



**ORIGINAL RESEARCH PAPER**

**Arts**

**THE TRADITION OF HINDUSTHANI CLASSICAL MUSIC : AN ANALYSIS**

**KEY WORDS:** Khayal , Thumri , Gharana , Aesthetics , Tradition , Guru parampara , Socio-cultural relationship

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**ABSTRACT**

Key feature distinguishing humans from other animals is the fact that we are intrinsically musical. Music is an expression of emotions, but it is also common sense that the intellect plays an important role in musical activities. In a study that is radical and important, titled 'How Musical is Man?', John Blacking observes, 'There is so much music in the world that it is reasonable to suppose that music, like language and possibly religion, is a species-specific trait of man.' Blacking prefers to define music as 'humanly organised sound' and a product of the behaviour of human groups, whether formal or informal.

The aesthetic preferences in Hindustani vocal music are linked to style, gender, performance context, and historical circumstance. Firstly, the distinctiveness of Hindustani vocal music is articulated through analysis of the use and application of several melodic shapes sung in different genres thus contributing to a general overview of their musical diversity. Secondly, different degrees of intensity of melodic shapes in music genres have been discussed, because they might cause remarkable changes from genre to genre, even if the same melodic shapes are applied.

Further, as observed by Ranade, 'Contrary to oft-repeated expectations, musics are found to be more culture-specific than imagined. This is so despite the fact that human organism, mechanically speaking, borders on being similar-nearly identical, the world over. It is no exaggeration that there are as many musics as there are cultures.'

Technically, the term 'voice culture' is perceived as moulding the voice through training in order to produce sound and musical movements which are distinctively identified from other musical cultures. In Hindustani music, merely training a voice in a particular way does not mean a genre difference. There are several vocal *gharanas* of Hindustani music that are vastly different from each other in both musical content and cultural context. Each *gharana* has developed a musical individuality of voice-production through training methods followed by a certain ideology of history and culture. Many music genres can be identified with Hindustani music and they are generally classified as classical, semi-classical and light classical music. Mainly *Dhrupad*, *Dhamar*, and *Khayal* are called classical music genres. Other genres like *Thumri*, *Tappa*, *Chaiti*, *Julha*, *Kajri* and *Dadara* are called semi-classical forms.

Blacking adds, 'Music is a synthesis of cognitive processes present in a culture and therefore confirms what is already present in society and culture.' It follows that any assessment or study of a music tradition must take in to account, not only its tonal and rhythmic structures, grammar and aesthetics but also processes and domains, which are extra-musical like its history, sociology, psychology, philosophy, economics, physics, technology and such other related aspects that have significant bearings on the deep structures of music in the respective cultures. Pertinent to understanding is what constitutes the 'identity' of any artistic tradition. Is it the geographical location with which the tradition is associated? Do the religious or political belief systems, or the cultural milieu of the land have any role to play? Is there any set of specific musical tenets that govern the music? This is indeed a complex issue. Any attempt to answer this question with respect to Indian music would warrant a thorough examination of various socio-cultural and music related fundamentals that are associated with it, which, in many ways, are radically different from the other major genres across the world.

The classical or the art-music of India, as we know it today, traces its origin to Samaveda, comprising the lyrical hymns of Rigveda, the oldest text preserved in any Indo-European language, composed between 1500 and 900 BC. Unlike the musical traditions of ancient Greece, Egypt, Sumerian, Israel and rest of the Middle-Eastern world, which survive only in a handful of notated fragments and partially documented theoretical systems, where elements of ancient and medieval Indian music remain alive in contemporary practice and are adequately documented in the treatises dating back to the pre-Christian era.

As a performing art deeply rooted in the sociocultural milieu, a sound understanding of certain aspects of religion, philosophy, aesthetics, history and culture becomes a necessary prerequisite for the study of Indian music. Furthermore, the Indian philosophy is firmly rooted in the belief of inter-relationship of various arts in general and that of graphic art and the art of music in particular. Ancient scriptures emphasise upon a strong connection between the art of image-making, painting, dancing, instrumental music and vocal music, thus expanding further the domain of background necessary to undertake a serious study of music.

A strong sense of spirituality is attached to Indian music, the realisation of which is essential for its study and practice. The immediate goal of music is sensory pleasure but its ultimate goal is regarded as the spiritual release. Indian music, like the other great traditions of the South Asian classical musical schools, is regarded as pre-eminently vocal-instrumental music of whatever degree of virtuosity is looked upon as tangential, whether it is as an accompaniment to the voice, or as an imitation/extension of the voice, or as a secondary tradition parallel to the vocal tradition.

The basis of Indian music is melody and rhythm; harmony and polyphony, as known in the West, have no part in the music. Much of Indian music is modal in character and is often accompanied by a drone, which establishes a fixed frame of reference and precludes key changes, which are so characteristic of Western music. Almost all genres and forms comprise numerous compositions and basic melodies from different regions in North India. *Ghazal* is generally considered as light classical music though they are also sung in semi-classical style by some musicians. These genres can be differentiated from each other in terms of their melodic features.

It is the patently aesthetic intention of art music that sets it apart from other categories. Two main elements govern it: *raga* and *tala*. *Tala* is a rhythmic framework, which unlike in many other traditions is cyclic, and not linear in nature; whilst *raga* is a tonal matrix. Since ancient times, two streams have evolved in the domain of art-music: performing and scholastic. The latter follows the former, thereby leading to

codification of pertinent rules, methods and techniques. Knowledge of fundamental theoretical precepts is considered essential to a practicing musician. It primarily involves a tradition of solo performance, providing the scope to innovate and interpret, and hence methods and techniques are developed to this end. Consequently, leading to the emergence of various musical ideologies and family traditions (*gharana/bani*).

An abundance of musical forms with specific structures based on patterning of musical elements (notes, rhythms, tempi etc.) can be found. Certain forms are regarded as more prestigious because of the demands they make on performers in terms of the skill and techniques required. On the other hand, genres in other categories of music are combined results of many active, non-musical factors (for example human life cycles, seasonal changes, associated rites and rituals etc.).

There is a deliberate cultivation of modes of expression and hence necessitate a highly structured teaching-learning process. Audiences are supposed to be educated about the art-form and are expected to contribute to music making, expressing their approval/disapproval in accordance with the established norms forming a part of the cultural pattern.

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