



A Brief History of Musical Time

— Padma Sugavanam

“The only reason for time, is so that everything doesn’t happen at once.”

- Albert Einstein

INTRODUCTION:

Time is considered to be one of the four dimensions of the universe. There is no existence as we know it, no action, divorced from an associated passage of time. The concept of time has been discussed extensively in *Śāstra* literature, both individually and in conjunction with other concepts such as space (like in the concept of *deśa-kāla-nimitta*, i. e. space-time-causation, the three conditioning *upādhi*-s of the human mind). In the context of the performing arts of music and dance too, time is a central concept - and time-related considerations are an integral part of aesthetic principles. And therefore, it is natural that, since the earliest *lakṣaṇagrantha*-s available (like the *Nāṭyaśāstra* (NS) or *Dattilam*), the concept of time, the way it is visualised from the perspective of music and dance, have been discussed in good detail.

This paper is an attempt to explore and analyse the way time - the abstract entity - has been understood in ancient *grantha*-s on the performing arts, the way this understanding was translated when put in the specific context of *nāṭya* (music, dance and drama), the evolution of this concept over the centuries, and the role that the *Sanḡītaratnākara* (SR) played in this gradual evolution. The focus is on the ‘idea’ or how these concepts were perceived, and how they changed over time.

SR is widely accepted as being a ‘link’ between the musicological concepts prevalent in ancient times, and those that came into vogue in the medieval and modern periods. While Śārṅgadēva (SD) himself gleaned much

of his knowledge of musical concepts mentioned in earlier *grantha*-s, from Abhinavagupta, most later authors, in turn, referred to the *SR* to understand the perspectives of preceding times. This paper will also attempt to examine the position of *SR*, in this role, from the point of view of the philosophy and musicology of musical time.

The concepts that are taken up for examination are *Kāla*, *Laya* and *Tāla*.

- (i) *Kāla* is seen to be used in two senses. One, as absolute time and the other, in a more restricted technical sense, as specific units of measurement of musical time.
- (ii) *Tāla* is time put into the context of music or dance, measured and expressed through various actions of the hand etc. *Tāla* is the temporal measure of music, although this unit is not absolute or fixed.
- (iii) *Laya*, too, is seen to be used in two senses. One, as the void or gap between two *kriyās* (actions). In another sense, it denotes the tempo of the rhythm of music – the second sense being a direct offspring of the first. It is notable that in later musicological texts, *laya* has almost been equated to *tāla*, since its predominant meaning became that of denoting the tempo.

These central concepts of musical time, have evolved in their meanings and usages, from ancient times to medieval and modern times. These are examined under three broad heads –

1. Concepts in the ancient *lakṣaṇagrantha*-s. These would include pre-*SR* works such as the *NŚ*, *Dattilam*, *Bṛhaddēśī*, *Mānasollāsa*, *Saṅgītacūḍāmaṇi*, *Abhinavabhāratī* (*AB*) and *Saṅgītasamayasa*.
2. Concepts found in *SR* and its commentaries
3. Concepts in medieval and later *lakṣaṇagrantha*-s such as *Saṅgītamakaranda*, *Saṅgītasūryodaya*, *Saṅgītanārāyaṇa* and an unpublished work on

Tāla - *Tālakalābdhi* of Acyutarāya (*AR*). This covers works up to 16/17 CE, the period when the concept of *Tāla-daśa-prāṇa*-s (*TDP*) became very prominent.

KĀLA AND TĀLA – KEY REFERENCES IN THE ANCIENT TEXTS

Bharata, the earliest available author on the performing arts gives a holistic definition of *tāla*. In the very opening of the 31st chapter of the *NŚ*, he starts describing the different aspects of *tāla* in the context of *Ghana vādyā*-s. He says

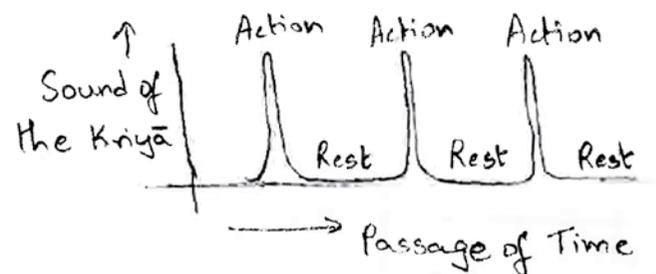
वाद्यं तु यद्यद्यन प्रोक्तं कलापातलयान्वितम् ।

कालस्तस्य प्रमाणं हि विज्ञेयं तालयोगतः ॥

(NŚ. 31. 1)

