

## Diversity within North Indian Khayal Vocalism: Exploring the Gayaki of Rehmat Khan and D.V. Paluskar

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### Abstract

*Khayal* is the predominant form of North Indian classical music, and within this form, several diverse musical ideologies are represented through distinct styles known as *gharanas*. The Gwalior *gharana* is known as the fountainhead amongst *khayal gharanas*. This paper examines the musical styles of two pre-eminent practitioners of the Gwalior *gharana* from the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Rehmat Khan and D.V. Paluskar, who belonged to two different generations, and deeply inspired successive generations of musicians and music lovers. The introductory section provides the context for both musicians. The following section describes Rehmat Khan's music tutelage and a detailed analysis of his music based on the available recorded archive. The third section of the article discusses D.V. Paluskar's journey as a vocalist, his musical training and a detailed description of his *gayaki* which helped him carve a unique space within the milieu of Hindustani music. The significance of this paper lies in the objective methodology adopted to study the *gayaki* of the two musicians, bringing forth fresh perspectives on music analysis, understanding of styles, and music research.

**Keywords:** Khayal, Hindustani music, Music analysis, Music archive, Rehmat Khan, D.V. Paluskar

### Introduction

The *khayal* form emerged as a prominent genre of vocal music in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and is a highly syncretic form borrowing elements from pre-existing genres such as Dhrupad and Qawwali. Improvisation is one of its key elements, and the form gives ample scope for individual musicianship and creativity among practitioners, which has shaped the perpetuation of *gharanas* such as Gwalior, Agra, Jaipur-Atrauli and Kirana. *Gharana* in *khayal*, came to be known as a lineage of hereditary musicians, their disciples and the particular style with distinct salient features that they represent. *Gharanas* are also dynamic spaces and flourish through constant stylistic changes by individual musicians in every successive generation. Gwalior *gharana* is considered as the oldest *gharana* of *khayal*. Within the Gwalior *gharana*, there are three main strands that produced formidable legacies of luminaries who represented distinct styles within their own *gharana*. Rehmat Khan (1860-1922)<sup>1</sup> was a direct descendant of the founding family of the Gwalior *gharana*. He was amongst the earliest vocalists from the Gwalior *gharana* to have been recorded. Several of his shellac 78 rpm gramophone records were published primarily in the early to mid-1920s. His *gayaki* (musical style) had profound impact on the music of erudite practitioners of succeeding generations such as Gwalior *gharana*

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<sup>1</sup> Some accounts suggest Rehmat Khan's year of birth as 1852.

vocalists Anant Manohar Joshi, Omkarnath Thakur, and Sharad Chandra Arolkar as well as Kirana *gharana* exponent Abdul Karim Khan. D.V. Paluskar (1921-1955) was the son and disciple of Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, a pioneering musician, who made significant contributions towards the propagation of Hindustani music in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. D.V. Paluskar also represented the Gwalior *khayal gharana* with a distinct *gayaki* that endeared to all. He went on to become one of the most prolific recording artists of the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, with published materials in a variety of formats including 78 rpm gramophone records, and longer-duration recordings in the form of vinyl records, spools and later, cassettes. This article provides a detailed comparative and objective analysis of the *gayakis* of the above vocalists of different generations, both of whom belonged to the Gwalior *gharana*, and yet, had distinct musical styles. They also embraced new technology, which made their music accessible to future generations, which in turn had a considerable impact in shaping the musical thought of several important practitioners of Hindustani Music. This paper also focuses on understanding the musical styles of the two vocalists by employing an objective methodology for analysis.

### **Scion of the Gwalior Gharana: Rehmat Khan and his Gayaki**

The Gwalior *gharana* of *khayal* vocalism was mainly propagated by the brothers Haddu Khan, Hassu Khan and their cousin Natthu Khan, all of whom were court musicians in the Gwalior court under the rule of Daulatrao Scindia and later, Jankojirao Scindia in the latter half of 19<sup>th</sup> century CE. Rehmat Khan was the younger son of Haddu Khan. While primarily receiving musical tutelage within the family from his father and uncles, he was greatly inspired by *beenkar* Bande Ali Khan's music (*been* is a string instrument relying heavily on *meend* or continuous glide between two notes, as an ornamentation), and also learnt from Baba Dixit, one of the senior disciples of Haddu Khan. Owing to the demise of his father and the untimely death of his brother, Chote Mohammad Khan, Rehmat Khan led a largely reclusive life, until his father's disciple Vishnupant Chatre, took him under his wings, and was instrumental in reviving his music career, and arranged his soirees in several princely states. Rehmat Khan eventually settled in the princely state of Kurundwad in western Maharashtra in the early 1900s. In 1919, he recorded for the Gramophone Company Ltd. and published eleven 78 rpm recordings in Bombay, thereby ensuring the accessibility of his music for posterity. He died in 1922 in Kurundwad, Maharashtra.

