



Three Musical Kandas in Janna's Yashodhara Charite

¹**Dr. Jyothi Shankar,**

¹Associate Professor,

¹Department of Research and Studies in Kannada,

¹Karnataka State Open University, Mysuru, India

Abstract : Janna's Yashodhara Charite holds a prominent place in Kannada literature for its poetic innovation and interdisciplinary richness. This paper focuses on three musically significant kandas of the epic, highlighting Janna's sophisticated integration of classical musical concepts into poetic expression. Through close analysis of selected verses, the study demonstrates how technical elements such as *thāya*, *tāla*, *rāga*, *ālāpana*, *gīta*, *laya*, *jāti*, and *rūpaka* are not used merely as decorative references but serve essential narrative and aesthetic functions, particularly in depicting the psychological transformation of Amritamati. By contextualizing these elements within the medieval Karnataka musical tradition and classical musicological texts, the paper depicts that Janna's kandas represent a rare convergence of poetic imagination and musical science.

IndexTerms - *Thāya, Tāla, Rāga, ālāpana, Ranga, Gīta*

In the Kannada poetic tradition, Janna's works occupy an important place. *Yashodhara Charite* is a much-discussed epic. It is difficult to classify this work strictly under the category of *champu* poetry—except for the prose lines of the *bharata-vakya*, no other prose occurs in the poem, and the use of metrical forms (*vruttas*) is also limited. By composing the work in the *kanda* metre and by opening a new path both in terms of theme and prosody, the poet Janna marks a distinctive innovation. In *Yashodhara Charite*, far more than Amritamati's sexual desire is woven into the narrative. Throughout the poem, we encounter both *desi* idioms and Sanskrit maxims, while the manner of combining similes is exceptionally refined and appropriate. One may note a famous verse in which four similes are interwoven within a single *kanda*.

amṛtamatiyēmba pātaki
 yamāyē banamāytu candramati mātēya mā
 tēmagē balēyāytu hīmsana
 mamogha śaramāytu kaḍēdudātmakuraṅgam (3-28)

Amritamati's illusion is compared to a forest, Queen Chandramati's words to a snare, the sacrifice of a flour-cock to an arrow, and the soul to a deer—this is an experiment in simile that carries spiritual significance. Janna, renowned for such distinctive experiments, also used distinctive musical terminologies when describing the music of the mahout (*māvatīga*). In a manner that serves as a prelude to all the events that follow, Janna introduces this episode in the second *sandhi*.

binadakkē pāḍuttirē nu
 ṇdani nidrēgē katakabijamāytenē mrgalo
 canē tilidālisi muṭṭida
 manamanē tōṭṭanē pasāyadānaṅgōṭṭal

The mahout begins to sing for his own amusement, purely for his pleasure. The sweetness and delicacy of that sound became like a *kataka* seed to the sleep of the doe-eyed Amritamati. A *kataka* seed was traditionally used to clarify muddy water; it was known as *nirmalī*. Here, the queen, unable to sleep, awakens; her sleep is clarified, and she ends up surrendering her very mind to the mahout. The simile of the *kataka* seed itself becomes the germination point for all the events that follow. If music or sound truly opens the mind, bodily awareness should dissolve into an absorption in sound (*nāda-anusandhāna*). That, however, does not happen here; instead, sexual desire awakens, and Amritamati takes a completely different path. From this point onward, in the next three verses, Janna deliberately incorporates musical elements into the *kanda* metre.

gahagahikēvaḍēda vahiṇiya
 sahāhē jhampēyadōlamarē ṭhāyadōlam ni
 rvahisi nēlēgōlisi baysikē
 mahacālēyalli mūrtivāḍēdudu rāgam ||2-29||

A musical *thāyi* called *vahini*, characterized by great resonance and exuberance, was set to *jhampē tāla*; it merged into another *thāya*, then into yet another *thāya* called *baysike*, and finally assumed the embodied form of a *rāga* through an expansive *mahachāle* *ālāpana*. The meanings of these technical musical terms are quite extensive.

Thāya – This musical form originated in Karnataka in the 12th century and remained in use until the mid-18th century. Purandaradāsa, Tānapācārya, and Venkaṭamakhī were renowned composers of *thāyas*. In the *caturdaṇḍi* system of music, *thāya* occupies the second position. These compositions were created separately for vocal and instrumental performance, allowing singers and instrumentalists to display their scholarship. Like the modern *tāna*, *thāyas* were not bound by strict rhythmic cycles; instead, varied rhythmic and metrical patterns were their defining feature. They were sung prior to *rāga* *ālāpana* (Musical Technical Dictionary, p. 434).