The instrument / playing called ghana has Time as its subject (lit. measure), conceived of as Tāla, articulated in terms of kalā, pāta and laya. (Rāmanāthan, Hema:2012:3)

According to Bharata, musical time (*tāla*) is the *summum bonum* of *kalā*, *pāta* and *laya*. *Kalā* means a part of a whole. In a more technical sense, it refers to all the *Niḥśabda kriyā*-s such as *āvāpa* etc. *Pāta*, which literally means falling (here - of the hand, or the cymbal), indicates all the *śaśabda kriyā*-s. So *kalā* and *pāta* would both come under the head – ‘action’. *Laya*, on the other hand, is the period of non-action (gap) between one *kriyā* and the next. So, very simply put, Bharata envisioned musical time (*tāla*) as a sequence of alternating action and rest.



Tāla as alternating sequence of action and rest

Regarding time in a more general sense (*kāla*), Bharata does not get into much detail. He stops with saying that time is the subject of *tāla*. He seems to be concerned only with that time, which is applied/used in *nāṭya* (music, dance and drama).

Lakṣaṇagrantha-s are generally written in a terse style. It is the commentaries, that often open the doors of broader ideas and possibilities that lie embedded within the succinct words of the *lakṣaṇakāra*. In the case of *nāṭya* literature, we have a master commentator in Abhinavagupta, a polymath, who brought his knowledge in several disciplines together to throw light on many intricate nuances found in Bharata and other ancient authorities, and in addition, also gave a wealth of information that was current at his times.

On the subject of both *kāla* and *tāla*, Abhinava has interesting perspectives and insights to offer. He starts a discussion by citing a particular view, which makes a distinction between *tāla* as an action, and *tāla* perceived as time.

अत्र क्रिया च तालः कालो वा ताल इत्याक्षिप्य
गान्धर्वनाट्यभेदेन यो विषयविभागः कृतः स
तुच्छ इत्यस्मभ्यं न रोचते।

*Atra kriyā ca tālaḥ kālo vā tāla ityākṣipyā
gāndharva-nāṭya-bhedena yo viṣaya-vibhagaḥ kṛtaḥ
sa tuccha ityasmabhyam na rocate.*

(Kavi, Pade:1964:151:3)

He alludes to a distinction made by some earlier writers – ‘action as *tāla*’ or ‘time as *tāla*’, made on the basis of *gāndharva* and *gāna*. He does not agree with such a distinction being made, as he believes that time cannot be perceived as being separated from action. Time is that, which is the cause of distinction between different actions – this is the explanation that Abhinava gives to time. He also says that the division, by itself, is also an action.

न कालः क्रियाव्यतिरेकः अपितु सर्वेषां परिच्छेदहेतुः
काल इत्युच्यते। परिच्छेदश्च क्रियैव।

(Kavi, Pade: 1964 :151 :4)

*Na kālaḥ kriyā-vyatirekaḥ apitu sarveṣāṃ
pariccheda-hetuḥ kāla ityucyate. Paricchedaśca
kriyaiva.*

*Time does not stand apart from action, but it is
time that is recognised as the cause of division between
all (events). And division is but action. (Ramanathan
Hema : 2012: 5)*

This thought process of Abhinava’s, bears the stamp of the *Pratyabhijñā* school of philosophy (also known as ‘Kashmir Śaivism’) to which he belonged. Utpaladeva, one of the foremost philosophers of Kashmir śaivism, in his seminal text *Īśvara-pratyabhijñā kārikā (IPK)*, brings out the same idea. He speaks of a ‘*kāla-krama*’ (sequence of time). Here, the metaphors are always related to Lord Śiva, who is the central deity in this school. The following citation, found in the *kriyādhikāra*, brings out this point.

मूर्तिवैचित्र्यतो देशक्रममाभासयत्यसौ।

क्रियावैचित्र्यनिर्भासात्कालक्रममपीश्वरः॥

(IPK 2. 1. 5)

Mūrti-vaicitryato deśakramam-ābhāsayatyasau

Kriyā-vaicitrya-nirbhāsāt-kālakramamapīśvaraḥ

*The Lord being all powerful, manifests spacial
sequence by creating wonderful variety in the forms
of creation, and He also brings about time sequence by
manifesting variations in actions. (Pandit:2004:10)*

Abhinava, who has also written a commentary on the *IPK*, called *Vimarśinī*, further explains that the whole concept of time is of no relevance in the ‘outer world’. Time and its related divisions are created by the human mind, and this is done in order to put actions into perspective. He says that outside of this world, time is imaginary. A similar thought is seen in the *Viṣṇu purāṇa* where time is

said to have no role to play in *Vaikuṅṭha* (कालं स पचते तत्र न कालस्त्र वै प्रभुः).

