

Musicolinguistic artistry of *niraval* in Carnatic vocal music

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Abstract. *Niraval* is a form of virtuosic musicolinguistic improvisation in Carnatic music whereby a line within a song is repeated in various melodic and rhythmic manifestations within the *rāgam* (melodic framework) and *tālam* (beat cycle). For a Carnatic singer, *niraval* makes different aesthetic demands than other forms of non-textual improvisation within the tradition. To convey artful, sincere renditions of the same lyrical text, the singer-musician must imaginatively devise interesting repetitions which attend to both melodic and rhythmic elements and the lyric text. Combining melodic and rhythmic skill and verbal artistry in a range of South Indian languages as well as Sanskrit, Carnatic singers display extraordinary communicative and artistic competence and captivate their audiences. This paper analyses the musical and linguistic elements of a single *niraval* performance in Sydney's Carnatic music community. It is hoped that such research will contribute to a greater understanding of the interplay of language and music in sung performance.

Keywords. Carnatic singing, ethnography, verbal art, music, improvisation

1. Introduction¹

Niraval, also spelt *neraval*, is a particular form of musicolinguistic improvisation within the South Indian music tradition of Carnatic music (see Subramanian 2006 for a social history; see Viswanathan & Cormack 1998; Morris 2001 for ethnomusicological studies of Carnatic music). Carnatic music is a vocal and instrumental tradition based around the performance of songs interspered by improvisatory formats. The repertoire is multilingual, featuring song compositions, mostly on Hindu devotional themes², composed in Sanskrit and the Dravidian languages Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam and different kinds of non-language vocables. Improvisatory formats form a significant part of performance and can take up over half the length of the entire concert. One of these improvisatory formats is *niraval*. *Niraval* improvisation involves the repetition of a line or two lines from an already-composed song in various melodic and rhythmic combinations over a continuing beat cycle called the *tālam*.³ This paper explores the musicolinguistic artistry of a single 4m 53s *niraval* performance of two lines from a Telugu song as performed by Prema Anandakrishnan a Tamil-speaking South Indian singer in Sydney’s Carnatic music community during one of her concerts.

The term *niraval* comes from the Tamil word *nirappu* meaning “to fill up”. *Niraval* is also known by the technical term *sāhitya prastāra* (Sundar 2010), Sanskrit for “combination of lyrics”.⁴ *Niraval* generally takes up a small proportion of a typical

¹ I would like to express my gratitude to my singing guru Shri Dr. M.S. Ramanathan for his musical instruction and knowledge, to Shri Dr. S. Giridhar Tirumalai for his Telugu translation of the song, to the singer Smt. Prema Anandakrishnan who performed this *niraval* for being a willing participant, and all the other performers and rasikas at Sydney Music Circle who participated in this particular concert and the research project of which it is part, to my PhD Principal Supervisor Dr Verna Rieschild for her invaluable guidance, and my family for all their support and assistance. All errors are entirely my own.

² This paper deals with mainstream Carnatic music which is almost wholly Hindu in subject matter and tied to Hindu cultural life. There are also Christian and Muslim traditions also regarded in the respective communities as “Carnatic music” which evolved from the same theoretical principles but have adopted different performance practices and repertoire tied to the respective faith traditions. Despite the almost wholly Hindu devotional song repertoire, there are numerous non-Hindu practitioners of mainstream Carnatic music. The degree of Hindu religiosity in (mainstream) Carnatic music is a point of some debate (see, for example, Benary 1972:43-44, Subramanian 2007)

³ The word *tālam* refers to the beat cycle and also the names for different beat cycles.

⁴ *Sāhitya* or *sāhiytam* is the term for the “text” of a song. *Prastāra* literally means “spreading out” but can refer to any form of combination. In poetry and music it is used to refer to a rhythmic

Carnatic concert.⁵ For example, in the concert chosen for this study there were three performances of *niraval*, each of roughly five minutes duration within a full three-hour concert. Nevertheless, *niraval* establishes a mood of heightened engagement for performers and *rasikas*⁶ (audience members), making it one of the highlights of a Carnatic music concert. For example, Praveen Narayan, a Sydney-based singer and *rasika* (audience member) reflected that his “favourite part of the concert would be the main *keertana* (song), along with (the improvisatory formats) *rāga ālāpana*, *neraval* and *swaram* (i.e. *kalpana swaram*)” (Praveen_Narayan_Email_1/11/11). Praveen Narayan’s reflection is significant because it highlights the regard that *rasikas* (audience members) have for *niraval*, singling it out as a significant part of the concert even though it takes up such a small duration of a concert.

Niraval is also viewed by Carnatic music scholars as an important part of the concert laden with potential for the expression of affect and as a kind of reverent re-enactment of Carnatic compositional processes. As Sundar (2010) states, “An effective *niraval* has the innate capacity to move the audience to tears. It exemplifies the personal experience the composer must have gone through to come out with such beautiful songs” (2010). At the 1983 Madras Music Academy conference, Telugu scholar and musicologist Kameswara Rao described *niraval* as a means of *rasa pushti* (fullness of aesthetic savour) (J.M.A.M. 1984:25-26). The practice of repeated elaboration on a single line of text has counterparts in Indian classical dance (Ram 2011:162) and North Indian classical music (Sanyal & Widdess 2004:239-245).

composition technique “by which a series of durations is consistently permuted to form rhythmic variety” (Morris 2001: 80) as outlined in musical treatises dating back at least as far back as the 18th century (Groesbeck 1999: 96) and further back.

⁵ Full Carnatic concerts conform to a standard concert format devised in the 1930s referred to as *katchēri paddhati* which features a range of songs and improvisatory formats. For social historical background on the *katchēri paddhati* see L. Subramanian (2000:30) and for description of the structure of the format see Morris (2006:307) and V. Subramanian (n.d.). Improvisatory formats during a concert take place around pre-composed songs and may be self-contained or embedded within the songs. *Niraval* is one of two improvisatory formats which are embedded in a song, the other being *kalpana swaram* (mentioned in Footnote 7).

⁶ The Sanskrit word is *rasika*. In this paper, the word *rasikas* with an English plural marker is used to refer to the collective. The same plural marking applies to the following Indian language terms used in this article: *āvartanam*, *kṛiti*, *rāgam*, *swaram*, *naḍai*, *gamaka* and *sangati*.

While most other forms of Carnatic vocal improvisation—*rāga ālāpana* (freetime melodic improvisation using non-meaningful vocables), *tānam* (freetime melodic and rhythmic improvisation using specific vocables *tānam*, *tam* or *ānanda*), *kalpana swaram* (melodic and rhythmic improvisation using solmisation⁷ syllables known as *swarams* within the beat cycle and progress of the song)—*niraval* uses part of the song texts, called the *sābityam* (poetry/literature/composition), as the actual material for melodic and rhythmic improvisation imbuing it with greater potential to draw attention to the semantic content and poetic features of the text. The only other form of improvisation which involves text is *viruttam* which is a freetime melodic elaboration of a scriptural or poetic verse. Hence, *niraval* is unique because it brings together melody, text and rhythm. Each performance of *niraval* requires of the artist improvised treatment of melody and rhythm within the confines of the *rāgam* (melodic framework) and *tālam* (beat cycle). And while this improvisation does not involve creating new lyrical material, the set lyric line chosen for *niraval* is subject to minor alterations in the rendering of the text. In this particular *niraval*, the main alteration to the text is in the form of repetition of phrases from the chosen line. There is also one instance of an omission of a word which may or may not have been intentional.

In this paper, a single *niraval* performance during a Sydney-based Carnatic vocal concert is analysed for its verbal artistry, taking into account the above musical elements. Through carrying out such an analysis, I aim to demonstrate the rich interplay between musical and linguistic elements in *niraval*. A number of recent studies of Aboriginal song have attempted to bring together musical and linguistic analyses (Barwick, Birch *et al.* 2007; Marett & Barwick 2007; Turpin 2005). This paper also draws from that tradition analysing *niraval* as a piece of musicolinguistic artistry. As Turpin & Stebbins (2010) state, “[o]ur understanding of the arrangement of musical components and their effect on linguistic form is still in

⁷ Solmisation is a system wherein each note of a scale is represented by a syllable. The western system of solmisation, also called solfege or solfa, is one example, made up of the syllables Do, Re, Mi, Fa, Sol, La, Ti, Do. Solmisation systems exist in several cultures and are a useful pedagogical tool. In Carnatic music, the solmisation system known as *swaram* is made up of the seven syllables (called *swarams*) Sa Ri Ga, Ma, Pa, Da, Ni. It is used as a pedagogical tool to provide a linguistic representation of melodies but is also sung (or melodically rendered by instruments) in performance both as set passages within a song known as *ciṭṭa swaram* and in the improvisatory format known as *kalpana swaram*.

its infancy” (2010:14). The patterned but spontaneous interplay of melody, rhythm and text of *niraval* provides a good opportunity for such an exploration.

