

The Gwalior Gharana: A Song of Strength and Purity

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Abstract - *The Gwalior gharana, a prestigious lineage in Hindustani classical music, has captivated listeners for centuries with its emphasis on clarity, power and a deep respect for the essence of raga. This article highlights the rich history, defining characteristics and enduring influence of the Gwalior gharana, and explores its contribution to the living fabric of Hindustani classical music. It explores the origins of the gharana under the Mughals, the rise of khayal under the Scindias, the unique style shaped by the Naththan brothers, and the main characteristics of Gwalior singing. It also examines the role of the guru-shishya parampara in transmitting knowledge, the gharana system and its role in fostering innovation, and the challenges and adaptations of the Gwalior gharana in the 21st century.*

Gharana - In Indian music, gharana is commonly used to mean 'ghar', i.e. a class of singers who have adopted the singing style of their guru through a father-son tradition or a guru tradition. Gharana has many synonyms such as ghar, kutumb, parivar, sampradaya, vansh, and parampara, etc. In music, there are different types of gharanas in all the three styles of singing, playing and dancing. In North Indian music (Hindustani music), we call it 'gharana', similarly in South (Carnatic music) it is called 'sampradaya' and in Western countries (modern music) it is called 'schools'. Gharana is a chain process which continues from generation to generation.

Different gharana traditions-

In ancient times, there were Shiva Mat, Brahma Mat and Bharat Mat sects in music and Dattil, Kohal, Matang and Abhinav Gupta were the followers of Bharat Mat. After this, many gharanas developed like Punjab, Bengal, Mewati, Delhi, Banaras, Jaipur (Atrauli), Rampur, Patiala, Kirana (Kairana), Bhindi Bazar, Indore, Pune, Kolhapur, Agra, Mathura, Gwalior, Betwa, Amritsar, Gujarat, Bihar, Bettiah, Darbhanga etc. got the opportunity to come into prominence. Dhrupad, Dhamar, Khayal, Thumri, Ghazal and Dadra are still popular in the North Indian style.

Origin and Development of Gwalior Gharana The origin of Gwalior Gharana can be traced back to the Mughal period which was the period of artistic and cultural splendor in India. The foundation of its development was laid under the patronage of emperors like Emperor Akbar and Man Singh Tomar. These enlightened rulers with their deep appreciation for music fostered a rich musical environment in their courts. It was during this time that Gwalior, a major city in central India, emerged as an important centre for Hindustani classical music, particularly Dhrupad and Dhamar, two other important singing styles.

The Gwalior gharana is believed to have originated from Nathan Peer Baksh. This gharana is the most famous gharana of Khayal, which is considered to be a gift of the Lucknow gharana, as it came to Gwalior and settled down when it could not find nourishment in the climate of Lucknow. Ghulam Rasool of Lucknow is considered to be the originator of this tradition. His main bani has been the Qawwal bani and his gharana is also called the Qawwal Bachchoon ka Gharana. Even today, the Lucknow gharana has not been able to develop independently and it has merged into various gharanas. Its form can be seen primarily in the Gwalior style.

Key features of the Gwalior gharana:-

1. Natural tone production from an open throat: Unlike some gharanas that use complex vocal techniques, the Gwalior style prefers a natural, open-throated approach. This produces a powerful and masculine sound that resonates with the listener.
2. Mastery of all aspects of khayal: The gharana places great importance on mastering all eight aspects of khayal singing - alaap (improvised exposition of the raga), bol alaap (singing the lyrics or syllables of the composition), boltan (fast and rhythmic singing), meend (gliding between notes), gamak (ornamentation), khatka (sudden break), murki (fast oscillation between notes), and layakari (rhythmic playing). This ensures a well-rounded and balanced performance.

