeet-1, 1960
	Madhyam based ragas	Ragas which are rendered basically in lower and middle octave thus they are rendered considering Madhyama as their base shadja to uplift the raga.	Pilu, Gara	Raag Vigyan-7, 1990
	No vilmbit tempo rendition	When the raga tempo is high, extreme vilambit (slow) tempo bandishes cannot be rendered because then the phrases of the raga will lose their identity thus even when a bada khayal is rendered in such ragas, then the tempo of the taal cycle is kept high – say madhya-vilambit tempo.	Adana, Soahani, Bahar	Taan Malika-4, 1947
	Uttarang Dominance	The ragas which are predominantly elaborated in higher octave (ranging from Madhya pancham to taar pancham)	Adana, Soahani, Bahar	Bhav-Rang Lahari- 2, 1974
	Chanchal nature	The term Chanchal means that which is unsteady / vacillating in its nature. The ragas which are higher in tempo have been categorised as Chanchal ragas.	Deskar, Sindura, Khamaj, Tilang	Taan Malika-1, 1947
Bade Ragas	The raga which is capable of giving birth to many ragas (Janak ragas)	The ragas which have multiple types or can be combined with several ragas such as Nat-Kedar, Jaldhar-Kedar, Basanti-Kedar, Pat-Bihag, Nat-Bihag, Marwa gives birth to Puriya, Sohani or Bibhas, Bhatiyar are grouped under Marwa thaat or Sanjhgiri, Maligaura consist of Raga Marwa	Kedar, Bihag, Yaman, Marwa	Madhyamik Sangeet-1, 1960
	Gambheer nature	Serious natured ragas	Bhairav, Puriya, Miyan Malhar	Taan Malika-1&4, 1947
	Saral ragas	Every raga has its own chalan but the ones which are relatively simple and can be made variety of combinations because of it.	Rageshri, Bhoop, Malkauns, Yaman	Oral Tradition
	Poorvang Dominance	The ragas which are predominantly rendered in Poorvanga (keeping focus on lower and middle octave – ranging mandra pancham to Madhya pancham)	Darbari Kanada, Puriya	Taan Malika-4, 1947
	Slow tempo	The ragas which have slow tempo	Darbari Kanada	Bhav-Rang Lahari-2, 1974
	Elaboration all the three octaves	The ragas which are elaborated in mandra, Madhya and taar saptak	Miyan ki Todi	Taan Malika-1, 1947
Either (can be both treated as Bade and Chote)	Medium paced, phrased based ragas	When raga is meaningful only when the phrases are rendered in a certain tempo	Chhayanat, Hamir, Gaud Sarang, Kedar	Oral tradition
	South Indian ragas	Ragas adapted from south Indian system	Hansadhwani, Abhogi, Kalavati	Oral tradition

Table 3: Classification of *Bade*, *Chote* and Either *Ragas*

other hand, lower–tetrachord dominance[9] and scope for elaboration in all the three octaves are technical in nature. While lower-tetrachord dominance can limit the scope of the *raga*, the exploration of the lower octave also makes the *raga* tempo slower. However, it is true that tempo and note structure are directly linked to emotions evoked, which in turn can convey a certain personhood. Thus, it is virtually impossible to draw water-tight compartments between musical and extra-musical features. But what is remarkable is that in sprite of these guidelines, the tradition is indicative of both anomalies/exceptions and changes (in terms of what is big and what is small) over time.

