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Recognising Ecology of Knowledge in Sharngadeva's Sangeet Ratnakar

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ABSTRACT

The ecology of knowledge, a concept emerging from sociology, emphasises the co-presence of diverse agents in shaping societies and recognises that knowledge is not only constructed through the interactions of various knowers but also possesses intersubjective, trans-scale, and trans-temporal dimensions. The central tenet of the ecology of knowledge is the recognition of the distinction between the knowledge construct and its creators. The knowledge construct is regarded as an independent entity with its own existence, separate from the individuals who generate it. Sangeet Ratnakar (SR) by Sharngadeva (13th Century CE), a musicological text meticulously represents earlier traditions encompassing its terminology and concepts and incorporates contemporary advancements, while also being extensively referenced in later musical and literary works. This paper examines the textual content and concepts enunciated in the text and the continuity of "knowledge construct" from the previous authors that is incorporated by Sharngadeva. The on-going accumulation of knowledge, the transfer of knowledge over generations and adaptive creation of knowledge is being studied in the research through the references stated in Sangeet Ratnakar.

Keywords: Sangita-Ratnākara, Sharngadev, ecology, musicology, shastra

Introduction

The Sangeet Ratnakar, which translates to "Ocean of Music and Dance," stands as a pivotal musicological text from mediaeval India. Authored by Sharngadeva in Sanskrit during the 13th century, this work is esteemed across various traditions of Indian classical music and dance as an authoritative reference. Sharngadeva was a member of the court of King Singhana (reigned 1210–1247 CE) of the Yādava dynasty, whose capital was Devagiri in Maharashtra. The Sangeet Ratnakar is organised into seven chapters. The first six chapters - *Svaragatadhyaya*, *Ragavivekadhyaya*, *Prakirnakadhyaya*, *Prabandhadhyaya*, *Taladhyaya*, and *Vadyadhyaya* cover various aspects of music and musical instruments. The seventh chapter, *Nartanadhyaya*, focuses on dance. As one of the most comprehensive historical treatises on Indian music theory from the mediaeval era, this text provides detailed insights into the structure, technique, and rationale of music and dance. The Sangeet Ratnakar represents a significant synthesis of ancient and mediaeval musical knowledge in India. Its influence extends through subsequent generations of Indian musicologists, who frequently reference it in their literature on music and dance. Noteworthy commentaries on the text include the Sangita-Sudhakar by Simhabhupala (1330 CE) and the Kalanidhi by Kallinatha (1430 CE).

In a theoretical framework, knowledge is conceptualised as a distinct element within the human environment and as a dynamic factor in human existence. Unlike natural objects such as stones or trees, knowledge is a human-made construct (Wojciechowski, 2009), similar to tools, shelters, or legal systems. To highlight its artificial nature and inherent structure, the term "knowledge construct" is employed. The core principle of the ecology of knowledge is the recognition that the knowledge construct is distinct from its creators. It is seen as part of the human environment, engaging individuals in a bi-directional relationship that encompasses both feed-forward and feed-back processes. This interaction underscores the crucial influence of the knowledge construct in shaping human thought.

Sangeet Ratnakar

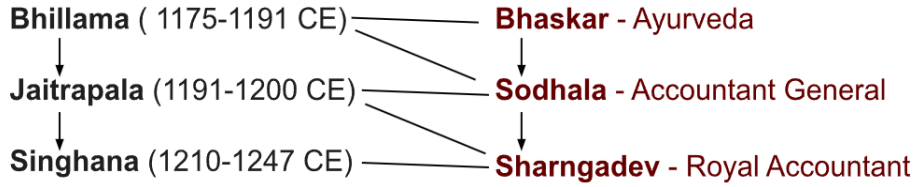
Sharngadeva introduces himself as belonging to a family originally from Kashmir, a region renowned for its rich tradition in Sanskrit scholarship. Kashmir was historically a centre of learning, producing eminent figures such as Abhinavagupta, as well as a succession of notable commentators like Anandavardhana, Matrigupta, and Mammata. Sharngadev likely inherited a deep engagement with various disciplines from his father, Sodhala, and grandfather, Bhaskara, reflecting the profound scholarly legacy of his family. Having settled in the Deccan, Sharngadeva would have been directly familiar with the local traditions and practices of that region. Simultaneously, he would have had indirect access to the theoretical and practical knowledge from Kashmir, integrating both the earlier *shastra* (theoretical knowledge) and *sampradaya* (practical tradition) into his work. This comprehensive exposure to both Kashmir's and the Deccan's intellectual heritage would have significantly informed his scholarly contributions.