2. Data and method of analysis

The discussion of *niraval* in this paper is based on a microanalysis of the melody, rhythm and text in a single *niraval* performance on a line from a song in Telugu by a singer, Prema Anandakrishnan, who is from a South Indian Tamil background. Prema Anandakrishnan is fluent in Tamil, English and Malayalam and can also understand Hindi. The audience is predominantly Tamil-speaking with a few speakers of Telugu and Kannada. In addition, all of the performers and nearly all the audience are also fluent English speakers. This *niraval* performance was commenced by the singer⁸ and occurred in alternating turns between the singer and the accompanying violinist.⁹ The singer and violinist had five turns each in this particular *niraval*. The *niraval* went for 4m 53s and took place during within a 2 hour and 46 minute concert by the singer. There were two other sequences of *niraval* during her concert which were of 5m 40s and 6m 17s duration respectively. The concert during which these sequences of *niraval* took place was observed and recorded and later one particular *niraval* was chosen and transcribed for musical and linguistic features. This particular *niraval* provided a good example of the scope of melodic, rhythmic and poetic devices, i.e. the musicolinguistic artistry of *niraval*.

Microanalysis, in the form of Conversation Analysis (Schegloff 2000; Goodwin & Heritage 1990) has proven useful to linguists interested in the emergent and sequential elements of spoken language through detailing a number of “paralinguistic features” of talk including pauses for breaths, lengthening of words, volume, speed, emphasis, pitch and interactional elements such as turn-taking sequences and overlap. The focus on emergent elements makes such a

⁸ All *niraval* performances are commenced by the main performer whether they are the singer or an instrumental performer.

⁹ Where there is melodic accompaniment, all vocal improvisatory formats typically take place in turns between the main performer and the melodic accompanist. While the self-contained formats of *ālāpana* and *tānam* typically consist of one full turn each, the embedded formats of *niraval* and *kalpana swaram* take the form of several alternating turns. Hence, a single *niraval* performance sequence like the one chosen for this paper will typically consist of several alternating turns between the main performer and the accompanist.

micro-analytical approach useful to the study of singing where it can be combined with musical transcription to provide a fuller picture of the artful interplay of language and music as it unfolds in a given performance sequence. Microanalysis is particularly crucial for the study of musical performance because it can highlight the coordination of timing between participants in performance referred to as “entrainment” (Clayton, Sager *et al.* 2005; Barwick 2011:v169). While I focus mainly on the singer in this analysis, her interplay with the violin accompaniment is an important aspect of the overall performance structure and will also be discussed.

The transcriptions are presented here as “musicolinguistic” graphs (see Figure 1), to present as detailed a picture as possible of the melodic, rhythmic and textual elements as they unfold in performance. Each graph (numbered A.1-A.51 in the top left hand corner) represents one *āvartanam* (beat cycle). The song including the *niraval* which occurs in it is in *ādi tālam*,¹⁰ more specifically *ādi tālam catusra naḍai*.¹¹ *Ādi tālam* is the most common beat cycle type comprising 8 beats¹² per cycle. *Catusra naḍai* is the most common and unmarked form of *ādi tālam* comprising four *naḍais* (sub-beats) per beat. Each *āvartanam* (beat cycle) of *ādi tālam catusra naḍai* is made up of 8 beats each of which are made up of 4 *naḍais* making for a total of 32 *naḍais* sub-beats. The line in which the *niraval* took place covers two *āvartanams* when sung normally without any repetition. The *niraval* itself took place from the end of A.3 to the end of A.51. However, the three *āvartanams* leading into the *niraval* (A.1-A.3) are included to demonstrate the rhythmically seamless transition from the song into *niraval* which takes place without any pause in the continuing *tālam* cycle. A.51 is the final line of the *niraval* sequence before the start of the *kalpana swaram*, another improvisatory format but involving the singing of *swarams* which often follows performances of *niraval* (see

¹⁰ Each beat cycle “type” is given a name. The word *ādi* means “primordial”. *Ādi tālam* is the name given to this *tālam*. It is the most common *tālam* in Carnatic music and the first one taught to students.

¹¹ *Catusra* comes from the Sanskrit *catur* “four”. *Tisra naḍai* (three sub-beats per beat) and other subdivisions (e.g. five or seven sub-beats per beat) of *ādi tālam* are also used but are much less common than *catusra naḍai*.

¹² The term *akṣara* is often used for beat but I prefer to use the English term beat.

Footnote 7). Hence, this *niraval* performance involved the elaboration of 2 *āvartanam*s worth of sung text over 48 *āvartanam*s.

The first row of each musicolinguistic graph depicts the eight beats of the *ādi tālam* cycle equally spread except in some cases where there are many *swarams* to fit in and the space for one beat is made bigger to accommodate them. The second row presents the *swarams* using the first letter of each *swaram*, e.g. ‘S’ for {*Sa*}, ‘R’ for {*Ri*} etc. as is conventional practice in Carnatic music notation. In the *swaram* row, each beat is divided into four *naḍais* (sub-beats) to capture the melodic movement (in some cases there are very fast melodic passages which require a more detailed subdivision of eight). Like the beats, the *naḍais* in the *swarams* row are also equally or near-equally spread. The third row shows the sung text. In the fourth row, a melodic contour graph is used to depict the movement of the pitch corresponding to the beats and *naḍais* of each *āvartanam* in the above two rows. The equal spread of beats and *naḍais* in the preceding rows enable the melodic contour to provide a better linear representation of the movement of melody according to the beats of the rhythmic cycle. The fifth row captures a phonetic representation of the words to reflect patterns of pronunciation—particularly vowel shape and duration/length—by the singer. Integrating Conversation Analysis transcription ideas (Schegloff 2000:60-61), a ‘.’ symbol is used for a pause of one *naḍai* and a ‘:’ is used to show that the previous note/vowel is lengthened for the duration of one *naḍai*. The same symbols are used in the *swaram* row and the “Phonetic” sung text row.

The melodic contour graph, *swaram* notation and phonetic representation of the sung text are supplemented in the sixth row with staff notation. The staff notation is all in treble clef and is based around the western pitch G as the tonic. Each *āvartanam* of 8 beats (i.e. 32 *naḍais*) is represented by two “bars” of the staff in 4/4 time. Hence, each beat in the 8-beat cycle is worth one crotchet and each *naḍai* (sub-beat) is worth one semiquaver. As the width of a staff is influenced by the number of notes and not by durational elements, it is not possible to spread the beats on the staff to align it with the above rows. To mitigate this lack of alignment, I have reproduced the *swarams* and the text below the staff notation. In the staff notation, one *naḍai*, which is a quarter of a beat, is represented by one

semiquaver. Oscillating *swarams* and *gamakas* (ornaments) are captured using slurs¹³ to indicate continuous movement between pitches normally called “slides” and, where required, demisemiquavers are used (e.g. in the syllable *-na* in the word *smaraṇa* in Figure 1).

While the staff notation does not provide an accurate enough representation of the subtle nuances of the *rāgam* to replace the *swarams*, it does provide an illustration which is more accessible to those with a background in general western musicology who are unfamiliar with the *swaram* system. The sung text beneath the staff notation is captured in a way which is revealing of vocalic ornamentation. As the durations of syllables are already captured in the durations of notes in the staff,¹⁴ the ‘.’ symbol is not used for the sung text which appears below the staff notation. Where a vowel occurs over several notes, it is repeated for each note e.g. the word *hari* may become *ha- a- ri* in the transcription below the staff. In some cases, the staff notation and text underneath it are sufficient enough for the analysis. For example, in Figure 8 and Figure 10 of Section 4.3, I have used staff notation alone to capture textual and/or melodic rhythm.

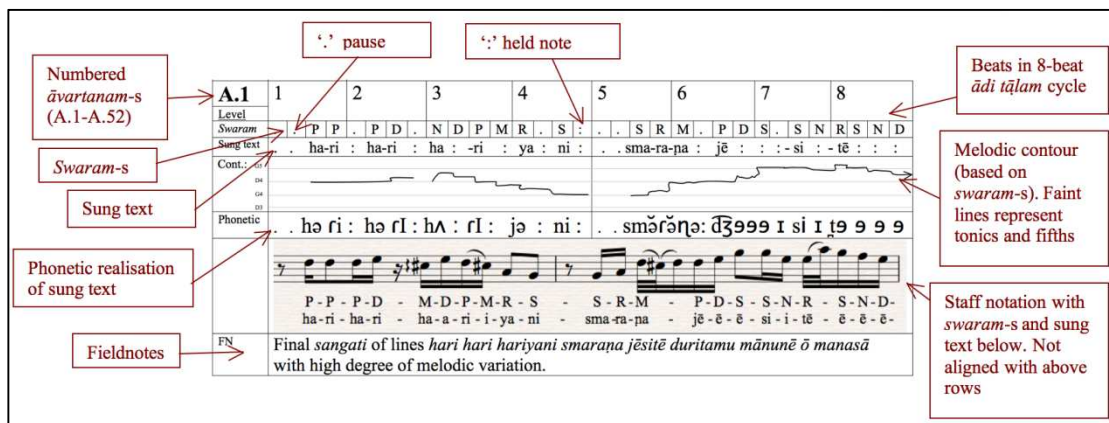


Figure 1. Musicolinguistic graph of the first āvartanam (A.1) of the niraval performance

The aim of using the above conventions is to capture the observable pitch, the relative duration or “periodicity” (Clayton 2009:329) and pronunciation of the song text as they unfold together across the axis of the beat cycle in performance.

