



## Implicit *rāga* knowledge in the Kathmandu Valley

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The term *rāga* is current not only in the classical traditions of North and South Indian music, where it is the subject of an extensive written and oral theory, but also in many non-classical traditions especially of religious music in South Asia. For example, devotional songs sung in the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal, are regularly attributed to *rāgas*; but there is little explicit (i.e. verbally expressed) knowledge about *rāga* among the performers of this music. The question whether the concept has any musical meaning in terms of melodic structure, and/or symbolic, cultural or historic meanings, can only be investigated through comparative musical analysis combined with ethnographic observation. In 1997, Grandin analysed songs in the *rāga* Basanta, and concluded that a consistent modal identity is present, despite scalar variation, and despite differences from the North Indian classical *rāga* of the same name; he interpreted this finding as evidence for the transmission of a musical Great Tradition from India to Nepal via local court musicians. Grandin's analysis, however, omitted consideration of several key factors. The *rāga* he analysed was one of a small number of seasonal *rāgas* where easy recognizability is culturally important; a degree of melodic consistency is therefore to be expected in his material. His method of analysis identifies common melodic motives and formulae, but does not identify any overarching model. And he analyses only song melodies, leaving out of account the *rāga*-prelude (*rāg kāyegu*) traditionally sung before each song. This study focuses on *rāga*-preludes for non-seasonal *rāgas*. The analysis suggests that such preludes follow a standard formal schema, that each prelude is a fixed melody, and that different singing groups sing the same preludes. It is suggested that a *rāga*-prelude constitutes a melodic model that underlies songs in the same *rāga*. These findings are consistent with Grandin's, and with his historical interpretation, but go further in revealing an implicit melodic system that does not depend on performers' explicit knowledge.

### *Reference:*

Grandin, Ingemar: "Rāga Basanta and the spring songs of the Kathmandu Valley. A musical Great Tradition among Himalayan farmers?", *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research* 12–13, 1997

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