
The Contribution of Female Artists in Purab Ang Thumri: Post Independent Era

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Abstract:

This research explores the significant contributions of female singers to the evolution and popularization of Thumri in the post-independence era (1947 onwards). Despite facing societal challenges, women singers played a crucial role in reviving and innovating Thumri, introducing new styles, techniques, and emotional expressions. This study examines the impact of female singers on Thumri's vocal style, performance, and presentation, highlighting their innovative approaches, emotional interpretations, and contributions to the genre's preservation and dissemination.

Keywords: Feminism, Artists, Thumri, Post-Independent era, Khayalanga Thumri, Bhajananga Thumri, Purab Ang.

Methodology:

This research employs a qualitative approach, combining historical, analytical, and interpretive methods to explore the contributions of female singers to Thumri in the post-independence era. The methodology involves:

1. Historical Research: Examining the social, cultural, and political context of post-independence India and its impact on Thumri.
2. Archival Analysis: Studying recordings, documents, and interviews of female Thumri singers from the 1940s onwards.
3. Case Studies: general examination of selected female Purab Ang thumri singers, including Jaddan Bai, Bari Moti Bai, Rasoolan Bai, Begum Akhtar, Sidhheswari Devi, Naina Devi, Shobha Gurtu and Girija Devi.
4. Musical Analysis: Analyzing the vocal styles, techniques, and emotional expressions of female Thumri singers.
5. Comparative Analysis: Comparing the contributions of female singers to Thumri with those of their male counterparts.

Objectives:

1. To explore the historical context of Thumri in the post-independence era and its impact on female singers.
2. To analyze the contributions of female singers to Thumri's vocal style, technique, and emotional expression.

3. To examine the role of female singers in preserving and disseminating Thumri.
4. To understand the challenges faced by female singers in the male-dominated Thumri tradition.
5. To highlight the innovations and innovations introduced by female singers in Thumri.
6. To evaluate the impact of female singers on the popularity and relevance of Thumri in contemporary times.

Introduction:

Thumri, a classical music genre of North India, has a rich history of emotional expression and poetic interpretation. In the post-independence era, female singers emerged as prominent contributors to Thumri's evolution, challenging societal norms and stereotypes. Despite facing obstacles, women singers like - Gauhar Jaan, Malka Jaan, Roshan Ara Begum (Pre-Independent era), and Jaddan Bai, Bari Moti Bai, Rasoolan Bai, Begum Akhtar, Sidhheswari Devi, Naina Devi, Shobha Gurtu and Girija Devi (Post-independent era) revolutionized Thumri, introducing innovative approaches, and emotional expressions. Their contributions not only enriched the genre but also paved the way for future generations of female singers. This research aims to explore the significant contributions of female singers to the Purab Ang Thumri in the post-independence era, examining their impact on the genre's vocal style, performance, and presentation, and highlighting their role in preserving and popularizing Thumri.

Before going to the discussion on the female contribution or reflection of feminism in Thumri, first a brief description on thumri is a matter of need here. In this article the basic features of 'Thumri' songs and 'Thumri singing' are briefly narrated. It should be mentioned here that a comparative study on Dhrupad and Dhamar on the one hand and Khayal and Thumri on the other appears to be highly interesting though of course that has no scope here. But then, Dhamar and Thumri deserve at least a short relevant reference to the subtle inner joy and outer jubilation on the one hand and subtle inner persiveness and outer sorrowfulness on the other hand existing in Dhamar and Thumri songs etc. of which may be manifested.

Some musicologists suggest that Dhamar and Thumri originally belonged to the ethnic music ('folk') prevalent in the area covering Mathura, Vrindavana, Varanasi and the vicinity of Lucknow. In fact, the themes, melody forms, rhythmic variations and the 'tala's of both Dhamar and Thumri fundamentally belonged to the respective long standing indigenous musical traditions (of the devotional cult) very close to each other. Most probably that is why it is said still now that the said music forms have their origin in the relevant ethnic folk music prevalent in the said area since the distant past. But then some fundamentally important points have not been duly considered by those who maintained such a view. One should remember that the relevant socio-cultural revolution in accordance with the exigencies of the times helped develop those traditional music forms (or 'art music' forms as they say).

As such Dhrupad, Dhamar, Khayal, Thumri (and Tappa too) have crossed the borders of the said ethnic music zone early in the modern period. Khayal and Thumri have come nearer to the music loving common people because of acceptability and accessibility. Again, whatever be the varying views of the concerned scholars in this regard, it may be conveniently pointed out that both Dhamar and Kheyal became widely known in public on the eve of the modern period and thereafter gradually became popular too being followed by Thumri (particularly in the 19th Century). By the middle of the 20th Century Khayal and Thumri became quite prominent, gently superseding Dhrupad and Dhamar. Now the luminous respective march of both Khayal and Thumri is self – explanatory.