Chote (small) *ragas* are usually *dhun ragas*, *madhyam*-based, with less that five notes, phrase–based, emphasizing a specific tetrachord (upper or lower), or fast-paced. *Dhun ragas* are mostly derived from folk traditions, and hence often do not find a place among the *ragas* that have attained classical status[10]. *Madhyam*-based *ragas* use the *Ma* (fa) note in exchange for the *Sa* (Do) note and hence have limited scope for expansion. Phrase-based *ragas* focus on a few distinctive phrases to establish their identities, though this concept is challenged by many musicians[11]. Tetrachord dominant *ragas*, by default, are expected to have less scope for elaboration, the number of notes available to them being less. Quick-paced *ragas*, often associated with non-serious emotions, and hence with *raginis* are expected to take less time, and hence are small. *Dhun ragas* indicate hegemonic tendencies while fast-tempo *ragas* are associated with feminine personhood. Yet contradictions exist. *Bhairava* has tribal origin, and yet is treated as a *bade raga* while *Bhairavi*, for all its feminine wiles finds a place both in *Khayals* and *Thumris*. On the other hand, structural aspects of tetrachord-centricity, less number of notes, fast tempo, all can lead to *ragas* with shorter duration.

However, it is also true that a number of *ragas* are indeterminate in terms of their duration, i.e., (a) some treat them as small while others interpret them as large, and (b) the same *raga* is given different treatments (long or short) in different contexts. They have been classified under 'either category.' The very fact that such a category exists is itself indicative of the fact that feature-based paradigms do not always work. In some indirect manner, the category opens up scope for hegemonic interpretations. We will visit them a little later. The summary of the points made above are presented in table 3 along with examples and sources.

Our brief analysis of the definition and categories of *bade-chote ragas* suggest a mix of conventional (extra–musical) and technical features. One can also argue that what looks conventional is actually driven by technical parameters which at some point in time have been forgotten or conventionalized. We have, in fact, illustrated this point briefly in the discussion above. However, even here the relationship between hegemony and scope of *ragas* is available – say *dhun ragas* are considered both inferior and *chote*. The emotions associated are feminine and romantic and the common forms they find use in are in *Thurmi, Tappa* or light film songs.

Our case for suggesting that *bade-chote* classification is not purely technical but hegemonic is also supported by the rules and classifications given above and the actual practice of classifying individual *ragas* as *bade-chote* as per various text books and oral traditions. In order to examine this we prepared an excel template of 117 *ragas* and classified them in terms of *raga* tempo, gender, tetrachord dominance, time of performance, emotions, and *raga* groups. Our findings suggested divergences between traditional guidelines and actual classification of individual *ragas* (see table 4)[12].

In terms of the relationship of *raga* tempo and the largeness of *raga*, it was found that *ragas* which were in slow tempo, or which included the use of slow, medium and fast (all the three tempos) were invariably large *ragas*. *Ragas* that are generally performed in medium and fast tempo were found to be significantly associated with shorter duration.

In the context of gender, in spite of such a huge body of literature and cultural hegemony, in actual documentation as opposed to precept, no relationship was found. Though tradition talks of female *raginis* being, in principle, shorter, this was not the case for the way *ragas* were documented.

In case of *poorvang* (lower tetrachord) dominance, and use of the whole range of the scale, there was moderate level of association with longer duration *ragas*. But it is to be noted that a whole cluster of

stylistic features are generally associated with lower tetrachord dominance – slow pace, use of elaborate *alamkaras* or ornamentation (*meand, gamak, andolan*) along with *vakra* (non-linear use of notes during descent) *chalan* which have a tendency of making *ragas* slower.

Ragas generally performed in the morning were identified to be longer in duration as per tradition and this is associated with serious emotions and slow pace, that justifies longer duration.

Emotions could not be clearly correlated with the largeness of *ragas* due to paucity of data. None the less, emotions of sadness and sadness-mixed with love were associated with *ragas* of longer duration, probably because sadness is associated with slow tempo.

In the context of the way that *bade* and *chote ragas* were defined and classified, data were not available for all the different categories. However, for the categories that data were available, results were interesting in terms of their conformity as well as deviations.