3. Straight taan and focus on clarity: The taans (tones) in the Gwalior style are generally clear and straight, avoiding excessive ornamentation. The focus is on maintaining the purity of the raga and letting its essence shine through.
4. Popular ragas and clear presentation: The gharana leans towards presenting well-known ragas in their most recognizable form. Techniques such as avirbhava and tirobhava (suggestion of other ragas) are generally avoided in order to maintain clarity and allow the listener to easily identify the raga being presented.
5. Focus on simple vilambit laya and bandish: The gharana generally uses a moderate tempo (simple vilambit laya) which allows for clear articulation of the lyrics and appreciation of the nuances of the raga. The gharana places the bandish (composition) at the centre of the performance, believing that it provides a complete melodic framework for the exploration of the raga.
6. Bol-alap and murki: The bol-alap uses different vocal techniques to sing the words of the composition, which adds depth and expression to the performance. This is followed by murki, a section characterised by rapid ornamentation and embellishment of the notes, showcasing the artistry of the singer.
7. Bol-Taana and Flat Taana: Bol-Taana integrates the words of the composition with melodic sequences, creating a fascinating interplay between language and music. Flat Taana, a hallmark of the Gwalior style, involves the singing of the swaras in a straight sequence at a slow tempo. This allows for a clear presentation of the sargam of the raga and highlights its unique melodic contours.
8. Emphasis on Bandish Repertoire: The Gwalior gharana has a rich collection of bandishes (compositions), which include various forms such as bada and chota khayal (elaborate and short compositions, respectively), thumri, tappa and tarana. Handed down for generations, these bandishes serve as the basis for improvisation and exploration within the framework of the chosen raga. Legacy of the Gwalior Gharana: Lasting Influence and Eminent Singers The Gwalior gharana has had a profound influence on Hindustani classical music. Its emphasis on clarity, simplicity, and respect for the essence of the raga has inspired several generations of singers.

Disciple Tradition of Gwalior Gharana:

The founder of this gharana was Nathan Peer Baksh. He had two sons Kader Baksh and Peer Baksh. Kader Baksh had three sons. Haddu Khan, Hassu Khan, Natthu Khan. All these three brothers were very proficient in Khayal singing. Hassu Khan's disciple tradition included Gule Imam, Mehndi Hussain, Balkrishna Bua, Baba Dixit, Vasudev Joshi etc. Late Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar was the disciple of Balkrishna Bua. Vishnu Digambar's disciples include late V A Kashalkar, late Omkar Nath Thakur, Vinayak Rao Patwardhan Thakur etc. Haddu Khan's sons Rahmat Khan and Imdad Khan were good singers of their time. Haddu Khan's son-in-law Inayat Khan and his son-in-law and disciple Mastak Hussain of Rampur and Mushtaq Hussain received music education from many people. Haddu Khan's disciples were Imdad Hussain and his son and disciple Wajid Hussain. Nathu Khan's main disciple was his adopted son Nisar Hussain himself, with the main disciples being Shankar Pandit and Ramakrishna Bajhe. Shankar Pandit's disciples were Raja Bhaiya Poonch Wale and Krishna Shankar Pandit. Alaap in form, special focus on swar lagaang and edhaar, attention to the level of the masses, use of flat taans, layakari etc. are the characteristics of this gharana.

Gwalior Gharana in the 21st Century:

Challenges and Adaptation Like many traditional art forms, the Gwalior gharana too is facing challenges in the 21st century. The fast-paced world and changing tastes of the audience can pose a threat to the preservation and transmission of this rich musical heritage. However, the gharana is adapting itself to these changing circumstances. Here are some ways in which the Gwalior gharana is moving ahead in the modern world:

1. Incorporation of Technology: Technology plays a vital role in making the music of the gharana reach a wider audience. Recordings, online tutorials and virtual concerts give people around the world a chance to experience Gwalior Gayaki.
2. Composing new Bandishes: While the traditional repertoire of the gharana remains important, some artists are composing new Bandishes that reflect contemporary themes and sensibilities. This helps keep Gwalior Gayaki relevant to modern audiences.

CONCLUSION:

The Gwalior gharana, a towering pillar in the Hindustani classical music landscape, is a testament to the enduring power of tradition. Its legacy extends far beyond its distinctive and engaging style of khayal singing. It embodies a



philosophy that prioritises strength, clarity and a profound respect for the essence of the raga. This commitment to purity and tradition has resonated with audiences for centuries, earning the gharana a place of utmost respect within Hindustani classical music.

The gharana's journey, from its early roots under the patronage of the Mughal emperors to its current evolution, is a testament to its adaptability. The masterful synthesis of the grandeur of Dhrupad and the expressiveness of Khayal by the Nathan brothers exemplifies the spirit of innovation within the tradition.

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