अस्ति स्वस्तिकगृहं वंशः श्रीमत्काश्मीरसंभवः ।
 ऋषेर्बृषगणाज्जातः कीर्तिक्वालितदिङ्मुखः ॥२॥
 यज्वभिर्धर्मधीधुर्यैर्वेदसागरपारगः ।
 यो द्विजेन्द्रैरलञ्चक्रे ब्रह्मभिर्भूगतंरिव ॥३॥

- SR, Chapter 1, Verses 2-3

There is a distinguished lineage, established by the sage Vrishagana in the picturesque valley of Kashmir, renowned for its benevolence. This family has garnered worldwide acclaim through its eminent descendants, who have embodied the qualities of Brahma on earth. These individuals, celebrated as the foremost among Brahmins, masters of Vedic knowledge, defenders of religious order, and presiding priests of Vedic rituals, have significantly enriched and elevated the family's esteemed heritage.

It can be inferred from the texts that King Bhillama of Devagiri, impressed by Bhaskara's expertise in Ayurveda, appointed him as the royal physician at his court. Additionally, Bhaskara's son, Sodhala, was appointed as the Accountant General (*Shrikaranagrani*) in King Bhillama's administration. During the reign of Bhillama's grandson, King Singhana, around 1200 CE, Sharngadeva succeeded his father Sodhala as the Royal Accountant and began composing his influential works on musicology. Given his distinguished lineage and the scholarly heritage of his ancestors, Sharngadeva inherited a rich blend of northern and southern traditions in both learning and the arts. In addition to his contributions to musicology, he seems to have continued his family's tradition in Ayurveda, authoring a work entitled *Adhyatmika Viveka*. Although this text is no longer available, Sharngadeva himself references it, underscoring his dual expertise in both music and medicine.



धनदानेन विप्राणामार्तिं संहृत्य शाश्वतीं

जिज्ञासूनां च विद्याभिर्गदार्तानां रसायनैः

dhanadānena viprāṇāmārti saṁhṛtya śāśvatīm

jijñāsūnāṁ ca vidyābhīrgadārtānāṁ rasāyanaiḥ

- SR, Chapter 1, Verse 13

This verse effectively encapsulates the three facets of Sharngadeva's life - his role as an accountant, his contributions as a scholar, and his practice as a physician.

Predecessors in the Knowledge Ecology

In the field of knowledge ecology, predecessors play a pivotal role in shaping and advancing the discipline. Foundational thinkers establish the core concepts and frameworks that define the field, while pioneers in inter-disciplinary research integrate diverse insights to create a holistic understanding of knowledge systems. Evolved practitioners apply theoretical principles in practical contexts, demonstrating their application. Commentators critically analyse and expand upon earlier works, refining the perspectives. Sharngadeva acknowledges his predecessors (*purva acharya*) who had provided the foundational concepts and practice in knowledge ecology in the opening section of *Sangeet Ratnakar*.

(iv) पूर्वाचार्यस्मरणम्

सदाशिवः शिवा ब्रह्मा भरतः कश्यपो मुनिः ।

मतङ्गो याष्टिको दुर्गाशक्तिः शार्दूलकोहलौ ॥१५॥

विशाखिलो दत्तिलश्च कम्बलोऽश्वतःस्तथा ।

वायुर्विधावसू रम्भाऽर्जुनो नारदतुम्बुरू ॥१६॥

आञ्जनेयो मातृगुप्तो रावणो नन्दिकेश्वरः ।
 स्वातिर्गणो बिन्दुराजः क्षेत्रराजश्च राहुलः ॥१७॥
 खट्टो नान्यभूपालो भोजभूवल्लभस्तथा ।
 परमर्षी च सोमेशो जगदेकमहीपतिः ॥१८॥
 व्याख्यातारो भारतीये लोल्लटोद्भूटशङ्कुकाः ।
 भट्टाभिनवगुप्तश्च श्रीमत्कीर्त्तिधरः परः ॥१९॥
 अन्ये च बहवः पूर्वे ये संगीतविशारदाः ।
 अगाधबोधमन्थेन तेषां मतपयोनिधिम् ॥२०॥
 निर्मथ्य श्रीशाङ्गदेवः सारोद्धारमिमं व्यधात् ।