¹³ Slurs are used instead of glissandi (slides) due to the limitations of the transcription software.

Hence, every slur must be interpreted as a slide between notes.

¹⁴ The durations of notes on a staff are distinguished by their form (e.g. semibreves, minims, crotchets, quavers etc.) unlike the durations of swarams which can only be represented by additional symbols or through spacing.

When the violin takes a *niraval* turn, the melodic contour and *swarams* are captured in the same way as for the vocalist, except with grey coloured lines and script in the musicolinguistic graphs. When the violin—or any other instrument—plays *niraval*, an enculturated listener can discern text from the rhythm of the violin because of the regular rhythmic setting of the line of text (see Section 4.3). This *perceived* lyric line for the violin *niraval* turns is included in the ‘text’ row- also in grey.

The representation of melody in this paper is based on the basic *swaram* scale of the *rāgam* in which the song is sung which is in this case is *Saraswati rāgam*. While there is more to *rāgam* than scale, every *rāgam* has an *ārōhaṇam* (ascending) and *avarōhaṇam* (descending) scale of *swarams* on which it is based (Alves 2006:134; Jairazbhoy 1995:28). Some *swarams* may represent a single pitch value (e.g. in all *rāgams* with a fifth {*Pa*} this is equal to a fifth) while others are more accurately described and transcribed as oscillations between pitch values. For example, in *Saraswati rāgam*, the fourth {*Ma*} is regarded as a raised (i.e. sharp) fourth, but this note is typically rendered as an oscillation between a fifth and a sharp fourth in performance. A non-oscillated {*Ma*} which is a stable sharp fourth occurs more sparingly and is likely to be a more conscious choice. While referring to particular *swarams* in writing, I will use the Western scale referents, sometimes prefixed by Western notational attributes (e.g. raised, major, minor etc.) followed by the regular abbreviated *swaram* terms used by performers in curly brackets. The *swarams* for all notes in the upper octave are prefaced by *mēl* “top” within the bracket, e.g. ‘upper fifth {*mēl Pa*}’. While there are notes in the lower octave these are not discussed in the paper. In the *swaram* line of the graphs, the upper octave *swarams* are represented in bold, while any lower octave *swarams* are underlined. Using this system of description, the *ārōhaṇam*, or “ascending” scale of *Saraswati rāgam* will be described as:

‘tonic {*Sa*}’, ‘major second {*Ri*}’, ‘raised fourth {*Ma*}’, ‘fifth {*Pa*}’, ‘major sixth {*Da*}’, ‘upper tonic {*mēl Sa*}’

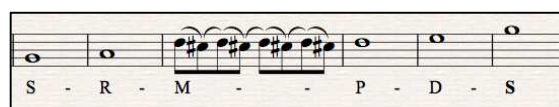


Figure 2. *Ārōhaṇam* (ascending scale) of *Saraswati rāgam*.

and the *avarōhaṇam* or “descending” scale:

‘upper tonic {*mēl Sa*}’, ‘minor seventh {*Ni*}’, ‘major sixth {*Da*}’, ‘fifth {*Pa*}’, ‘raised fourth {*Ma*}’, ‘major second {*Ri*}’, ‘tonic {*Sa*}’.

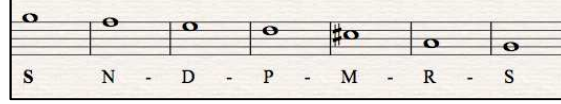


Figure 3. Avarōhaṇam (descending scale) of Saraswati rāgam.

Although both oscillating and non-oscillating raised fourths are included in the ascending and descending staves respectively, in practice, either form of the raised fourth (or other notes such as the minor seventh {*Ni*} which can also be oscillating) can occur whether in an ascending or descending melodic sequence.

3. Where *niraval* fits into the Carnatic concert

The sequence of a Carnatic music concert revolves around the performance of songs (already composed) and improvisatory structures which precede, follow or occur within songs. As mentioned in the Introduction, all Carnatic songs are on Hindu devotional themes with a few exceptions. As a result there is a shared linguistic repertoire of devotional concepts, mostly from Sanskrit, despite the diversity of languages in the song repertoire. This shared repertoire is a significant part of what makes Carnatic song themes accessible to audiences made up of people from Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, Malayalam and other South Indian language communities.

Carnatic concerts subscribe to a format, known as the *katchēri paddhati* which was developed in the early 20th century (Subramanian 2000:30). This involves the performance of songs with increasing amounts of improvisation attached to it. Improvisation is almost always in the same *rāgam* as the song to which it is attached together creating discrete units of performance called “items” comprising the song and surrounding improvisatory formats which are all typically tied together by being in the same *rāgam*.¹⁵ The item can be referred to by

¹⁵ There are instances where changes of *rāgam* occur within an “item” including the *rāgamālīka* “little garland of *rāgams*” which is a song composition in a few different *rāgams*. A *viruttam* (freetime

the name of the song. The concert builds up to a “main item” which is characterised by the most improvisation (Subramanian n.d.). The observed concert by Prema Anandakrishnan featured 14 items (see Table 1 and Table 2):

Item no.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Approx time (mins)	7	9	8	14	21	8	4	40	2	36	3	5	4	1
Niraval?					Y			Y		Y				
Total concert length (including approx 4 min of pauses): approx. 2 h 47 min,														

Table 1. “Items” and durations of each item in Prema Anandakrishnan’s concert.

Item no. 5 – ‘Hari Hari Hariyan?’ <i>Saraswati rāgam</i>					
Instr.	Vocal	Violin	vocal w/ violin accomp.	voc + violin (5 turns each)	voc + violin
<u>Perf. structure</u>	ālāpana (freetime improvisation using vocables) on <i>Saraswati rāgam</i>	ālāpana on <i>Saraswati rāgam</i>	Performance of <i>kṛiti</i> (composition) titled ‘Hari Hari Hariyan?’	Niraval on chosen lines from the <i>kṛiti</i> (in this case the whole <i>pallavi</i>)	<i>Kalpana svarams</i> (solfa improvisations) in <i>Saraswati rāgam</i> around chosen line as a refrain
Approx time (mins)	6	3	4	5	3

Item no. 5 – ‘Hari Hari Hariyan?’ total time: 21 min

Table 2. Breakdown of Item no. 5 into constituent sequences.

As mentioned in the Introduction, there were three sequences of *niraval* during the 2 hour 46 minute concert, taking up a total time of roughly 15 minutes.

melodic improvisation of a verse) which can also be in several *rāgams* is typically connected to the song which follows it, providing another instance of changes in *rāgam* within an item.

Niravals took place during three items, the 5th, the 8th and the 10th. The *niraval* during the 5th item has been chosen for analysis.

The most common song format in Carnatic music is the *kriti*, literally, “composition”, a form of set composition developed and popularized by Thyagaraja (1767-1847) (Jackson 1992:19-20), one of the most revered Carnatic composers. *Niraval* often takes place in the rendering of *kritis* over a chosen line or pair of lines. The word *kriti* itself is Sanskrit for “a work of art” or “creation”. *Kritis* are viewed as complete works of art within the tradition and can be performed as standalone pieces with no additional improvisation. *Kritis* typically have three separate sections called, respectively, *pallavi* (sprout),¹⁶ *anupallavi* (after sprout) and *caranam* (foot/section). Table 3 shows the text and translation for the *kriti* during which this particular *niraval* performance occurred divided into its *pallavi*, *anupallavi* and *caranam*. The *kriti* is titled *Hari Hari Hariyani* composed by Walajapet Venkatramana Bhāgavatar (1781-1874).

In performance, each line or pair of lines is repeated several times in relatively set melodic and rhythmic variations called *sangatis* (set variations).¹⁷ Each line can have one or more *sangatis* (typically between two and four and not more than six) and each *sangati* is usually repeated once. Audiences expect *sangatis* in a performance of a song (whatever the song format). Students of Carnatic music learn *sangatis* of a song from their guru and are expected to reproduce them in performance. While these *sangatis* are relatively stable, there is still a degree of flexibility which results in differences in *sangatis* between different major performers or artistic lineages and some room for the innovation of new *sangatis* (cf. Matoba 2008; Morris 2001). Hence, different performers will have different versions of a song (even excluding any improvisatory formats). Some *sangatis* are memorable, and audience members will generally look for those.¹⁸ *Sangatis* can also be regarded as the building blocks for *niraval* (Vijaykrishnan 2007:308) In

¹⁶ The word *pallavi* is used to refer to the first section of the *kriti* and also to refer to the only section of sung text performed as part of the *Rāgam Tānam Pallavi* (RTP). Both are about the same length (1-2 *āvartanams*)

¹⁷ The link between *sangati* and *niraval* is highlighted by Vijaykrishnan (2007: 11) who states that “the seeds for *niraval*” were set out “in the *sangatis*” of Thyagaraja’s compositions.

