

is time objective or subjective? was the rāga-samay system meant to be rigid convention? or was its conceptualization and use determined by specific contexts? is our current practice of the system due to cultural conditioning? what happens if a rāga wills itself in your mind at a different time? how does the power of an artist's creative intuition and imagination factor into this? are we contributing to the extinction of certain rāgas in the public sphere by restraining them to a specific time? these are some of many questions that we'll explore at my upcoming concert, 'kālacakra: transcending time through rāgas'.

in rāga śāstras you find varying opinions and conflicting statements in regards to the rāga-samay system. we see that prescribing specific times to rāgas does not occur until around the 12th century, and even then, with varied accounts - some śāstras and musicians utilizing such a system and others not. some state that this is an important system, and not adhering to a rāga's prescribed time will have a negative effect. others say well it's nice to do this, makes things a little more auspicious, but you don't have to. then, there are those that don't even mention it at all. it then starts to crystallize into something different, an aesthetic perception of time, where visualization associated with time and season guides a certain emotive environment that the rāga finds itself situated in (e.g. rāgamālā paintings). of course, still a very subjective experience, but a popular narrative forms making the system rule and order rather than a system open to continued evolution through the subjective and creative experiences of its practitioners.

why so many varying accounts?

well, why not? some people experienced their rāga practice in nature and specific environments and perhaps felt a powerful creative association within them while practicing a rāga at a particular time, or in visualizing it as an individual with characteristics and a backstory including an attributed time. some practiced these rāgas in temple environments, where the relation of rāga, ritual, and time became a powerful tool to achieve a point of singularity, as one does in pūjā, through consistent repetition, visualization, and evocation. others felt that such methods were restrictive rather than creative, suppressing the surge of a rāga's creative potential, and therefore did not adhere to this principle as it did not apply much in their context. it is the power of the mind that creates, expresses, and unfolds a series of attributions in making the rāga feel more visceral. how that happens is subjective, isn't it? how one chooses to associate with the rāga, and more importantly, how a rāga chooses to associate with a practitioner is what

should be of importance. i remember getting the urge to sing darbari kanada at 8am one day. it wanted to flow and flow it did. who am i to stop the rāga from surging up when it does?

we should continue to create rāga-associations through subjective expressions. why do we now have a homogeneous view on this topic? it's nice to codify things and rely on a set perspective, and when we label it "tradition" we create an impression of conformity and rigidity. as we can see, it is neither true nor false to call this time-association system "tradition". it is not as old as the rāgas themselves, but it has become common practice now and thus "tradition". intentions, ideas, and complexity get lost in translation through time. in more ways than one, it has become comfortable in the world to rely on one perspective or authority to have the final say and to discard a diversity of perspectives. the mystique of the rāga-samay system often becomes more alluring to people than the rāgas themselves, with tales of evil spirits haunting those who sing rāgas improperly - including at the incorrect time. i feel bad for my students, as when i teach them alhaiyā bilāval at 5pm, i am apparently subjecting them to such entities.

this may be a controversial subject, but we owe it to rāgas to explore them with open hearts and minds, and that when we feel inspired to sing them triumphs over when we should subject them to be sung. in valuing the aesthetic contributions of the rāga-samay system, painting a vivid picture of a sunset rāga in the minds of listeners while singing it during the sunrise is a more creative endeavour. it becomes a meditation on the power of creativity and will for the artist, and a new potentiality of their intimacy with the rāga.

"...although there are experiences in time, these are not produced by the power of external things; rather they are created by the inner changes of time. as dreams are produced in sleep, the three experiences (of body, speech and mind) are all created by the changes of connate inner consciousness, or subtle time. understanding this, the yogin understands time, and perceiving the three times as equal in timelessness, he embodies the awareness of kālacakra, of vajra-time."
- jamgon kongtrul, 'the jewelled mirror' (a text on astronomy associated with the kālacakra tantra)

- akhil jobanputra