



Dhrupad, The Singing Style: Remarkably Losing its Effect

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Abstract

The evolution of Indian music is vast and intricate. During this journey Sangeet (music) included the elements of Deshi (regional) and Gaandharva or Marga (classical) Sangeet at times and appeared with various classical forms or styles in different ages. Dhrupad, evolved in the medieval period and still prevalent, has been considered one of the most authentic forms in Hindustani classical music through which Raga may be properly expressed. Raga being a prevailing Cultural Tradition of India which had been rightly executed as well as preserved by the Gharana representatives till the mid and even later phase of the twentieth century A.D. through Alaap and in the form of Bandish (composition). These compositions were known as Cheez to the Gharana exponents, supposed to be the most precious things as the hint of proper rendition of Ragas were hidden within. So, this cultural heritage should not go beyond our reach and we need to preserve this by proper culture of this musical style. A thorough investigation is sought why this high class musical form as being losing its glory day by day and not being able to attract the present generation; the practice of Dhrupad is waning and no such clear idea regarding the form has still developed among the learners in spite of formation of the Academic Institutions (Colleges and Universities) under Higher Education Departments in India where Institutional Training in Music is being exercised.

Keywords: Cultural Tradition; Evolution of Indian music; Deshi and Marga Sangeet; Raga; Hindustani classical music; Dhrupad; Gharana; Institutional Training

Introduction:

Dhrupad is assumed to have been reconstructed through modifications of the Dhruvpad or Dhurpad by the genius of Raja Man Singh Tomar (1486 -- 1516 A.D.), king of Gwalior along with his associate music connoisseurs at the last phase of fifteenth century A.D. (**Roy 79**). Raja Man did not stop himself only organising the new musical style, but also founded an institution for the campaign of the same. Under his enlightened support Dhrupad found a creative environment for growth. Tansen sang of his glory and mentioned him as his patron. It was in this atmosphere of a benign and cultured ruler that the Dhruvpad blossomed (**Deva 100**).

Dhruvpad evolved from Dhruva Prabandha, an offshoot of Salag-Suda Prabandha. Prabandhas were meant for Classical Compositions devoid of Alaap or Vistar (expansion and improvisation through musical notes); namely Geet-Prabandha, Vadya-Prabandha and Nartan-Prabandha. Prabandhas had been in use throughout India during the era till before the concept of Form Music was established. Geet-Prabandha (Vocal Composition) comprised Deshi (regional) Raga and Taal. These Prabandhas, devotional in nature, were mostly sung or performed in the temples. The composer of this music was called Vaggeyakaar. The music seemed to hear Dhrupad like but without Alaap, Bol-Baat and other embellishments. This music was familiar as Haveli Geet during the medieval period in northern India (**Ghosh 22-25**).



Raja Man was able to assume of an organised or further development of Dhruvpad Prabandha because Vishnupad, Shivapad, Chitrapad, Charyapad, Dhruvpad and other Padas (Pada means lyric) were prevalent during his time. It may be realised when Dhruvpad emerged out of Dhruvpad after modifications, Alaap and other embellishments might have been added to it. And this was done because of the congeniality of the new style to be performed in the Court. Gradually, the new form or style of Classical music was elevated to Court-music as the same was adopted as well as exercised by the Court-musicians not only of Gwalior but also of other parts of northern India. Nayak Bakshu, Miyan Tansen, Niyamat Khan Sadarang and so many great music personalities of different times contributed their noble touch for the development and popularity of this musical style.

The excellence of Dhruvpad depends upon proper execution of several specific articulations of sound and embellishments. The Gharana representatives have left remarkable contributions to the formation as well as exclusive presentation of Raga till before the Institutional system was introduced. Hindustani Ragas are rendered basically through the forms of Dhruvpad and Khyal for centuries. Starting from the last phase of nineteenth century a great consciousness had been observed by the initiation of a few educationists cum scholars from different fields. Actually, they tried for the overall social and cultural development through some changes. Institutional training in music began to be assumed during the first phase of twentieth century. The Protagonists of this Renaissance dreamt the development of Music and Culture through the co-relationship between Theory and Practice. Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar are remembered with great regard in the field of *Hindustani* classical music. These two personalities had utmost contribution for the propagation of the basics of *Hindustani* classical music among the common people. They took initiative for the foundation of Music Institutions along with arranging seminars as well as Classical music concerts with the renowned Music Maestros in order to disseminate music education among the mass people.