¹⁸ “[T]here are those who like to anticipate particular *sangatis* in a composition and gain satisfaction in hearing those *sangatis* which they were expecting” Mohan Ayyar, Carnatic musician, scholar and *rasika* (FB_Comment_20/10/11)

general, however, *sangatis* are relatively stable structures and are more likely to be learnt or devised prior to performance than improvised. The only thing which does often change in a performance is the number of times each *sangati* is repeated.

The text of ‘*Hari Hari Hariyani*’ is presented in Table 3.

Section	Lyric text	Translation
<i>pallavi</i>	<i>hari hari hariyani smarāṇa jēsītē</i> <i>duritamū mānūnē ō manasā</i>	If you remember/recite “Hari Hari Hari” all sins/misdeeds will disappear
<i>anupallavi</i>	<i>parama puruṣudaina bhāva janakuni</i> <i>paripūrṇamuga bhakti sēyucunu shrī</i>	Worship the Great soul, Vishnu with full dedication
<i>caraṇam</i>	<i>rāma bhakta varulanu dūṣincaka</i> <i>rātri pagalu yara nīmīsamē māraka</i> <i>rāmacandrapura vara shrī vēṅkaṭa-</i> <i>ramaṇa bhāgavata bhāvitamagu shrī</i>	People who are in the community of Rāma without insulting, day and night, unceasingly, Reside in Rāmachandra pura (like) Venkatramana Bhāgavatar, becoming divine.

Table 3. Text and translation of the kriti titled Hari Hari Hariyani (adapted from a translation by Shri Dr. Giridhar Tirumalai).

As with this particular example, *kritis* generally have short texts. Based on this concert and two other concerts observed and recorded as part of the doctoral project of which this paper is a part, the average song has around 30 words, usually no more than 90 and some as few as 5, for example, the *pallavi* in a RTP (see Footnote 16). *Hari Hari Hariyani* has 33 words. The repetition of lines in *sangatis* (set variations) and the repetition of *sangatis* enable the short song texts to take longer than they would if they were performed from start to finish without any repetition. In addition to the repetition of each line in *sangatis*, the *pallavi* acts as a kind of refrain for the whole song, as it is sung at the beginning of the song, between the *anupallavi* and *caraṇam* and again following the *caraṇam*. Hence, the

kṛiti (composition) *Hari Hari Hariyani* took 4m 8s prior to the start of the *niraval*.¹⁹ In the analysed performance, the whole *pallavi* (made up of nine words) was chosen for *niraval* and the artist commenced it following her rendition of the whole song in its *sangatis* and followed the *niraval* with *kalpana swaram* (i.e. *pallavi*, *anupallavi*, *pallavi*, *caranam*, *pallavi*, *niraval*, *kalpana swaram*).

In the following section, I will discuss the way that the singer combines melody, rhythm and text to create an effective and exciting *niraval* performance.

4. Clever word displays: Niraval as an art of musicolinguistic combination

Niraval always take place on a chosen line or pair of lines within the song. The choice of lines for *niraval* may be a matter of convention because certain lines within certain well-known songs may be well-known choices for rendering *niraval*. However, as a general rule, lines chosen for *niraval* are those with heightened poetic language and profound meaning (Sundar 2010; Krishna 2010:17-18). In *niraval* the set lyric combines with melodic and rhythmic improvisation such that the words themselves are the improvisatory material. As mentioned in the Introduction, this is what sets *niraval* aside from almost all other forms of improvisation. While the lyrics are not improvised, the melodic and rhythmic configurations are improvised, allowing for semantic emphasis and interesting interplay with the spoken syllabic stress of the sung text. Manipulation of the text mainly takes the form of repetition of phrases from the chosen text during the *niraval* development. Performers need to balance what is “given” to them by the tradition with their own “added” creativity (Nettl 1983:30), working within the confines of the text, the melodic framework of the *rāgam* and rhythmic parameters of the *tālam* (beat cycle). While Nettl’s formulation of “given” and “added” was used in relation to music, and specifically composition, the rules of creativity and

¹⁹ *Niraval* can either start following the end of a song (the last return to the *pallavi*) by going to the chosen line or can take place at the time the particular chosen line is first sung during the course of the song. The flexibility between these two points of commencement adds further to the unpredictability and surprise for the audience. In this case, the *niraval* was performed at the end of the song.

tradition are equally applicable to improvised forms of music and verbal art. Like musical performance, verbal art forms rely on canons and a regard for innovation within that canon, a balance “between extreme fixity and unconstrained creativity” (Foley 1997:364). In singing, the balance between the given and the added is both musical and verbal.

The verbal artistry required for *niraval* is suggested in its technical Sanskrit term, “*sābhitya prastāra*” (see Footnote 4). Other definitions are provided by Kassebaum (1987) and Campbell & Teicher (1997):

“[T]he text and melodic rhythm (i.e. the rhythm of the melody which, during the performance of a song, is the rhythm of the sung text which is conventionalised in set variations called *sangatis*) provide the structure for improvising variations of pitch. While keeping the rhythm intact, parts of the entire theme are filled in with new melodic material” (Campbell and Teicher 1997:32 my parenthesis).

“The text and the tala (*tālam*) are performed as composed, but with variations created within these limits the meaning of the text can be highlighted by reordering the text and its melody to create *clever word displays* while staying within the structure of the precomposed piece” (Kassebaum 1987:45, my emphasis and parenthesis).

Campbell & Teicher’s (1997) description emphasises melodic variation which takes place over a seemingly set textual and rhythmic structure. While it is true that the text and rhythm of the text are much more stable than the melody, they are also subject to variation and are not simply empty, still-standing vessels being “filled” with melodic material. Kassebaum’s definition appears to be more accurate, taking into account the “reordering (of) text” even if this is only carried out partially through phrase repetition. Neither of these definitions accounts for the rhythmic variation manifest in small departures from and returns to the rhythm of the sung text (see Section 4.3.1). However, both definitions of *niraval* include elements of rhythmic, melodic and linguistic creativity, demonstrating how *niraval* could provide a rich field for the exploration of the interplay of musical and linguistic elements in performance.

Drawing on Bauman’s (1975:295) notion of “keying” performance (or in this case, a sequence of heightened performance) through a variety of metacommunicative devices which frame a particular communication as performance, the start of the

niraval was “keyed” following the final *sangati* by Prema Anandakrishnan singing the first line *hari hari hariyani smarāṇa jēsītē* and holding the final syllable *tē* and ornamenting it around the major sixth {*Da*}. The holding of the final syllable of a line is a common device used for closing the *pallavi* section to go into either the *anu-pallavi* or *caraṇam* sections, or to finish a song. This closure device is also commonly used to mark a transition into the improvisatory formats of *niraval* or *kalpana swaram*, both of which occur while the *tālam* (beat cycle) of the song is still in progress. Following the closure device, the singer repeats the phrase *smarāṇa jēsītē* and sings the rest of the line with minimal pitch variation which keys the *niraval*. This is enhanced by a softening of volume and a slowing down of the tempo of the *tālam* which add dynamic and temporal intrigue.

The melodic contour must be set to the syllables of the text working within and around the rhythmic parameters of the *tālam* (beat cycle) and based on the conventional rhythm of the sung text in its *sangati* form. The artist may depart from the rhythmic constraints of the conventional text rhythm, however, he/she will need to return to the conventional text rhythm following these excursions. The conclusion of each *niraval* turn is marked (melodically and rhythmically) by a return to the *sangati* version of the chosen lines which acts as a refrain. Usually, only the first few words, in this case *hari hari hariyani*, are sung in the refrain at the end of each *niraval* turn.

The following four subsections now examine the ways in which “clever word displays” (Kassebaum 1987:45) manifest through an art of combination in *niraval*. The first sub-section, Section 4.1, looks at the manipulation of the text through the repetition of phrases (Section 4.1.1) and a single instance of an omission of a word (Section 4.1.2), highlighting the importance of knowledge of the line of text and its composite phrases²⁰ in *niraval*. In Section 4.2, melodic ornamentation of words and syllables is analysed in terms of how much it is used to emphasise particular words and phrases as well as how it compares to my own interpretation of syllable stress if the text was spoken. Section 4.3 examines rhythmic variation and the importance of the rhythm of the sung text for both vocal and instrumental performance.

²⁰ When using the term “phrases” with no adjective I refer to language phrases as opposed to “melodic phrases”.

4.1 Manipulation of the text

Niraval performances do not introduce new lyrical content. However, singers are able to manipulate the order of the text to some extent. While this is not identified as a central feature of *niraval*, it is quite typical of *niraval* performance. In this section I look at two ways in which the singer plays with the order of the words. The text of the chosen lines for *niraval* (which was, in fact, the entire *pallavi* section) is presented in Table 4:

Phr. #	Phrase 1				Phrase 2	
Word	<i>Hari</i>	<i>Hari</i>	<i>Hari</i>	<i>yani</i>	<i>smaraṇa</i>	<i>jēṣitē</i>
Part of speech	Prop. N. sing.	Prop. N. sing. (dup)	Prop. N. sing. (trip)	quotative particle	N. sing.	V. + conditional
Transl.	Hari	Hari	Hari		remem- bering	having done
Phr. #	Phrase 3		Phrase 4			
Word	<i>duritamu</i>	<i>mānunē</i>	<i>ō manasā</i>			
Part of speech	N. FP	V. FUT	N. + vocative			
Transl.	“(my) sins/misdeeds”	“will be healed”	“Oh mind!”			
Full transl.	<i>hari hari hariyani smaraṇa jēṣitē duritamu mānunē, ō manasā</i> ²¹					
	Tr. “If (you) remember/recite ‘Hari, Hari Hari’, (all your) sins/misdeeds will be healed, oh mind!”					

