

**Khyal:  
Classical Singing of North India**

**Video Cassette ETHNO VC 1**

**Accompanying texts by Martin Clayton and  
Veena Sahasrabudde**

# Khyal: Classical Singing of North India

Devised by Martin Clayton

Soloist Veena Sahasrabuddhe

Producer Robert Philip

This booklet is designed to be used in conjunction with the Open University video, *Khyal: Classical Singing of North India* (ETHNO VC1).

**The video** contains two parts:

1. A demonstration by Veena Sahasrabuddhe of the various stages and techniques employed in a khyal performance of Rag Rageshree. In this section, passages of explanation and demonstration (with the aid of her students Jayanti Sahasrabuddhe and Pallavi Mhalgi) alternate with extracts from a public performance. This section is designed to be used in conjunction with the teaching text which comprises the first part of this booklet (see below).
2. The complete public performance of Rag Rageshree, recorded in Pune in April 1996.

**This booklet** also comprises two sections:

1. Teaching text and activities to accompany the first part of the video. Written by Martin Clayton, this text is adapted from the Open University course AA302 *From Composition to Performance: Musicians at Work*.

This section assumes no prior knowledge of Indian music, and is intended to introduce the reader to the fundamentals of khyal singing.

2. An essay, *Khyal and its presentation*, written by the featured soloist Veena Sahasrabuddhe (p.12).

Veena Sahasrabuddhe's essay presents a performer's view of the genre. This text makes rather more use of technical vocabulary and will be of more interest to readers with some prior knowledge of Indian music, and of khyal singing in particular.

You will find the text of the featured composition ('Prathama sura sadhe'), with English translation, on page 11.

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# Khyal: Classical Singing of North India

Teaching text and activities to accompany the video

Martin Clayton

## 1. An introduction to khyal singing

This text and the video which it accompanies provide an introduction to khyal, a genre of Indian classical vocal music. The video includes performance footage, demonstrations by the performer, and extracts from a teaching session. Before you watch the video, however, a little background information will be useful.

The North Indian (or Hindustani) art music tradition is practised widely over northern and central India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (see Figure 1). It is also quite well known beyond this native area: you may have heard, or at least heard of, leading performers such as the sitarist Pandit Ravi Shankar. It is an art music tradition, comparable in some respects to that of the West. Court and religious contexts have played an important role in its development, while in the present day its largest audience is to be found among the middle-class population in the towns and cities.

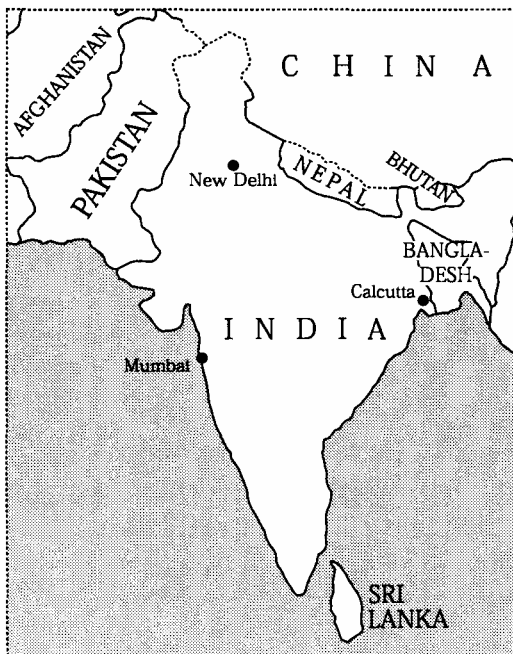


Figure 1 *North Indian art music is practised widely over northern and central India, Pakistan and Bangladesh*

The tradition includes a number of related styles and genres, both vocal and instrumental. The piece featured in this video belongs to a genre called khyal, which is the most commonly heard vocal genre in the tradition (although not by any means the only one). This video and text are not intended as a survey of, or introduction to, Indian music as a whole, but as a detailed case study of a single performance. This particular performance is typical of the khyal genre, but

not everything that happens here happens in all performances, and conversely some features common in other styles are not represented here.