According to Pārvadeva's *Saṅgīta Samayasāra*, there are 93 *thāyas*–

Sl No	Thāya	Sl No	Thāya	Sl No	Thāya	Sl No	Thāya
1	Vēṇa	24	Vidāri	47	Esṛta	70	Kalā
2	Gati	25	Durvāsa	48	Uttuṇḍula	71	Chavi
3	Jāyi	26	Bhramaralīlā	49	Handupāyi	72	Chāyā
4	Anujāyi	27	Kālā ce thāya	50	Vahila	73	Svasthāna
5	Oyāra	28	Cittā ce thāya	51	Adhika	74	Avasthāna
6	Vali	29	Jodāṇē (jodiyā ce thāya)	52	Añkhuḍa	75	Apasthāna
7	Vahāṇi	30	Karuṇā	53	Napāyi	76	Navāṇi
8	Dhāla	31	Gītā ce thāya	54	Bharaṇa	77	Amṣa
9	Pasara	32	Śārīrā ce thāya	55	Haraṇa	78	Ghaṭanā
10	Lalitagāḍha	33	Sādā ce thāya	56	Sanagida	79	Ākramaṇe
11	Poccagāḍha	34	Kartari	57	Nikkaraḍa	80	Vakratā
12	Apakhalla	35	Ardhakartari	58	Bhajavane	81	Kandharane
13	Nissaraḍa	36	Nakhakartari	59	Subhāva	82	Kalarava
14	Laṅghita	37	Kuruleya	60	Holāva	83	Vedadhvani
15	Svaralaṅghita	38	Muṭṭeya	61	Rāṅgarakti	84	Ghanatva
16	Pēṭṭhopēṭṭhi	39	Mukulita	62	Rīti	85	Āhata
17	Phēllophēlli	40	Uccanīca	63	Anukarane	86	Avatīrṇa
18	Moḍāmodi	41	Nikkhāyi	64	Dharanī	87	Bokkala
19	Gunthāgunthi	42	Ukkhāyi	65	Dharimelli	88	Sukurābhāsa
20	Khacara	43	Nirata	66	Vivandhāyi	89	Duṣkarābhāsa
21	Gāṇā ce thāya	44	Nirgīti	67	Miṭṭhāyi	90	Asādhāraṇa
22	Tarahara	45	Vattuḍa	68	Gītajyoti	91	Ucita
23	Tattavaṇa	46	Parīvaḍi	69	Hombhe	92	Buddāyi
						93	Baisikē

Within *vahini* there are two types—*ālāpti* and *śītaśīta*—each of which again has two subtypes: *khuttā* and *utphullā*.

In Śāṅgadeva's *Saṅgīta Ratnākara*, information is available on 96 *thāyas*, which he classifies into several categories.

Vyaktāsaṅkīrṇa sthāyagalū

Sl No	Thāya						
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1	Śabda	4	Vahanī	7	Chāyā/kāku	10	Tīkṣṇa
2	Dhāla	5	Vādyāśabda	8	Svaralaṅghita		
3	Lavanī	6	Yantraja	9	Prerita		

Guṇabhedadinda uṇṭāda prasiddhasthāyagalu

1	Bhajana	9	Śabda	17	Gātra	25	Komala
2	Sthāpana	10	Bhṛta	18	Upaśama	26	Sama
3	Gati	11	Amśa	19	Kāṇḍāraṇā	27	Prasṛta
4	Nāda	12	Avadhāna	20	Nirjavana	28	Snigdha
5	Dhvani	13	Apasthāna	21	Gādha	29	Cokṣocita
6	Chavi	14	Nikṛti	22	Lalitagādha	30	Sudeśika
7	Rakti	15	Karuṇā	23	Lalita	31	Apekṣita
8	Druta	16	Vividhatva	24	Lulita	32	Ghoṣa
						33	Svara

Asaṅkīrṇa sthāyagalu

1	Vaha	6	Pralambita	11	Niḥsaraṇa	16	Troṭitapratīṣṭa
2	Akṣara	7	Avaskhalita	12	Bhrāmita	17	Prasṛtākuṇcita
3	Ādambara	8	Troṭita	13	Dīrghakampita	18	Sthira
4	Ullāsita	9	Sampraviṣṭaka	14	Pratigrāhyollāsita	19	Sthāyuka
5	Taraṅgita	10	Utpaṭviṣṭa	15	Alambavilamba	20	Kṣiptasūkṣmānta

Miśra sthāyagalu

1	Prakrtistha	9	Ghanatva	17	Chandas	25	Guru
2	Śabda	10	Śithila	18	Sukurābhāsa	26	Hrasva
3	Kalākrama	11	Avaghaṇa	19	Saṃhita	27	Śithilagādha
4	Ghaṭanā	12	Pluta	20	Laghu	28	Dīrgha
5	Sukha	13	Rāgeṣṭa	21	Antara	29	Asādhāraṇa

