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Voice Cultures in Hindustani Classical Music

Chinthaka Prageeth Meddegoda

Introduction

This paper investigates aspects of how aesthetic preferences in Hindustani vocal music are linked to style, gender, performance context, and historical circumstance. First, the distinctiveness of Hindustani vocal music is articulated through analyzing the use and application of several melodic shapes sung in different genres thus contributing to a general overview on their musical diversity. Secondly, different degrees of intensity in melodic shapes sung in music genres are discussed, because they may cause remarkable changes from one genre to another although the same melodic shapes are applied. Taking this as a point of departure, the question of which cultural and historical contexts determine voice cultures is examined. In doing so, this paper can provide some ideas about the role of cultural and historical differences that are probably of much higher importance to the identity of voice cultures than perceived musical differences.

Distinctive Voice Cultures in Hindustani Classical Music

Factors that cause a music genre to be differentiated from another include the varied distribution of melodic shapes in genres of Hindustani music. Technically, the term 'voice culture' is perceived as molding the voice through training in order to produce sound and musical movements which are distinctively identified from other music cultures. In Hindustani music, training a voice in a particular way alone does not make a genre different from another. There are several vocal *gharanas*¹ of North Indian music which are vastly different from each other in both musical content and cultural context. Each *gharana* has developed musical individuality of voice production through training methods followed by a certain ideology of history and culture. Hindustani music comprises many music genres and they are generally classified as classical, semi classical, and light classical

¹ Different lineages of ideology in music or dance in North India.

music.² Mainly *dhrupad*, *dhamar*, and *khyal* are called classical music genres. Other genres i.e. *thumri*, *tappa*, *chaiti*, *julha*, *kajri* and *dadara* are called semi-classical forms.

Genre	History latest since	Places	Who performs today (according to preferences)	Main musical features
<i>dhrupad</i>	13 th century	Temple, Court,	Mostly male, some female	<i>meend, andolita, gamak</i>
<i>khyal</i>	15 th century ³	Court, in the Places where courtesans lived	Male, Female	<i>meend, andolita, gamak, murkhi, khatka</i>
<i>thumri</i>	19 th century ⁴	In the Places where courtesans lived, Urban entertainment	Female, Male	<i>meend, gamak, murkhi, khatka, gitkiri</i>
<i>tappa</i>	17 th century ⁵	Private places, Urban entertainment	Male, Female	<i>gamak</i>
<i>dadara</i>	18 th century	Private places, Urban entertainment	Female, Male	<i>meend, murkhi, khatka</i>
<i>ghazal</i>	13 th century	Private places, Urban entertainment	Male, Female	<i>murkhi, khatka</i>

Figure 1: Table summarizing genre with its time of emergence, place of performance, performers and main musical features.

All genres and forms consist of many 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

² Terms such as classical, semi classical, light classical and folk refer to common typology or taxonomy in Hindustani music genres used by scholars to ease the understanding of the repertoire in general, though these terms might be arguable. Manuel classifies *khyal* as classical genre and *ghazal*, *thumri*, *dadara* and *tappa* as semi-classical genres. He puts less improvised *ghazals* as light classical (Manuel, 1989: 96, 100, 102, 104, 110). Van Der Meer describes music genres other than classical as semi-classical, light, folk and film-music (Meer, 1980: 79). For further references on the usage of these terms see: Qureshi (2000: 813, 823, 827) and Zadeh (2012:3, 4, 30, 32, 43, 44).

³ Manuel, 1990: 35.

⁴ Manuel, 1990: 34. Manuel discusses many opinions on the origin of *thumri*, and there is emphasis on early nineteenth century as the period it became more important although its history goes back much further.

⁵ Trivedi, 2010: 123.

musicians. These genres can be identified as different from each other mainly in terms of their melodic features.

melodic shapes	<i>dhrupad</i>	<i>khyal</i>	<i>thumri</i>	<i>tappa</i>	<i>bhajan, dadara, chaiti, julha, kajri</i>	<i>ghazal</i>
<i>gamak</i>	large range, medium range, narrow range	medium range, narrow range, large range	narrow range	narrow range, medium range	narrow range	narrow range
<i>meend</i>	large range, medium range, narrow range	large range, medium range, narrow range	narrow range, medium range	narrow range	narrow range, medium range	narrow range
<i>khatka</i>	seldom	average	often	average	often	often
<i>murkhi</i>	non	average	often	seldom	often	average
<i>gitkiri</i>	non	seldom	often	often	average	non
<i>andolita</i>	occasionally	occasionally	non	non	non	non
<i>kan</i>	often	often	often	average	often	often

Figure 2: Table showing distribution of different melodic features in Hindustani music genres.