Table 4. Full text of chosen lines for *niraval* and translation of constituents.

²¹ The vocative phrase *ō manasā* “oh mind!” in various genres of devotional poetry is often translated with an exclamation mark to capture a kind of exclamatory calling out to the mind.

4.1.1 Repetition of phrases

In the observed *niraval* performance, the singer repeats phrases within the chosen line of the text. There were three instances of phrase repetition, two of which involved one particular phrase within the line. In this section we will analyse the three instances and highlight the ways in which these constituted communicatively competent and artful uses of the lyrical material without altering the meaning of the lines.

The first instance of phrase repetition was in the transition into the *niraval* itself where Prema Anandakrishnan repeated the second phrase of the chosen lines *smaraṇa jēsītē*—“if you remember”. It is significant that the singer repeated the whole verb phrase (+ conditional marker) instead of simply the verb *jēsītē*—“do” (+ conditional marker). Hence, the singer treated the verb phrase as a single unit encompassing the act of remembering/reciting and she repeated the whole phrase to give it emphasis.

A.3	<i>hari hari hariyani</i> <i>smaraṇa jēsītē</i> :	“Hari Hari Hari” (+quot) if you remember/recite
A.4	: <i>smaraṇa jēsītē</i>	if you remember/recite
A.5	<i>duritamu mānunē ō manasā</i>	sins/misdeeds will disappear, oh mind!
Transl.	If you remember/recite “Hari, Hari, Hari”, if you remember/recite (all your) sins/misdeeds will be healed, oh mind!	

Example 1. Repetition of smaraṇa jēsītē.

The other instances of repetition involved the vocative phrase *ō manasā* “Oh mind”. Once again, the singer treated the two words as one phrasal unit. Two examples of the repetition of each of these phrases (Example 2 and Example 3) are presented below with the repeated phrases in bold. Each line represents one *āvartanam* (beat cycle represented by A.2, A.3 etc.) in order to capture how the text falls within the rhythm of the *tālam* (beat cycle) at the basic level of each cycle. The translation of the whole sequence is presented in the bottom row.

A.12	((violin)) <i>hari hari hariyanī</i> ²² ((singer)) ō; manasā:	((violin)) “Hari Hari Hari” (+quot)
A.13	((singer)) Oh mind!
A.14	ō manasā:: <i>smara:ṇa jēsītē...</i>	Oh mind! If you remember/recite...
Transl.	((violin)) “Hari Hari Hari” ((singer)) Oh mind! Oh mind! If you remember/recite...	

Example 2. Repetition of ō manasā.

The phrase *ō manasā* “oh mind” is a common phrase used in many of Thyagaraja’s *krītis* (e.g. *Sitammamāyamma*, *Sādincharē*, *Nāma Kusumamulacē*, *Gitārthamu*, *Bhajana Seyya Rādha* to name just a few). The phrase typically accompanies some sort of advice, admonition or a statement of which the “mind” is asked to take heed. This device has the effect of capturing the poet addressing their own mind but in the context of performance where it is uttered (i.e. sung) aloud it can also have the effect of addressing the listener’s mind. Addressing the mind appears to be a common element of Hindu devotional poetry going back centuries including Tamil Vaishnavite poetry of the *Ālvārs* (see Devasenapathi; 2003:100). The phrase “oh mind” is used in translations of 18th century devotional poetry from Bengal (McDermott 2001) and Orissa (Routray 2007:336). Addressing oneself in a self deprecatory way is also observed by Saloman (1994) in the devotional poetry of the Baul a path in Bengal which syncretises elements of Hinduism and Islam (Saloman 1994:278). The devotional themes and poetic style of Carnatic songs draw from various genres of Hindu devotional poetry, particularly those from South India. Hence, Carnatic songs are sometimes considered part of a broader tradition of Hindu devotional poetry (see Sadarangini 2004:50).

The word *mānas* is a word of Sanskrit origin referring to the mind or heart as distinct from the soul (Monier-Williams 2005[1899]:783) and is the root word for several related words referring to mind, thought, cognition and human beings defined as being “with thought” (Monier-Williams 2005[1899]:783-4). In Telugu as well as Tamil, the word *manasu* means “mind” (Brown 1903:957; Winslow 2004[1862]:854) and is likely to have come from the Sanskrit *mānas*—“mind” given its extensive use in Hindu devotional language in both Tamil and Telugu.

²² These are the words being suggested by the violinist.

According to Caldwell’s (1998[1913]) *Comparative Grammar of the Dravidian or South Indian Family of Languages*, vocatives in Telugu take the form of changing the ending *-u* into *-a* or *-ā* as well as the insertion of “various unimportant vocative particles, or particles of exclamation (which) are prefixed to nouns” (1987:306). Vocative markers in Tamil are slightly different, generally without the prefixed particle and a different vowel ending. However, the poetic device of addressing the mind is common enough in Carnatic song compositions to be understood. Hence, Prema Anandakrishnan’s repetition of the phrase *ō manasā* exploited her own awareness of the unity of the vocative phrase structure in Telugu, its meaning, poetic conventionality and affective significance although she is not a fluent Telugu speaker. For her, singing was an act of devotional communication, and an important part of this involved being able to express the devotional sentiments in the *sāhityam* (lyrics).

A.31	((violin)) <i>hari hari hariyani smarana</i> [<i>jēsītē</i>] ((singer)) [ō man]asā:	((violin)) “Hari Hari Hari” (+quot) if you remember/recite ((singer)) Oh mind!
A.32	: (.) <i>smaraṇa jēsītē ō:</i>	If you remember/recite, oh
A.33	: manasā (.) <i>duritamū mānunē ō:</i>	mind! All sins/misdeeds will disappear, oh
A.34	: manasā ...	mind! ...
Transl.	((violin)) If you remember/recite “Hari Hari Hari” ((singer)) Oh mind! If you remember/recite, oh mind! All sins/misdeeds will be healed, oh mind!	

Example 3. Repetition of ō manasā.

The third instance of phrase repetition involved the phrase *ō manasā* again (Example 3). The repetition of the vocative phrase thrice in Example 3 conveys the poetic effect of addressing the mind between each phrase. Once again, the verb phrase *smaraṇa jēsītē* was not split and neither was the verb phrase *duritamū mānunē*. While this particular *niraval* performance was characterised by the repetition of phrases, other *niraval* performances may involve the repetition of single words and some reordering of the words in the line.

4.1.2 Omission of words

In A.34, following Example 3, the singer returned to the beginning of the chosen line, but she omitted one instance of the word *hari*. The ‘(.)’ in Example 4 represents this omission in which the singer paused for the duration of the second *hari*. It is unclear whether or not this omission was intended but the meaning does not change significantly as each *hari* which follows the first one is a multiplication intended to enact the repetition of the name “Hari”.

A.34	... <i>manasā hari (.)</i> <i>hariyani smarāṇa jēsītē</i>	...mind! “Hari (.) Hari” (+quot) if you remember/recite
-------------	--	--

Transl. ... mind! If you remember/recite **“Hari Hari”**...

Example 4. Omission of hari.

Examples 1-4 highlight the way that different shades of meaning and emphases can be expressed through the repetition of words and alteration to the order of the text. They also highlight why singers place an importance on knowing the meaning of the text for effective *niraval* performance. Another Carnatic singer and fellow disciple Krishna Ramarathinam (also a Tamil-English bilingual but brought up in Australia) reflected, “initially when I learn the song I won’t know the meaning but then **once you take up *niraval*** and stuff like that it’s imperative that you know the meaning” (KR_Interview5/09). The examples in this subsection suggest a familiarity by Prema Anandkrishnan with the meaning of the phrases within the chosen line(s) and demonstrate the use of phrase repetition and, in a single case, the omission of a word, in *niraval* to artfully convey the poetic sentiment in a variety of ways.

4.2 Melodic form

Aside from the repetition of phrases from the song text, the communicative competence of the artist can be displayed through their manipulation of melodic form. The importance of melody in *niraval* is highlighted by Campbell & Teicher’s description of *niraval* as consisting of “variations of pitch” and “new melodic material” (1997:32). Viswanathan & Cormack’s (1998) work on melodic

improvisation highlights the importance of *rāgam*²³ stating that a “broad system of rules has been absorbed and used like a blueprint for molding the edifice of each improvisatory form” (Viswanathan & Cormack 1998:231), emphasising a balance between melodic creativity and familiarity, as integral to the *rāgam* system (1998:229).

Niraval is recognizable as a distinct structure within the Carnatic concert because of its melodic distinctness from the *sangati* forms of the same lyric lines with which Carnatic audiences are typically familiar. At the phrase level, emphases in the melodic contour through held notes, *gamakas* (ornaments) and melodic phrases which bring out the beauty of the *rāgam* can express the poignancy of particular phrases. At the level of the syllable, these melodic emphases do not align with syllable stress patterns of the words in the chosen lines. In this section, we analyse the relationship of melodic form with the phrases of text which are subject to special melodic treatment and with the syllable stress patterns of the text.