His published recordings in short three-minute 78 rpm formats, which were made in his advanced age, are not entirely representative of his music. Nevertheless, they give us a fair idea about his musical thought and an individual voice that he was able to portray through his music. Ragas reviewed for this study include Malkauns (*peera na jaani*, *vilambit khayal* in *tilwada*), Bhoop (*jab se tumisana laagari*, *drut khayal* in *teentala*), Yaman, and Bhairavi (*Jamuna ke teer*, *thumri* in *deepchandi*). Rehmat Khan enjoyed a wide repertoire width, a fact corroborated through the discography given above. An objective analysis of his *gayaki* with reference to his recordings available in the public domain is shown below. The analysis has been conducted based on specific parameters pertaining to voice production, improvisational techniques, and unfolding of the bandish. Observations are made with reference to the basic features of vocalism in Gwalior *khayal gharana*.

Rehmat Khan's voice was unique and he could be considered a pioneer of his time in striving for a sweet intonation and voice production as against a bias towards an aggressive tonal quality prevalent in the Gwalior *gayaki*. His *swar-lagaav* (voice production) was pin-pointed and extremely tuneful which contributed to the emotional richness of his *gayaki*. Rehmat Khan's *bandish* (composition) renditions while adhering to the basic melodic structure, are loosely bound. The *laya* (tempo) and *theka* of *bandishes* were leaning towards a medium tempo, adhering to the tempo prescribed in the Gwalior *gharana gayaki*. The tempo of his *khayals* ensured that the melodic idea whether through the *bandish* or *vistaar* (elaboration or expansion), was often executed in more than two or three *avartans* (rhythmic cycles). He preferred *talas* such as *tilwada*, *ektala* and *teental*. The Gwalior idiom focuses on rendering *alaap* (unmetered and metered improvisation) and *vistar* according to the structure of the *bandish*. Rehmat Khan's *vistar* was neither structured nor sequential but more free flowing. The most notable feature in his improvisation is the *meend* (a type of ornamentation suggesting continuous movement between any two notes) laden and *aas-yukta* phrases that he employs, uplifting and enriching the emotional quotient of his music. An abundance of such phrases also lent a high degree of continuity in his *gayaki*. Gwalior *gayaki* emphasizes on *avarohi* and *sapaat tanas* (virtuosic runs). In Rehmat Khan's renditions, there is a clear bias towards rendering a sequential and straight phrase in the ascent and the descent in steps rather than *sapaat tanas*. Use of double notes is also frequent in his *tanas*. The intonation in *tanas* is marked by forcefulness and vigour. Sharad Chandra Arolkar, an erudite scholar musician known for his insightful and detailed study of the old masters of the *khayal* form, associated Rehmat Khan's music with sweetness in appeal, simplicity and softer approach towards elaboration.<sup>2</sup>

From the above observations, it is clear that Rehmat Khan embarked on creating an individual voice within the *gharana* while retaining several features of the Gwalior idiom. The study of his musical style carries significance because, after his demise, prominent representatives of the *gharana* predominantly included disciples (and their lineage) outside the founding family. Thus, this analysis provides a glimpse into the *gayaki* of early Gwalior *gharana* practitioners.

#### **D.V. Paluskar's Legacy and Individual Creativity**

D.V. Paluskar, a brilliant vocalist of the Gwalior *gharana*, belonged to a later generation than that of Rehmat Khan. Born in Kurundwad, western Maharashtra in 1921, he went on to establish a stellar career as a Hindustani music vocalist with a prolific discography, which continues to inspire musicians and music lovers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He was the son of Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, a pioneer in music pedagogy and performance. Having lost his father when he was only ten years old, D.V. Paluskar received his initial musical tutelage from Vishnu Digambar's nephew Chintamanrao Paluskar in Nashik. A prodigious talent, he is understood to have learnt 300-350 *bandishes* in about fifty *ragas* at a young age. Thus, by the time he entered his teens, he was already well-versed in giving short *khayal* presentations. His debut performance in 1935 at the prestigious Harvallabh Sangeet Sammelan in Jalandhar, Punjab at the age of 14, was very well received. After a brief stint with Narayanrao Vyas, Paluskar shifted

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<sup>2</sup> See Ramachandran (2013, pp. 56-65), for a more detailed music analysis of Rehmat Khan's *gayaki*.