Sharngadeva, through his profound understanding, has distilled the essence of various viewpoints from earlier music experts (*purva acharya*) into his work. Drawing from a vast array of predecessors - including Sadashiva, Shiva, Brahma, Bharata, Sage Kashyapa, Matanga, Yashtika, Durgashakti, Shardula, Kohala, Vishakhila, Dattila, Kambala, Ashvatara, Vayu, Vishvasu, Rambha, Arjuna, Narada, Tumburu, Anjaneya, Matri Gupta, Ravana, Nandikeshvara, Svati, Binduraja, Kshetraraja, Rahula, Rudrata, King Nanyadeva, King Bhoja, Somesha, King Jagadaka, and the interpreters of Bharata such as Lollata, Udbhata, Shankuka, Abhinavagupta, and Kirtidhara - Sharngadeva has synthesised their diverse insights into his seminal work. This extensive engagement with prior scholarship has allowed him to present the pinnacle of musical knowledge in his book.

Ecology of Knowledge in Sangeet Ratnakar

Through meticulous textual analysis, it is evident that Sharngadeva integrated several elements and concepts from earlier works while also critically assessing their relevance. He selectively amended, added to, or eliminated certain concepts to align with the art forms of his own era. The following observations, based on this detailed study, illustrate these modifications and adaptations:

The *Natyashastra* by **Bharata**, dating from before 500 BCE, is a seminal and comprehensive treatise on the performing arts, profoundly shaping the dance, music, and literary traditions of India (Vatsyayan, 1996). Comprising 36 chapters and a total of 6000 poetic verses, the text provides an exhaustive exploration of performance arts. It covers a wide array of topics, including the composition and structure of dramatic works, stage design, acting genres, body movements, makeup, and costumes, also addressing the roles and objectives of art directors, musical scales, instruments, and the integration of music with performance. The musical text *Dattilam*, attributed to **Dattila**, is believed to have been composed shortly after the *Natyashastra* (Lath, 1978). It is generally dated between the 1st and 4th centuries CE. Sharngadeva incorporates and builds upon the detailed descriptions of *svara*, *shruti*, *grama*, *murchchhana*, *jati*, *marga-tala*, and *gitaka* as outlined by Bharata and Dattila (Sharma & Shringy, 1978). Additionally, a significant portion of the material in his *Nartanadhyaya* is derived from the *Natyashastra*, reflecting his engagement with and adaptation of earlier theoretical frameworks.

The *Brihaddeshi*, a Sanskrit treatise on Indian musicology attributed to **Mataṅga** and dating from the 6th to 8th centuries CE, is the earliest text to explicitly discuss the concept of *raga* and differentiate between *marga* (ancient) and *desi* (regional) music (Sharma & Vatsyayan, 1992). Sharngadeva, in his own work, incorporates and expands upon these ideas by including detailed discussions on *shuddha tanas*, the *viniyoga* (application) of *jati*, *murchhana*, *prastara*, *raga* classification, and the *lakshanas* (characteristics) of individual *ragas*.

Abhinavagupta (950–1016 CE) was a multifaceted figure from Kashmir, renowned as a philosopher, mystic, musician, poet, dramatist, and aesthetician. Among his extensive oeuvre of over 35 works, his most significant contribution is the *Abhinavabharati*, a comprehensive commentary on Bharata Muni's *Natyashastra*. This seminal work has had a profound impact on the interpretation and understanding of classical Indian performing arts. Abhinavagupta's influence on Sharngadeva is prominently evident in the extensive and nuanced elucidation of concepts found in Sharngadeva's work. This influence manifests in the depth and sophistication with which Sharngadeva explores and articulates various elements of musicology, reflecting the profound impact of Abhinavagupta's theoretical insights and interpretative approaches.