Like most performances of North Indian art music, this one features a soloist assisted by a group of accompanists. Typically for khyal, the singer is accompanied by one or more players of the drone-producing lute called tanpura; a drum set called tabla; and a melodic accompanying instrument, in this case a harmonium. The role of these different instruments should become clear in the course of the video. They are essentially at the disposal of the soloist, who instructs the musicians what to play, when and how. (Although subservient in this respect, they are nevertheless often fine musicians in their own right.)

The soloist featured on the video is Veena Sahasrabuddhe, one of the leading performers of the khyal genre. She will take you through a performance of Rag Rageshree (i.e. a rag or mode, by the name of Rageshree). This piece moves through a number of distinct stages, of which some of the most important are described and demonstrated on the video. In each case, after this explanation, you will see a corresponding extract from the final public performance itself. Finally, the video shows the whole public performance without interruption. After you have studied the video for this case study, you should be familiar, at least in general terms, with the following points.

- 1 What is meant by the term 'rag' (mode, melodic framework), and what Rag Rageshree sounds like (we will not, however, be analysing the rag itself in any detail).
- 2 What is meant by the term 'tal' (metre, rhythmic cycle); the particular tal used here (called jhaptal) and how it regulates the music.
- 3 The way the performance moves through different stages, and the kind of techniques employed by the soloist.

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### Activity

In a moment I shall ask you to watch the first section of the video. Below is a list of the technical terms that are used and explained in the video, laid out in the order in which they occur, so that you can find them easily. For some I have added explanations, which may include additional information not on the video. The others are the names of the stages in the performance I mentioned above.

As you watch the video, I want you to use the list of terms for two activities.

- 1 Listen out for mention of the terms listed. Pause the video and read my notes as each term is mentioned, to ensure you understand the term and how it is used.
- 2 In the places where I have not supplied notes about the stages listed, listen to the explanation that is given on the video, and then pause the video and make your own notes based on the information you have heard, answering the following questions in each case.

- (a) Is this stage sung with, or without, drum accompaniment?
- (b) Is it sung to a particular text, or if not how is it vocalised?
- (c) How would you describe the rhythmic and melodic style (i.e. fast or slow, free or strict, flowing or broken, etc.)?

Now watch the masterclass in the first part of the video, following my list of terms and pausing to read and make notes where appropriate. (This section of video lasts for about 23 minutes. Do not watch the complete final performance which follows it, yet.)

barhat	The 'development' of a piece, translated loosely here as 'improvisation'; barhat means, literally, 'increase; growth'.
aroh-avaroh	Basic ascending and descending lines of a rag.
alap	..... ..... .....
sargam	Singing to the abbreviated note names (i.e. instead of a meaningful text); these are, in ascending order, sa, re, ga, ma, pa, dha, and ni (you will not however hear the fifth note pa in this example, since it is not used in this rag). Veena Sahasrabuddhe is using sargam here as a teaching device - she instructs her pupil to repeat the melody 'in alap', by which she means singing to the vowel 'aah'.
bandish	..... ..... .....
tal	Metre, i.e. that which regulates the rhythm.
jhaptal	A particular tal. Jhaptal has a ten beat pattern which is repeated indefinitely.
bhav	Mood, emotion, meaning.
bol alap	..... ..... .....
bahlava	..... ..... .....

tan .....  
.....  
.....

Remember to stop the video when you get to Section 2, entitled 'Veena Sahasrabuddhe performs Rag Rageshree'.

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## Discussion

Here are my notes for the different stages. I hope you got at least some of these points, although you may not have got them all. (I have separated comments on rhythm and melodic style, although these are closely related.)

- alap                    sung without drum accompaniment;  
                          no text (uses vowel sounds, such as 'aah');  
                          slow tempo, rhythmically free; a mixture of long and short phrases;  
                          flowing melody with lots of portamento, melisma, ornamentation etc.
- bandish                sung with drum accompaniment;  
                          sung to a text;  
                          medium tempo, strict rhythm;  
                          slightly simpler melodic line than alap.
- bol alap                sung with drum accompaniment;  
                          sung to a text;  
                          medium tempo; fairly free rhythm.
- bahlava                sung with drum accompaniment;  
                          medium tempo;  
                          very long, continuous, flowing and rhythmically loose melodic lines.
- tan                      sung with drum accompaniment;  
                          no text (vowels);  
                          fast tempo (especially in the performance footage);  
                          long, continuous melodic lines.