The thought process of Abhinava and other philosophers belonging to the *Pratyabhijñā* school, appear to be very strongly inspired by the grammarians, for their ideas on time. In fact, this very idea is propounded by Bhartr̥hari in his exhaustive chapter on time – *kālasamuddeśa*, in his work *Vākyapadīya*. He says that it is time that creates the perception of the universe having a sequence in actions and forms, where as in reality, the world is actually without sequence.

निर्भासोपगमो योज्यं क्रमवान् इव दृश्यते।
अक्रमस्यापि विश्वस्य तत् कालस्य विचेष्टितम्।

(Vākyapadīya 3. 9. 46)

Nirbhāsopagamo yo'yam kramavān iva dr̥śyate
Akramasyāpi viśvasya tat kālasya viceṣṭitam

It is the effect of time that the apparition of the universe, in reality sequence-less, is perceived as if possessing sequence. (Sarma :1972:73)

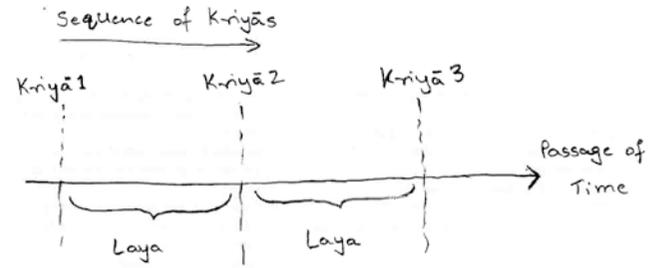
Bhartr̥hari also states that activity is so entwined with time, that time could metaphorically be believed to be activity itself. (काल एव हि विश्वात्मा व्यापार इति कथ्यते- *Vākyapadīya* 3. 9. 12).

When put into the context of music/dance, what would such *vyāpāra* refer to? The different actions of the hands such as *samyā*, *āvāpa*, *coṭikā* etc., have been described by Bharata. These are reckoned in different ways, and when they come together as a predetermined sequence, it is called *tāla*.

Having established actions to be the basic building blocks of *tāla*, the next important concept in this connection, is *laya*. Towards the end of the 31st chapter of the *NŚ*, Bharata takes up the subject of *tāla* for a second time¹. Here he explains *tāla* as

1 In the beginning of Ch 31, Bharata speaks of *laya* in direct relation to *tāla*. In the end of Ch 31, he speaks of *laya* in

having the three features of *yati*, *pāṇi* and *laya*². Abhinava explains the nature of *laya*, and defines it as the period of rest between two syllables that are uttered, or that between two *kalā*-s. Every action in sequence, such as the uttering of two syllables by the same mouth, or the reckoning of two *kriyā*-s, has a beginning and an end. And between every action and the next in such a sequence, there has to be a gap, however infinitesimal that gap may be. This gap, or period of rest, is called *laya*.



Lāya as gap between Kriyās

In the context of musical time, the actions/*kriyā*-s are instantaneous actions such as striking of the palm, snapping of fingers, waving the hand, striking of the *kāṁsyatāla* etc. It is *laya* which has a duration. The *kriyā* is instantaneous. Consequently, it is only this period of rest that determines the tempo of the *tāla*, the measure of the duration of time. For example, the greater the *viśrānti*, the slower the tempo. With this as the basis, the *NŚ* talks of three kinds of *laya* – *druta*, *madhya* and *vilambita*.

In the work titled *Sarasvatihṛdayālankārahāra* (*Bharatabhāṣya*), (written just about a century after AB and a century prior to SR), Nānyadeva (1097-1154 CE), in addition to technical information, also speaks of time in a more general sense, as indicating what is past, present etc. He also says that no one or no thing, can escape the force of

connection with *pada*. Nevertheless, the force behind the concept is the same.

2 *Yati*, *pāṇi* and *laya* can be temporal features even without *tāla* too, as part of the melodic line manifested through *pada*.

time.³ Pārśvadeva, in his *Saṅgītasamayāsāra*, speaks of *tāla* and *laya* being the same. He also makes an interesting mention of *tāla* as being twofold-*hastagā* and *manoḡā* - One using the hand gestures to measure time and one not having actions, but mentally keeping measure of time⁴.

Other works – pre-NŚ ones like *Dattīlam*, as well as post- AB works such as *Mānasollāsa* of king Someśvara, *Saṅgītacūḍāmaṇi* of Jagadekamalla, also deal with these subjects, but they are mostly in line with what was said by Bharata.