The Hindustani musician Anirban Bhattacharyya expresses his opinion on melodic shapes used in Hindustani music as, “Basically what harmonium players play on harmonium is the imitation of vocal style. So we have this common kind of patterns in the vocal music itself which are common to all the ragas like we have *gamaks*, we have *tans*, we have *meend*, we have one thing called *murkhi*, we have *khatka*. So these are typical note combinations which the singers do sing. Some singers do one or two of them as specialty. This is a full set, so people choose out of this set” (Bhattacharyya, 2012). Ancient treatises of Hindustani music provide almost a complete set of terms for various melodic shapes which are used in Hindustani music practice.⁶ All melodic shapes are more or less well defined, but only a few of them are spoken about in general. Here, I have chosen the most basic and

⁶ “Classification of ornaments and other techniques appear frequently in theoretical literature from the *Natyashastra* onwards: the *Sangeeta Ratnakara* lists 15 *gamakas* and as many as 96 *sthayas*” (Sanyal & Widdess, 2004: 161).

widely used terms for a few melodic shapes. Figure 2 shows an approximate scheme of a few basic melodic shapes in Hindustani music that are differently distributed in various genres.

Figure 2 provides a general idea about how melodic movements are applied in different genres. Although the same melodic shapes are shared among all genres, the intensity of melodic shapes can vary in each genre, i.e. between *dhrupad* and other genres. Figure 3 and 4 illustrate the intensity of a *gamak* in *dhrupad* and *khyal*. The lines show the melodic movement of the *gamak*. In *dhrupad*, the *gamak* shows a clear tendency to intensify the turns within the melodic movements, while in *khyal* all parts of the *gamak* are of similar intensity.

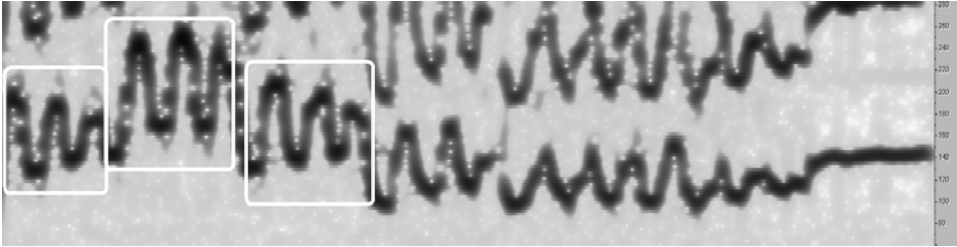


Figure 3: Spectrogram⁷ of a *gamak* on Ma (Re^b-Ma-Re^b-Ma-Re^b-Ma), Ni (Ma-Ni-Ma-Ni-Ma-Ni), and Dha^b (Ga-Dha^b-Ga-Dha^b-Ga-Dha^b) in Raga Bhairav by Uday Bhawalkar in *dhrupad* style (2:20.034 – 2:27.087).

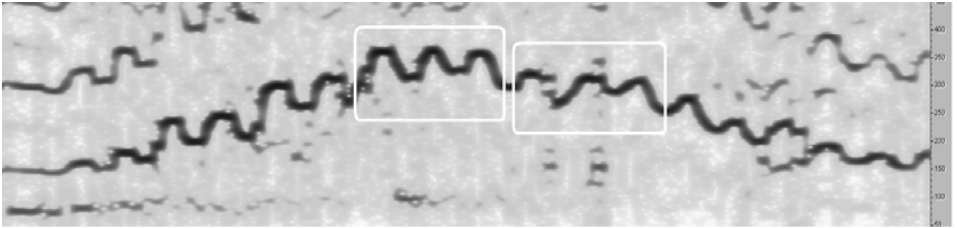


Figure 4: Spectrogram⁸ of a *gamak* on Ni^b (Dha^b-Ni^b-Dha^b-Ni^b-Dha^b-Ni^b) and Dha^b (Ma-Dha^b-Ma-Dha^b-Ma-Dha^b) in Raga *Bilaskhani Todi* by Satyasheel Deshpande in *khyal* style (2:09:448 – 2:12:189).

The darkness of the melodic line shows the intensity, while the width of the line shows the volume.

