

# THE ABHANGA - MUSICAL FORM USED IN HARIKATHA

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## SYNOPSIS

Abhangas have been composed by Thukāram, SamarthaRāmadās and Jnāneshwar. But however the Abhangas of Thukāram are most popular so much so that the form itself is associated with Saint Thukāram.

Abhangas are used both in Harikatha and Bhajana. Since these are soaked with Bhakthi and clothed in simple soul-stirring tunes, are also suitable to be rendered in music concerts and congregational singing. Abhangas can be grouped into two types on the basis of the nature of the Sahitya. There are Abhangas which are used in Harikatha-s in between a story describing an event connected with the story which could only be rendered in a particular Niroopana of the Harikatha. The other variety is a general one describing the greatness of Lord Vithoba which is purely devotional in its content and could be used in Harikathās, Bhajanas and elsewhere. The music is simple and the tune is repeated with slight embellishments and variations. Retaining the original melody the singer, according to his power of imagination, could introduce some variations to suit the devotional mood. To intensify the devotional fervor certain key-phrases are gradually rendered faster and faster, increasing the tempo which sounds very pleasant with the jingle of Jālar and the accompaniments and it slows down later gradually to its original tempo. This is a specialty in the general devotional Abhangas. There are no fixed tunes for the Abhangas. This may be the reason for the Abhanga 'SundarateDhyāna' for example, being heard in ragas like YamanKalyān, Multāni etc. Even in YamanKalyān, the tunes heard are many and are rendered in different tempos.

The Abhangas are in Marathi language pertaining to the Abhanga metre. This paper will deal with the various types of Abhangas with regard to the lyrical content ragas used and intricacies pertaining to the metre. Some of the Abhangas of the Composers mentioned above will also be demonstrated in the form of vocal rendition.

## INTRODUCTION - MUSICAL FORMS IN KATHAK LAKSHEPA

In Kathak Lakshepa, a variety of musical forms comprising gadya and padya varieties are used. Perhaps there is no other performing art similar to Kathak Lakshepa when it comes to the variety of forms used as it consists of classical, light classical and folk varieties in both its musical and literary contents. The text of some of the songs are metrical and others are in prose form. These compositions by many illustrious composers in the different languages have been well incorporated to suit the story situations.

Metrical texts in Sanskrit, Marathi, Tamil, Telugu and Kannada are used in Kathak Lakshepa. Most of these forms are named after their metre. The Bhagavathars of South adopted many Marathi musical forms from the Marathiketan. Some of the popular Marathi forms figuring in Kathak Lakshepa are Abhang, Sanki, Dindi, Ovi, Ganaksharee, Anjanigeeta, Kekvali, Chowpalyi, Savalyi and Khadga. Some of these forms have fixed tunes. Associated with them which have been popular to such an extent that they are known as Sanki tune and Dindi tune ( Mettu ) without naming the raga. There are examples for Sanki and Dindi composed in Tamil but retaining the tune. That is to say that the MarathiSanki at times is translated into Tamil but rendered in the same tune and Tala.

Sloka, Vrya, Mattakokila and different types of Chanda like the Kmadachanda figuring in the Sanskrit language are used in Kathak to suit the different themes.

AhavalViruttam, Tevaram verses from Periyapuranam, Tiruvembavai, Tiruppavai Tiruppugazh in Tamil have been incorporated in some themes like the sixty three NyanmrCharitrs. Besides these, forms such as Dvipada, Choornika, Padyam in Telugu and Kannada verses have been used.

There are other musical forms used, which are common to other art forms also. These are the Keerthans of BhadrachalaRamadas, Ashtapadis of Jayadeva, Tarangs of

NityanaTeertha, Bhajans of Mirabai, Tulsidas, Kabirdas, songs of the various composers like SadkivaBrahmendra and Purandaradasa. There are folk tunes like Lili, Oonjal, Chindu, Nondichindu, Kavadichindu, Temmangu besides the DivyanamaKeerthanas and the UtsavaSampradayaKeerthanas.

Apart from these forms there are songs composed in the various Niroopanas by Bhagavathars to suit the story situations and to form a link during the narration.

As for the ragas used in the songs, these consist of both the Hindustani and Karnatic varieties with some folk tunes.

There are fixed tunes for some of the musical forms but most of them have been changed and it is rather difficult to determine the ragas for some. Moreover the performers use two or three tunes in various ragas and at times they are at liberty to use any raga suitable for the rasa.

### ABHANG

*Susblok avaaamaanachaabhangavaaniprasidhatuk ayachee*

*Ovijnaanasaaacheek imvaaaaryaamayoorapantbachee*

This verse is illustrative of those of the prominent composers of the various Marathi literary forms. Thukaram's Abhangas are full of devotion. Abhangas are highly sacred forms in music and correspond to the Keerthana of the South.