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## Activity

The next section of the video shows the complete concert performance of the Rag Rageshree. This section lasts for 25 minutes. You will find it useful to watch it now to consolidate your understanding of the characteristics of the different stages of the piece and how they fit together in a single ultimate performance.

As you watch, the timings chart in Figure 2 below will help you to keep your bearings and follow what is going on. The captions on the video will also help to identify the stages of the piece.

Time (mins)	Section
0	Alap
1	
2	
3	Bandish – first part
4	
5	
6	Bol alap
7	
8	Bahlava
9	
10	
11	Bandish – second part (antara) which emphasizes the upper tonic ('sa')
12	
13	Bol alap based on antara (second part of bandish)
14	
15	Sargam
16	Bol alap
17	
18	Tan
19	Bol tan (tan sung to words)
20	Tan
21	Tarana (wordless composition set to a different rhythmic cycle)
22	
23	
24	
25	

Figure 2 *Approximate timings for stages of the Rag Rageshree performance*

As you watch, make notes in answer to the following questions. How would you describe the organisation of the performance as a whole? Why do you think these stages come in the order they do?

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## Discussion

You should have noticed certain tendencies as the music moves from one stage to another.

1 It moves from singing without drum accompaniment, to singing with the drums (tabla). As the drums are introduced, the music changes from unmetred to metred (in this tradition, metred sections are always accompanied by drums).

2 Although the transition is not entirely smooth, the rhythm is much more regular at the end than at the beginning.

3 Rhythm and tempo are much faster at the end than at the beginning.

4 We move from singing without text, to with text, and back again.

We may surmise that the different stages occur in this particular order so as to allow (or to bring about) a transition from unmetred, unaccompanied, slow and rhythmically free singing to that which is metred, accompanied, fast and rhythmically strict.

Some additional points that may not have been immediately obvious from the video are to do with the division between which aspects of the music are rehearsed and decided beforehand, and which are directed by Veena Sahasrabuddhe as the concert performance takes place. Basically, the students know from rehearsal that they will be required to sing during refrains of the bandish (which they will have learned), and keep quiet while she is singing alap, bol alap, bahlava and tan. If she wants them to sing up or quieten down in the performance, she gestures appropriately. The pace is set by Veena Sahasrabuddhe too: she indicates this by tapping her hand at the beginning, and when an acceleration is required.

## 2. Notation

The next thing to consider is the role of notation in this tradition. At one point on the video you saw Veena Sahasrabuddhe singing from a printed notation.<sup>1</sup> Actually, she did this at our request – she would not normally sing from notation, but did so to enable us to compare different versions of the bandish (composition). What will not have been clear is the relationship of the information in this printed notation itself to (a) what she actually sings 'from' the notation, and (b) what she sings in her own demonstration and performance of the same piece, without reference to the notation but drawing instead on her own knowledge of the piece. To clarify this, I have transcribed the first line of each of these into staff notation in Examples 1, 2 and 3 below. In order to follow the notations you will need to know:

1 that the three-flats 'key signature' does not indicate a Western-style key. B<sup>b</sup> is in fact the 'key note' (the main note we hear in the drone); the scale is hexatonic, with no fifth and a flat seventh (notated here: B<sup>b</sup> C D E<sup>b</sup> G A<sup>b</sup>).

2 the 10-beat metre jhaptal is indicated for our purposes by a 10/4 time signature. The single bar line and the symbol 'X' indicate the beginning of the

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<sup>1</sup>From a collection first published in the first quarter of the twentieth century, by the famous Indian musicologist Pt V. N. Bhatkhande. Originally in the Marathi language, this is now best known in its Hindi translation. This composition is found in Volume 5 of Bhatkhande's *Hindustani sangeet paddhati: kramik pustak malika* (Hathras: Sangeet Karyalaya).



cyclical pattern (X marks beat 1; thus, counting back, you will find that the first version starts on beat 5).