⁷ Extracted from the audio excerpt (2:22.889 – 2:26.751) found in Bawalkar, 2008: track no. 5.

⁸ Extracted from the audio excerpt (2:09:448 – 2:12:189) found in Deshpande (2004) track no. 4.

The pedagogy of voice training in Hindustani music mainly focuses on accuracy of pitch and melodic shapes in order to execute the style of the respective music genre while, the timbre or tonal quality is intriguing in western art music.⁹ Range, dynamics, timbre of voice, and methods of improvisation can vary from musician to musician even if they sing the same raga in the same music genre.

Vocal training methods are embedded into and evolve from the cultural context in which musicians were brought up. Therefore, they differ from genre to genre. For example, *thumri* singing was developed through courtesans who mostly performed dances while singing. During dancing, they could easily produce lighter, florid, effeminate, and romantic vocal renderings rather than singing calm, sober, dignified, majestic, or spiritualistic melodies as in *dhrupad* performances. *Thumri* singers had to satisfy an audience whose expectations of aesthetics were more towards romantic and erotic experiences through music.¹⁰ Therefore the melodic shapes were honed in each genre in order to fulfill diverse cultural requirements. Stephen Slawek writes on improvisation of Hindustani music that “much of what occurs in a performance of Hindustani music [...] is actually fixed music in the sense that the performer has practiced and rehearsed those exact melodic or rhythmic phrases hundreds, if not thousands, of times before” (Slawek, 1998: 336). As such, frequently sung melodic shapes are dominantly honed in a genre highlighting the iniquity from other genres. Though the genres are differently identified, almost all the ragas are shared among all genres as compositional frameworks. Therefore, the preference of ragas which are often sung in a genre does not make considerable difference from one genre to another. Ragas are improvised in a genre through applying various melodic shapes in creative order. Other features that make vocal genres different in Hindustani music are composition structures, lyrical meanings, musical instruments used and the historical and present-day cultural contexts.

⁹ Meer says “In the first place the sound of the voice is kept as natural as possible, contrary to Western voice production. This implies a vast difference in tonal quality, in which the standards are quite flexible”(1980: 169).

¹⁰ Manuel mentions that “The ‘counterfeit’ nature of aesthetic emotion, while indeed present in art in general, is again, uniquely important in the *mehfil thumri*, where the performer is a courtesan whose personal success lies in her ability to manipulate men, all the time feigning affection, longing, jealousy, and so on, while in fact remaining secretly aloof and affection, longing, jealousy, and so on...” (Manuel, 1990: 134).

Evolution of Voice Culture and Religious Ideas

In music genres associated with spiritual intentions, the production of intonation and musical enunciations are distinctly identifiable from other genres. In brief, most melodic ornaments¹¹ are broader and sung in slow rhythm in such musical genres in comparison to other music genres. The early stages of emerging Indian music were mostly tied to Hindu religious practices. With the influence of Persian culture on Indian music, music in North India has evolved as a separated classical music genre which can be distinctly identified as independent from South Indian classical music. Still Hinduism-centric ideology is dominant and clearly apparent in Hindustani music genres, though it was highly practiced and developed by Persian musicians as well, who followed the Muslim religion.¹² As a matter of fact, most early *dhrupad* singers were Brahmins who later converted to Islam by force or through marriages, in many cases to obtain patronage from Muslim rulers (Meer 1980: 57). Given that most Indian musical treatises were based on Hindu ideology and written in Sanskrit and other Indian languages, Persian musical elements were appropriated in North Indian music culture despite Persian religious ideology. However, some Persian Sufi interpretations enriched *dhrupad* ideology making them attractive and impressive for Muslim rulers (Subramanian, 2006: 4649). Widdess describes thoughts on *dhrupad* singing told by hereditary musicians who observe that mainly *dhrupad* is sung for the sake of god and not just for entertaining the people (Widdess, 1994: 93).¹³ The musical elements which are sung in *dhrupad* are believed to be sacred for their intonation is produced through the heart. Richard Widdess quotes an excerpt of an interview:

¹¹ Clayton and Sahasrabuddhe translate the Hindi term *alankara* as ornaments. *Alankara* connotes various melodic shapes which embellish the basic frame of the melody. Clayton and Sahasrabuddhe mention "For a dignified *khyal* presentation *alankaras* (ornaments) such as *meend*, *gamak* and *aas* are needed." (Clayton and Sahasrabuddhe, 1999: 13).