Someshvara (1126–1138 CE), a Western Chalukya king, was also a distinguished historian, scholar, and poet. He authored the *Manasollasa*, an encyclopaedic Sanskrit text that covers a wide range of subjects, including polity, governance, astronomy, astrology, rhetoric, medicine, food, architecture, painting, poetry, dance, and music. Musicology experts suggest that the *Prakirnaka* chapter of the *Sangeet Ratnakar* may have been derived from the *Gita-Vinod* section of the *Manasollasa* (Sharma & Shringy, 1978). **Nanyadeva** (1097–1133 CE), the founder of the Karnat dynasty of Mithila, was also a notable musicologist and the author of the important text *Bharatabhashya* (Desai, 1976). This work is significant for its inclusion of detailed verbal texts accompanying *jati-prastaras* and descriptions of *Kapala-ganas*, which are first documented in the *Bharatabhashya*. It is plausible that Sharngadeva drew from Nanyadeva's *Bharatabhashya* when composing his own *Sangeet Ratnakara*.

Sharngadeva's grandfather, **Bhaskara**, was a distinguished Ayurveda acharya of his time. His disciples, **Nagarjuna** and **Keshava**, made significant contributions to Ayurveda through their important texts. Nagarjuna, author of the *Yogaratanamala*, begins his work with a tribute to his guru Bhaskara (Muradabadi, 2005). Similarly, Keshava, in the concluding verses of his text *Siddhamantra*, acknowledges himself as Bhaskara's disciple and mentions

receiving patronage from King Singhana. Although Bhaskara himself was active during the reign of King Bhillama, his influence extended through the era of King Singhana, as his students continued to propagate his teachings. Bhaskara's son and Sharngadeva's father, **Sodhala**, authored two significant works on Ayurveda: the *Gadanigraha* (Acharya, 1911) and the *Sodhala Nighantu* (Sharma, 1971). These texts demonstrate the ongoing tradition of Ayurvedic knowledge within the family, which Sharngadeva likely inherited. This continuity is evident in the *Pindotpatti Prakaran* of the *Sangeet Ratnakara*, where Sharngadeva provides a detailed account of embryonic formation and the progressive development of sensory knowledge and imagination.

Sharma and Shringy (1978) have highlighted that the *Sangeet Ratnakar* contains parallel references to the *Charaka Samhita* and the *Sushruta Samhita* in the context of human embodiment discussed in the *Pindotpatti* section of Chapter 1 of the *Sangeet Ratnakara*. The *Charaka Samhita* (circa 400 BCE - 200 CE) is a significant Sanskrit text on Ayurveda, while the *Sushruta Samhita* (circa 2000 BCE - 600 CE) is another crucial Ayurvedic text renowned for its unique chapters on surgical training, instruments, and procedures. These texts provide important historical context and insights into the understanding of human physiology and development, which Sharngadeva draws upon in his work. Sharngadeva's perspectives on music, as noted by Fletcher (2001), reflect the principles of non-attachment found in the *Bhagavad Gita*. His approach to music emphasises detachment from personal ego and worldly concerns, aligning with the *Gita*'s teachings on performing one's duty without attachment to the results.