Raga tempo	*Bada*	%	*Chota*	%	Either	%	Remarks
Slow	26	100	0	0	0	0	Clear trend **
Medium	14	36.84	15	39.47	9	23.68	No clear trend
Slow & Medium	3	100	0	0	0	0	Data less
Medium & Fast	7	24.13	16	55.17	6	20.68	*
Slow, Medium & Fast	17	80.95	1	4.76	3	14.28	Clear trend **
Total	67	57.26	32	27.35	18	15.38	117 ragas
Raga Gender	*Bada*	%	*Chota*	%	Either	%	Remarks
Male	49	59.75	21	25.60	12	14.63	No correlation
Female	20	52.63	11	29.72	6		No correlation
Total	69	57.26	32	27.35	18	15.38	117 ragas
Tetrachord dominance	*Bada*	%	*Chota*	%	Either	%	Remarks
Poorvang	44	64.70	14	20.58	10	14.70	*
Uttarang	11	36.66	15	50	4	13.33	
Both	12	75	1	6.25	3	18.75	*
Total	67	58.77	30	26.31	17	14.91	114 ragas
Time	*Bada*	%	*Chota*	%	Either	%	Remarks
1 Dawn	12	70.58	4	23.52	1	5.88	**
2 Late Morning	12	80	1	6.66	2	13.33	**
3 Noon	3	100	0	0	0	0	
4 Afternoon	7	70	3	30	0	0	
5 Evening	15	65.21	4	17.39	4	17.39	*
6 Late evening	18	46.15	14	35.89	7	17.94	
7 Night	0	0	1	33.33	2	66.66	
8 Late night	2	50	2	50	0	0	
Anytime	0	0	2		0	0	
Total	69	58.97	31	26.72	16	13.79	116 ragas
Emotions	*Bada*	%	*Chota*	%	Either	%	Comments
Calm	20	83.33	1	4.16	3	12.5	**
Devotion	12	66.66	6	33.33	0	0	
Love	16	64	5	20	4	16	
Heroic	5	45.45	6	54.54	0	0	
Joy	4	100	0	0	0	0	
Happy	4	44.44	3	33.33	2	22.22	
Sad & s love	12	70.58	4	23.52	1	5.88	*
Serious	9	75	2	16.66	1	8.33	*
Exciting	6	60	2	20	2	20	
Total	45	63.38	15	21.12	11	15.49	71 ragas

Table 4: Tradition guidelines and currently available traditional classification

Raga groups	*Chota*	%	*Bada*	%	Either	%	Remarks
Chote categories							
Dhun ragas	6	100	0	0	0	0	*
Madhyam Based *ragas*	2	100	0	0	0	0	
Less number of notes	4	100	0	0	0	0	*
Tetrachord dominance	3	75	0	0	1	25	Cannot say
Bade categories							
Slow paced, phrase based	0	0	18	100	0		*
Saral ragas	0	0	27	84.37	5	15.62	*
Either categories							
Strictly phrased *ragas*	11	50	5	22.72	6	27.27	Partially
South Indian *Ragas*	3	37.5	2	25	3	37.5	No relation
Medium paced, phrase based	6	27.27	13	59.09	3	13.63	*
Total	35	29.66	65	55.08	18	15.25	118

Table 5: *Raga* groups – *bade* and *chote* – and *ragas* identified under them

Dhun ragas and *ragas* with less than five notes neatly fit into the category of *chote ragas*. Slow-paced and *saral ragas* fit in clearly as *bade ragas*. Either category *ragas* did not show any clear trend.

5. Concluding remarks: Structure, Tradition, Personality and Hegemony

Within a short space, this reflection makes a long journey. In the first three sections we have attempted to establish the definition of *raga* in HCM, point to the underlying hierarchy and hegemony at work where the boundaries between structural musical constructs and extramusical hegemonic concerns are blurred. In the section on *bade* and *chote ragas* we have tried to see the relation between various parameters – structural as well as extra-musical – and how they have influenced the size of the *raga*.