KĀLA AND TĀLA – ŚĀRṄGADĒVA'S TREATMENT IN THE SR

SD's approach in general, to all the areas of music and dance that he has covered in the SR, is to summarise the concepts in prevalence in the past, and also to present his opinions and *siddhānta* on some topics, in a succinct and brief way. In presentation of material from earlier times, he seems to have very closely followed Bharata, and more importantly, Abhinava's expositions on various subjects.

SD starts off the *Tālādhyāya* by defining the term *tāla*, and describing it as the *ādhāra* – foundation or *terra firma* on which *gīta*, *vādyā* as well as *ṅṛtta* are established. According to him, *tāla* is, in the context of music and dance, that which represents time. But how is this musical time related to time in general? SD says –

कालो लघ्वादि मितया क्रियया सम्मितो मितिम्।

गीतादेर्विदधत्तालः,॥ (SR 5. 3 ac)

*Kālo laghvādi mitayā kriyayā sammito mitim
gītāder-vidadhat-tālaḥ.*

3 कालः सृजति भूतानि कालः संहरते प्रजाः। कालः सुप्तेषु जागर्ति कालो हि दुरतिक्रमः॥ (Desai :1961:22)

4 मनोगा हस्तगा चास्य द्विविधा मानकल्पना SSS. 10. 6ab

As in the case of Bharata, SD does not get into defining *kāla* or abstract time, but highlights its correlation with musical time- *tāla*. He says that - *Tāla* is that time, which is measured by the durations of *laghu*, *guru* and other *kriyā*-s, and which establishes the foundation of *gīta*, *vādyā* and *ṅṛtta*. In fact, SD has visualised *tāla* as a *kāla-khaṇḍa*. A similar thought process is seen in the thoughts of the *naiyyāyika*-s, who speak of *akhaṇḍa-kāla* (absolute/ undivided time) and *sakhaṇḍa-kāla* (time which is divided).

- Through his definition of *tāla*, the facets that SD brings out are:
- *Tāla* – a means of measuring time (*pramāṇa*)
- Its main components being *kriyā*-s (*laghu*, *guru*, *pluta* etc.)
- In the specific context of *saṅgīta*

On a comparison with Bharata's definition, conceptually, the two definitions appear to be identical. But, on closer examination, some points stand out.

- a. Bharata's connecting *tāla* inextricably with the *Ghana vādyā*
- b. Bharata's use of the term *laya* and the absence of the same in SD's definition
- c. Bharata's inclusion of the dramatic element, while SD only mentioning music, drumming and dance

The most interesting among the above, is (b). Why has SD left out/omitted the concept of *laya* while defining *tāla*? The concept of *tāla* as being a composite unit consisting of actions and rests, gives a completeness to the idea of *tāla*. And there is enough internal evidence to prove that SD had very closely followed Abhinava in explaining many concepts. Then why would SD choose to omit *laya* in his definition?

SD was neither unaware, nor disinclined, towards the idea of *laya*. Because later in the

tālādhyāya, he does devote some time to explaining the same⁵. N Ramanathan (1999:81) explains that action and rest are only meaningful in relation to one another. Therefore, SD perhaps did not see the need to mention *laya* separately in his definition. Abhinavagupta too, brings out this point about *laya*, when he says - 'कलाया एव च लयं विना न स्वरूपलाभो लय एव हि ताल'. He points out that without periods of rest, an action cannot have any practical form. So, in a sense, *laya* can be thought of, as *tāla* itself.

When SD, later on in the *tālādhyāya*, does deal with *laya*, he defines *laya*, very much in line with the view of Bharata – when he says क्रियान्तरविश्रान्तिर्लयः (SR 5. 44ab), which means that *laya* is the rest after a *kriyā*. More simply put, it is the tempo of the *tāla*. He then goes on to describe the different types of *laya* (tempos). Thus, though SD recognises the concept of *laya* and actually expounds it, he deems it necessary to do so only in the context of determining the tempo, and not while painting the larger picture of musical time.

Could this shift of definition, point to a change in the way the whole concept of *laya* was perceived? Technical terms can evolve to assume different meanings, different connotations at different points in time. It is also possible for a certain term which is contextually used in more than one sense, to, in course of time, assume any of its multiple meanings as its primary meaning - thereby fading out what was in earlier times, its primary sense. For example, the term '*dhruva*', in the times of SR, could refer to a *kriyā*, or a *mārga*, or a kind of *sālagasūda*, etc. Today, the term *dhruva* refers to a kind of *tāla* with a specific arrangement of *anga*-s. In this manner, could it be, that the term *laya* was assuming the connotation of tempo with more primacy (mainly due to the fact that many authors identified *laya* and *tāla* as being the same),

and therefore, SD and later authors as well, chose not to include the concept of *visrānti/laya* in their fundamental definitions of *tāla*?