¹² In India, Ustad Aminuddin Dagar compared *alap* to the ritual decoration of the image of a deity [Sringar], and to the eight ways of serving a deity [Ashtaseva] (Widdess, 1994: 94).

¹³ Ustad Aminuddin Dagar described *dhrupad* as an "offering to the feet of *Bhagavan* [God]" (Widdess, 1994: 93). For him, a successful *dhrupad* performance is one that is sung for God, not orientated towards the audience. Similarly the late Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar stated that *dhrupad* performance is first for the praise of a deity, secondly for oneself as a form of meditation, and lastly for the audience's enjoyment. And a *dhrupad* festival programme attributes to Ustad Fariduddin Dagar the statement: "This ancient vocal music is not for your entertainment, it is only for the delight of God, who is inherent in both the singer and the listener" (Ibid.).

Some features of *dhrupad* may be attributed directly to its status as sacred music, while others result from the avoidance of the stylistic peculiarities of other genres that do not carry the same esoteric status. Mohammad Hafeez Khān Talwandiwalē explained, for example, that the decorative ornaments and arabesques of other styles must be avoided in *dhrupad*, because they would be inappropriate when ‘singing before God’; the ornamental technique called *gamak* is permissible in the free metric vocal improvisation called *alap*, however, because it ‘comes from the heart’. The complex, fast-tempo variations which he performs after the *dhrupad* composition serve to enhance *zikr*, a state of spiritual ecstasy induced by repeating the name of God (int. [RW] Jan. 1995) (Widdess, 1994: 95).

Gender Aspects

In India before the 18th century, females were not encouraged to learn or perform spiritual, highly majestic or honored arts such as *dhrupad* singing. Across the 18th and 19th centuries, music and dance rapidly flourished and were encouraged by Moghul emperors in North India. *Dhrupad* was the official stream of music in early Moghul courts and similarly, in Hindu temples (Meer 1980: 57). In this period courtesans were allowed to perform lighter ragas of *dhrupad* in Moghul courts and subsequently *khyal* singing style.¹⁴ Sadaranga was a *dhrupad* singer¹⁵ in a Moghul court who did not sing *khyal* but composed *khyal* compositions and taught them to others (Meer, 1980: 57). *Khyal* singing style eventually became popular as a female music genre given that its melodic intonation was considered to be lighter than *dhrupad*. Richard Widdess draws metaphors on *dhrupad*, *dhamar* and *khyal* singing styles in relation to their stylistic features as follows:

The elephant is a symbol richer even than the lamp in cultural references appropriate to *dhrupad*. Its gait is considered to be ponderous yet dignified, slow but sensuous, and is often compared with the style of presentation of a *dhrupad* composition, which contrasts so markedly with the more rapidly-moving, highly

¹⁴ *Khyal* was highly in vogue after Sadaranga developed and promoted *khyal* by composing thousands of compositions for females.

¹⁵ “The genealogy of Misri Singh’s immediate descendants is not clear, but it is generally supposed that they included Ni’mat Khan, who became the chief court musician of the emperor Muhammad Shah Rangile (1719–48), and adopted the pen name Sadarang” (Sanyal & Widdess, 2004: 23).

ornamented styles such as *khyal* and *thumri*. The term 'elephant's gait' (hāthi ka cāl) is applied by members of the Dagar family to the slow style of singing *dhrupad*, in which the notes of the composed melody are sung in a ponderous but swaying rhythm, as opposed to the more irregular rhythm of *dhamar*, which they term *umt ki cāl* (camel's gait). Lahiri (1977) quotes a proverb from Bihar in which the strength of the elephant and the speed of the horse stand for *dhrupad* and *khyal* respectively (Widdess, 1994: 101).

Likewise, in the sphere of classical music in North India, the *dhrupad* and *dhamar* was considered as male genres and *khyal* and *thumri* were attributed as female music genres. *Dhrupad* and *khyal* were accompanied by *pakhavaj* and *tabla* respectively which can be metaphorized as male and female in regard to their tonal quality. As a organological fact, the *pakhavaj* is one of membranophones, which produce lower frequencies of vibration and higher amplitude of sound which is louder than the moderate vibration rate and amplitude of general speech. For this reason *dhrupad* singers had to sing louder than the sound of *pakhavaj*. By comparison, the loudness of *tabla* is more moderate and female voices could more easily be heard than the sound of *tabla*. Thus, *khyal* were originally composed by males for females though later they were sung by males as well. With the arrival of electronic sound equipment and amplification to India, many elements in the voice culture of each genre were managed without much effort to produce a louder voice.