Findings point to a convoluted mixture of attempts at coherence within chaos. The tradition lays down rules but at the same time allows for inclusions, insertions, modifications and rearticulations. There are no water-tight compartments or mathematical exactitude as with the 72 *Melakartha* of the South Indian classical system. The ideology of *Margi* vs *Desi* reiterates itself – the classical vs the folk, the serious vs the light, the sacred vs the secular, the large vs the small are all articulated with technical justifications and bolstering. But the history of practice, whether old or new, points in a different direction. The presence of many tribal or folk *ragas*, for instance *Bhairava, Pahari* and *Bhatiyar,* indicate that the compartments are not water-tight. Movements do take place. Contemporary exponents tell us that once *Bhairavi* was large, but now it has become small (Raja, 2016). Over history, *raga* genders have changed – examples, *Vangala-Vangali, Basant-Basanti, Gauda-Gaudi* (Gangoly, 1935).

An attempt to link personhood to the size of the *raga*, at a theoretical level as well as classification of individual *ragas* doesn't indicate any clear connection. However, this is a fairly confusing area. If one closely examines the Thumri and *Dhun* traditions[13], the most popular of *ragas, Pilu, Pahadi, Bhairavi, Kafi, Khamaj*, and *Jogia*, are both male and female. Yet the emotions explored are mostly erotic, and often performed by female singers with poetry that is expressive of feminine wiles. Thus, a strong thread of masculine-feminine, primal-derivative is no longer a strong force in contemporary practice.

Apparently, lower tetrachords are linked to longer *ragas*. At the same time, we are told that where tetrachord constraints are not there, because the whole range of the scale can be used, *ragas* are *bade*. This makes sense. But the association of lower tetrachord, on closer looks indicates a cluster of features, that act as confounding variables. For example, *ragas* in lower tetrachords are also slow in tempo and use non-linear progression. Both can delay the duration of the *raga* and make it longer. In

other words, two key concepts emerge. The persona of the *raga*, its inherent personality, embeds lower tetrachord, low, slow notes and non-linear progression make the *raga* slow, reflective, serious. However, it also holds the possibility that if at any point of time, the *raga* is favoured for light repertoire, and is introduced into, say *Thumri*, the character of the *raga* would need to change, it may still play in lower tetrachord and yet become *chote* in nature. These underlying possibilities exist and they are reflected amply in case of *Bhairavi* and other such *ragas*.

This brings us to the concept of *Gharanas* and *Dhun ragas. Gharanas*[14], or cultural musical families are localized, stylized with distinct mannerisms. What is important for our discussion is that each *Gharana* has its own favourite *ragas*, and often based on their predications and treatment, the same *raga* can be treated as *bade* or *chote* in different *Gharanas*. For example, *raga Hameer* (in *Gwalior gharana*) (Parrikar) and *Nat Kamod* (in *Jaipur gharana*) ("Mallikarjun Mansur Raga Nat Kamod," 00:00–29:25; "Raga Nat Kamod | Vidushi Manjiri Asnare Kelkar | Newar Bajo Re & Sachi Kaho," 00:00–22:55;) are considered as *bade* where the *raga* is elaborated on the basis of phrases; progression is not sequential from lower octave to higher octave focussing on each important note of the *raga* – it is rather flexible, the *laya* (tempo) of *tala* (rhythm) of the *bada khayal* is not *ati-vilambit* (extremely slow) but *vilambit-madhya* (moderately slow / slightly slower than medium). The *talas* (rhythms) used are also suitable for the tempo they prefer such as *Tilwada, Jhumra, Adachautala* (in *Gwalior gharana*) or *Teentala, Jhaptala* or *Roopak* (in *Jaipur gharana*). When these *ragas* are rendered by other *gharana* artists ("Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty Pandit Samar Saha Raga: Hameer- Patdeep- Bageshree," 31:00–32:00, 51:00–52:00) or when examined by the theoreticians, they find that these *ragas* have limited scope for elaboration (Raja, 2016) thus they are *chote*. This indicates that beyond structural features, non-musical socio-cultural components have the ability to range, scope and duration of a *raga*.