The style of Dhruvpad singing is still prevalent but the impetus to learning as well as practice of this genre among the present generation is disappointing in spite of a large number of Academic institutions under the Department of Higher Education have been set up across India. This is a very lamentable thing and alarming too that so rich Cultural Tradition of ours is being overlooked and kept aside. Some Concerts and Learning Centres will not suffice to get back the health of the prestigious almost losing musical style. Before starting a critical analysis on the present lack we need to have a brief but clear idea about the Cultural Tradition of India as well as the Evolution of Indian music.

Cultural tradition of India:

The tradition of *Acharya* (Guru or trainer) and *Shishya* (disciple) is very old in India. These saintly *Acharyas* believed in plain-living and high-thinking. The impact of their noble ideas enriched Indian music and culture. Ancient culture and education of this land were nurtured by these *Rishis* (saints). They spent their life in the *Ashrama* (hermitage). Their abodes were the seats of perfect learning and mental edification. The learning process through *Gurukul* (residential) system was thus transmitted from the *Acharya* (Guru) to the *Shishya* (disciple) and *Guru-Shishya* or *Acharya-Shishya Parampara* (tradition) continued for centuries till before the abolition of the same.

Royal patronage enabled the *Acharyas* to carry on the *Acharya - Shishya Parampara* independently. The *Acharyas* rendered free services to the society as their moral duty instead of professionalism. Hankering after money and wealth were immaterial to them. They used to put down their innovations and experiences on various subjects along with music through manuscripts. Logical discussions and scientific analysis of those subjects were entertained very cautiously in the *Parampara* and inferences were taken unanimously in the presence the King.



Theories of the ancient music, as expounded by the musicologists (*Acharyas*), had maximum resemblances and minimal controversies in most of the cases (**Ghosh 94**).

Evolution of Indian music:

Detailed information about the evolution of this music is found since from the age of the *Vedas*. The origin of the *Swaras* (musical notes) and their gradual development irrespective of *Vedic* (*Marga* or Classical) and *Laukik* (*Deshi* or regional) *Swaras* occurred during this time. The practice of *Vedic* music became obsolete in the Classical period that begins at about 600—500 B.C. (**Prajnanananda 44**). An extensive research on the development of Indian music as well as *Ragas* and their classifications was initiated from this time. The *Gandharvas* are considered to have established *Gaandharva* or *Marga Sangeet* (music). In fact, the *Gandharvas* took the leading role to accomplish successful progression of Indian classical music.

Raga is the base of Indian music and it plays an indispensable role in the performance of Classical music. Indian classical music refers to organised and high-class musical exposition through proper articulation of sounds with definite embellishments of musical notes and rhythm. *Raga* is the compound of the powerful ingredients of Classical music which expresses specific moods. Classical music, undoubtedly, denotes development towards music that did not occur a day. Perseverance, rigorous practice and strong dedication led the musicologists (those, having logical erudition on music) and the music professionals to accomplishments.

Before the beginning of the Christian era, music was divided into *Marga* and *Deshi* (**Prajnanananda 44**). *Marga* or *Gaandharva Sangeet* was bounded with certain rules of *Raga* (melody), *Taal* (beats), *Chhanda* (rhythm), *Dhatu* (tune), *Matu* (lyric), *Geeti* (articulation) and remained unchanged irrespective of regions. On the contrary, *Deshi Sangeet* expressed its regional trait and was devoid of excessiveness of musical elements like *Gaandharva Sangeet*. *Deshi Sangeet*, having modified with some musical elements of *Gaandharva Sangeet*, appeared as *Abhijaat Deshi Sangeet* and was named as *Prakirna* in Sanskrit or *Pakinnak* in native language. The *Prakirna* songs were further modified and the new form was called *Biprakirna*. Both *Prakirna* and *Biprakirna*, the two forms of *Abhijaat Deshi Sangeet*, were in vogue till the Christian era (**Goswami Preface: 10**).