Thumri is a very prominent female music genre which is enriched by the musical components of *khyal* and folk music elements such as *charchari*, *raas* and *holi* (Manuel, 1990: 52). *Thumri* rapidly flourished during the reign of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah in Lucknow in the 18th century with his tremendous patronage, fondness and talent in the genre (Manuel 1990: 34). Currently, *thumri* is a rich music genre which is sung by both male and female singers. Nevertheless, it was only practiced by females up to the early 20th century. At present the controversy over singing male and female music genres by appropriate gender is not a matter of contention although it was highly contested in the past.¹⁶

¹⁶ Srijan Deshpande, the son of Pandit Satyasheel Deshpande, expressed his opinion to the question on singing *dhrupad* by females as follows: "Women sing *khyal* successfully, so I don't think why they shouldn't sing *dhrupad* successfully, I mean, I don't think this is such a question anymore, I feel, when I go to a concert, I don't really think whether there is a male singer or a female singer" (pers. comm. Deshpande, 2012).

Social Hierarchy

As *dhrupad* was a sacred, majestic, and elite music genre, the musicians of this repertoire possessed the highest dignity amongst other musicians in North India. Some *dhrupad* singers who were originally Hindu had to convert to the Muslim religion for they were disreputable among Hindu community after serving Muslims. The most respected musicians were called *Kalawant* who sang for spiritual orientations (Sanyal & Widdess, 2004: 64). Second most respected were those who provided solo performances in the service of Muslim rulers at *Darbars* (royal courts). The pioneer musicians of four *banis* (four kinds of *dhrupad* traditions) were considered as upper middle class given that they received remuneration for their service from the court of Akbar. The musicians who were involved in musical practices which included dance and oriented for various commercial purposes can be put in the third position in the music community. In first instances, *dhrupad* singers did not sing music genres e.g. *khyal* and *thumri* which was notorious as one of low level music genres in North India. In regard to economic reasons, *dhrupadians* composed *khyals* and taught courtesans (*tawaiifs*) who were performers in Moghul courts. Some *dhrupad* singers started to perform and formulate *khyal gharanas* with the rise of a new social environment. Some aspirants who carried the lower strata in the society were not yet welcome to learn *dhrupad* in traditional schools and therefore they switched to learn *khyal* which did not demand candidates/aspirants belonging to higher castes or prestige lineages.¹⁷ With the extensive involvement of *dhrupad* singers in *khyal* practices and huge masculine involvement in learning, teaching, and composing bought *khyal* genre into higher status in the society nearly as *dhrupad* genre. Moreover, *khyal* singers were patronized by royal courts¹⁸ and subsequently many other aristocrats

¹⁷ Sharbari Mukherjee writes: "Traditionally, women have never been permitted to sing or learn *dhrupad* which is said to be the divine music meant for the gods, and was always associated with temple rituals. It was a male bastion strictly taught to the male members of the family or to son-in-law and the knowledge was sometimes handed down as dowry to those who married in to the family of some musicians of high status. But women were never practitioners" (Mukherjee, 1983: 7). See also (Narayanan, 1999: 54).

¹⁸ Further information about royal patronage on *khyal* is given in the following statement in one of Wade's articles: "*Khyal* was developed to maturity after *dhrupad* and is second in prestige among the Hindustani vocal genre. Legend credits a royal patron of the 1400s, Sultan Husain Sharqi (1458–1477) of Jaunpur, with the creation of a genre by that name. Though its relationship to the *khyal* of today is dubious, it was probably one of numerous popular regional genres that surfaced in classical music only when a royal patron brought it into an influential cultural sphere; in the case of

enthusiastically involved in composing and practicing *khyal*. Today, female candidates are welcome to the *dhrupad* traditional schools and also *dhrupad* is taught as a compulsory subject in universities and other Hindustani music learning centers.¹⁹ As such, voice production, and applying music dynamics in different musical practices were developed according to the religious ideology, gender factors, and social hierarchism.