Dhun ragas is a much more complex area. *Dhun* refers to the light treatment of a *raga*. Favoured more by instrumentalists, it allows for improvisations, use of grace notes or touch notes and phrases that are not necessarily a part of that *raga*. A brief historical exploration suggests that *Dhun ragas* are very popular, and in the process of a *raga* being exposed to *dhun* treatment, and gaining popularity, it may over time lose its credibility as a *Khayal raga* and over time, may be dropped or treated with shorter exposition in *Khayals*. Thus, ironically, the popularity of a *raga* may excommunicate it from *Khayal* or *Dhrupad* repertoire and make it a short *raga* over time such as Bhairavi[15]. This is linked to the concept of *Prachalit/Aprachalit ragas* in *Khayal* format where over time, there are many examples of *ragas* that were not obscure but over the last few decades have become popular and *bade* with fairly large elaboration, for example, *Kalavati, Narayani, Ahir Bhairav*, and *Bhinna Shadja* (Patki, 1971). *Janak ragas*, as we have seen historically, have changed regularly. Between the earliest examples in *Sangeeta Makaranda* to the colonial consolidation in Bhatkhande's (1934) *thaat* tradition of key *ragas*/modes, there is hardly a *raga* that has remined constants.

It all finally comes down to performance. Traditions are created on the basis of performance and codified practices. HCM embeds both stability and scope for improvisation and change within rules that govern the exposition of a *raga*. It is this which makes the classification of *bade-chote ragas* and the discovery of underlying principles so difficulty. Rules do exist, but they can always me interpreted. We did discover relationships between structural features and the expository capacity and duration of *ragas*. But interestingly, they can always be changed. A preliminary exploration of four pairs or *bade* and *chote ragas* using multiple renditions[16] – both vocal and instrumental – suggests that the number of rhythm cycles and notes used in both categories do not show significant difference. What is different is the tempo and the duration of standing notes and *chalans*. Add to any *raga* an elaborate *alaap* and *vilambit gat* and change the tempo and the beat patterns and it can become a *bade raga*! All the other structural parameters can be discarded!

This is best illustrated when one compares the performance techniques used differently for the same *raga* (*Desh, Tilak Kamod, Bhairavi, Meera Bai ki Malhar, Maru Bihag*)[17] but sung in different styles, say, *Khayal* and *Thumri*. The differences are found in the duration of standing notes, *alamkaras* used, use or no (minimal) use of *alaap* and *vilambit* gat, etc.

This brings us back to the notion of personhood again. While moods can change in short bursts, personalities are stable traits. They are what make a person – here *raga* – recognizable. Personalities – recurring patterns of behaviour – are linked to identities. Identities have histories, socio-cultural affinities, status, power (or the lack of it), gender, lineage, affinities. Whether a *raga* is *bade* or *chote* is determined by all these. Our preliminary research suggests that whether a *raga* is *bade* or *chote* is determined not only by rules or structural features, but by the whole history of the personhood of a *raga*. And over time, with change in musical culture and non-musical forces, personhood can also change.

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Notes

[1] A recent paper on Western classical music points to hegemonic tendencies due to implicit beliefs and practices in cultural institutions of classical music, Ayerst, 2021.

[2] Gendered perception of music is found to be based on stereotypes of masculinity and feminity embedded in listeners" psyche. Sergeant and Himonides, 2016.

[3] In terms of primary and derivative *ragas*.

[4] Matanga's *Brihadesi* has a chapter on *ragas*, in the sense it is used today. *Kukubha* figures as a major melody here, but is later pushed to the status of minor *ragini*. The same is the case for *Bhairav* which is yet to come into existence at this point (Gangoly, 1935). Velaulli, a tribal melody at this point, is later Sanskritized and becomes a major mode (*thaat*) transformed into *Bilaval* (Gangoly, 2017, 21). This is also indicative of the ways that the status of the *ragas* shifted over time. *Sangita Makaranda* of Narada (5th CE to 11th CE?) for the first time makes a distinction between *ragas* (male) and *raginis* (female) (Gangoly, 1935, 22).