Another interesting style adopted by SD while defining many technical terms, is that he provides the etymological derivation of the word as well. This adds force to the technical definition, by providing a deeper perspective of the term. This was also very likely, an inspiration from Abhinava who gives the *nirukta* for many technical terms. Regarding the terms under discussion, namely *kāla*, *tāla*, and *laya* as well, some interesting etymologies are seen.

SD commences the *tālādhyāya* with the *nirukta* of the term *tāla*, before he proceeds to define it. He says –

तालस्तलप्रतिष्ठायामिति धातोर्घञि स्मृतः।

गीतं वाद्यं तथा नृत्तं यतस्ताले प्रतिष्ठितम्॥⁶

(SR 5. 2)

Kallinātha further elaborates on this verse and says that, by the *Aṣṭādhyāyī sūtra*-s – पदरुजविशस्पृशो घञ् (3. 3. 16) and अकर्तरि च कारके संज्ञायाम् (3. 3. 19) – the word *tāla* gets the meaning of *adhikaraṇa* on application of the suffix घञ्. This being the case, the purport of SD's verse is that the word '*tāla*' is derived from the root '*tala*', used in the sense of *pratiṣṭhā* (establishing). The reason for using such a root is that, music, drumming and dance are all established on the substratum of *tāla*. Abhinavagupta also notes this fact.⁷ In addition, he also brings in another possible interpretation at this point - that the word *tala*, could mean the palm of the hand. Since *tāla* is reckoned by different

⁶ Trans : The word *tāla* is derived from the root '*tala*' and has the '*ghañ*' suffix. It is used in the sense of establishing/ fixing because music, drumming and dance, all have *tāla* as their foundation.

⁷ तत एवाह - तल प्रतिष्ठकरण इति।

(Rāmanāthan, Hema: 1964:151:10)

⁵ क्रियान्तरविश्रान्तिर्लयः स त्रिविधो मतः। SR 5. 44

actions of the hand, the derivation – तले भव (Kavi, Pade :1964:152:8) -would be equally meaningful.

The grammarians speak of the term *kāla* being derived from the root 'kal' which could mean to throw, to cast forth, to sound, to go etc. The word 'kalanā' denotes a progressive manifestation of the supreme as sequences of space and time. Abhinava also echoes these thoughts while commenting on the *IPK*. But there is no mention of an etymological derivation, in the text of *AB*.

SD does not mention a *nirukta* for the terms *laya* or *kāla*. But we do find mention of the etymology of *laya* in *AB*. Abhinava says that the word is derived from the *dhātu - līñ śleṣaṇe*, meaning to cling on to, to embrace, to cover etc. This *nirukta* renders the term *laya* with an even more appropriate connotation - the period of rest is metaphorically speaking, clinging to the *kriyā*-s. The root *līñ* proffers a heightened sense of proximity between action and rest, thus bringing out their *avinābhāva sambandha* or *anyonya* very clearly.

KĀLA AND TĀLA FROM POST- SR LAKŚAṆAGRANTHA-S

The centuries after the *SR*, saw a slow evolution of various concepts relating to *tāla*. Post-*SR* works like *Saṅgītarāja* of Mahārāṇā Kumbhā (1433-1468 CE), *Saṅgītaḍāmodara* of Śubhaṅkara (15 CE), *Saṅgītamakaranda* of Nārada⁸ (15-16 CE), *Saṅgītasūryodaya* of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa (16 CE), *Saṅgītanārāyaṇa* of Puruṣottama Miśrā (17 CE), *Rāgatālacintāmaṇi* of Polūri Govinda Kavi (Late 17th CE) etc. contain much interesting information on *tāla*.

An important landmark in the evolution of the concept of *tāla* in the post-*SR* period, is the development of the concept of *sūlādi tālas* and

later, *TDP* as the primary rhythmological theory. The *TDP*-s took shape around the 15-16 CE and brought out a number of texts that were dedicated just to the exposition of *tāla* and the *TDP*-s⁹. Such a practice of composing works, entirely on the subject of *tāla*, was not in practice in earlier times. Many of these *grantha*-s are still in manuscript form. One of these- *Tālakalābdhi* (*TK*) of *AR* (1530-1543 CE), will be taken up for a closer study.