4.2.1 Melodic form and salient phrases in the sung text

In Section 4.1.1, we saw that *ō manasā* “oh mind!” was the phrase which was most often repeated. These repetitions were also characterised by special melodic treatment through long held notes, *gamakas* (ornaments) and special melodic phrasing. In A.12-A.13 where the singer repeats *ō manasā*, the long syllables *ō* and *-sā* were held, the latter being held for a markedly long duration such that the phrase goes over almost two *āvartanam*s. The vowel of the final syllable is held over one full *āvartanam* from A.12.8.3 to A.13.8.3, bringing the flow of the text to a standstill (while the *mridangam* continues to play out the beat cycle)²⁴ and enabling the singer to melodically embellish it with *gamakas*. *Gamakas* take place throughout the *niraval*, but only in a few instances is a vowel lengthened to such

²³ As with “*tālam*”, “*swaram*” and the English word “language”, the term “*rāgam*” is used to refer to both the concept or system of *rāgam* and the individual *rāgams* within the system.

²⁴ One of the characteristics of Carnatic songs is that there is typically no cessation of or changes in the *tālam* (beat cycle) from the start of a song to its finish. Freetime formats of *ālāpana* and *viruttam* are always a prelude to songs and never interspersed. There may be sections with a change in speed over the continuing beat cycle. Outside the Carnatic music repertoire, rhythmic discontinuity is more common including the genre of *sampradāya bhajan* and *Bharata Nāṭyam* and other Indian classical dance forms where there are changes of *tālam* and *naḍai* without pause within a particular song or dance item.

There are melodic contrasts between the two repetitions of *ō manasā* in A.12-A.13. First, the treatment of the vocative particle *ō* is different. In the first *ō manasā* the *ō* is sung on a major sixth {*Da*} while the second slides down from a major sixth {*Da*} to a raised fourth {*Ma*}. This slide adds melodic emphasis to the second *ō* and could be interpreted as mimicking the prosody of sighing. At the end of the phrase, the long final vowel *-ā* is held for a longer duration and ornamented heavily in the first *ō manasā* and more subtly while the same vowel in the second *ō manasā* rests on an oscillating raised fourth {*Ma*}. The high pitched *ō* and heavy ornamentation for *-ā* in the first *ō manasā* contrast with the down-sliding, shorter *ō* resting on a lower pitch, and more subtly ornamented *-ā* in the second *ō manasā*. These contrasts are foregrounded by the parallelism of the phrase repetition and the rhythm (see Section 4.3). The communicative act of addressing the mind is given fuller poetic and affective scope through such original melodic treatment.

Other than the phrase *ō manasā* “oh mind” the phrase *smaraṇa jēsītē* “if you remember/recite” was also subject to held notes and ornamentation. In contrast, *hari hari hariyani* “Hari Hari Hari (+quot)” and finally the phrase *duritamū mānunē* “(your) sins/misdeeds will be healed” were not melodically emphasised.

4.2.2 Melodic and syllabic stress

While the melody can be used to emphasise particular phrases within the chosen line of the song text, it is also interesting to see how melody interplays with syllable stress including cases of alignment and misalignment.²⁵ Melodic stresses can be brought about by ornamentation or the use of notes or melodic phrases which stand out. For example, in each repetition of *ō manasā* in A.12-A.13 (see Figure 4), the singer raises her pitch on the syllable *ma-* maintaining its emphasis.

At times, the primacy of melodic form creates misalignments in the stresses of the syllables as they would be if the line was spoken or recited. For example, in A.6, the vocalist’s rise in pitch at the *-ri* in *hariyani* is melodically different from the contour of the *sangati* (set variation) form in which the pitch rises during *ba-*. The higher note on *-ri* has the effect of putting a melodic stress on it which is at odds

²⁵ Alignment and misalignment of melodic, rhythmic and spoken syllable stress is common in both composition and improvisation. In this paper, I focus only on the relationship between the three in *niraval* itself.

with the stress patterns of spoken language in which the first syllable of a word is emphasised.

Figure 5 compares the standard *sangati* version and a melodic *variation* early on in the *niraval* in which the singer rises up in pitch at the syllable *-ri*. By going up on the syllable *-ri*, the singer also renders the melodic pitch at odds with the syllable stress if the words were spoken. This is one example of the misalignment of spoken syllable stress with salient parts of the melody. In such parts, the sung text becomes more of a vehicle for music rather than linguistic meaning.

A. 3	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Level								
Swaras	P M P P : P P . P D P M R : S : : . . S R : M : P : : : : P . nd							
	: : ha ri : ha ri . ha : ri : ya : ni : : . . sma ra : na : je : : : : si . te:							
Cont.:								
Phonetic	a : hǎɾɪ : hǎɾɪ . hʌɾɪ : jə : nɪ : : . . smǎɾǎ:ŋə:d̪ʒə : : : : sɪ . t̪ə.ə							
	P-M-P-P - P-P - M - D-P-M-R - S - S - R - M - P - P - N-D ā - ā - ha - ri - ha - ri - ha - a - ri - i - ya - ni - sma - ra - na - jē - si - tē - ē							
FN	Standard <i>sankati</i> version of first line of <i>pallavi</i> to conclude. Final syllable is extended over to the next <i>āvartanam</i> as a closure.							
A. 6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Level								
Swaras	: : P P P : P P : . . M : N : D : D M : P P M R : R M : P P : nd pm							
	: : ha ri : ha ri : . . ha : ri : ya : ni : : sma ra : na : jē : : : : si : te:::							
Cont.:								
Phonetic	: : hǎɾɪ : hǎɾɪ : . . hʌ : rɪ : jə : nɪ.i : smǎɾǎ.ǎŋə:d̪ʒə.ə.ə sɪ : t̪ə.ə.ə							
	P - P - P - P - M - N - D - MP P - P - M - R - R - M - P - P - N - D - P - M ā ha - ri - ha - ri - ha - ri - ya - ni - i sma - ra na - jē - ē - ē - si - tē - ē - ē							
FN	<i>Mridangam</i> player plays high tone softly at A.6.4.2, following singer's delayed and higher pitched syllable <i>-ri</i>							

Figure 5. Comparison between *sangati* (A. 3) and the same line in *niraval* (A. 6).

Another example of misalignment between melodic and syllabic stress takes place in A.14 in the word *smaṛaṇa* where the unstressed syllable *-ra-* slides from the oscillating raised fourth {*Ma*} up to a non-oscillating minor seventh {*Ni*} (see Figure 6).

Sa} and sometimes beyond in the same manner as other forms of melodic improvisation. For example, the singer commences this particular *niraval* performance using a narrow range of notes focusing around the major sixth {*Da*}. As the *niraval* unfolds, there is increased melodic variation with each turn but this always begins from focal notes. The shift in the focal notes throughout the *niraval* is one aspect of its melodic variety and structure.

In her second *niraval* turn, the singer focuses again around the major sixth {*Da*} but with a deviation in rhythm and lyrical emphasis. Only in her third *niraval* turn does she make the upper tonic {*mēl Sa*} her focal note. She does this for two *āvartanams* before going up further to the second above that {*mēl Rī*} and beyond to an oscillating upper raised fourth {*mēl Mā*} which is the highest note reached. On her fourth turn, the singer returns to re-explore the major sixth {*Da*} and goes back up to the upper tonic {*mēl Sa*}. The fifth and final *niraval* begins again around the major sixth {*Da*} but then covers a broad range of *swarams*. The different focal notes throughout the *niraval* mean that melodic variety is more easily produced.

Figure 7 captures the singer's use of the upper tonic {*mēl Sa*} as the focal note in the third *niraval* turn. In A.22 and A.23, the focus on the upper tonic {*mēl Sa*} is maintained. Then in A.24, the singer goes beyond to the upper second {*mēl Rī*} and the melody peaks with an oscillating upper raised fourth {*mēl Mā*} on the final syllable *-ṇa* of *smaraṇa* before descending again. Hence, the singer uses the focal note of the upper tonic as an anchor, making the rise to the oscillating upper raised fourth {*mēl Mā*} particularly noticeable. The large interval between the upper major second {*mēl Rī*} and the oscillating raised fourth {*mēl Mā*} adds a further sense of leaping to the climax. The use of focal notes enables the singer to build the *niraval* and establish a sense of melodic tension and release as the melody moves beyond each focal note. The point at which the upper tonic {*mēl Sa*} is reached and when the highest note—in this case the upper oscillating raised fourth {*mēl Mā*}—is reached are both moments of climax during the *niraval*.

Figure 4 earlier), the parallel melodic structure realised by the long held notes on *ō* and the final syllable *-sā* and the ornamentation of that final syllable in both repetitions are matched by the same rhythm of the syllables *mana-* of one *naḍai* and two *naḍais* (i.e. one semiquaver and two quavers) for the first and second syllables, respectively, in the two repetitions. While the syllables on either side, *ō* and *ā*, are not identical in their durations they are sung for longer than the syllables *mana-* providing a further sense of rhythmic parallelism.