[5] For various kinds of classifications, see *A Historical Study of Indian Music*. Swami Prajnananda. Calcutta: Anandadhara Prakashan,1965.

[6] Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty, eminent vocalist, for one, refers to the extortionary range of *ragas* frequently during his conversations or demonstrations of *ragas* (Chakraborty 04:40–06:20)

[7] For Khayal and Dhrupad, mostly *bade ragas* are preferred, while for *Thumri* or *Tappa* (light modes) *chote ragas* are preferred. Some *ragas* are performed in both contexts.

[8] Here as well contradictions exist. While *Hamsadhwani* is considered big, *Shivranjani* is never played as a *Khayal* and mostly favoured in film music.

[9] Another set of theorists suggest that where no specific tetrachord is favoured, *ragas* are big.

[10] Very much like the tradition of *Desi* and *Margi*.

[11] Pandit Ajoy Chakrabarty discards this concept. However, the case of limited phrase-dominant *ragas*, such as *Hameer* and *Chaya Nat*, are problematic since they are often treated as belonging to the ambiguous category of being performed in both large and small format, and yet experienced performers often prefer the shorter repertoire.

[12] The classification of the *ragas* into *bade-chote*, and the listing of the key features of the *ragas*, namely *raga* tempo, gender, tetrachord dominance, prescribed time of performance, emotions and categories was done on the basis of both oral tradition and the following books (Tagore, 1884; Begum, 1942; Daniélou, 1954; Patwardhan, 1968; Thakur, 2012)

[13] Here, it is used in its generic use to include *Dadra, Hora, Kajari, Jhoola* and other light forms as well.

[14] A system of social organisation in the Indian subcontinent, linking musicians or dancers by lineage or apprenticeship, and more importantly by adherence to a particular musical style (Wikipedia).

[15] "In the 1930s, Bhatkhande observed (Bhatkhande Sangeet Shastra Vol. 4, 2nd edn., 1970, p.610), that Bhairavi possesses insufficient profundity to support the more formal formats of raga presentation. As

evidence, he cites the fact that, although compositions of Bhairavi are found in all other genres of HM, it is difficult to find slow-tempo *khayals* in this raga. This observation is perhaps more valid today because Bhairavi has, by now, become a light *raga* comparable to *Pilu* or *Khamaj*, especially in vocal music. In instrumental music, however, the *raga* still delivers a considerable diversity of interpretations and presentation formats, than Bhatkhande probably encountered (Raja, 1916).

[16] A work currently under preparation.

[17] Here, *Mira Bai ki Malhar* and *Maru Bihag* are considered *bade*, and *Desh*, *Tilak Kamod* are considered *chote*, and *Bhairavi* is treated with ambiguity. However, the same *ragas* can become *bade* or *chote* based on their use in the two traditions – *Khayal* and *Thumri* ("Bhairavi – 1 Hour with Pandit Ajoy Chakraborty | Sagarika Classical," 00:00:00 – 01:13:16; "*Meher Paralikar* at Malhar Festival 2019 – *Raga Mirabai ki Malhar*" 00:00:00 –00:47:24; "Naiya Padi Majdhar – *Thumri Mishra Bhairavi* Shobha Gurtu [Full Song] I Prem Ras," 00:00:00 –00:12:17; "*Thumri Meerabhai ki Malhar* | Pt. Ajoy Chakraborty |Hindustani Classical Vocal Komal Nishad| Part 5/6," 00:00:00 – 00:21:11); "Dr. Prabha Atre || SwaraArpan – 7 || *raag Mishra Maaru Bihaag* – *Thumri*," 00:00:00– 00:18:16, 00:00:00– 00:20:37); "Smt. Kaushiki Chakraborty | Raag Maru Bihag," 00:00:00–01:00:32; "*Thumri More Saiyan in Raag Maru Bihag*," 00:00:00–00:15:21).

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