SR was a very influential text that wielded an immense influence over musicology, for centuries to come. Many of the *grantha*-s that came out after *SD*, followed in his footsteps to a large extent.

- *Kāla* - Most post-*SR* works dive straight into the units of measuring time such as *kṣaṇa*, *lava*, *kāṣṭha* etc., and do not delve into the meaning and import of *kāla* itself. Defining units of measurement of time, has been done since the time of Bharata himself. *SD* onwards, authors do not concern themselves with abstraction, or any other facets of *kāla*. With time, it seems that *kāla* has assumed the primary meaning of representing many units to measure time.
- The concept of *laya* too has remained quite the same. The meaning of 'क्रियानन्तरविश्रान्ति', which in turn determines the tempo of a *tāla* is still the primary meaning of *laya*. Interestingly, one *lakṣaṇagrantha* uses the term *laya* in the sphere of melodic music. In his work *Saṅgītaḍāmodara*, Śubhaṅkara mentions three kinds of *laya*-s viz. *hr̥ḍi sthitiḥ*, *kaṇṭha sthitiḥ* and *kapāla sthitiḥ*. After Bharata and Abhinava, this is probably one of the rare instances where the author uses the term *laya* in the context of *gīta*, not in *tāla*. The point he makes here is that, music is halted or paused in three different *sthāna*-s or parts of the body.

⁸ Nārada, according to some schools belongs to approx. 10 CE. But the author believes that this text is more likely to have been written around 15-16 CE

⁹ In his book on *TDP*, titled *TK*, Acyutarāya mentions twelve different works, (most of them unavailable today) that deal with the different aspects of the *TDP*-s.

- About *tāla*, later works such as *Saṅgītanārāyaṇa* do away with definitions of *tāla*, and straight away explain the *anga*-s etc. The most singular conception of *tāla*, found in post-SR works is in the *Rāgatālacintāmaṇi* of Polūri Govinda Kavi. In his work, he gives many interpretations to the word *tāla*, including *āgamic* ones. Later, he says that '*Tauryatrika (gīta, vādyā and nṛtta)* is in the form of *tāla*, this *tāla* is in the form of *nāda*, and *nāda* is *brahman*. One who understands this is truly knowledgeable¹⁰'. The idea of how *tāla* is to be perceived as *nāda*, in a non-esoteric sense, is quite baffling. It is common in Indian literary culture, to connect any field of art practice to the divine, as a way of showing respect to the field of study. But even that being said, this comparison or metaphor is difficult to rationalise.

As mentioned earlier, a good number of *lakṣaṇagrantha*-s with special focus on the *tāla* aspect - in particular the *TDP*-s - came out around 15-16 CE onwards. Some of them include *TK*, *Svaratālādīlakṣaṇam*, *Tāladīpikā*, *Tālakalāvīlāsam*, *Arjunabharatam* etc. Arati Rao (ITC-SRA: 2013) says that, *Tāladīpikā* is the earliest work to put the ten *prāṇa*-s together and deal with it as a composite theory describing *tāla*. But one of the most interesting works on this subject is Vijayanagara king, AR's¹¹ *TK*. This work brings together the collective thought of many authors, provides citations and also gives a *siddhānta* of the author on many of the topics. The author has studied, analysed and evaluated the views of many contemporary and earlier authorities on the

subject. This work deals entirely with the *TDP*-s and has quite a few new ideas.

AR ON TĀLA AND KĀLA



Acuytarāya and his queen

The initial part of this work has a detailed exposition on *Tāla*. Various interpretations are offered to bring out the different facets of this subject.

- For instance, on the etymology of the word *tāla* - since ancient period, the word *tāla* is said to be derived from the root '*tala*'- to establish (*pratiṣṭhā*). But AR, in addition to this traditional definition, also gives the following as an alternate interpretation.

तल्यन्ते¹² प्रकाश्यन्ते नृत्तगीतवाद्यानि येनेति वा तालः

Here AR interprets *tāla* to mean - that which throws light upon *gīta*, *vādyā* and *nṛtta*. In other words, that which illuminates, renders bright, makes clear etc. Such an interpretation is not seen in earlier texts.

10 *Tālasvarūpamāi tauryatrikam boppu*
Tālambu nādamaī tanaru cuṇḍu
Nādambe brahmamāi nayamoppa gāvuna
Brahmasvarūpamāi paraginattī
Tāla tattva meringi tauryatrikamunandu
Vartiṅcunataḍu tatvajñūḍiṭlu.... (RTC 5. 55)

11 Acuytarāya (1530-1543 CE) was the younger brother of King Krishnadevaraya of the Vijayanagara empire and also succeeded him on the throne.