Changes in Musical Identity regarding Gender, Religious Beliefs and Social Hierarchy

The possible ways of infusing varied singing styles in a voice culture are through the development of popular media and new technology. In the *gharana* system of learning music, the students were limited to a certain music culture in which his or her *guru* belongs. Each vocal *gharana* was isolated from the other not only because of the geographical distances but also lacking communication facilities to mobilize musical ideas in the society in contrast to the condition at present. Musicians from different *gharanas* did not often have the opportunity to hear, watch or learn other vocal styles. Hereditary musicians of *gharanas* were responsible for maintaining their inherited style and specialties by being conservative within the art form.

With the development of various transportation systems, dominantly the railways in the second half of 19th century, musicians could often travel for attending music events taking place in various regions of North India. Subsequently, in the gramophone era of India, classical music performances of various artists from different *gharanas* were recorded by gramophone companies. These recordings were made available to anybody who could afford them. Therefore, musicians had much more opportunity to hear repeatedly and learn other singing styles through imitating. Today, most classical vocalists maintain some singing elements which are said were inherited from their own *gharanas* but this knowledge is not crucial for the general middle class audience. However, all vocal *gharanas* share almost the same singing elements that are used in varying quantities according to the genre's preferences and the prevalent taste promoted by each *gharana*.

khyal, the patron who did this was another Mughal sovereign, Muhammad Shah (1719–1748)" (Wade, 2013: 951).

¹⁹ I and my female classmates learnt *dhrupad* and *dhamar* as a compulsory subject at Bhatkhande music institution in Lucknow and Banaras Hindu University in Varanasi.

The participation of classical singers in Gujarati, Marathi and Parsi theatre and film is worthy to examine how far a musician could stretch his voice to perform many singing styles. Indian theatres, such as Parsi, Marathi and Gujarati theatre, regularly employed classical musicians to provide stage music and also as actors who could sing while acting. Music directors borrowed musical elements to set music in order to fulfill the requirements of the plots. Music genres such as *khyal*, *thumri*, *bhajan*, *ghazal*, *qawwali* were used to make the plot more realistic and attractive. According to Grimes, renowned *khyal* singers like Pandit Bhaskarbua Bakhle, Pandit Yevateshwarikar also directed and composed music for Marathi theatre and classical singers such as Bhimsen Joshi (from Gadag), Kumar Gandharva (from Belgaum), and Jitendra Abhisheki (from Goa) and some pioneers of the classical music in Maharashtra such as Balkrishna Ichalkaranjkar (from Ichalkaranji) and Vishnu Dighambara Paluskar (from Miraj) who came from the Maharashtra-Karnataka border also were involved in Marathi music dramas (Grimes, 2008: 13).

Some classical singers played 'singer-actors' in music dramas and they mostly performed main roles in the stories. These musicians must have gone through learning and performing diverse music genres in order to make the music drama more attractive and economically successful. Female impersonators such as Amritlal, Nayak Naslu Sarkari, Jayshankar Sundari, and Bal Gandharva were famous for playing heroine characters in Marathi, Gujarati and Parsi theatres. They sang many North Indian singing styles in accordance with the scenes. These female impersonators possessed extraordinary timber²⁰ and range²¹ in their voices which are distinct from ordinary male and female voices. Hansen describes that "The preferences exercised by public and patrons for female performers, male-to-female impersonators, or both, need to be understood as shifting over time in

²⁰ Hansen describes about the timber of voice of Naslu Sarkari as "When Jehangir Khambata founded the Empress Victoria Theatrical Company in 1877, he took full advantage of the talents of a popular female impersonator known as Naslu Sarkari. Famed for his sweet, 'cuckoo' voice (*kokil kanth*), Naslu played the Emerald Fairy to Kavas Khatau's Prince Gulfam in the Indar Sabha" (Hansen, 2001:67,68).

²¹ Hansen mentions about Balgandharva's voice as such "Similarly, his songs were memorable for their emotional expressivity, particularly the projection of the traditional sentiments of romance and pathos (*shringara* and *karuna rasa*). His voice production was not falsetto but midway between today's male and female registers, as was true of other singer-actors of the time, regardless of gender. His spoken voice is said to have been an idealized version of (presumable upper-caste) women's speech" (Hansen, 1999:136). See also Nadkarni, 1988:118.

conjunction with strictures relating to caste, class, gender, and codes of morality” (Hansen, 2001: 64). Similarly, this fact has been reflected also in the singing cultures of North Indian music, throughout history.