Example 1 *Printed notation (after V.N. Bhatkhande)*

Example 2 *Transcription of what Veena Sahasrabuddhe actually sang from the printed notation for demonstration purposes.*

Example 3 *How Veena Sahasrabuddhe sang the same phrase in performance, without reference to the notation.*

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**Activity**

Compare the notations in Examples 1 and 2. How you would describe the relationship between the printed version and version sung from it? What does this suggest about the status of notation in this tradition?

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**Discussion**

We can say that the printed version (Example 1) is simpler than even that sung from the notation (Example 2). To put this another way, the notated version is like a skeleton which is 'fleshed out' by the performer by the addition of subtle ornamentation. More striking still, in a couple of cases Veena Sahasrabuddhe actually sings a different note from that printed. This suggests that the importance of the notation is quite low: Veena Sahasrabuddhe does not feel constrained by it, and is confident that her own version is at least as authoritative as that printed.

These observations are backed up by a couple of other things on the video. First, Veena Sahasrabuddhe and her accompanists are not performing from notation. Secondly, in her explanations she clearly attributes little importance to notation: it is a means of preserving compositions (bandishes) as an insurance against failures of memory, and for this purpose audio recordings nowadays do a much more efficient job (since any refreshing of memory would be done well before a public performance). In fact, as she states in the video, Veena

Sahasrabuddhe learned this composition from her father: this would have been a process of imitation and memorisation; in other words, oral transmission. Although she is aware of the existence of a notated version, she does not consider it authoritative. For instance, when she and I were collaborating on the translation of the song text (see below) she pointed out to me that the version printed was in fact incorrect in several details (i.e. she considered the version she had learned orally to be the authoritative version).

### 3 Conclusion

Here is a list of things you should have picked up about North Indian art music, and the khyal genre in particular.

- This music is not performed from a score. Although notations do exist, only a small part of what is performed is notated (the bandish), and even that in a very skeletal fashion. Notation is little used, and has little or no authority.
- The performer memorises a certain amount of material: the bandish (i.e. the basic setting of the text) and the rag and tal. (I don't expect you to have picked up the details of these from the video, but it should be clear that melody and rhythm are regulated in some way.)
- Using this learned material, the artist constructs a performance. She is guided by certain basic principles (the transition from unmetred, slow, rhythmically free music to that which is metred, fast and regular); within this overall plan various specific techniques or processes (bol alap, bahlava, tan etc.) are accommodated. We could describe this as a kind of loose formal 'model' for the construction of a performance.
- Both the overall formal plan, and the specific techniques used, are defined in such a way as to allow an infinite number of equally valid, and equally authoritative, performances.
- Accompanists know what is expected of them, to a great extent, from their own training. The soloist retains overall control of the performance, however, and can signal any changes required (e.g. acceleration).

## Translation of song text

### **Sthāyī**

Prathama sūra sādhe raṭe nāma jau lauñ  
rahe

Yāhi ghaṭa meñ pragāṭa prāṇa sādhe

### **First section**

First (before turning to any other aspect of  
music) gain mastery over svāra (pitch)

(Then, with the music you have learned)  
repeat (God's) name while life remains in  
this body

### **Antarā**

Sapta sūra tīna grāma gunijana bakhānat

Āvana gavana ko dhyān

Vidya kaṭhina bheda pāve gurunha saṅga  
sādhe

### **Second section**

Seven pitches and three scale-types are  
expounded by the wise

Pay attention to the melodic movement

One gains access to the secrets of this  
difficult art (only) through close contact  
with one's guru

Traditional. Text translated by Veena Sahasrabuddhe, Hari Sahasrabuddhe and Martin Clayton.

This material is adapted from Chapter 12 of the Open University course AA302, *From Composition to Performance: Musicians at Work*. Details of this and other Open University courses are available from Course Enquiries Data Services, PO Box 625, Dane Road, Milton Keynes, MK1 1TY, telephone 01908 858585, or on the Internet at <http://www.open.ac.uk/>

# Khyal and its Presentation

Veena Sahasrabuddhe

## The khyal singer

If you listen to many khyal performances, you will notice differences between the styles of presentation of different artists. One of the reasons the khyal form is so popular is precisely that it offers an artist scope for creating a variant suited to her voice, ideas, taste and experience.