Gaandharva Sangeet became obsolete just after the Christian era. *Biprakirna* songs were modified again and in course of time *Prabandha Sangeet* evolved. *Prabandha Sangeet* was basically of three types; namely *Suda*, *Alikrama* and *Biprakirna*. *Suda* *Prabandha* was further divided into *Suddha-Suda* and *Salog-Suda*. With the advancement and demand of time, many a classical musical styles were developed in different forms and shapes out of different *Prabandhas* irrespective of North India and South India.

Hindustani classical music and Dhrupad:

From 15th Century A.D. onwards, Indian music began to be divided into *Hindustani* and *Carnatic Sangeet* with several musical forms. During these periods, the *Acharya-Shishya Parampara* was about to dying in North India and the *Acharyas* managed to settle down to South India. The *Acharyas* concentrated on the developments of the *Deshi Sangeet* therein. *Carnatic* classical music was thus developed. With the abolition of the Temple-oriented music and the *Acharya-Shishya Parampara*, the contemporary Court-music came into prominence. The *Gayak-Vadak-Nartak Parampara* or the professional performers began to be popular and inevitable especially in North India. Those professional performers used to stay in different places of North India. Not only in Classical music, but had their efficiency in Folk music also. They were vocalists, instrumentalists and dancers. They were responsible to recognize themselves as the followers of certain *Gharanas* from the last phase of 18th Century A.D. (**Ghosh 99**).



Dhrupad and *Khayal*, the two derivatives of *Prabandha*, began to be developed and modified in many ways since from the medieval period and are still prevalent in northern India. *Dhrupad* was modified, practised and initiated from Gwalior and there from it flourished throughout Northern India. *Khayal* was elevated to Court-music and gained its popularity from the reign of Shahjahan, the Mughal emperor (**Mitra Preface: 12**). The modern style of *Khayal* or the *Kalavanti Khayal* also spread from Gwalior and the credit is bestowed with Shakkar Khan, Makkhan Khan, the disciples of Ustad Ghulam Rasool, and their descends. Their style was known as *Quawaal BaccheKi Gayaki* (**Mukhopadhyay 78**). In course of time, the term *Gharana* was introduced both in *Dhrupad* and *Khayal* styles among the Court-musicians. *Gharana* deals with professional performers and the forms of *Hindustani* classical music.

There were four types of *Dhrupad* comprising four different music articulations among the *Kalavant-Parampara* or the performers of *Dhrupad* during the *Mughal* period. They were known as *Vaan* or *Vaani*. The four types were *Gaurhaar Vaan*, *Daagar Vaan*, *Khaandaar Vaan* and *Nauhaar Vaan*. The *Vaans* were related to the regions of Gwalior, Delhi, Rajasthan and Punjab respectively. The performers of *Dhrupad*, during that time, used particular suffix with their names such as Shahab Khan Daaguri, Imaam Baksh Khaandaari and likewise. It means those performers were related to *Daagar* and *Khaandaar Vaans* of *Dhrupad* respectively. The performers of *Khayal* also used *Quawaal* as suffix with their names such as Bade Muhammad Khan *Quawaal*, Makkhan Khan *Quawaal* etc (**Ghosh 99**).

In ancient Indian musicology (music study and research), five *Gaandharva Geetis* (style of music in terms of utterance and modulation) were discussed. The *Geetis* were *Suddhaa*, *Vinnaa*, *Gaudi*, *Besaraa* and *Saadhaarani*. Afterwards, *Vaans* or *Vaanis* of *Dhrupad* were developed out of those *Geetis*. The *Vaans*, somehow related to regions, were named as *Gaurhaar Vaan*, *Daagar Vaan*, *Khaandaar Vaan* and *Nauhaar Vaan*. *Gaurhaar Vaan* had resemblance with the sound production of Gwalior. The nature of this *Vaan* in the music was placid and full of *Meend* (special gliding approach from one note to the other by skipping one or more notes). *Daagar Vaan* was applied in the music with inclusive characteristics of *Lug* and *Dutt* (exclusive utterance of adjacent notes and ornamentation by skipping notes) except *Meend*. *Gaurhaar Vaan* and *Daagar Vaan* were created from *Suddhaa Geeti*. *Khaandaar Vaan*, a bit restless in nature, had excessiveness of *Gamak* (shaking character of notes) and *Khatkaa* (repeated advancement with the same note). The nature of *Nauhaar Vaan* was also restless and on the basis of *Chhutt* (frequent use of skipping notes). *Khaandaar Vaan* and *Nauhaar Vaan* were produced out of *Vinnaa* and *Besaraa Geetis* respectively. *Saadhaarani Geeti* turned into *Mishra Vaani* in course of time. *Dhrupads*, generally being heard in the modern times, are of *Mishra Vaani*. Some people also relate *Vaans* or *Vaanis* with different streams of *Khayal* presentation (**Roy 56**).