12 Could the reading be तल्यन्ते ?



"Manuscript of TK, GOML D12992"

- (ii) AR says that if *tāla* is time, then how can *tāla* also be called a prana?¹³ Essentially, the question is that, how can the sub-set and the super-set be one and the same? Then, he provides the explanation that due to the difference in duration of *laghu*, *guru* etc. (one being smaller/larger than another), it would not be inappropriate to call these *kāla*. It is very interesting that AR discusses this problem. Not many other authors take it upon themselves.
- (iii) He also makes different *pūrvapakṣa* arguments on whether or not *tāla* is *nitya*¹⁴. Finally he presents his *siddhānta*, saying that *tāla* is indeed eternal, and justifies his conclusion by alluding to the 'vīcītarāṅga-nyāya'.¹⁵

13 तालः कालस्वरूपं श्रेत् कालः प्राणो न युज्यते।
अपि न्यूनादिभेदेन कालः प्राणः प्रकीर्तितः ॥
(Ms. D12992, Fol. 9, l. 5-6)

14 तालः कालो न नित्योऽसौ खण्डकालस्वरूपतः।
चलनात् कालसंबाधात् मितेर्जन्मादितोऽपि च॥
नाप्यनित्यस्स तालोऽयं प्रत्यभिज्ञाप्रमाणतः।
अनादिकालरूपत्वं नाशकस्याप्यभावतः॥
सृष्ट्यादि लयपर्यन्तं वर्तमानस्त्वतीन्द्रियः।
तालो नित्ये विनाशादि प्रत्ययः स्फूर्तिगोचरः॥
लघुप्लुतादिरूपोऽयमनित्यमिति गीयते।
उत्पत्तौ बाधकाभावान् (नोधियो) विषयान्तरम् ॥
(Ms. D12992, Fol. 9-12)

15 वीचीतरङ्गन्यायेन चोत्पत्तेर्ज्ञप्तिसंभवः।
(Ms. D12992, Fol 12, l. 13)

- (iv) AR also emphasises that though *tāla* is said to have ten 'prāṇa-s, this *prāṇa* is very much different from the 5 *prāṇa*-s that sustain human life. It is not of the form of *vāyu*. But nevertheless, since it infuses life, just as *prāṇa* does to the body, he justifies the use of the term *prāṇa* in relation to *tāla*.

The above account gives a good picture of how deeply and keenly AR has looked at *tāla*. What makes it all the more valuable, is that he is probably one of the few medieval authors to do this. It is common for *lakṣaṇagrantha*-s to recount the verses of earlier authors. AR does too, but with the difference that he actually debates the different arguments and then offers his own opinion at the end. One can see a commentary-like style in the *mūla* text itself.

On the subject of *kāla* though, he does not enter into any discussions. In a manner similar to many other *grantha*-s, he too directly moves on to give different units of time measurement such as *lava*, *kṣaṇa*, *kāṣṭha* etc. About *laya*, he connects the tempi to the *mārga* of the *tāla*. Though AR presents interesting arguments on the nature of *tāla*, he does

As soon as *āvartana* of a *tāla* ends, the next one begins instantaneously. And this cycle can go on without an end. This is being compared to the unending succession of waves in the ocean.

not enter into abstractions or metaphysics. In fact, he does not even discuss the inter-relationship of *laya* and *tāla*.

SUMMARY

There are 3 terms *kāla*, *tāla* and *laya*, that have been used to describe time. And all the three have had multiple interpretations.

Kāla has been interpreted as time in general, the cause for division of actions. *Lakṣaṇagrantha*-s also give various units of measuring time. SD says that *kāla*, is measured as *laghu*, *guru* etc. and also goes on to define these measures. A view of time as an abstract entity is rarely taken up by *lakṣaṇakāra*-s, most likely, for the simple reason that it was not directly related to the subject at hand. Nevertheless, Abhinava presents many perspectives on the abstraction of time as well. But SD, who for a large part followed Abhinava, did not take this thought forward. And neither did the later writers, who predominantly followed him (SD).

When abstract time, is placed in the context of *saṅgīta*, it is *tāla*. So, if *kāla* is thought of as the super-set, *tāla* could be a sub-set which is specific to the field of music and dance. This *tāla* is a sequence of action and rest. The actions mark the division of time and the rest measures the duration of the action. Both of these put together is *tāla*. SD adapts this prevalent definition and removes the part of rest (*laya*) from it. It is likely that he believed that actions and rests are inseparable, therefore the mention of one would automatically include the other. Later writers also followed suit. They treat *laya* as a separate unit, or even an independent *prāṇa*, and speak of it in the sense of tempo. Also, SD must have adopted the term *kriyā* from AB (*kriyā* is not seen in earlier works). Post -SR, almost all texts use either the same or a similar definition of *tāla*, and relate it to the term *kriyā*. So much so,

that *kriyā* is till date, used in this context, in the same connotation.

