

Towards a Theory of Formal Functions for North Indian Classical Music

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Despite renewed interest in studying form in Western music scholarship, seen for example in William Caplin's form-functional theory, little of this interest has been directed to non-Western music. My paper addresses this situation, through a form-functional exploration of the *rāga*-based classical music of North India. Although this might seem an arbitrary extension of Western formal ideas to Indian music, formal functions are just beginnings, middles, and endings in music—which are implicit in 'emic' Indian ethno-theoretic descriptions of *rāga* performance. I will therefore discuss several such formal functions in *rāga* music. But Caplin has also described such functions as the internal meanings of music, which can be interpreted from its underlying grammar. So, I will illustrate how the above formal functions in *rāga* music arise from *rāga* grammar, developing in the process some ideas about the grammar-meaning connection in Indian music—which is something that has been neglected, despite the interest in exploring *rāga* structure that has long-persisted in musical scholarship. All of this suggests that form-functional studies can provide insight into grammar-meaning connections in music more generally. Consequently, I will end with a discussion of what this implies for a more universal theory of formal functions.