There are some essential applications in classical music such as *Meend*, *Shruti*, *Gamak* etc. through which *Ragas* may properly be expressed. Classical music is nothing but the sublime combination of *Deshi* and *Marga Sangeet*, though *Marga Sangeet* has become obsolete since from the beginning of the Christian era. Miyan Tansen of Gwalior created *Ragas* like *Miyan Ki Malhar*, *Miyan Ki Todi*, *Darbari Kanada* etc. which require huge scope of *Meend*. Tansen composed many *Dhrupads* where *Gaurhaar* or Gwalior *Vaan* was used. This *Vaan* or transformed *Geeti* was related to Gwalior. Actually, the specific utterance and articulation of music acknowledges the *Deshitva* or the nature of *Deshi* music.

Gharana: General idea

Gharana is an exclusive feature in *Hindustani* classical music, which is missing in *Carnatic* and other branches of North-Indian classical music. *Gharana* evolves from the Persian word *Ghar* which means family and it stands for music professionals under one family or certain school of music who follow definite style of singing, instrument playing or dance.



Gharana talks about innovative styles in presentation, powerful improvisation and consistent variety of features, maintaining certain steps called *Silsila* (**Ghosh, 99-100**). There are certain common traits irrespective of all *Gharanas*, but differences of applications make the originality as well as identification of the *Gharanas* themselves. The *Gharana* system gradually crossed the barrier of lineage and extended to the trained disciples from generation to generation (**Roy, 3**).

Gharana implies excellence of certain elements associated with the particular Form (*Dhrupad* or *Khayal*) of *Hindustani* classical music. At least three generations' performances continuity is the true recognition of a *Gharana* and each exponent of which has to be renowned in this case. Exponent/s of a particular *Gharana* may emerge with some innovative ideas which are adopted and practised by other representatives of the *Gharana* itself. Innovative ideas standardize the quality of *Gharana* music to a higher degree and give birth to a *Gaayaki* (exclusive style) in course of time. A recognised *Gharana*, thus, flourishes with its exclusive characteristics. *Gharana* does not entertain a mere imitation; it survives through *Taleem* (expertises) and proper improvisations.

Concept of Institutional Training system:

The excellence of Institutional Training system lies on the culture of proper synchronisation between Theory and Practice with logical explanation. This system narrates that theory and practice were equally important and complementary to each other in old *Acharya-Shishya Parampara*. In the medieval period professionalism was gradually prioritized rather than old traditional values in the *Acharya-Shishya Parampara*. Theoretical as well as analytical thoughts began to lose its glory day by day and the place of practice rapidly started rising up with the advent of the *Gharana* concept. The Pioneers of the Institutional system tried to unify the ideas of the old *Acharya-Shishya Parampara* and the *Gharana* system of the medieval period.

Critical Analysis:

In this present age, *Khyal* is being exercised as well as performed to a large extent among huge number of practitioners in comparison with *Dhrupad*. The practice of *Dhrupad* is reducing gradually. There is ample scope for proper expression of *Raga* in *Dhrupad* through *Alaap* (expression through gradual and successive expansion of musical notes). And the *Alaap* portion of *Dhrupad* being neglected day by day which is very lamentable. People show much interest on different *Laykaris* (variation of *Chanda* or rhythm) rather than *Alaap*. This practice is being observed both in the academics and performance purposes.

Now, the point is that *Dhrupad* and *Khyal* which were formed in the medieval period of India and flourished, popularised as well as exercised by the *Gharana* (different schools or styles of *Hindustani* classical forms) exponents till the beginning phases of 20th Century A.D., then why the deterioration in terms of *Ragdari* (exclusive rendition of *Raga* presentation through Phrases or certain combination of musical notes), *Alaap* and other related matters to *Hindustani* classical music is still taking place in spite of the foundation of so many Academic Institutions where both theory and practice are logically handled? A number of Terminologies related to the theory of Indian classical music being kept aside and casually omitted in the performances, only creates confusion to the learners. Is there any lack or gap in the syllabus which students or learners are not able to relate with?