Abhangas have been composed by Thukaram, SamarthaRamadas and Jnaneswar. But however the Abhangas of Thukaram are most popular so much so that the form itself is associated with Saint Thukaram as seen in the above verse.

Abhangas are used both in Harikatha and Bhajana. Since these are soaked with Bhakthi and clothed in simple soul-stirring tunes, are also suitable to be rendered in music concerts and congregational singing. Abhangas can be grouped into two types on the basis of the nature of the Sahitya. There are Abhangas which are used in Harikatha-s in between a story describing

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The following description is in Marathi which furnishes the Lakshanas of two Abhanga varieties.

*I. Abangaachedonaprakara*

*Motbadonavaalahaan*

*Mothyachecharacharana*

*Pabilyateenacharani*

*Prathyak insabavarna*

*Chautyacharaneem*

*Charavarnamotheyaabhanga*

*Dona prakaraapahilyaprakara*

*Dusaryavathisaryacharanache*

*Antimprasaasato*

*II. Dusaryaprakara*

*Pabilyatibicharani*

*Prasaasato*

*Labaanabhanga*

*Pahilyaprakara*

*Dona charanaasataka*  
*PratyekaCharanantba*  
*Athavak vachitusahavarnaasatanta*  
*Dusaryaprak arantachaaracharana*  
*Athaathavarnancheasatatapabilya*  
*Tina charanacheanteempaasaasato*

Old medieval Marathi lyrics are in Ovi or Abhangametre. Ovi is normally a couplet but the Abhanga can be a series of Ovi-s. There is another tradition which believes that all lyrics praising Vithala are called Abhangas. This is in accordance with the reference given by the Kannada poet named Chaundarasa who belonged to the 13<sup>th</sup> century. A.D. He refers to the Lord Vithal as AbhngaVithal. This name was also adopted by Eknath and other Marathi poets.

There seem to be two views regarding the term Abhanga. One is that Abhnga means destruction -less (Abhanga) and the other could be the erect pose Vithala. Krishna of Vrindavan is seen in the Tribanga pose where as the PandurangaVithala of Pandharpur is seen in the SamaCharani posture.

*“SamacharaneeAbhanga*  
*Nava tanachandobhanga“*

saysNandev which means that the two lines of the Abhanga should be balanced like feet of Vithala.

The earliest reference to Vithala as AbhngaVithala is probably the one contained in the Kannada literary work, “AbhinavaDaasaKumaaraCharitha” of Chaundaradasa (1300 A.D). This work in its *Vittalashataka* contains the praise of God under the name AbhngaVithala. The term Abhanga associated with the deity is interpreted by some scholars as connected with the name of the metre Abhanga in which Jnaneswara, Thakuram and other saints sang. The others say that Abhanga means ‘having no destruction’ and the God Vithala is destruction-less. The earliest Abhanga is found in the works of Mahanubhavs who were the contemporaries of Chayndarasa. Whether the Abhangas were called so because they were

sung on Abhanga Vittala or because of the particular type of metre popular among the Marathi saints is a point worth investigating.

According to the view of R.S.Panchamukhi, it is quite probable that the deity got the name 'Abhanga' from the name of the metre in which the songs were sung on it. There is no second instance to support such a surmise. He suggests that the term Abhanga prefixed to the name of the Vittala refers to the peculiar pose. If a deity is with two bends, the image of Devi, for instance, is known to be Dvibhanga, the perfect erect pose is called Samabhanga or Abhanga.

According to the metrical construction, there are different types of Abhanga-s.

- i. Devadvāra: This type of Abhanga has three six letter lines and four one letter line. The total comes to twenty two letters.

Example :

*Sundarathedhyaana/ ubhevitevari/  
Karak attivari/ thevuniya  
Mak arak undala/  
Talapatheesravani/  
KanthiKausthubhamani/  
Virajitha//  
Thukkambhanemajhe/  
Hecheesarvasukha/  
Paathishrimukha/  
Aavadine//*

( ThukkaramAbhang )

This is also called as MothaAbhang or long Abhang. Ovi also comes under the category where there are twenty two letters. Majority of the songs of Thukkaram are in twenty two letters.

- ii. Devivaar : This is a small Abhang where there are two eight letter lines totaling upto sixteen which is called LahaanAbhang.
- iii. This variety is a mixture depending on the number of syllables and the lines used. It is called by different names such as PrathishtaAbhang, SuprathishtaAbhang, AnushtupAbhang, BrahathiAbhang, PankthiAbhang, JagathiAbhang etc.

