



ASSESSING THE DEVELOPMENT AND INFLUENCE OF VARIOUS GHARANAS ON THE HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL VOCAL STYLES: A REVIEW

Mendole Chandrashekhar Hirachandji, Dr. Kiran Hooda

Department of Music

NIILM University, Kaithal (Haryana)

ABSTRACT

Indian classical music, akin to the sky, has a wide range of presenting techniques for specific ragas. These techniques are referred to as "gharanas" in Hindustani classical music, which are singers who follow their guru's singing manner through father-son or guru-tradition. Gharanas have influenced the development of music over the past 300 years, combining centuries of traditions, high-class gurus, and guru-disciple traditions. These musical traditions—from the earliest Gwalior Gharana to the characteristic styles of Agra, Kirana, Patiala, Jaipur-Atrauli, and later hybrid schools—both carry on and innovate. Each of the Gharanas has placed its own unique technical, aesthetic, and pedagogical principles upon khayal singing and associated genres to influence not only raga presentation and improvisation but also repertoire, rhythmic handling, and stylistic identity. This paper concludes that the Gharana system in Hindustani classical music has significantly influenced vocal styles, fostering continuous evolution while maintaining historical traditions. Its standardized methods have produced diverse musical influences, balancing individual creativity with group knowledge, technical accuracy, emotional expression, and historical legacy. The Gharanas' rules and values preserve creative integrity, adapting to globalization and technological advancements.

KEYWORDS:- Gharanas, Classical Music, Vocalist, Hindustani

INTRODUCTION

Indian classical music resembles the boundless sky when its creative dimension is examined. It is posited that in antiquity, a singular type of Indian classical music prevailed. Nonetheless, the many foreign invasions over the centuries significantly influenced Indian classical music, resulting in a divide within this musical tradition. This indicated the emergence of two forms of Indian classical music: Carnatic music predominantly practiced in Southern India and regarded by some as the foundational variant of Indian classical music, and Hindustani music, the North Indian and improvisational variant of Indian classical music. Raga constitutes the essence of Hindustani classical music.

Each raga possesses a clearly delineated structure comprising a sequence of four, five, or more musical notes that form the basis of its melody. The manner in which the notes are articulated and expressed within musical phrases, together with the emotions they evoke, is more critical in characterizing a raga than the notes themselves. This provides significant opportunity for improvisation within the established framework of any raga [1]. Every practitioner of this genre (Hindustani classical music) is fundamentally both a composer and an artist. During the performance of a raga, an artist progressively explores novel pathways and linkages among the used notes, guided by their imaginative state, while yet adhering to the fundamental discipline of the raga. Thus, he gradually transcends the constraints of the Raga grammars and immerses himself in the more nuanced and elevated emotional essence of the Raga.

Alap is the introductory segment of a Raga performance in the traditional Hindustani classical (Khayal) vocal or instrumental style, serving as the prelude to the Raga. In the alap section, the raga is introduced, and the avenues of its progression are elucidated through the utilization of all the notes pertinent to that specific raga, along with permissible transitions among them, appropriately allocated throughout time. Alap is typically performed solely with the tanpura drone and is sung at a sluggish tempo or occasionally without any tempo. Subsequently, in vocal Raga (Khayal) performances, the vilambit bandish segment is presented, whereby the lyrics and rhythmic cycle, or taal, are introduced. A bandish is a predetermined melodic composition in Hindustani vocal music, structured inside a specific raga, accompanied rhythmically by a tabla or pakhawaj, supported by a continuous drone, and enhanced by melodic instruments such as the sarangi or harmonium. Vilambit is a category of bandish performed at an exceedingly slow tempo, ranging from 10 to 40 beats per minute. The initial paragraph of the song, Sthayi, is succeeded by the subsequent one, Antara [2]. A

Vilambit bandish is typically succeeded by a Drut bandish, characterized by a faster pace of approximately 90–120 bpm, accompanied by various forms of melodic and lyrical improvisation within both the Vilambit and Drut compositions.

Beyond this limitless expanse of individual improvisations, a variety of presenting techniques are evident throughout the country when performing a specific raga. In Hindustani classical music, the primary distinctions in raga presentation techniques are designated by several "gharanas."

Origin and Development of Gharana

Gharanas, a fundamental aspect of life, have influenced the development of music over the past 300 years. Gharanas are a category of singers who emulate the singing manner of their guru, either through father-son tradition or guru-tradition. Centuries of traditions, high-class gurus, and guru-disciple traditions, passed down through generations, combine to form them.

Dr. Krishna Rao Pandit and Dr. Deshpande define "gharana" as a mark or identity that preserves a particular style of singing, although each vocalist has their own distinctive style. Dr. Aban Amisgi defines a gharana as an individual who is extraordinary, talented, strong, and capable. This individual, following their traditional methods, crafts a new concept under the guidance of distinct rules and principles.