Ragdari implies a way to successful rendition of *Raga* presentation. The sense of *Ragdari* develops out of *Taleem*. Institutional training can give a mere outline of a *Raga* to the students; but *Gharana* training encourages and enables learners to go with thorough presentation of a *Raga*. Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande believed this truth in heart and soul. So, he went on learning from Ustad Nazir Khan and Ustad Ashik Ali Khan. Besides, he



learnt almost three hundred *Dhrupad* and innumerable compositions of *Khayal* from Pandit Raoji Buwa Belbalkar and Ustad Ali Hussain respectively (**Mukhopadhyay 228**).

Dhrupad and *Khayal* both possess vast span of *Ragdari* through *Alaap* and *Vistaar* respectively. *Alaap* encourages gradual expansion of chronological *Swaras* (musical notes) of the *Raga* while expansion of Phrases (combination of certain notes) is exercised in *Vistaar*. In both the cases, the purpose is to express *Raga* properly. *Alaap* (expansion of notes or syllables that unfolds a *Raga*) and the *Bandish* (composition) both should have a consistency of presentation in between. Discrepancy between the two portions means wrong representation of a *Raga* and the artiste is criticized as a result (**Mukhopadhyay 225**).

Appreciation of music is a prime condition for a learner or music lover to assess a particular style of music. The appreciator must have prior experience about that style he / she is going to listen to. Regular habit of listening to authentic music enables a learner to realise subtle differences among the prevalent musical styles. A Guru (teacher or trainer) is an ideal person to better guide him / her towards right direction with proper *Taleem* (training), which will definitely help to enhance the capacity and senses regarding particular style of music. Unfortunately, most of the learners of this present age are unable to achieve proper *Taleem* due to unavailability of an ideal Guru in most of the cases, economic constraints and other valid reasons. The discrepancies, however, in the practice and performances of *Dhrupad* of the present day context are enlisted one by one.

1. Most of the cases *Dhrupad* are performed without manual *Tanpura*; in lieu of that electronic *Tanpura* is used. Electronic devices produce mechanical sound. Proper temperament does not grow as a result.
2. The use of *Pakhawaj*, the essential percussion instrument for the musical style, is decreasing; this lack has been taking place for the last few decades in the academic field and even in the performance premises. The position of percussion instrument has been replaced by *Tabla* in most of the time. As a result, exact sound production is not obtained. Lot of changes or replacement in *Bols* (syllables) of *Taal* / *s* also take place.
3. The term *Ragdari* is very important as per *Raga* presentation is concerned. In *Hindustani* classical musical field this *Ragdari* portion is being neglected among the youngster learners. Without proper knowledge of this portion *Raga* cannot be expressed properly. As a result performance goes in vain.
4. *Alaap* portion is being highly neglected and almost omitted; tendencies of excessive and unnecessary *Laykaris*, improper vocalism as well as lack of aesthetic sense in the performances have made people averse to the musical style.

Conclusion:

Ancient *Ragas*, their classifications and applications are obsolete today. Modern *Ragas* and their treatment resemble with that of the period, the *Gharana* exponents dealt with. *Bandish* (composition), which also known as the term *Cheez* to the *Gharana* representatives, have been carefully preserved and transmitted to the same *Gharana* representatives from one generation to the other in the form of *Dhrupad* or *Khyal*. *Bandishes* were treated as gem or treasure as they imply the way to unfold *Ragas*. *Nayaki* and *Gayaki* are two musicological terms and very much inclined to *Hindustani* classical music. *Nayaki* refers to the lessons that a disciple learns from his *Guru* during the apprenticeship. After having learnt a great deal of lessons the disciple acquires that much of potentiality to adopt ideas beyond his *Gharana*. He then, will have some power to blend ideas with self-experience and which is called *Gayaki*. Rigorous practice and contemplation of mind work together to shape a *Gayaki* in course of time. *Gharana* training helps a learner to understand different *Gayakis* apart from one's own.



A future Performer of Dhrupad must understand the terminologies associated in the musical style and has to apply them after proper realisation. Exact articulations with appropriate and moderate embellishments applicable in the Ragas through proper rendition of Bandishes will definitely re-establish the standard and presentation of the musical style in the long run.

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