Although there are inevitable differences between the styles of different artists, there is almost total agreement among them that one's voice has to be specially trained before one can perform khyal well. What are the attributes of a voice which is considered ideal for khyal singing? Such a voice should be rounded (*golaidar*), resonant (*ghumardar*), rich in overtones (*javaridar*) and emphatic (*vazandar*). It must also have a range of at least two full octaves – one needs range to present a *bandish* with complete ease.

Further, a khyal singer's voice should be steady and one must have the breath necessary for singing long notes. One must practise reciting the lyrics in order to learn how the words fall in the melodic-rhythmic framework, and one must practise singing both high and low notes with different vowels so that the vowels do not become corrupted. Different vowels also bring variety to *alaps*.

While we are discussing voice, we must also consider dynamics. Apart from pitch, variation of dynamics is an effective vehicle for musical expression. Today you can find many artists who use dynamics with great skill. This is especially suited for bringing an emotional touch to one's singing.

While voice is important, a good voice alone is not enough to make one a complete khyal singer. The musical material one chooses must be carefully screened to maintain the dignity (*vazandarpana*) of khyal. Dignity demands that successive melodic phrases must seamlessly merge with one another.

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Technical terms are glossed at the bottom of the page on which they first occur, with a transliteration in *italics*, then (as necessary) translation or interpretation.

**khyal** *khyāl* lit. idea, fancy

**golaidar** *golāidār* lit. having roundness

**ghumardar** *ghumardār* lit. having mass or thickness

**javaridar** *javāridār* lit. having 'javārī', referring to the special flat bridge used to create the overtone-rich timbre of the *tānpūrā* and *sītār*

**vazandar** *vazandār* lit. having weight or emphasis

**bandish** *bandīś* lit. structure, pattern; 'a skeletal song composition used as a basis for improvisation' (VS)

**alap** *ālāp* lit. speaking, conversation; mus. 'slow, improvised passages' (VS)

**vazandarpana** *vazandārpan* lit. the quality of being *vazandār* (see above)

For a dignified khyal presentation alankaras (ornaments) such as meend, gamak and aas are needed. Even within these, meend is of prime importance. Without practising meend one cannot get gamak; successive notes cannot be well joined; and the beauty of a mukhra which crashes to a sam in madhya saptak from tar saptak cannot be brought out.

Other kinds of alankaras such as kan, murki and harkat must also be perfected by a khyal singer. But these are to be used with caution. Excessive use of these alankaras can bring an unwanted lightness (halkapan) which is not welcome in khyal singing.

### The khyal form

Having considered attributes of voice, let us now come to the elements of khyal form. A typical khyal presentation of a raga uses two bandishes, the first in vilambit (slow) tempo and the second in drut (fast) tempo.

One observes the following stages in the presentation of each bandish: first, the bandish is sung as it is, and then it is then improvised upon. Slow improvisation (alap, bol alap, bahlava) on the sthayi comes first, followed by similar treatment of the antara, and finally faster improvisation on the sthayi (bol tan, tan)

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#### **alankara** *alaṅkāra*

**meend** *mīṇḍ* or *mīṛ* slide, portamento

**gamak** *gamak* shake, oscillation

**aas** *ās* ‘an illusion of continuity and/or of the presence of ‘Sa’ created by gradually fading out the voice, often while gliding to Sa, so that the singer’s voice merges with the drone and its cessation is less noticeable’ (VS)

**mukhra** *mukhrā* anacrusis (lit. face)

**sam** *sam* beat one

**madhya saptak** *madhya saptak* middle octave

**tar saptak** *tar saptak* upper octave

**kan** *kaṇ* a kind of subtle grace-note (lit. particle, drop)

**murki** *murkī* a turn

**harkat** *harkat* ‘a phrase sung contrastingly fast in the context of slow development’ (VS)

**halkapan** *halkāpan* lit. lightness, cheapness

**vilambit** *vilambit* slow (‘in practice, c. 1 beat per second or slower’)

**drut** *drut* fast (‘c. 4 beats per second’)

**bol alap** *bol ālāp* ālāp sung to the song text

**bahlava** *bahlāvā* lit. amusement, diversion; mus. ‘rhythmic variation directed at throwing listeners’ sense of timing off-balance’ (VS)