The popularity of the Gujarati, Marathi and Parsi theatres were declining after the advent of Bollywood in the 1930s. Many actors, plots, and music repertoires of Parsi and Marathi theatre were appropriated in Hindi film music productions. In the mid 1930s, music directors increasingly included western music elements, a feature that continues until today. Renowned classical singers such as Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Amir Khan, D. V. Paluskar, Parveen Sultana, Aarti Ankalikar, Bhimsen Joshi, Rajan & Sajan Mishra, Sathyasheel Deshpande, Ahmed Hussain & Mohd Hussain, Rashid Khan, and the playback singers such as Lata Mangeshkar, Asha Bhosle, Mohd Rafi, Manna Dey, have sung classical compositions and those based on classical music in Hindi films. Many instrumentalists of classical music such as Ravi Shankar and Zakir Hussain have directed music in films and have applied various musical elements from different genres. While singing and composing music for commercial purposes, classical vocalists adopted new ideas in creating more marketable music for mass audiences.

Present Hindustani Musical Practices

Srijan Deshpande said in his interview on the question whether Hindustani classical singers may be capable of performing genres apart from their specialty that:

Most people will tell you to stick to one form and build your voice around only that form, but my father himself does this, he is accused by lot of people for, you know, having trouble with his voice because he came up with a lot of forms, but he was complemented by a lot of people in that he is able to express them and the beauties of various forms in his voice. I think he indulged with all of this, not in *dhrupad* but *khyal*, *thumri* and *ghazals*. So yes it is possible the amount of quality that you can maintain is different, and it is a question, but to certain extent, yes, it is possible. It would be very difficult to maintain the highest quality of each of those separately not only in terms of voice, also in terms of content, in terms of form, in terms of rhythm at the use, but to an extent, yes” (Deshpande, 2012).

From the late nineteenth century to the present, musicians who belonged to traditional lineages in India have diversify their practice of additional music

genres while some maintain only their inherited music genre. The bias of male and female genre is not a concern anymore in Hindustani musical genres but in the case of *dhrupad*, there is still a dichotomy between actual aesthetic preference of the society and the social agenda on feminism/gender equality. In the sphere of *gharana* traditions, mostly hereditary musicians are proud to continue their own singing style as they received it from forefather musicians in their family. Many of them avoid singing other music genres which do not fit to their social status, gender, and sometimes to their religion as well. However, such thoughts on status are more or less outdated among a great part of the present-day audience. Some contemporary vocalists in the commercial field, who have also learnt classical music in *gharana* traditions, have managed to sing other music styles. Finally, most vocalists of classical genres share similar vocal elements that appear in different quantities thus reflecting their training and individual aesthetics.

VOICE IDENTITIES OF PROFESSIONAL SINGERS:

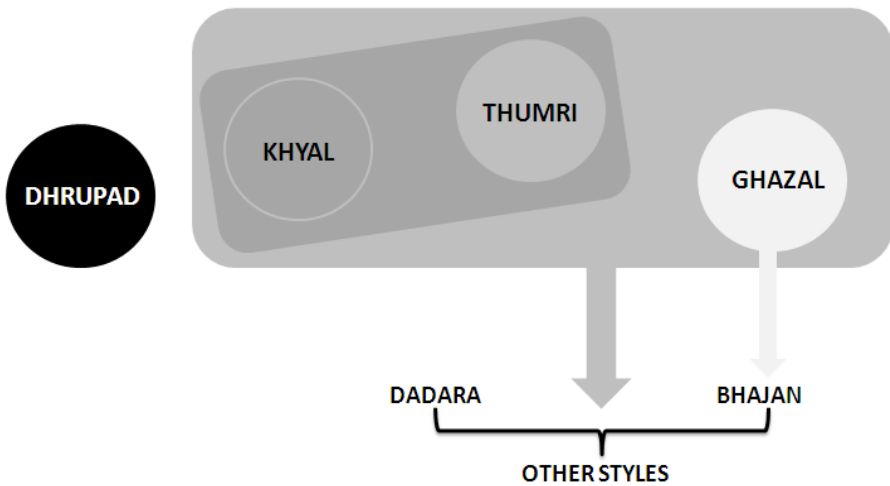


Figure 5: Present voice identities of professional singers and their performances in other genres of Hindustani classical music.

