



THE FEATURES OF HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

A typical Hindustani performance, which may last well over an hour, begins with a long, non-metrical improvisation (*alap* or *alap*) by the singer or melodic soloist, followed by *jor* or improvisation without a metrical cycle but with a perceptible pulse, and eventually, by the similar but faster *jhalā*. This is followed by the composed piece, which is performed with improvised variations—most typically *Khayāl*—a poetic form in vocal music—and *gat*—a short, rhythmically distinctive theme—in instrumental music. Here, the soloist is accompanied by the percussionist on a *tabla*, and the improvisations often involve various kinds of virtuosic rhythmic competition and cooperation. The various styles of singing in the Hindustani Classical Musical style are *Dhrupad*, *Khayāl*, *Thumri*, *Tarana*, *Tappa* and *Ghazal*.

KEYWORDS : Jhalā, Aalap, Khayāl, Vocal Music

Dhrupad

This is the most ancient form of Hindustani classical music. *Dhruva* means 'fixed' and *Pada* means 'text'. There are no decorative touches in *Dhrupad*, only the *meends* and *gamaks* are allowed. No 'Taans' in *Dhrupad*, only *Layakarīs* like 'Dogoon', 'Teengoon', 'Adi' and so on. The lyrics are based on religious offerings and the *Pakhawaj* and the *Tanpura* are the designated instruments for *Dhrupad*. The lyrics used to be in Sanskrit centuries ago, but are presently sung in Brajhasha, a medieval form of Hindi that was spoken in Mathura. The *Rudra Veena*, an ancient stringed instrument, is used in *Dhrupadi* instrumental music.

The theme and content of *Dhrupad* music is primarily devotional with recitals in praise of particular deities. *Dhrupad* compositions begin with a relatively long and acyclic *Alap*, where the syllables of the mantra 'Om Anant tam Taran Tarini Twam Hari Om Narayan, Anant Hari Om Narayan' is recited. The *Alap* gradually unfolds into the more rhythmic *Jod* and *Jhalā*. This is followed by a rendition of *Bandish* in accompaniment to the *pakhawaj*. The great Indian musician Tan Sen sang in the *Dhrupad* style. *Dhamar*, which is a lighter form of the *Dhrupad*, is sung primarily during Holi.

Dhrupad was the main form of northern Indian classical music until two centuries ago, but has since then given way to the somewhat less austere *Kahyal*, a more free-form style of singing. The loss of its main patrons from among the royalty in the Indian princely states, *Dhrupad* ran the risk of becoming extinct in the first half of the twentieth century. Fortunately, the efforts by a few proponents from the Dagar-family have led to its revival and eventual popularisation in India and in the West.

Khayāl

This is the most popular form of singing at present. *Khayāl* is an Urdu word meaning 'imagination'. Less rigid than *Dhrupad*, and more romantic and delicate, it allows for greater decorative effects and freedom.

A *Khayāl* consists of around four to eight lines of lyrics set to a tune. These lines are used as the basis for improvisations. Though its origins are unknown, it appeared during the fifteenth-century rule of Hussain Shah Sharqi and was popular by the eighteenth-century, during the rule of Mohammed Shah. The best-known composers of the period were Sadarang (Niamat Khan's pen-name), Adarang, Manrang and Nisar Hussain Khan Gwalior.

Thumri

A form of light semi-classical vocal music, developed during

the latter part of the Mughal rule, in the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (1847–1856), *Thumri* allows for extreme flexibility and freedom in singing style. *Thumri* is generally recited with a liberal use of *meends* and *taans*. Basically, by character and nature, *Thumri* is very romantic and allows the expression of varying emotions and feelings. The essence of *Thumri* can be best understood from the name itself: 'Thumri' is derived from 'Thumak' meaning graceful stamping of the foot.

The three types of *Thumri* are the *Punjabi*, *Lucknavi* and the *Poorab Ang Thumri*. The lyrics are typically in a proto-Hindi language called Brajhasha and are usually romantic.

Tarana

Like *Khayāl*, *Tarana* has *sthai* and *antara* but the difference between the two styles lies in the fact that *Tarana* uses syllables like *nadir*, *tanana*, *yalali* and so on. Today generally, the rendition of *Tarana* is done only after *Khayāl* by artists to display their prowess in *taans* in *drut laya* or fast tempo.

Taranas convey moods of elation and are usually performed towards the end of a concert. They are made up of a few lines of rhythmic sounds or *bols* set to a tune. The *Tarana* of Hindustani music is comparable to the *Tillana* of Carnatic music.

Tappa

This form of light Classical Music originated in Punjab and is richly ornamental, with quick turn of phrases and incessant volleys of *Taans* emerging from each word, in a swinging rhythm. Sung in Punjabi, the origin of this style is credited to Miyan Shourie who originally belonged to Lucknow but later migrated to Punjab. These songs are love-lyrics.

Ghazal

Ghazal was originally a Persian form of poetry. In the Indian sub-continent, *Ghazal* became the most popular form of poetry in the Urdu language through the efforts of classical poets like Mir Taqi Mir, Ghalib, Zauq and Sauda among the North Indian literary elite. *Ghazals* are popular with multiple variations across Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asia, Turkey, India and Pakistan. Although *Ghazals* can be sung in multiple variations, including folk and pop, its greatest exponents sing it in a semi-classical style.

Instrumental Music

Although Hindustani music clearly is focused on vocal performances, instrumental forms have existed since ancient times. In the recent decades, instrumental Hindustani music has received more attention than vocal music, especially outside South Asia, perhaps because the lyrics in the latter are not easily understood.

A number of musical instruments are used in Hindustani classical music. The *veena*, a stringed-instrument, was traditionally regarded as the most important, but few play it today and it has largely been superseded by its cousins such as the *sitar* and the *sarod*, both of which owe their origin to Persia or modern-day Iran. Other plucked or struck stringed-instruments include the *surbahar*, *sursringar*, *santoor* and various versions of the slide guitar. Among bow-instruments, the *sarangi*, *esraj* (or *dilruba*) and violin are popular. The *bansuri* (bamboo flute), *shehnai* and harmonium are the important wind instruments. The *tabla* and the *pakhavaj* are the most popular in the percussion ensemble.

Notes

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4. The term *sruti* literally means 'that which is heard.' One of its senses refers to the 'received' texts of the Vedas, here it means notes of a scale
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