Rhythm is also subject to stress through the presence of strong and weak beats and pulses in the *tālam* which add to the relationships of alignment or misalignment between melodic stress and syllable stress. Hence, syllable stresses of the repetitions of the phrase *ō manasā* in A.12-14 which are misaligned by melodic “stress” are also misaligned by the rhythmic stress which places the syllable *-na* on the stressed beat where it would usually be the first syllable *ma-* which is stressed. Likewise, the rise in pitch which places melodic stress on the normally unstressed syllable *-ri-* in the word *hariyani* in A.6 (see Figure 5 earlier) is further emphasised by similar misalignment of rhythmic stress with syllable stress. In particular, the pause before the word *hariyani* places the stressed syllable *ha-* on an unstressed pulse halfway through the third beat while the unstressed syllable *-ri-* is on the fourth beat which is stronger. In contrast, the *sangati* version (also illustrated in Figure 5) has both melodic and rhythmic stress aligned with syllable stress. Another example of this connection between melodic, rhythmic and syllabic stress is in the example of the word *smaraṇa* in A.14 (see Figure 6 earlier) which, in spoken form, would normally have a stress on the first syllable *sma-*. An upward slide on the unstressed syllable *-ra-* is matched by the lengthening of the same syllable to three *naḍais* creating melodic and rhythmic stress. This lengthening and sliding is a significant contrast to the rhythm and melody used for that syllable in the *sangati* version of the chosen line, where the syllable *-ra-* is only one *naḍai* long and does not slide. While this could be considered as a misalignment from the perspective of spoken word stress, some *sangatis* also place a rhythmic stress on *-ra-* while others stress the other unstressed syllable *-na*. Hence, the patterns of alignment between melodic, syllabic and rhythmic stress are already fluid in the *sangati* versions of the phrase *smaraṇa jēsītē*.

Another important rhythmic aspect which affects melody is the shift from *madhyama kalam* “medium pace” to *dhurita kalam* “faster pace”. This will be discussed further in Section 4.3 but this change is melodically relevant because it involves fitting in more notes into each beat (see, for example, Figure 11). These fast passages of melodic ornamentation, referred to by the term *bhrga*²⁶ (glossed as “turn” in the sense of melodic ornamentation), characterise the latter *niraval* turns. A detailed discussion of Carnatic ornamentation is beyond the scope of this paper but it is an important aspect of *niraval* which warrants closer attention.²⁷ Rhythm will be discussed in more detail in Section 4.3.

4.3 Rhythm

4.3.1 Rhythmic departures and returns

Except in cases of phrase repetition or long held notes which bring the flow of the sung text to a standstill, the variation in *niraval* is mostly melodic with the text rhythm, i.e. the rhythm of the sung text or “textual rhythm” (Campbell & Teicher 1997), remaining relatively stable. The stability text rhythm is highlighted in a 1955 lecture demonstration of *niraval* at the Madras Music Academy Conference where the presenter, Sangīta Kalānidhi Mudikondan Venkatarama Aiyar stated that the “*eduppu*” (the point at which the sung text line starts in the *ṭalam*) should always be maintained” (J.M.A.M., 1956:23). The *niraval* performance by Prema Anandakrishnan is characterised by relative stability in the *eduppu* with departures and returns within the sung text line and occasional long held notes.

As mentioned, the *sangati* (or *sankati*) form of the first few words of the *niraval*, the words *hari hari hariyani*, are used as a return point- which I call the *sangati* refrain- following each *niraval* turn. The two chosen lines usually take up two *āvartanams* in *niraval* as in the *sangati* version.

Figure 8 depicts, using staff notation, the text rhythms of the first three *niraval* turns, showing how they adhere to the text rhythm of the *sangati*. The first line

²⁶ *Bhrga* (also spelt *brika*, *briga* or *brigha*) is defined as a kind of *gamaka* “ornament” (Swift 1990: 76; Ayyangar 1981: 343). A possible origin of the term is the Sanskrit word *bhrg*, an onomatopoeic word evocative of the crackling of fire.

²⁷ For example, one of my reviewers has suggested the importance of final syllables (e.g. *-sā*) and open syllables (e.g. *ō*) as ripe for ornamentation. See Swift 1990 and Ayyangar 1981 for discussions of Carnatic music ornamentation.

depicts the *sangati* version of the lines prior to the closure which transitions into the start of the *niraval*. A.3, A.8, A.18 and A.26 are presented on their own as single *āvartanam*-s, because A.3 represents a transition into the *niraval*, and the other three are *sangati* refrains where only the first few words of the chosen lines are sung before the violinist commences his *niraval* turn. The rest of the *āvartanams* can be organized in pairs, which are presented in individual rows to compare the text rhythm between them:

Figure 8. Text rhythm over first three vocal niraval turns including sangati refrains.

As the staff notation of the rhythm demonstrates, the text rhythm of the chosen lines is similar for many of the lines with the exception of A.12-13 and in A.22 where the rhythm of the sung text is brought to a standstill by long held notes and/or repetition. In the remaining lines, there are some minor departures, as in A.16 when the word *hari* starts three *nadais* into the line, as opposed to two. In A.16, the phrase *hari hari hariyani* follows a different beat pattern, starting slightly later, making the final syllable *-ni* start on the fifth beat. This rhythmic departure is

brief as the usual three-*naḍai* pause before the next phrase *smaraṇa jēsītē* (see A.3, A.4 and A.18) is simply eliminated, bringing the line back into the conventional text rhythm. Then, in A.17, the line departs from the text rhythm again when the singer sings the word *duritamū* one *naḍai* later than usual. However, the line returns immediately to the rhythm when the second syllable *-ri-* is shorted to one *naḍai*.

The pause in A.6 is another example of rhythmic departure (see Figure 9). In that case, the return takes place in the following word, *smaraṇa*. The *mridangam* player responds to this delay by playing a higher tone in the following *naḍai*, a percussion response to the change in rhythm and melody:

A. 6	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
Level								
Swarams	: : P P : P P : . . M : N : D : D M : P P M R : R M : P P : nd pm							
	: : ha ri : ha ri : . . ha : ri : ya : ni : : sma ra : ṇa : jē : : : si : te:::							
Cont.: G5 D4 G4 D3								
Phonetic	: : hərI : hərI : . . hʌ: ri: jə : ni.i : smǎrə.ǎṇə:d̪ʒə.ə:ə sI : t̪ə.ə.ə							
Staff	<p>P - P - P - P - M - N - D ā ha-ri-ha-ri - ha-ri - ya -</p>				<p>- MPP - P-M-R-R-M-P-P-N-D-P-M - - ni - i sma-ra ṇa-jē-ē - ē-si-tē-ē-ē-ē -</p>			
FN	<i>Mridangam</i> player plays high tone softly at A.6.4.2, following singer's delayed and higher pitched syllable <i>-ri</i>							

Figure 9. Departure and return in A.6.

As Figure 8 and Figure 9 show, the rhythm of the sung text in *niraval* is characterised by departures and returns from the conventional text rhythm of the *sangati* form creating rhythmic tension and resolution. Repeated phrases and held notes constitute significant departures which are sometimes only resolved by continuing the line in the following *āvartanam* (beat cycle). The other departures tend to be much smaller even during the melodically and rhythmically eventful *dhurita kalam* sections.

4.3.2 *The importance of melodic rhythm to instrumental accompaniment*²⁸

Even when the accompanist plays *niraval*, it is possible, especially in the early stages, to distinguish the text rhythm through the rhythm of their melody which I refer to as the melodic rhythm. In songs (i.e. the non-improvisatory sections), the instrumentalist's melody is typically in unison with the singer. In other words, instrumentalists play the tune of the song along with the singer. In *niraval*, when the instrumentalist takes their *niraval* turn, they use the rhythm of their melody to suggest the syllables of the words in the sung text with similar departures and returns to a stable text rhythm. A comparison of the singer's text rhythm and violinist's melodic rhythm at the start of every even-numbered *āvartanam* (see Figure 10) shows a correspondence, with the first two *ṇadai*s typically outlining the final *-ā* of the word *manasā* from the previous line, and the notes from the third *ṇadai* suggesting the text rhythm of the *sangati* version of the words *hari hari hariyani*. The violin *niraval* turns are within the rounded box in Figure 10. There is a small deviation by the singer in A.6, with the pause following the second *hari*. Likewise, in A.16, the *ā* from the previous *manasā* takes three *ṇadai*s rather than two causing a lag. In this particular instance, the text rhythm is more markedly different. In both A.6 and A.16, the syllable *-ni* spills over onto the fifth beat, in other words, into the second half of the *āvartanam*. The melodic rhythms in A.10 and A.12 played by the violinist very clearly conform to the text rhythm of the *sangati* versions (A.3, A.8 and A.18) of the lyrical phrase. While A.10 appears to conform more to the syllabic rhythm, A.12, in fact, mirrors the *sangati* version more accurately because the similarity is also melodic. These are just two examples of how the text rhythm is captured by the violin's melodic rhythm.