Today, some musicians who are not hereditary but specialize in a particular genre are also additionally renowned in other music genres. Exceptionally, *dhrupad* singers do not sing other genres in popular media even though they teach and demonstrate other genres for academic purposes. Figure 5 illustrates that musicians in Hindustani music can be divided into four categories according to the music genres they are publicly performing. *Dhrupad* singers are isolated in their repertoire, as they do not publicly

perform other genres. *Khyal* singers perform *khyal*, *thumri*, *dadara*, *bhajan* and folk genres which are transformed into the light classical context of Hindustani classical music. *Thumri* singers perform *thumri*, *khyal*, *dadara*, *bhajan*, *ghazals* and other vocal styles. Finally, *ghazal* singers perform *ghazal*, *bhajan* and in rare cases *thumri*, *dadara*, *chaiti* and other vocal styles. Currently, singers keep to the genres shown in figure 5.

Conclusion

The scheme outline in Figure 2 above describes the distribution of melodic features in Hindustani music genres providing an overview how these genres are distinctive from each other. Figure 3 and 4 compares the intensity of a *gamak* in *khyal* and *dhrupad* showing that the same melodic shape can be differently understood and practiced in two different genres reflecting the aesthetic preference of the performer and the community to which the performer belongs. This comparison also underlines that Hindustani vocalists express emotions through varying degrees of intensity in tones which are prompted through lyrical meanings and the melodic shapes of the genre. Here, the separation of musical content from its cultural context eases the way to respectively review the skeleton of a music genre abstracting it from its surrounding subjectivity.

In *dhrupad*, the vocalization is made in slow rhythm and musical ornaments are broader compared to other music genres. Hindu religious ideas have been reflected in *dhrupad* singing along with some Persian religious and Sufi interpretations. Religious interpretations of music say that singing decorative ornaments and arabesques such as *khatka*, *murkhi*, narrow *gamak* and *gitkiri* have the tendency to distort the spiritual identity of *dhrupad*.

The history of Hindustani music reveals that females were discouraged by society from singing *dhrupad* because highly spiritual arts needed to be performed by males. Masculinity in Hindustani singing is portrayed through lower pitch, bass tone, louder volume, slow melodic movement and higher energy, and heavy curvaceous renderings that are virtually ubiquitous in *dhrupad* performances. In contrast, femininity in singing portrayed through the frequent use of middle and higher pitch range, mild tone, moderate and faster melodic movements such as *khatka*, *murkhi*, *gitkiri*, *kan*, narrow range *gamak*, lighter *meend* are prevalent in *thumri* singing.



Figure 6: The unknown courtesans singing *ghazals* in a Mushaira, Hyderabad, India. Photo: Open source.

The ranking system of musicians in Hindustani music was based upon the purpose and contest for a musical performance. It says that musicians were evaluated not only through rating their musical abilities but were ranked in the system according to context such as singing for spiritual purposes, singing for the elite in society, and singing for general audiences. This hierarchy system of musicians also must have been idealized through the Hindus' caste system propagated by some Brahmins who led the society by being mediators between the people and the Gods. With the arrival of new technology in India, conservative features of learning, teaching, and performing, changed exceeding the boundaries regarding gender, religion and social hierarchies which were considered before the mid of the nineteenth century. Various music pieces from different places in India were broadcast and records of many vocal performances were available at the market.

At the same time, theatre genres such as Parsi, Gujarati and Marathi brought tremendous change to the general concept of singing styles and cultural boundaries. Female impersonators, females, and males could accommodate their voices when singing various music genres. The general public has admired musicians as versatile artists who could sing many singing styles one after another. The trend was continued also through the Hindi film industry where many singers have shown their ability to adopt to various voice cultures without noticeable interruption based on any

gender, religious and social hierarchical issues. Figure 5 manifests a general idea on interaction of singers within the area of Hindustani music implying that musicians of *dhrupad* have not given public performance of other singing styles compared to the musicians of other genres who perform many genres except *dhrupad*. Moreover, females have not thrived in singing *dhrupad* to a noticeable extent. Musicians of the Dagar *gharana* (a *dhrupad gharana*) have encouraged women by teaching and promoting them in an effective manner. Almost all universities and other institutions of Hindustani music provide *dhrupad* as a subject for female aspirants. It is apparent that religious and social hierarchical boundaries are not hindrances anymore for females to learn and perform any music genre. The only hindrance might be that the overall intonation of *dhrupad* singing has been conceptualized as 'masculine' throughout the history and this idea is still more or less ingrained in many musicians and listeners of *dhrupad* until now. In Hindustani music, the way of making sound using the throat is itself not only to voice musical ideas but also the way the voice is cultured by societal and musical preferences, cultural history and religious beliefs.

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