The founders of gharanas exhibit respect, affection, politeness, a strict adherence to rules, and an attitude of pride and arrogance, which contribute to the traditional development of gharanas. No other music in the world can match the unique characteristics of Hindustani music, known as gharanas. Progressive music has been developed, and the path of progress has been demonstrated by musicians under their protection. Human society regards gharanas, also known as Kutumb Parivar and Kul, as a component or unit. An exclusive group of musicians establishes a community through gharanas, which in turn generates a substantial community.

The competitive emotions that arise in the traditional interaction of gharanas foster progressive music. The competition and rivalry that arose from the traditional contact and struggle of gharanas greatly benefited and encouraged practical music. Music conferences, concerts, or sangeet goshthi have replaced the traditional mehfil, which served as the medium and symbol of this living music.

The perspective of contemporary Hindustani music has shifted as educated artists and music professors have replaced gharana singers and instrumentalists. The pervasive promotion of music

in the modern era aims to make Hindustani music accessible to the general public. The promotion of modern music closely links with modern music education. The majority of musicians and teachers did not disregard gharanas and gharana-based music, utilizing the unique qualities of traditional training while not entirely rejecting it.

The tradition of music conceals the most significant qualities of ancient Hindustani music. While new experiments and inventions in Hindustani music are always welcome, they must adhere to the boundaries of ancient traditional music and never violate or disregard its foundational principles. The soul of Hindustani music is exclusively interpreted through tradition, and no invention has been created by breaking the limits of traditional music [3-4].

Gharanas and their Influence in Vocal Styles

1. Gwalior Gharana: Shaping New Classical Foundations

The Gwalior Gharana stands as the oldest and most influential Gharana in Hindustani classical music, established in the 16th century and widely regarded as the foundation upon which many subsequent vocal traditions were built. The Gharana's emphasis on clarity of notes, extensive use of Tans (fast melodic passages), and systematic approach to Raga development established fundamental principles that would influence virtually all subsequent vocal schools. From musical purity and clarity, to the proverb of Gwalior that "even the children of Gwalior sing in tune there's an extraordinary history behind their perfectly embellished sounds. Technical characteristics of the Gwalior Gharana demonstrate a deep, rounded approach to the development of voice where technical form and expressiveness are equally balanced. The typical Gwalior voice throwing style has been described as both attacking and forceful, while simultaneously maintaining sweetness and melodic appeal. This duality speaks to the Gharana's deep knowledge of the vocal mechanism and their mastery of lethal prowess accompanied by gracefulness. The Gharana's proclivity for bol vistaar (expanding the lyrst's syllables of lyric content using multiple notes) to open vilambit slow time, the instant seeming establishment of laya (rhythm), showcases a Schenkerian methodical natural progression devises musical development which slowly grows intricate but retains consistent architecture. A mainstay of the Gwalior Gharana's storied contribution to Hindustani music; their influence transcends technical innovation to core pedagogical principles that have laid the very foundation for modes of musical instruction, transcending both Hindustani and Carnatic traditions. The emphasis on behelawa as a mainstay of the Gharana, combined with highly skilled execution by all Gwalior singers, established standards for vocal virtuosity that continue to influence contemporary practice. The Gharana's style of bol-bant, which stresses the use of all syllables of

the asthayee to keep the lyrical sense while preventing just a hash of syllables, shows a developed mastery of controlling musical ornamentation and literary meaning that is now the standard of advanced khayal performance.

2. The Agra Gharana:

Rhythmic Innovation, Vocal Power the Agra Gharana signifies an important evolution in Hindustani vocal music, with origins that date back to the medieval era before being revitalized in the 19th century by Ustad Faiyaz Khan. Founded first by two vocalists, Shamrang and Sasrang, who mastered the dhrupad-dhamar genre, the Gharana first focused on the rare refinements of Hindustani music but later evolved to incorporate khayal performance during the mid-nineteenth century. This shift illustrates the Gharana's adaptability to remain relevant with new musical movements, all while upholding individuality, stylistic uniqueness, and technical foundations. The Agra Gharana's distinctive approach to vocal music is marked by dramatic, booming singing, heavy layakari (rhythmic ornamentation), and an extensive repertoire of compositions that value technical prowess and emotional depth. This sharpened focus on layakari within the Gharana is a direct result of ties with dhrupad and dhamar traditions, producing a unique fusion that brings rhythmic intricacy to khayal gayaki. This combination of rhythmic complexity with vocal expressivity and lyricism has made the Agra Gharana one of the top performing gharanas famed for its capacity to navigate complex rhythmic patterns while maintaining vocal power and clarity. The importance of Ustad Faiyaz Khan's impact on the Agra Gharana cannot be understated, as he was instrumental in solidifying the gharana as a separate school within khayal gayaki. His approach emphasized long alaap passages accompanied by complex layakari, creating a vocal style that mixed meditative discovery with rhythmic precision. The Agra style's preference for the execution of compositions in madhya-laya (medium tempo) nature of this balance, allowing for technical display and emotional conveyance within a framework that maintains rhythmic integrity and flow.