Abhang seems to be a basic indigenous metre of the old Marathi poets and writings. It is said to be an offshoot of the original Ovi. Abhanga is a later derivation of the Ovi. The very best Ovi of the Jnānesvari is said to be an Abhang. The following Abhanga is an example figuring in the Niroopana 'Draupadee Maanasamrakshana' where Shakuni invites Yudhishtira to play the game of dice. This is an example of a Devadvara Abhanga.

*“Dusaryaadivasi  
Pandavaachinela  
Nootanasabhelaa  
Kauravendra  
Sak unimbane dharma  
Maanduamaak yela  
Kramuvayaavela  
Aanandaane”*

The above Abhang seems to be a variety of Motha Abhang and has twenty two letters also known as Devadvaara.

H.D.Velankar in his article “Apabhramsa and Marathi metres” writes on Abhang. The following are some of his views on Abhang.

“..... The Poets, the earliest of whom is Nāmadeva, a contemporary of Jnāneswara, composed songs in the Ovi metre and sang them to the accompaniment of a pair of cymbals and a lute, while instructing the masses in their Vaishnavite creed, but never as Abhanga. The name Abhanga is evidently of late origin. It must have been given to the popular form of the Ovi, which is sung and not merely recited, at a time when there arose a necessity to distinguish this form from the other, i.e., the literary one which in course of time became completely free from any metrical restrictions except the Antyayamaka as explained above. Curiously enough the new literary form retained the old name, while the original old form got a new name. In this connection it must be clearly understood that in the early days of its currency, the word Abhanga must not have signified any simple metre. It only meant ‘an unbroken or musically uninterrupted’ group of stanzas composed in the Ovi metre. It may indeed be pointed out that the word retains this sense even today. To sing an Abhanga means to sing not this or that stanza but a group of stanzas forming a unity owing to the common idea and the concluding portion, containing the name of the poet and such other things. In this capacity the Abhanga may be compared with Apabhramsa Kadavaka. Only later on the word must have been used in a secondary manner to signify the Ovi-s of which the Abhanga is

made. Authoprs like Nāṁdev and Thukāram describe their stanzas Ovi and not as Abhangs. Attempts have been made to trace the word Abhanga and its meaning as far as possible in the works of Marāthi poets including the Mahānubhāva once. But except in a few Abhanga of doubtful authenticity, it is nowhere found to signify any simple or even a strophic metre. In all the three passages of the Krishna Purana, the word is without doubt used euphemistically in the sense of the ‘conclusion’ or the end. A word signifying end or finish is never used in connection with holy things.....”

In most other passages the word signifies ‘imperishable’ which is the real meaning of the word in its Sanskrit form. Rajwade derives the word from Bhanga which according to him, means a melodious group of letters i.e., and Aksharangana like Yagana, Nagana etc. Abhnaga is that metre in which no such ganas exist. A.K.Priyolkar Vividhajnanaṁvistara 1933,p.279 on the other hand tries to connect the name with an important episode in the life of the great saint, Thukaram, namely the non-destruction of the books containing his poems even when they were thrown into the water. Velankar holds the view that the derivation of the name Abhanga from some technical Bhanga seems to be improbable. He says that the name was originally applied to the strophic metre, which consisted of an unbroken group of Ovi-s resembling the Kadavaka of apabhramsa poetry and then in course of time it was applied to the constituent Ovi-s themselves. This indeed is a perfectly natural course. This may have taken place even during the boom period of the Abhanga that is when every Marāthi poet or poetess who could compose, tried his or her hand on the Abhangametre. The mere presence of the word Abhanga in the sense of a metre occurring in a poem therefore need not drive us to the conclusion that it is of a doubtful authenticity if it can be proved to be otherwise authentic.

“Apabhramsa and Marāthimetres”  
H.D.Velankar - New Indian Antiquary,  
1938, 219-220

The following example is a general devotional Abhanga of Jñanesvara which describes the greatness of the name of Vitthoba. His mudra Baaparakhuma is seen in the last stanza. This is rendered in YamanKalyan and the three beat Tala.



*SaaraasaaraaVitthoba*

*Naamatujesaara*

*Hare mbanavunisulapaani*

*Japataabevaaramvaara*

- i. Aadi Madhya anthyanijabeejaomk aara  
Patitaaajnaanijadaraleapaara*
  - ii. Bhuk tiaanimuk thisuk badaayak adaataar  
Dbruvaprablaadaambarisbek elaabaniradhaara*
  - iii. Divase divasemvyarthazaathohaasamsaar  
Baaparak humadevevaru Vittalaadhaar*
-