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Analysing *ālāp*: Historical, Cognitive and Linguistic Approaches to Indian Music

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The practice of *ālāpa* (lit. “conversation, discourse”), that is, the melodic exposition of a *rāga* in Indian classical music, is described in historical sources since the 13th century, and continues to be an essential constituent of performance in both North and South Indian (Hindustani and Karnatik) musical traditions today (as *ālāp* and *ālāpanā*). The term suggests an analogy with spoken language, which it resembles in being a solo, semi-improvised, and non-metrical communicative performance. I will interrogate this analogy with reference to indigenous theory, early notated examples and modern performance practice, and with the help of schemas and recursive syntax.