6	Cāla	14	Apasvarābhāsa	22	Vakra	30	Sādhāraṇa
7	Jīvasvara	15	Baddha	23	Dīptaprasanna	31	Nirādhāra
8	Vedadhvani	16	Kalarava	24	Prasannamṛdu	32	Duṣkarābhāsa
						33	Miśra

R. Satyanarayana includes *vali* as well, but this does not appear in the base text of the *Saṅgīta Ratnākara* edited by Subrahmany Shastry. After mentioning *ṭhāya*, Janna refers to *jhampē tāla*.

Jhampē Tāla – This is one of the *sūlādi sapta tālas*. Its components and *jāti* variations are as follows: one *laghu*, one *anudruta*, and one *druta* together constitute *jhampē tāla*.

- **Laghu**: A beat followed by counting fingers; symbol “I”. Its time units (*akṣarakāla*) depend on the *jāti*.
- **Anudruta**: A single beat; symbol “U”. One time unit.
- **Druta**: One beat followed by a wave; symbol “O”. Two time units.

The five *jātis* of *jhampē tāla* are based on the type of *laghu*. In *tiśra laghu*, one beat and counting two fingers results in three time units, hence *tiśra jāti*. In *caturaśra laghu*, one beat and counting three fingers are used.

Tāla	Aṅga	Jāti	Akṣara
Jhampē	IUO	Tiśra	3+1+2=06
		Caturaśra	4+1+2=07
		Khaṇḍa	5+1+2=08
		Miśra	7+1+2=10
		Saṅkīrṇa	9+1+2=12

After discussing the *tāla*, the next verse elaborates the ālāpana and mentions the *rāga*.

Mālagēyōlagāṇa sōḍarguḍi
Dālambāḍēda Atē rāṅgaraktiyōlamarduA
Pālikēvaḍēdu bajāvānē
Mālavasiriyēmba rāgamāṇ cālisidam (2-30)

The mahout, singing in such a way that the interior of the palace—like darkness that intensifies light—became ever more radiant, transformed the very space into a stage, and created delight there. One might imagine that instruments were being played all around, as he began to sing the *rāga Mālavaśrī*. The word *rāga* also conveys meanings such as love and the colour red. Janna thus adopts musical technical terms here as well.

Ranga – This word signifies a place for performance such as drama or dance, and it is used in that sense here. *Ranga* is also one of the *astottara śata tālas*, consisting of four *drutas* and one *guru*, with a total of 16 time units per cycle.

The *rāga* named by Janna is *Mālavaśrī*. This *rāga* is a *janya* of the 22nd *melakarta*, *Kharaharapriya*. Its scale is:

Ārohaṇa: Sa Ga Ma Pa Ni Da Ni Pa Da Ni Sa
Avarohaṇa: Sa Ni Da Pa Ma Ga Sa

It is an *upāṅga*, *ghana*, *sarvakālikā* *rāga*. Śhaḍja is the *graha svara*, while Gāndhāra, Madhyama, and Nishāda serve respectively as the *jīva* and *nyāsa* svaras. Famous compositions in this *rāga* include Tyāgarāja’s *Ennallu Tirigēdi* and Muttusvāmi Dīkṣitar’s *Maṅgalāmbāyai*. In the next *kanda* as well, Janna continues to emphasize key musical elements.

Tālada layamāṇ nēnēyadē
Keṭalōḍam ṭhāyada jātiyōl grāhayutam
KeṭalōḍaA – gītamanēm
Dālatiyōl mēlēdu pāḍidam rūpakamāṇ (2-31)

Singing without regard to the rhythmic pulse of the *tāla*—whether the previously mentioned *jhampē tāla* or the *astottara ranga tāla*—makes the rendition sound like a *thāya*; but when one observes the point of melodic entry (*graha*), it appears to be a *gīta*. Overall, the metaphor of *gīta* and *thāya* illustrates the extraordinary manner in which the mahout's singing profoundly moved the mind. In this *kanda* verse, Janna highlights several crucial aspects of music, namely:

Tāla: The means of measuring time in singing; it holds the song's movement within a defined framework.

Laya: The saying “śrutir mātā layah pitā” is well known. If pitch (*śruti*) is the mother of music, rhythm (*laya*) is the father. Both are subtle elements. Everything in nature has an inherent motion. The speed of music or performance may be called *laya*. *Laya* and *tāla* are interrelated; *laya* is expressed through *tāla* actions.

