

Appreciating Hindustani Music
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Lecture 32
Gharanas- Schools/Styles of Khayal

Gharana. Gharanas of Khayal are socio-cultural groups of Khayal musicians with each group being held together by a common stylistic and approach to Khayal, its performance and aesthetics. And this could include many aspects such as the way the voice is projected, the repertoire of compositions that they choose, that they pick compositions from, the manner of vistaar, the kinds of ornament preferred, the laya preferred and so on.

Dr. Ashok Ranade has said this in an essay that *gharana mhanje eka shishta eka nishchitapanaa* - that is it is a discipline, it is a specific manner of approaching the art of presenting ragas which gives a well-defined place to all elements in the world of Khayal and this is gharana. It is gharana he says, it is a *samyak drishtikon* that is it is an all encompassing perspective, a view and an approach.

So, while within each gharana, one can discern a consistency in how ragas are presented, there is considerable divergence across gharanas. So, gharana makes for both variety and sameness. And like everything else here too there are overlaps, grey areas which challenge these gharana boundaries. The world of Khayal has been defined by gharanas in critical ways. Gharanas have commanded fierce loyalty from performers and listeners. Gharana wars have been fought, each gharana contesting its superiority over all others.

And through much of the 20th century, the Khayal world was intensely obsessed with gharanas, gharana purity, gharana loyalty, and betrayal. Today, that intensity has certainly waned, but it is not yet time to announce the irrelevance of gharana. The word gharana derives from the word “ghar” which means house.

Historically, Khayal was practiced by court musicians; that is musician families attached to various courts in North India, and these musicians transmitted the art, the repertoire and the aesthetics strictly within the family: father to son, father to nephew.

And it was a closely guarded secret. It was guarded like a very precious possession. And it is understandable because the livelihood of these musicians was precisely this: the fact that they had this repertoire and they could sing, they could sing ragas in this way. And so it is understandable that they did not want to share it with outsiders. But around the end of the 19th century outsiders also started gaining access to this music.

It is well documented for instance that the Gwalior Royal Court, the Sindhyas who were the patrons of the Gwalior Gharana Masters, Haddu and Hassu Khan - they asked them to teach this music to students outside their family. So, Gwalior gharana is regarded the mother of all gharanas. Most other gharanas directly or indirectly stem from Gwalior gharana. And here it might also be mentioned that there is an older Kawwal Bacche gharana.

Kawwali, as I have mentioned earlier, is regarded as having influenced the evolution of Khayal and Kawwal Bacche as the name suggests were progeny of performers of kawwali. These people also performed Khayal. And one Bade Mohammed Khan of this family, the Kawwal Bacche gharana - he had a deep impact on the crystallization of the Gwalior style itself. Musical lore has it that the founders of Gwalior Gharana, Haddu and Hassu Khan, they

listened to Bade Mohammed Khan's music secretly because he would not teach them directly.

But they listened to his music secretly and incorporated elements from his style to then fashion the Gwalior gayaki or singing style which then became, which then was promulgated elsewhere. And so, if Gwalior is the mother of all gharanas, one can say Kawwal Bacche is the father. In fact, there are musicologists who have suggested this.

But Kawwal Bacche - there are no musicians who have affiliation to this gharana for more than a century and a half. So, now, even though the families of musicians attached to various courts undoubtedly had their own unique approach to Khayal, their own repertoire and so on, gharana started being recognized as such, that is as musical styles with distinct identifiable features, they started being recognized as such in the beginning and the middle of the ah 20th century.

Prominent among these gharanas are Gwalior, Agra, Kirana, Atrauli Jaipur, Patiala, Indore, Bhandi Bazar, Mewati, Rampur Sahaswan and many others. And these, as you can see, the gharanas are named after places - Gwalior, Agra etcetera. And this is the place where the founder of the gharana hailed from. Now, if a brilliant musician comes up with a distinct style as has happened in the 20th century that style is not thereby regarded as a gharana.

The rule of thumb has been that if a certain master, this particular, this brilliant musician who has come up with his own distinct style, if this master has 2 generations of students after him who owe allegiance to the style then that style is regarded as a gharana. So, 3 generations of practitioners of the same style results in a gharana. This is generally accepted even though it is arbitrary.

While stylistic differences are not easy for the novice to discern - it is not at all easy, even once you have advanced or you started learning Khayal also it is not particularly easy to see these stylistic differences - but they are a matter of great importance to the aficionado and obviously, the performers themselves. Now, some of the important aspects where we find stylistic differences are sur. It is how are the swaras intoned. Is it an aggressive, is it with an aggressive voice with broad strokes or is it pinpointed and delicate or is it something in between - natural?

How vested is the style in the bandish? Now, this is a very important criterion. Is the style, does it give any prominence to the bandish, its structure, its text, etcetera while elaborating on the raga? Is the bandish a critical element or one that is used for most part as an anchor for raga vistaar? Then you have layakari also, what is the role of rhythmic play? These are only a few broad aspects. Now, Srijan Deshpande will take us through a few gharanas and discuss their important stylistic features.