

# Khayal singing and Purity of Raga

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It is no secret that Khayal as a musical form could crystallize because of some tendency towards musical freedom.

However, to some extent, every musical form has stood in the docks for taking more freedom than warranted by the rules which, in other words, was distorting the original form. It is as if every generation blames the later, that is, the next one, for its anarchic tendencies.

When Khayal is accused of taking more freedom in relation to the question of Raga-purity it is mainly suggested that 'purity of Raga has been jeopardized by Khayal-singing'. In reality, statements of different import can also be made about the relationship between Khayal singing and Raga-purity. But we will consider the above view which perhaps, is the majority view.

What are the premises on which this complaint about Raga-purity is based? The supporting premises are two: 1) Khayal is the dominant, contemporary musical form. 2) Raga is the distinctive feature of Indian Music. We can proceed by accepting the two premises, or we can reject them and yet argue further. In case we accept the position that Khayal is not the dominant musical form it does not matter whether Raga-purity is maintained or distorted in Khayal-singing. Similarly, if we accept the position that Raga is not a distinctive feature of Indian Music, the matter of Raga-purity does not assume the importance it otherwise does. However, we will accept both the premises and move ahead.

What do we mean by Raga-purity? A group of notes that is bound together by Aroha-Avaroha and such other characteristics is called Raga. Now a musical behaviour in consonance with such rules results in Raga-purity. What do we achieve by adherence to these rules? Why should we adhere to these rules? The answer is that if we allow the distinguishing lines between various Ragas to disappear then we will not know what exactly we want to sing, what to listen to, and what to evaluate and examine. Due to the existence and use of a body of rules each and every individual artiste can develop the same seed-form in a different manner. From the side of the

audience it means the listeners can understand what is being elaborated. However, a question arises whether it is inevitable to have a Raga for elaborating a seed-form? Can we not take a Dhun and elaborate its dormant elaborative possibilities? The Raga does not come into picture in this respect though there is a seed-form and a subsequent elaboration of it. Even in Western Music there is something like thematic elaboration. On this background, can we insist that for musical elaboration we need Raga? Our need for Raga must have some other basis.

In this context, we have a few more questions to take care of. Raga-elaboration has not come into being with the Khayal. It was there even when Khayal-singing had not become a dominant channel of musical expression. This means that even in pre-khayal period Raga-purity must have been successfully threatened quite often! We get evidence of such 'distortions' in some musicological terms. For example, Tirobhava and Avirbhava. To deviate from the Raga in its original version and then again come back to it inevitably involved transgression of Raga-rules. Raga-classification includes terms like Shuddha, Chayalag and Sankeerna. What does this denote? One Raga taking a shadow of another is Chayalag and one, that for the sake of entertainment mixes Chayalag and Shuddha is Sankeerna. This means, in a way, there is an increasing proportion of Raga-distortion here. If Raga-distortions are thus provided with separate categories then obviously we have a very long tradition of Raga-impurification. There is one more Raga-classification which is illuminating in this respect. Shuddha, Mishra and Dhun-Raga is the classification. What do these terms indicate? They indicate different allowable and long-established degrees of taking freedom. The conclusion seems to be, that, to take a holiday from rules is a well-established practice, to deviate considerably from the norms of Raga-purity has a long tradition, and to formulate systems or methods out of deviations is what the science has been invariably trying to do. There is something in human nature and in the nature of music that makes all this inevitable. We do want freedom but we also long for rules to tell us how to enjoy it. We want scope for our musical elaboration but not without a set of rules that guide us in this exploration.

Do we mean that Raga-purity will always go the way of more and more deterioration and we should not complain about it? We do not take this position. What is suggested is that the impurity we are talking about is unfortunately of only one; single type. Our view of the affair is rather narrow and the question has to be tackled on more comprehensive basis. There are at least three ways or types of Raga-distortion and all of them must be considered before any final opinion is expressed about the matter. The three types are: Musicological, Historicist and Aesthetic.

The musicological distortion is easy to understand. When the grammatical rules regarding the Varjya-Avarjya, Alapatva-Bahutva are transgressed the Raga-distortion that results out of it is of the musicological variety. Unfortunately we have been giving undue emphasis on this variety and are in agonies over it - Agonies that are disproportionate to the importance of this variety.

Let us now turn our attention to the second variety we have mentioned. The historicist variety is a statement which eludes to the fact that a particular Raga is not being sung in a way it used to be. For example, when Raga Ahir Bhairav was not much in vogue the phrase Dha Ni Re was used in Raga Bhairav Bahar with more freely. Pancham Bageshri is no longer sung as a separate entity and since then the note Pancham is used more frequently in Raga Bageshri. Another interesting example is Raga Durga which was once accepted and sung as an Aprachalita Raga. With its increased use one never knew how and when it became Saral and Prachalita. All the historicist examples draw our attention to musical practices that have changed over a period of time and have been recognized by all except musicology. We can broadly say that the historicist aspect emphasizes the chronological and genealogical features while the musicological aspect throws light over grammatical and etymological features of the question. Not long before, majority of the varieties of Raga Bahar were titled as Bhairav Ki Bahar, Bageshri Ki Bahar, suggesting that some deviations were introduced in the original variants of Raga like Bhairav, Bageshri etc. with a view to adding to their total entertainment value, (the word Bahar meaning enjoyment). But later, the deviations were given a separate and a free status and giving them different and independent names was in a way symptomatic. Whatever may be the reason, the tendency is to recognize and consolidate the deviations and include them in the available structure of musicological norms. It is like an illegitimate offspring legitimized by adoption.

I have maintained that there is an aesthetic aspect to the question of Raga-purity. This aspect becomes operative whenever in musical expression and performance, decision about Raga-purity is taken according to evaluative criteria used for judging the music concerned as a work of art. Today eyebrows are raised with disapproval because Khayal is being sung more and more like Thumri. Raga Darbari, it is pointed out, is distorted if it is sung decoratively. Our attention is also directed to the fact that if one sings a Khayal in Bhairavi the Raga will be practically distorted. All this means that there is a separate important category of Raga-behaviour which can be called 'Chalanbheda'. Due to the peculiar characteristics falling within the purview of this category each Raga has its musical phrases (the basic musical units) moulded and distributed according to certain norms. And it is on these basis that a correspondence of

Ragas and musical forms is established. It is unthinkable to sing a Thumri in Bhoop, Khayal in Khamaj, Khayalnuma in Pilu and a song or a lyric in Khat-todi because this will mean a 'category-mistake' and will result in total aesthetic failure of the concerned musical expression.

What one has to remember is that the question of Raga-purity is basically a question that has its problematic core in aesthetic aspect though it has other two aspects in musicological and historicist. In addition, the aesthetic aspect being predominantly performance-oriented it is mostly controlled and ultimately shaped by relevancy of musical phrasing based in a particular performance. The relevances of musical phrasing is finally decided by the reigning norms of correspondence between 'Chalanbheda' of a Raga and the contemporary hierarchy of musical forms. It is a known fact that hierarchy of musical forms is in itself a dynamic entity. Hence to emphasize the musicological aspect of the problem of Raga-Purity instead of the aesthetic aspect and draw unduly pessimistic conclusion is unwarranted. It is also an evidence of lack of musical perspective.

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