Nāda Jāti: *Jāti* is an ancient musical concept and seems to have occupied the place later taken by *rāga*. There were eighteen *jātis*, classified as Śuddha and Saṅkīrṇa.

Śuddhajātigalu	Saṅkīrṇajātigalu
Śādjī	Śadjakaiśikī
Ārśabhī	Śadjodīcyavā
Gāndhārī	Kaiśikī
Madhyamā	Śadja madhyamā
Pañcamā	Gāndhārodīcyavā
Dhaivatī	Raktagāndhārī
Naiśadī	Madhyamodīcyavā
	Kārmāravī
	Gāndhārapañcamī
	Āndhrī
	Nandayantī

Tāla Jāti: The seven *sūlādi tālas*, with five *jātis*—*tiśra* (3), *caturaśra* (4), *khaṇḍa* (5), *miśra* (7), and *saṅkīrṇa* (9)—together yield thirty-five *tālas*.

Tāla	Aṅga	Jāti	Akṣara
Dhruva	IOII	Tiśra	3+2+3+3=11
		Caturaśra	4+2+4+4=14
		Khaṇḍa	5+2+5+5=17
		Miśra	7+2+7+7=23
		Saṅkīrṇa	9+2+9+9=29
Maṭhya	IOI	Tiśra	3+2+3=08
		Caturaśra	4+2+4=10
		Khaṇḍa	5+2+5=12
		Miśra	7+2+7=16
		Saṅkīrṇa	9+2+9=20
Rūpaka	OI	Tiśra	2+3=05
		Caturaśra	2+4=06

		Khaṇḍa	2+5=07
		Miśra	2+7=09
		Saṅkīrṇa	2+9=11
Jhampē	IUO	Tiśra	3+1+2=06
		Caturaśra	4+1+2=07
		Khaṇḍa	5+1+2=08
		Miśra	7+1+2=10
		Saṅkīrṇa	9+1+2=12
Tripuṭa	IOO	Tiśra	3+2+2=07
		Caturaśra	4+2+2=08
		Khaṇḍa	5+2+2=09
		Miśra	7+2+2=11
		Saṅkīrṇa	9+2+2=13
Aṭa	IIOO	Tiśra	3+3+2+2=10
		Caturaśra	4+4+2+2=12
		Khaṇḍa	5+5+2+2=14
		Miśra	7+7+2+2=18
		Saṅkīrṇa	9+9+2+2=22
Eka	I	Tiśra	3
		Caturaśra	4
		Khaṇḍa	5
		Miśra	7
		Saṅkīrṇa	9

Gīta: Though the word *gīta* broadly means song, it is a technical term which refers to compositions known traditionally as *sālagasūḍa* prabandhas. A *prabandha* is an ancient musical form consisting of parts such as *udgrāha*, *melāpāka*, *dhruva*, and *ābhoga*, along with elements like *svara*, *pada*, *pāṭa*, *biruda*, *tēnaka*, and *tāla*. Among prabandhas, *sūḍa*, *ālikrama*, and *viprakīrṇa* are three types; *sūḍa* again divides into *śuddha* and *sālaga*. The *sālaga sūḍa* prabandhas are known in the *deśī* tradition as *gīta*. These further include seven varieties such as *dhruva*, *maṭṭha*, *pratimaṭṭha*, *niḥsāruka*, *aṭṭatāla*, *rāsa*, and *ekatālī*.

The final phrase mentions *rūpaka*. *Rūpaka* is one of the *sūlādi sapta tālas*. Śārṅgadeva, in his *Saṅgīta Ratnākara*, describes two kinds of *ālāpana*: *rāgālāpti* and *rūpakālāpti*. *Rūpakālāpti* refers to the manifestation of a rāga within a *rūpaka*, that is, within a prabandha or song. It lies between a suggestive indication of the rāga (*ālāpti*) and a full expansion (*ālāpa*). The phrase “*pṛthagbhūta vidārikam*” implies singing by dividing or pausing at various points in the song. Continuous, uninterrupted singing is *ālāpa*, while segmented or intermittent exploration is *rūpaka*. Any rāga exposition based on words or phrases of a text and bound to tāla is termed *rūpakālāpti*.

Rūpakasthena rāgena tālena ca vidhīyate
Yā proktā rūpakālāptih (saṅgīta pāribhāṣika kośa. Pg. 509, 510)

The significance and purpose of poetry are immense. The musical elements woven in these *kāṇḍas* of Janna deserve a call for detailed analysis. At first glance, they may seem merely to describe the music of a mahout; but on deeper examination, it becomes clear that Janna has embedded numerous musical concepts and technical terms within the *kanda* verses. From a musical perspective, Janna's *kandas* thus appear very significant.

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