²⁸ A further aspect of rhythmicity which adds interest to the *niraval* is in the ways the *mridangam* accompaniment engages with and responds to the text rhythm in performance by the singer and/or the violinist. An analysis of the interplay of *mridangam* and vocal rhythm would require a more detailed and complex analysis.

Figure 10: Text rhythm of vocal and melodic rhythm of violin niraval (in box) in the first two turns of niraval.

One regular accompanist at the concerts discussed the role that the text plays for accompanists, acknowledging the importance of knowing the words to *niraval* performance for accompanying instrumentalists. For accompanists, knowledge of the phrase boundaries and the number of syllables in each word assists in giving the audience a sense of the rhythmic shape of the lyric text (cf. Krishna 2010:17), as demonstrated by the reflection in Example 5 by a regular Carnatic melodic instrumental accompanist:

In an ideal situation, the accompanist can do complete justice to the *niraval* only if he knows the lyrics making up the *niraval* line or phrase. This enables him to mentally vocalise the variation with a greater degree of precision as he progressively elaborates the *niraval*. However, for obvious reasons, it is not possible for an accompanist to have an intimate knowledge of all the lyrics that every vocalist chooses for the *niraval* on the concert platform. The accompanist can, however, make up for this by cultivating an awareness of the points in the *tālam* cycle where he should "break", or where he should "pause", and the length of time-interval each of these requires. This will have substantially (but not exactly) the same effect as if the words are being articulated on his instrument, and will also synchronise to a large degree with the percussionist's beats.

Example 5. A Sydney-based accompanist on knowledge of lyrics for effective accompaniment to niraval (Accomp._Interview 2/07/11).

Example 5 highlights the importance of knowing how the text is realised within the rhythmic flow. This text rhythm awareness includes knowing at what point word and syllable boundaries occur in order to give the impression of playing lyrics of the song during *niraval*, i.e. "the same effect as if the words are being articulated on his instrument". Without outlining the phrase or syllable boundaries, the instrumentalists' *niraval* playing will sound more or less identical to *kalpana swaram* (a form of improvisation featuring sung *swarams*), especially in the latter stages of the *niraval* where the *dhurita kalam* "faster pace" melodic phrases fill out the whole *āvartanam* (beat cycle) with little pause, much like the *dhurita kalam* playing of the latter stages of *kalpana swaram* improvisation.

4.3.3 Rhythm during the ***dhurita kalam*** section

In the *dhurita kalam* section, rhythmic patterns are emphasized in a melismatic style which accentuates each *naḍai*. This is achieved melodically by regular pitch movement at the *naḍai*- (semiquaver-) level and a *bhṛga* style which involves vocal attacks on almost every *naḍai* regardless of whether there is pitch movement or not. There are very few held notes as with the earlier *niraval* turns. This accentuation makes it possible to discern rhythmic patterns made by the syllables and through melodic and rhythmic accents. In the *dhurita kalam* section, there are also fewer pauses for breath and little or no spaces between words resulting in the words seeming to "fill up" each *āvartanam*, recalling that the word *niraval* itself means filling up.

The singer's fifth and final *niraval* turn is characterized by a *bhṛga* style and is wholly in *dhurita kālam*. Rhythmic patterns are discernible from the outset in A.43. The singer distributes each of the first two syllables in the word *jēsītē* over two *naḍais* (two semiquavers) each and produces an intervocalic /j/ on the third *naḍai* of the syllable (A.43.8.4), creating a new rhythmic accent within the syllable and giving the effect of continuing the two-*naḍai* pattern of the first two syllables:

Further rhythmic patterning takes place in A.44. Within the phrase *duritamu mānunē*, the syllables *-mu* and *-nu-* go over two *naḍais* and the long vowels *mā-* and *-nē* go over four. This rhythmic pattern of 2, 4, 2, 4 is actually the normal text rhythm of the *sangati* version, however, the pattern is accentuated by the melodic and vocal treatment in *dhurita kālam* (faster pace) in a *bhṛga* style. The phrase *ō manasā* in A.44 also has a rhythmic pattern with the syllable *ō* broken up into two three-note phrases each going over four *naḍais*, then the word *manasā* is sung with the first two syllables taking two *naḍais* each and the final syllable *-sā* going over four *naḍais*. In that final syllable, the four *naḍais* are further broken up by the beginning of the new *āvartanam*, A.45, which suggests a continuation of the two-*naḍai* pattern in A.45 of the first two syllables. Following this pattern, the normally syncopated text rhythm of the phrase *hari hari hariyani* is replaced by a continuation of the two-*naḍai* pattern for all eight syllables, i.e. 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2, 2 (see Table 3). Following this, the phrase *smaraṇa jēsītē* in A.45 has a pattern of 2, 2, 4, 2, 2, 4. A.46 is rhythmically very similar to A.44. There is a slight difference in the rhythm of the word *duritamu* which forms a pattern of 1, 2, 1, 2 in A.46, and the word *manasā*, although the same length, is also rhythmically different with a 2, 3, 3 pattern, as opposed to the 2, 2, 4 pattern at the end of A.44. In A.47, the singer returns to the *sangati* refrain which cues the violin to take their fifth turn.

A.	Syll.	-	<i>sma</i>	<i>ra</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>jē</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>tē-</i>								
43	No. of	19	1	2	3	2	2	3								
		<i>naḍais</i>														
A.	Syll.	-ē	<i>du</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mā</i>	<i>nu</i>	<i>nē</i>	<i>ō</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>sā</i>			
44	No. of	2	1.5	1.5	1.5	1.5	4	2	4	8	2	2	2			
		<i>naḍais</i>														
A.	Syll.	-ā	<i>ha</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>ha</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>ha</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>ni</i>	<i>sma</i>	<i>ra</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>jē</i>	<i>si</i>	<i>tē</i>
45	No. of	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	4	2	2	2
		<i>naḍais</i>														
A.	Syll.	-ē	<i>du</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>ta</i>	<i>mu</i>	<i>mā</i>	<i>nu</i>	<i>nē</i>	<i>ō</i>	<i>ma</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>sā</i>			
46	No. of	2	1	2	1	2	4	2	4	8	2	3	1			
		<i>naḍais</i>														
A.	Syll.	-ā	<i>ha</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>ha</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>ha</i>	<i>ri</i>	<i>ya</i>	<i>ni</i>	-					
47	No. of	2	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	16					
		<i>naḍais</i>														

Table 5. Number of *naḍais* in each syllable demonstrating rhythmic parallelism, especially A.44, A.45.

Rhythmic combination is, therefore, an important part of setting the text²⁹ to build the *niraval*. The artist may depart from the text rhythm slightly in order to develop these rhythmic patterns, especially in the latter stages of *niraval*. In these stages the clear word boundaries and enunciation of the words in the text yield to the display of rhythmic and melodic patterns. In the latter *niraval* turns, phrase order is usually maintained and the nuances of meaning created by melodic emphasis and repetition are no longer used by the artist. The heightened meaning of the whole line is what remains and is emphasized purely by the excitement of rhythmic flurry as the text spreads out across the whole beat cycle in bursts of

²⁹ Turpin (2007) uses the term “text setting” to refer to the process of “aligning rhythmic and text groups” in Central Australian song (2007:101). In a sense, rhythm, text and tune of *niraval* are all independent of one another, however, the way that the set *sangatīs* of the chosen two lines are patterned over the set of two 8-beat *āvartanams* provide a model for the extempore rhythmic patterning of *niraval*.

5. Conclusion

While *niraval* performances involve a small portion of text, the analysis of a single performance shows how melody, rhythm and text combine to create a heightened aesthetic musicolinguistic experience. *Niraval* performances are special moments during the Carnatic concert where the artist's creative abilities are on display. The performance frame moves from the rendering of set musical and textual structures to an improvisatory frame where the artist can use those canonical elements as material for improvisation. The *niraval* frame is made all the more special by the fact that the material for improvisation includes a portion of the song text itself. Hence, the artist is given the opportunity to render the lyrical line within the beat cycle in various combinations of melody, rhythm as well as text. The performance of *niraval* thus demonstrates how advanced Carnatic singers fit Barwick, Birch *et al.*'s (2007) definition of great singers, who are "at once musicians and wordsmiths, who toss rhythm, melody and word against one another in complex cross-play" (2007:6).

Skill in performing *niraval* requires not only the verbal, rhythmic and melodic mastery discussed here but also attention to where it is appropriate to do *niraval*, ways in which it should be appropriately "keyed", the ability to build the *niraval* melodically and rhythmically in stages and, where it is done with an accompanying or co-artist, awareness of musical turn-taking conventions and the interplay with percussion instruments. Like good conversationalists, Carnatic singers work with their co-performers to co-create a verbally artful musical experience and *niraval* is an appropriate example of this. These additional performance skills are beyond the scope of this discussion but would better inform an understanding of the creative processes at play during *niraval* and other Carnatic singing performance practices. Another weakness in my analysis is that I have focused on one particular *niraval* performance which raises questions regarding the extent to which this performance is typical. I have demonstrated this to some extent by drawing on definitions of and participant reflections about *niraval*. Comparative musicolinguistic analyses of several *niraval* performances including performances by different singers would be a worthwhile follow-up.

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