to Poona (now known as Pune) in 1935 and received extensive *talim* from Vinayakbua Patwardhan. This was also a period when he started teaching at the Pune branch of Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, established by Patwardhan (Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, school of music, was founded by V. D. Paluskar in 1901 in Lahore. The senior Paluskar, later, sent his disciples to establish branches of this music school in different parts of the country with a mission to propagate Hindustani classical music amongst the general public). Both Patwardhan and Vyas were senior disciples of Vishnu Digambar Paluskar. D. V. Paluskar was a much sought-after vocalist during a period dominated by luminaries such as Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Omkarnath Thakur, Kesarbai Kerkar and Amir Khan. He created his own individual niche, while steeped in the Gwalior *gharana gayaki*. He presented a systematic *alaap*, *bol-anga* and forceful *tanas* with great alacrity and skill. Another notable feature is that even short 78 rpm recordings comprising of *khayal* renderings in different *ragas*, include all the components of improvisation such as *alaap*, *bol-alaap*, *bol-tanas* and *akaar tanas*. Apart from *khayal*, D.V. Paluskar was equally well known for the emotive renditions of *bhajans* (devotional poetry). He contributed to cine music as a playback singer in films like Baiju-Bawra and a Bengali film named Shaapmochan. He toured China as an official member of a cultural delegation from India (Nadkarni 2005, p. 277). His fledging career came to an abrupt end with his death in 1955 due to encephalitis.<sup>3</sup> Sharad Sathe, a serious practitioner and musician-scholar, was amongst his prominent disciples.

D.V. Paluskar was recorded extensively, especially by the national broadcaster All India Radio. An extensive discography of his music in a variety of formats including 78 rpm gramophone records, spools, vinyl records and cassettes, is available in the public domain. The digitised versions of all the above formats are available on the internet today, making Paluskar's music readily accessible. For the purposes of this study, I have reviewed recordings in ragas Chayanat, Gaudmalhar, Shree, Miyan ki Todi, Ramkali, Miyan Malhar, Nand, Bhimpalasi, Kamod, Tilak-kamod, Kedar, Puriya, and Deshkar. Observations on Paluskar's *gayaki*, based on certain parameters like voice production, and the aesthetic approach towards the exploration and improvisation of the *bandish*, is given below.

D.V. Paluskar sang with extreme clarity and was endowed with an exceptional voice with a tinge of nasality. Natural voice production, innate sweetness, flexibility and pliability are the essential features of his voice. The Gwalior *gayaki* proposes a short outline of the *raga* before the commencement of the *bandish*. D.V. Paluskar did not deviate from this notion and presented an introductory *alaap* always in *akaar* (articulation of the vowel sound aa) delineating the essential phraseology of the *raga*. He maintained the authentic rendition of the *bandish* like other practitioners of the Gwalior *gharana*. His treatment of the song text involved clarity in pronunciation, and he took care to ensure that the words were not distorted, although he treated the lyrics primarily as melodic material. The emotive element in his music was chiefly brought in through his voice quality. The Gwalior *khayals* (in particular slow tempo or *vilambit khayals*) lean towards a medium tempo or slow-medium tempo. Paluskar relied on this tempo for his *vilambit khayals*. A review of his recordings reveals preference for *ektala* for his *vilambit*

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<sup>3</sup> See Deodhar (2007) and Nadkarni (2005) for a detailed sketch on D.V. Paluskar.

*khayals* and *teentala* for the *drut khayals* (though recordings of *bandishes* set to other talas like *jhaptala*, are also available). Paluskar adopts the mode of systematic unfolding of the *raga* with the *alaap* predominantly being articulated in *akaar*. Improvisation or *vistaar* of the *bandish* portrays facets of a *raga* through a balanced inclusion of various stages like *aalap* (in *aakar*), *bol-aalap* (using words or *bols* of the *bandish*), limited *aalap* in the *antara* and *behelawa*<sup>4</sup> in a slightly raised tempo. Paluskar employs several varieties of *tanās* like *sapaat*, *avarohi*, *phirat*, *ragaanga* and *gamak tanās*. The *tanās* are noticeable for extreme clarity (*daanedaar*) and rendered with *gamak* even at an increased tempo.<sup>5</sup> His music has inspired generations of musicians. His forte was an exceptional voice and his ability to deliver a systematic and an aesthetically coherent performance, embracing the modern tools of recording technology. Commenting on the eclectic assimilations in D.V. Paluskar's music, contemporary khayal exponent Ulhas Kashalkar (2005, pp. 41-42) observed that Paluskar appreciated Omkarnath Thakur's powerful voice, aesthetically appealing *bandishes* of Anant Manohar Joshi and Mirashibua, and the tunefulness of Bade Ghulam Ali Khan.

### Conclusion

The above analysis and observations reiterate the notion of stylistic diversity within the *khayal* form, not only in terms of the presence of different *gharanas* but also distinct styles within a single *gharana*. Both Rehmat Khan and D.V. Paluskar were representatives of the Gwalior *gharana* belonging two different generations and a vastly different cultural milieu. Both built formidable legacies through their individual expressions while retaining certain facets of their *gharana*. In a tradition where live performances were not time-bound, both also embraced modern technology and recorded their music for posterity, providing fresh perspectives on the organisation of musical material within a specific duration, while not compromising on the aesthetic richness of a performance.

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<sup>4</sup> Behelawa is considered to be an important section in the scheme of improvisation of Gwalior khayal-s. It's usually a link between slower *vistaar* and fast *tana-s* and is characterized by higher density of notes (as compared to *aalap*) rendered with an inherent swing to the note patterns.

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed understanding of an objective method to analyse a musical style, see Ramachandran (2013, pp. 155-164).

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