Looking at current practice, *kāla* has come to be used in the sense of speed (*oṅṅām kālam*, *reṅḍām kālam* etc.) in *karṇāṭaka* music. There is a very interesting distinction here. In earlier times, *laya* spoke of the time interval between two *kriyā*-s. Which means, the physical reckoning of the *kriyā*-s in *madhya-laya* would be faster than the reckoning of *kriyā*-s in the *vilambita laya*. This was how tempo was changed. But, today, the terms *oṅṅām kālam*, *reṅḍām kālam* etc. do not involve change in the speed in which *kriyā*-s are executed. In fact, the *kriyā*-s, and the *tāla* as such, remain unchanged. It is the rendering of the music that increases or decreases in speed. So essentially, the term *kāla* has moved from being a term that has to do with *tāla*, to one that has to do with the music/song.

Today, the term *tāla* would denote a cyclic unit of time, measured and reckoned by a specific sequence of actions. The measure of a certain number of *akṣara*-s and the inherence of *viśrānti* are also still very much a part of today's understanding of *tāla*. It is interesting to note that there have, in ancient times, been compositions (*gītaka*-s and *nirgīta*-s) where there was no cyclicity of *tāla*. Each section of the composition would be in a different *tāla*.

The term *laya* has, for most part, retained its general sense. Though this is generally the case with *lakṣaṇagrantha*-s, in the oral tradition and in current practice (in South India), another term – '*kālapramāṇa*' is used in the sense of tempo. The Hindustani music field still retains the term *laya* for expressing tempo (*vilambit lay*, *madhya lay*, *drut lay*), but in the practical/oral tradition of *Karṇāṭaka* music, *laya* has come to mean rhythm in general, and not tempo. *Laya* is also used in certain specific contexts to indicate things related to rhythmic/mathematic structures in *tāla* or in musical presentation as well. For ex. '*Laykārī*' in

the Hindustani, or ‘Laya-vyavahāram’ in *Karṇāṭaka* music – to indicate the complexities in rhythm related aspects etc.

Such a detailed study of the concepts of *kāla*, *tāla* and *laya*, has been possible only because of an unbroken textual tradition over the centuries. Referring to the SR’s contribution as a link between ancient texts and later perspectives of musicology, Premalatha Sharma speaks of the SR as a ‘*dehalī dīpa*’, i. e. a lamp on the threshold that serves to illuminate both the inside and the outside (in this case, that which illuminates the works of both earlier and later times).

It is fascinating to note a parallel between the way physicists’ conception of time has evolved – with Einstein and his theories of relativity being a link in that evolution – and the way perspectives on musical time have also evolved, with SR being a similar link. Physics has moved from the concept of absolute time, to the paradigm of relative time based on the frame of reference, and its relation to the speed of light. In the context of musical time, *kāla* has also transformed from being an unbounded concept of time, to relative measures of musical time – such as first *kālam*, second *kālam* – based on a frame of reference, in a similar way.

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About the writer :

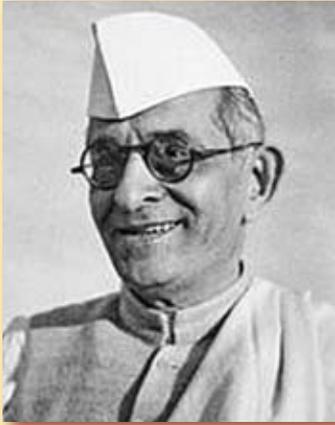


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Cultural Reintegration

The process of Cultural reintegration is like the process of nutrition which regenerates the living tissues from day to day. A student of culture first studies it and becomes a reception centre. He then absorbs its finest elements, if the culture is not alien. This makes him true to himself, his country and his culture. He, in the next stage, tries to live up to them under the conditions of age. As soon as he does this, he becomes an active centre of reintegration. He radiated the permanent values of his culture; and produces a healthy renaissance by establishing contact with alien influences.

He then grows rich in personality and dynamic effectiveness. And the culture passing through the crucible of the student's individual nature, will be an organic creation fresh with new life and tenacious and powerful with its ancient strength.

This is reintegration.

— Kulapati Dr. K. M. Munshi