3. The Kirana Gharana:

Precision and Microtonal Mastery The Kirana Gharana represents one of the most important and fundamental innovations within Hindustani vocal music, founded by Abdul Karim Khan and Abdul Wahid Khan during the late 19th century, characterized by an innovative emphasis on note purity and microtonal subtleties. This Gharana's supreme focus on her perfection of microtonal intonation of notes (swara) led to higher standards of vocal accuracy and a unique musical expression, perceiving each note, not merely as a dot on a graph but as different artistic domains that can be extended horizontally. This philosophical approach drastically changed how classical musicians and audiences made sense of the relationship between melody and emotion. The technical innovations

introduced by the Kirana Gharana had a lasting influence on the development of khayal gayaki to all genres of music. Abdul Karim Khan and Abdul Wahid Khan transformed the khayal performance by infusing the vilambit (slow tempo section) to delineate the contours of the raga with precision, exploring every note with deliberation, which would set the stage for almost all subsequent vocal forms. This systematic approach to Raga creation combined with the Gharana's emphasis on slower tempos and the intricate implementation of microtones (Shrutis), cultivated a meditative quality that deepened the spirit of classical vocalism. The Kirana Gharana's influence on contemporary Hindustani music can be seen through the work of iconic musicians like Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, who epitomized the Gharana's ideals of robust vocal technique, exquisite breath control, and profound grasp of musical intricacies. That heart-wrenching emotional wailing in the upper registers that marks Kirana singing has become a hallmark of classical vocal performance today, and the complex sargam taans that Abdul Karim Khan brought in, shaped by Carnatic traditions, exemplify the Gharana's openness to cross-cultural musical conversations.

4. The Patiala Gharana:

The Patiala Gharana embodies a distinctive blend of classical artistry and local folk traditions, founded by Fateh Ali Khan and Ali Baksh, and are notable for its fusion of Punjabi folk music into classical forms. This combination of folk and classical traditions have produced a unique vocal style characterized by a bold and intricate mastery of melody, rapid taans, and a world of perfect musical techniques that reflect the deep artistry of classical music alongside the vividness and exuberance of folk forms. The Gharana's improvisational artistic vision that synthesizes many gharanas methods to advance khayal singing further exemplifies undoubtedly a creative current that has been a fundamental power in the growth of Hindustani vocal music. Even in the technical minutiae passed down from the Patiala Gharana, there's a higher conception of vocal production that marries force with sophistication. Known soft in manner and detailed in complex vocal embellishment and enormous layout of bandishes (composed interpretations of ragas), the Gharana creates a tone that may both exude fierce purpose or ghostly suggestion. The earliest thurmi renditions of Ali Baksh Khan and Fateh Ali Khan, distinguished with their fast taans in the born Punjabi tappe individuals custom are an ideal illustration of this symbiosis involving regional artistry into classical forms without ever losing stand the basis of the two societies.

The contribution of the Patiala Gharana on the broader trajectory of Hindustani music involves technical innovations. The higher development of the classical music's repertoire and the aesthetic concepts that envelop it. The Gharana's focus on performance as imaginative extemporization as well as inter-gharana exchange has supported a more fluid conception of musical borders, furthering

the progress of an emerging classical music which blends numerous traditions while still being rooted in the classical idiom. This methodology has become particularly influential in recent years, as artists increasingly aim to develop unique styles that respect traditional roots while embracing modern sensibilities and multicultural influences.

5. The Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana:

Plurality, Complexity & Rare Musical Explorations The Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana, established by the illustrious musician Alladiya Khan, embodies one of the most intellectually refined approaches to Hindustani classical music, distinguished by its intricate and uncommon ragas, elaborate layakari, and structured method of raga development. The Gharana's dedication to searching wider, richer, more elaborate dimensions of the musical cosmos has played a pivotal role in safeguarding and upholding the greater raga system, permitting individual and advanced musical dialects to remain vibrant in practice and flow down the rivers of time through their descendants. Its highly scientific approach to musical pedagogy has yielded a comprehensive pedagogy for mastering and playing even the most technical aspects of the classical music.

The Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana's artistry shines through in its deliberate, controlled approach to khayal singing, utilizing an expansive exploration of a raga's melodic and rhythmic patterns, imbued with a high degree of ornamentation and rhythmic complexity, yet remaining supremely ordered and graceful. The Gharana's lineage approach to khayal form, necessitating the creation of hundreds of elaborate melodic variations from established rhythmic patterns, demonstrates a fiendish, astonishing musical intelligence and technical akhar that has historically established benchmarks for the entire universe of classical music. This technique demands such technical virtuosity and still such profound theoretical comprehension and musical insight to navigate elaborate musical fabrics while retaining musical grace. The all-inclusive khayal, thumri, dadra and tappa repertoire of the Jaipur-Atrauli Gharana is a reflection of the staggering musical intelligence and technical finesse that marks this gharana. This holistic, interdisciplinary foundation of musical education helps raise musicians with a deep understanding of varied musical styles and the ability to pull from all sorts of stylistic wells in their craft. The Gharana's impact on modern classical music is evident in the ongoing popularity of intricate and rare ragas that might otherwise have been neglected, as well as in the high standards of technical accuracy and theoretical understanding that characterize contemporary classical education [5].

6. Neo-Darwinian Revisionism and Cross-Cultural Syncretism

The 20th century represented a pivotal era of change for the Gharana system, marked by heightened interaction among various schools and an influx of global musical influences that blurred the lines

between traditions. This wave of creativity, invention, and defiance has resulted in the development of radically different approaches to the art form of classical music, that pay respect to their discipline's long and storied legacies, while embracing current sensibilities and intersecting cultures. The rise of the Bhendi Bazaar Gharana, famed production of elaborate vocal stylizations and polished melodic artifice, is an indisputable sign of this new evolution, and showcases just how alive and well the Gharana system remains today. Musicians like Ustad Amir Khan are the further evolution of the Gharana idea, where divergence enables convergence of many styles and synthesis methods that not just safeguard multiple customs but create personal creative identities. Amir Khan's infectious interpretation of the styles of Abdul Wahid Khan, Aman Ali Khan, Rajab Ali Khan and Abdul Karim Khan and his intellectual musical disposition produced the Indore gharana, evidence that modern artists are capable of creating new schools while honoring their classical legacy. This mixed approach was beginning to be something of a hallmark in today's classical music landscape, where artists frequently follow paths laid by jazz, gospel, and various other genres before discovering their unique sound. The influence of modernization and globalization on the Gharana system has brought about new challenges and created new pathways to ensure survival as well as the proliferation of classical vocal traditions. There is another, opposing current at work here as well, felt by all, from neophytes to grandmasters — the necessity of updating pedagogical and artistic traditions to suit contemporary contexts. The on-going influence of Gharanas on global musical cultures speaks to their lasting power and importance [6].

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Hindustani classical music, the Gharana system has been crucial to the development and change of vocal styles. These musical family trees, which range from the Gwalior Gharana to contemporary hybridizations, have fostered continuous evolution to accommodate the demands of new cultural contexts while retaining close ties to historical traditions. While maintaining the fundamental components of traditional art forms, the standardized methods pertaining to vocal production, repertory, and artistic approach have produced a wide range of musical hues and inspiration that continue to influence modern singers. The Gharana system's lasting influence emphasizes its worth as a template for artistic growth that strikes a balance between individual inventiveness and group knowledge, technical accuracy and emotional expression, and historical legacy and modern adaptation. The rules and values established by the Gharanas offer vital resources for preserving creative integrity as Hindustani classical music advances into new spheres and possibilities in response to globalization and technological advancements.

REFERENCES

- L.L.M.P. Sheba and A. Revathy, (2014). Raga identification using clustering algorithm. In 2014 International Conference on Communication and Signal Processing. IEEE. pp. 1932-1936.
- S. Sanyal, A. Banerjee, A. Patranabis, K. Banerjee, R. Sengupta and D. Ghosh, (2016). A study on Improvisation in a Musical performance using Multifractal Detrended Cross Correlation Analysis. *Physica A: Statistical Mechanics and its Applications*, 462, 67-83
- Evans, A. E. (2016). Music in India: An Overview. The Research and Scholarship Symposium (2013-2019)
- Sarpotdar, D.R.M.S. (no date) *Gharana in Hindustani classical music, Pratibha-spandan.org*. Available at: <https://swarsindhu.pratibha-spandan.org/wp-content/uploads/v12i03a50.pdf>
- Kulkarni, M.M. (2025). *Analysis of rhythmic aspect in gharanas of Hindustani music, Sangeetgalaxy.co.in*. Available at: <https://sangeetgalaxy.co.in/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/27.-Maneesha-M.-Kulkarni.pdf> (Accessed: August 24, 2025).
- Mondal, R. (2025). *The influence of gharanas on the development and evolution of vocal styles in Hindustani classical music, Ijcrt.org*. Available at: <https://ijcrt.org/papers/IJCRT2506411.pdf> (Accessed: July 23, 2025).