**sthayi** *sthāyī* refrain; the first section or stanza of a composition (lit. permanent, fixed)

**antara** *antarā* the second section or stanza of a composition

**bol tan** *bol tān* a tān sung to the song text

A bandish is a fixed melodic form created out of swara, laya, raga and tala. It is in two parts: sthayi and antara. Generally speaking the sthayi explores the poorvanga (lower tetrachord) whereas the antara focusses on the tar shadja (upper tonic).

The custom of singing the whole bandish - sthayi as well as antara - at the start, helps form an image of the raga in the minds of the listeners. A good bandish sketches out the important phrases of the raga in which it is composed. When a bandish is sung, the words may have to be modified according to the demands of its melodic form. Grammar clearly has to take a back seat here, for the literary meaning of a bandish and its musical meaning - the emotional atmosphere it creates - are two different things. To fully understand a raga a khyal singer must study a number of bandishes in it. Each bandish has an individual viewpoint from which it looks at the raga; it therefore projects a different aspect of the raga.

Just as language uses different types of pauses - comma, full stop and so on there is a sublanguage of pauses in music as well. Appropriate use of pauses helps put the melodic shapes in relief and completes the picture which the notes are trying to create. Pauses also have a significant role to play in the improvisation that follows. For example, ragas Pooriya, Marwa and Sohni all employ the same notes. Nevertheless, in these three ragas one pauses at different places in the octave. As a result, the phrases one hears are quite different, and so are their emotional colours.

### **Vilambit khyal and its presentation**

Vilambit bandishes are found in popular talas such as ektal, teental, jhoomra, tilwada, and jhaptal. How slow should vilambit tempo be? To some extent this is a matter of individual taste. Each singer decides the tempo for her singing considering her training, aesthetic sense, and the quality and capability of her voice. However, there are some basic principles one must observe.

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**tan** *tān* rapid vocalisation, arabesque

**swara** *svar* tone, pitch

**laya** *lay* rhythm, tempo

**raga** *rāg* mode, melodic structure

**tala** *tāl* metre

**poorvanga** *pūrvāṅg* lit. foremost part; mus. lower tetrachord

**shadja** *ṣadja* Sa, the principal drone note

**avartan** *āvartan* cycle (i.e. of the *tāl* or metrical pattern)

**theka** *thekā* standard drum pattern associated with a *tāl* (metric cycle)

**ektal** *ektāl* a *tāl* of 12 beats

**teental** *tīntāl* a *tāl* of 16 beats

**jhoomra** *jhūmrā* a *tāl* of 14 beats

**tilwada** *tilvādā* a *tāl* of 16 beats

**jhaptal** *jhaptāl* a *tāl* of 10 beats

Many traditional bandishes almost demand a particular tempo. The beauty of the bandish and the balance of its form comes alive only if the right tala and tempo are used. One hears much slower vilambit tempi today than our tradition recommends. The sthayis of many traditional khyals are composed to be sung over two avartans of the tala. If one tries to sing such a sthayi in one avartan at a much slower tempo its balance changes. For convenience, the vazan (emphasis) of the mukhra will also have to be changed, since its interaction with the tabla bols will be different. Even the tempo, and therefore the structure, of the improvisation (barhat) will have to change. All things considered, it is best to keep the traditional tempo if one is singing a traditional bandish. Just as a bandish has its own tempo, it also has its own tala, because the feel of the theka has been kept in mind when deciding its phrasing.