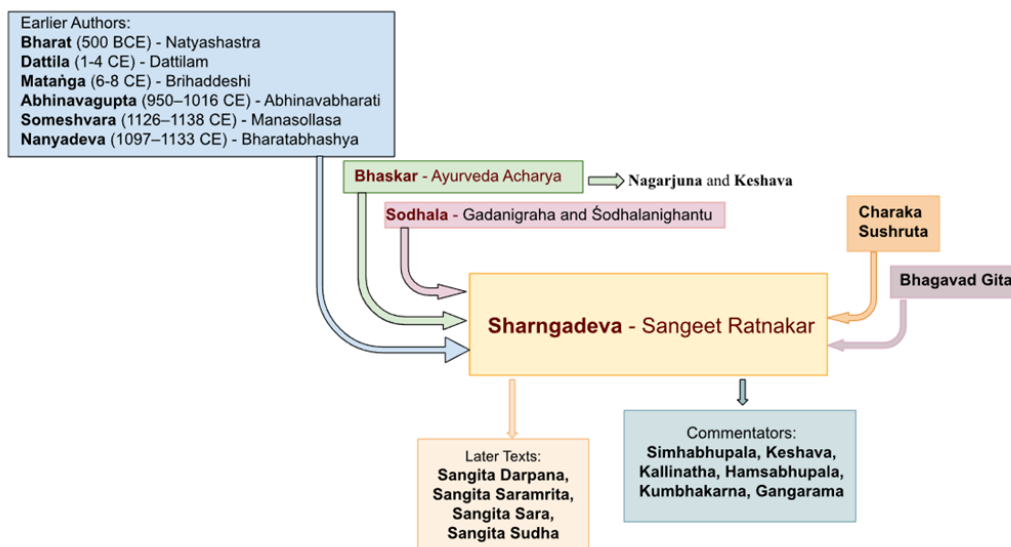


Figure 1 : Scheme of Knowledge Ecology of Sangeet Ratnakar

M. Krishnamachariar, in his *History of Classical Sanskrit Literature* (1935), identifies seven commentaries on the *Sangeet Ratnakara*. The commentators include **Simhabhupala**, **Keshava**, **Kallinatha**, **Hamsabhupala**, **Kumbhakarna**, and **Gangarama**. Among these, only the commentaries by Simhabhupala, Kallinatha, and Gangarama are extant today. Simhabhupala's *Sangita Sudhakar* is recognised as the earliest commentary and describes the *Sangeet Ratnakara* as both profound (*gambhira*) and complex (*vishama*). Kallinatha's commentary, *Kalanidhi*, is notable for its connection of the theoretical aspects (*lakshana*) of the *Sangeet-Ratnakara* with contemporary practical applications (*lakshya*). Kumbhakarna is later identified as the author of the *Sangitaraja*, where he is not explicitly recognised as a commentator on the *Sangeet Ratnakara*. However, a substantial portion of the content in *Sangitaraja* serves as an extensive elaboration on the *Sangeet Ratnakara*. A manuscript of Gangarama's Hindi commentary, *Sangita Setu*, also references numerous concepts from the *Sangeet Ratnakara*. This indicates that Gangarama's work draws extensively from Sharngadeva's treatise, reflecting its influence and the integration of its ideas into his own commentary.

One notable aspect of the *Sangeet Ratnakara*'s influence is its structural impact on subsequent musicological treatises. Authors of the post-Sharngadeva period, such as those of the *Sangita Darpana*, *Sangita Saramrita*, *Sangita Sara*, and even *Sangita Sudha*, despite its critical stance towards the *Sangeet Ratnakara*, adopted the organisational framework established by Sharngadeva. This alignment in the arrangement of subjects underscores the profound and lasting influence of the *Sangeet-Ratnakara* on the development of musicological literature.

Conclusion

The exploration of knowledge and knowing has long been a central concern for philosophers. It is crucial to differentiate between the ecology of knowledge and traditional philosophical analyses, as well as contemporary anthropological and sociological approaches. While traditional philosophy often focuses on the nature and justification of knowledge, the ecology of knowledge examines the dynamic relationship between knowers and the knowledge construct itself. In this framework, knowing is seen as a relational act between the knower and the object of knowledge. The ecology of knowledge emphasises that the knowledge construct exists as an independent entity, distinct from the individuals who generate or engage with it. This perspective underscores the significant impact of this knowledge construct on shaping human cognition and societal interactions. The *Sangeet Ratnakara* describes the gradual evolution of ancient art forms known as *marga* and its regional adaptations termed *deshi*. This progression highlights how the

foundational principles of the performing arts were adapted and transformed into diverse local expressions, reflecting both continuity and innovation in the music and dance. The Sangeet Ratnakara stands as a pivotal reference in the field of *Sangeet-shastra*, marking a significant milestone in the study of music theory by bridging ancient and mediaeval traditions, also connecting the knowledge of Ayurveda and philosophy with the arts (Figure 1). As a seminal text, it has been extensively commented upon, drawing both profound admiration and critical examination. Its considerable influence on later musical traditions underscores its crucial role in shaping and preserving the principles of classical music theory. The work's enduring impact highlights its foundational importance in the development and transmission of classical music. The text serves as a vital bridge between ancient, mediaeval, and post-13th-century periods of music history in India. The ecology of knowledge as seen in the synthesis of earlier traditions and contributing to the evolution of musicology connects diverse historical phases, offering a comprehensive understanding of the development and continuity of Indian music and dance.

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