Opinions differ on the origin of Thumri. Some say that Thumri has its origin (though very distant) in ancient “Chhalikya” dance-drama-music. Again, some opine that Raja Mansingha Tomar, ruler of Gwalior (1484 to 1516 A.D.) created ‘Thumri’ and from the Raja’s title “Tomar” the term ‘Thumri’ has come. But then it has been admitted by all (and also there being no dispute about Sadarang’s relevant contributions) that Sadarang introduced ‘Majlishi Baithaki Thumri’ sometime in the forties or fifties of 18th century A.D. It appears that ‘Thumri’ was publicly introduced sometime after 1860. Sadarang created ‘Bole-Bant’ Thumri which again subsequently became two-fold ‘Gat-bhao’ and ‘Nritya bhao Thumri’. Thereafter his followers Sanadpiya, Kadar Piya and Lalanpiya composed well appreciated Thumri songs. In the 19th century Sadik Ali Khan (nephew of former Dhrupadiya Ud. Ali Baqsh) and Nawab Wajid Ali Shah made prominent contributions to the realm of ‘Thumri’ by composing some charming Thumri songs or bandishes. Thumri was never sung in the Royal Court of Delhi. Another pattern of ‘Thumri’, i.e. ‘Bole-banao’ Thumri also became prominent. The said Thumri songs had their distinctive features. The very terms ‘Bole-bant Thumri’, ‘Bole-banao Thumri’, ‘Gat bhao Thumri’ and ‘Nritya bhao Thumri’ are self-explanatory.

The ‘Angas’ of Thumri are known as ‘Purab Ang Thumri’ and ‘Panchhao Thumri’, Purab Ang means Lucknow style and Banaras style of Thumri singing. Panchhao means Thumri prevalent in Patiala style of singing. Ustad Bade Gulam Ali Khan said in an interview that, ‘Thumri has only one Ang, that is Purab Ang’.

Briefly speaking, Dhrupad and Khayal have their respective charm and greatness. But then still existing quite a number of Dhamar and Thumri bandishes and their respective proper manifestations convey that Dhamar is basically more romantic than Dhrupad, while Thumri is more romantic than Dhamar and Khayal.

Finally, ‘Thumri’ as mostly prevalent today may be reasonably classified, thus ‘Bhajananga Bhava Thumri’ and ‘Khayalanga Baithaki Thumri’, while the former is prevalent in Kathak dance as part of some events thereof, the latter is prevalent in the classical music conferences. A table accordingly (relating to the same) is shown below.

Table relating to Thumri singing

- **Bhajananga Bhava Thumri (Kathak Dance)**

1. ‘Thumri’ sung along with the relevant play acting (as part of the relevant event).
2. ‘Nrityangi bole – Thumri’ (as part of the relevant event) (‘Gat-bhao’ style).

- **Khayalanga Baithaki Thumri**

1. Khayalanga Tan-Thumri
2. Khayalanga Bhava Thumri
 - a. Bole-banao Thumri
 - b. Bole-Bant Thumri

Now coming to the contribution of female singers to Thumri specifically in Purab Ang Thumri as described before, in the post-independence era (1947 onwards) has been significant, shaping the genre's evolution and popularization. Some of the popular artists' journey of music has to be discussed regarding this.

Jaddanbai Hussain

(1 April 1892 – 8 April 1949; known professionally as Jaddanbai) was an Indian singer, music composer and especially contributed to Purabang thumri.

Bari Moti Bai

Husna Jan or Husna Bai was a Tawaif and a Thumri singer of Banaras during the late 19th and the early 20th century. She was known in Uttar Pradesh as an expert in khayal, thumri and tappa gayaki she is credited with redefining and revolutionizing the singing tradition in the early 1900s, singing patriotic songs and inspiring other singers to follow suit. She was trained by Thakur Prasad Mishra, and the famous Sarangi player Pandit Shambunath Mishra, and her tappa gayaki she mastered under the teaching of the legendary Chote Ramdas Ji of Banaras. Her thumri and other subgenres of thumri were published as ‘Madhu Tarang’ (Sharma, 2012). Harishchandra also got her to compose Geet Govind by Jaidev. She was considered in the same league as Vidyabari and Badi Moti Bai, masters of the art of thumri and tappa. Bai was referred to as ‘Sarkar’ or chieftain, as she rose to great heights in her career.

Rasoolan hussain Or Rasoolan Bai:

(1902 – 15 December 1974) was a leading Indian Hindustani classical music vocalist. Belonging to the Benaras gharana, she specialized in the romantic Purab Ang of the Thumri musical genre and tappa. Rasoolanbai became an expert in Tappa singing as well as Purab Ang, Thumri, besides dadra, poorbi geet, hori, kajri and chaiti.