After the vilambit bandish has been sung as it is, it is the turn of alaps. Slow melodic phrases, whether sung before the bandish starts as a preface, or as improvisation when elaborating on the bandish, are called alap. Let us first consider prefatory alaps sung before the bandish (and the theka) start. These alaps are either seen as a vehicle to create the atmosphere of the raga, or the pakad - signature - of the raga is sung to help the listener identify it. In my opinion prefatory alaps should introduce not only the raga but also the notes of the mukhra and the tempo the artist plans to use. Some khyal singers prefer the nomtom style of alap characteristic of dhrupad singing. Nomtom alaps are rhythmically more regular.

Two distinct styles can be noted in alap improvisation. Some artists use the phrases of the bandish as the basis, varying and decorating these in numerous ways as they go. This style is known as upaj ang. Others go from note to successively higher note in the octave, highlighting each note in order. This style is called merukhanda paddhati. In my opinion one must keep in mind the phrases of the raga, if not those of the bandish, while singing alaps. To understand this, consider the bandish as an art object which you are placing in a showcase. To make it look its best, (and to make people notice it) you will have to consider such questions as where to position it, how to illuminate it, what else to put around it and so on, so that the central object looks its best.

One or two other points must be discussed before our study of barhat is complete. These are: shadja bharna and the use of the principle of symmetry in alap design. In every raga the base swara - shadja - has a unique role. We are always singing other swaras in the implicit or explicit context of the shadja, and a sense of fulfilment is invariably felt upon reaching the tar shadja. Creating such a sense of fulfilment is called shadja bharna.

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**pakad** *pakaḍ* lit. handle, hold

**nomtom** *nomtom* from the syllables ‘nom’ and ‘tom’, two of those used to sing ālāp

**dhrupad** *dhrupad* a vocal genre, reckoned to be somewhat older than the khyāl

**upaj ang** *upaj aṅg* upaj = produce, productivity; aṅg = part, limb

**merukhanda paddhati** *merukhaṇḍa paddhati* ‘the way of permutation’

**shadja bharna** *ṣaḍja bharnā* ṣaḍja = the note Sa; bharnā = to fill, to complete

Symmetry is a very useful notion when designing alaps. The form of every raga offers its own unique opportunities for symmetric phrases between the poorvanga (lower tetrachord, sa re ga ma) and uttaranga (upper tetrachord, pa dha ni sa). To a listener, the two phrases linked through this symmetry appear to be a sawal (question) and its jawab (answer).

What gives classical singing its liveliness is that fully following all the rules of raga and of khyal, an artist is able to bring novelty to her performance. Improvisation in a vilambit composition must never lose sight of the rhythmic tensions and balance of the bandish. Every tala and its theka has its own characteristic form, like a meter in poetry, which a good khyal bandish exploits. There are limits to how slow a tala can be played before the form melts away. Similarly, the feel of a theka gets lost if it is played too fast.

The phrases used while improvising on a bandish must match the form and tempo of that bandish. The more the form and laya of the alaps matches those of the mukhra, the more seamless and perfect the avartan will appear. We are not talking here about simply starting the mukhra at the right point in the avartan so that sam is met. The perfect avartan maintains a close relation between the swaras and phrases of the alaps on the one hand and the progress of the theka on the other hand, so that the listener can feel the mukhra and sam coming. The end point appears so natural, so logical, that the listener is moved to giving out an immediate expression to her joy. This logic of relating to the tala bears the technical name *amad*. This smooth merging of swara and laya into one is considered the finest achievement of the khyal singer's art.

Some artists use only the sthayi part of the composition for doing improvisation whereas others use both sthayi and antara. I feel that the antara should also be used, since it offers tremendous scope for improvisation around the tar shadja. A majority of sthayis do not offer such scope.

After alap comes bol alap. When the words are repeated while improvising slow phrases, we call the form bol alap. In this type of improvisation, the words are to be treated as meaningful entities. Neither individual words nor word order should be so mutilated as to disturb the meaning of the song. Simultaneously, the tempo of utterance must follow the tempo of the melody. A slightly faster variant of bol alap which provides a link between alap and tan is called bahlava.