Awards

1957: Sangeet Natak Akademi Award: Vocal

1963: National Academy of Music, London's Recognition Award for Cultural Music

1963: Cash prize of \$10000 by erstwhile UK Government

Akhtari Bai Faizabadi

(7 October 1914 – 30 October 1974), also known as Begum Akhtar, was an Indian singer and actress. Dubbed as "Mallika-e-Ghazal" (Queen of Ghazals), she is regarded as one of the greatest singers of ghazal, dadra, and thumri genres of Hindustani classical music.

Awards:

1968: Padma Shri

1972: Sangeet Natak Akademi Award

1975: Padma Bhushan (posthumously)

Siddheswari Devi:

(8 August 1908– 18 March 1977) was a legendary Hindustani singer from Varanasi, India, known as Maa (mother). Her music embodied the Banaras Gharana style, which focuses on conveying deep emotions and feelings through musical notes and voice modulations. A stalwart figure in thumri, Siddheshwari's repertoire also encompassed khayals, dhrupads, dadras, tappas, kajris, chaitis, horis, and bhajans. She is considered one of the greatest Thumri singers of the 20th century and was called the 'Thumri Queen' by her contemporaries like Kesarbai Kerkar.

Awards and honours

- Padma Shri by the Government of India (1966)

- Sangeet Natak Akademi Award
- Honorary D.Litt. degree by the Ravindra Bharati Vishwavidyalaya in Kolkata (1973)
- Desikottam degree by the Vishwa Bharati Vishwavidyalaya.

Naina Devi

(27 September 1917 – 1 November 1993) also known as Naina Ripjit Singh, was Indian vocalist of Hindustani classical music, most known for her thumri renditions, though she also sang dadra and ghazals. She was a music producer at All India Radio and later with Doordarshan. In her Thumri singing, she stressed on the need to study Nayika Bheda (Ashta Nayika), the eight different kinds of heroines classified in the Natya Shastra, to render thumri effectively. Though she also sang in other genres like qawwali and ghazal.

Her Published notable works:

Mushtaq Hussain Khan (Biography), by Naina Ripjit Singh. Sangeet Natak Akademi, 1964.

Thumri, Its Development and Gayeki, Journal, Volume 6, Issue 1. ITC Sangeet Research Academy.1985. pp. 13–17.

Girija Devi:

(8 May 1929 – Present) is an Indian classical singer of the Seniya and Banaras gharanas. She performs classical and light classical music and helped elevate the profile of thumri. She is dubbed as the 'Queen of Thumri' for her contribution in the genre. Girija Devi made her public debut in 1949 on All India Radio Allahabad.

Girija Devi sings in the Banaras gharana and performs the Purab ang thumri style typical of the tradition, whose status she helped elevate. Her repertoire includes the semi-classical genres kajri, chaiti, and holi and she sings khayal, Indian folk music, and tappa. The New Globe Dictionary of Music and Musicians once stated that her semi-classical singing combined her classical training with the regional characteristics of the songs of Bihar and eastern Uttar Pradesh.

Awards

Padma Shri (1972)

Padma Bhushan (1989)

Sangeet Natak Akademi Award (1977)

Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship (2010)

Maha Sangeet Samman Award (2012)

Sangeet Samman Award (Dover Lane Music Conference)

GiMA Awards 2012 (Lifetime Achievement)

TanaRiri Puraskar (2011)

Shobha Gurtu

(1925–2004) was an Indian singer in the light Hindustani classical style. Though she had equal command over pure classical style, it was with light classical music that she received her fame, and in time came to be known as the Thumri Queen, and for the 'Abhinaya' sung in her full-throated voice.

Shobha Gurtu specialized in semi classical forms such as thumri, dadra, Kajri, Hori etc., effortlessly adding pure classical passages into her singing, thus creating a new form, and reviving the magic of forms like Thumri, of which she became a greatest exponent in time. She was particularly influenced by singer Begum Akhtar and Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan.

In 1987, she received the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, and was later awarded the Lata Mangeshkar Puraskar, Shahu Maharaj Puraskar and the Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar. In 2002, she was awarded the Padma Bhushan.

Awards:

- Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 1987
- Padma Bhushan in 2002
- Lata Mangeshkar Puraskar
- Shahu Maharaj Puraskar
- Maharashtra Gaurav Puraskar

Conclusion

The contribution of female singers to Thumri in the post-independence era has been transformative, revolutionizing the genre's vocal style, performance, and presentation. Their legacy continues to influence contemporary Thumri, ensuring the genre's continued relevance and popularity. The contributions of female singers in Thumri serve as a testament to their talent, dedication, and perseverance, cementing their place in the history of Indian classical music. In conclusion, the contribution of female singers to Thumri in the post-independence era has been profound, shaping the genre's evolution and ensuring its continued relevance. Their innovative approaches, emotional expressions, and contributions to preservation and dissemination have enriched Thumri, inspiring future generations of female singers and solidifying their place in Indian classical music history.

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