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**tar shadja** *tār ṣadja* upper Sa

**uttaranga** *uttarāṅg* lit. further or upper part; mus. upper tetrachord

**amad** *āmad* lit. arrival, approach

**bahlava** see p.13



Tans provide piquancy (*chamatkriti*) in a khyal presentation. Only tans have the capacity to raise the tempo to a climax. The best tans display architectural beauty besides the wonder of rapid movement of voice. How much of a total khyal presentation should be devoted to tans? The right proportion depends on the nature of the raga and bandish. The moods of some ragas such as Sohni, Adana, Shankara get expressed well through tans. In the case of some bandishes the mukhra starts with a tan. In such a situation the principle of continuity demands that the improvised part just preceding the mukhra also employs a tan.

Tans are classified into *sapat*, *alankarik*, *gamak*, *jabdeki*, *chhootki* and so forth, on the basis of tempo and melodic shape. Whatever the classification, a tan sounds its best if it is clear, *daanedar*, sung in *aakar*, and *vazandar*. Depending on the tempo of the bandish, tans may be sung at 4, 6 or 8 notes to the *matra*. The *vazan* must be maintained even in the fastest tempo used.

The sequence of notes appropriate for a raga must be observed in tans as well. In ragas such as *Miyan-Malhar*, *Jogkauns* and *Gaud-Malhar*, which have *vakra* (irregular) ascent and descent, the tans must also be *vakra*.

### **Madhya lay and drut khyal**

After *vilambit* khyal, usually a *madhya laya* or *drut* bandish is sung. Most often two bandishes are sung in a raga, one *vilambit* and the other in either *madhya* or *drut* tempo. They are also called, respectively, *bada* and *chhota* khyal. When giving a full exposition of a raga I often sing three compositions in successively faster tempi. In this manner the abrupt, aesthetically unsatisfactory jump of tempo from *vilambit* to *drut* is avoided. Instead, a bandish in medium tempo is interposed, making for smoother transitions and a more pleasing overall effect. As I said earlier while discussing *vilambit*, each bandish has its inherent *laya* in which it sounds best. This principle also extends to *madhya laya* and *drut* bandishes.

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**chamatkriti** *camatkṛti* lit. wonder, astonishment

**sapat** *sapāt* lit. 'level'; featuring motion in one direction only

**alankarik** *alankārik* lit. 'ornamental'; usually refers to intricately patterned tāns

**gamak tan** *gamak tān* a tān featuring rapid oscillations between notes

**jabdeki tan** *jabḍe kī tān* 'jaw tān'; a tān featuring a kind of gamak produced with a powerful motion of the throat muscles

**chhootki tan** *chūṭ kī tān* 'shooting tān'; a short, fast, dramatic variety

**daanedar** *dānedār* lit. 'granulated'; i.e. each note should be clearly articulated

**aakar** *ākār* sung to the vowel 'ā' (aah)

**vakra** *vakra* lit. 'crooked'

**madhya laya** *madhya laya* medium tempo

**bada** *baḍā* lit. large; *baḍā khyāl* is the slow bandiś

**chhota** *choṭā* lit. small; *choṭā khyāl* is the fast bandiś

## Tarana

Tarana has become a very popular form of composition today. Tarana is a khyal-like composition in which syllables like 'tana', 'dere' and so forth are used in place of words. The speciality of tarana lies in the great scope it offers for doing layakari. Syllables used in taranas can be drawn from the bols of sitar, tabla, mridang and other instruments. Sargam may also be used. Tarana compositions can be found in a variety of talas such as teental, ektal, jhaptal and jhoomra tal. Most taranas are sung in madhya or drut laya, although some traditional taranas can also be found in vilambit laya. These latter are called khyalnuma (khyal-like) taranas. In khyalnuma tarana the improvisation expected is similar to that used in vilambit khyal (as described above).

There are some taranas in madhya laya. These call for forms of improvisation suited to that laya. Some other taranas are suitable for playing on instruments. Yet other taranas are composed for ati-drut (very fast) laya. These offer the artist an opportunity to display her ability to articulate the syllables clearly at a rapidfire laya. One form of improvisation very suitable for for such laya is layakari employing the syllables of the tarana.

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**tarana** *tarānā*

**khyalnuma** *khyālnumā*

**ati-drut** *ati drut*

**layakari** *laykārī* rhythmic play, rhythmic variation

## Video Credits

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