Regarding Dhrupad Music

Considered to be one of the oldest formats of canonized north Indian classical music, Dhrupad sangeet had widely influenced music in India as abroad. This paper discusses a brief history of Dhrupad music, some of the key stylistic elements as well as the chief instruments employed in rendition. Further, a brief discussion establishes structural differences between Dhrupad gayaki and Khayal gayaki. Finally a mention is made of the current gharanas that practice and teach this form.

Introduction and Brief History

It is said that one of the earliest patrons of Dhrupad music was Raja Maan Singh of Gwalior. His court hosted several brilliant musicians for performances and conferences. Some of these artists included greats such as Nayak Bakshu, Nayak Pandaveeya, and Mohammad Lohan. Appropriately, Raja Maan Singh appreciated the rarity of such conferences from a musicological perspective and pondered the idea of canonizing various aspects of the music. The proposition was to regularize a mode of communication for extant musical ideas in order to capture the various raags, their types with descriptions, along with corresponding compositions. These were the rudiments of what is observed as Dhrupad music. Notably, before the Dhrupad, there existed folk music centered around themes celebrating nature, existence, birth, marriage, death, discipline and sacrifice. Remnants of folk verses are visibly present in Dhrupad verses.

Instruments of Dhrupad

The typical accompanying instruments used in Dhrupad are the Tanpura (4 stringed drone) and the Pakhawaj (drum accompaniment). The composition is typically rendered through vocals, the Rudra Veena or even the Rubab. Today, aspects of Dhrupad structure are clearly observable in classical renditions from various gharanas, regardless of the instrument. Whether these are Gats composed for the Sitar or Basuri (flute) or Khayal bandishes (raag based compositions), the alaaps and meends (glissando) are heavily guided by the Dhrupad style. More recently, Dhrupad has also been practised and taught on western instruments such as the Cello (Nancy Kulkarni), Alto Saxophone (Igino Giovanni Brunori) and the Silverflute (Virginia Nicoli).

Characteristics of Dhrupad

Dhrupad is a compound sanskrit word constructed from dhruv (fixed) and pad (word). A typical composition is developed in two parts, namely Alaap and the Dhrupad. The Alaap may be loosely interpreted as an introductory communication to set the mood of the raag. It however is very strict in its development. Though unassisted by percussion, it is intrinsically metered in its unravelling. The Alaap begins with a slow tempo with sonorous enunciations of syllables Re, Nom, Tom, Ta, Na, Dhi etc. The Alaap proceeds to a medium paced Jod (joining section) and finally a Jhala (concluding section of the Alaap) which may be assisted by a pakhawaj.
Irrespective of whether it is the *alaap* or the *dhrupad*, each syllable is required to be pronounced with utmost clarity. Each note sung or played is rendered with a character governed by its surrounding notes usually. This is achieved through the means of a *meend* i.e. a glide between notes.

**Some notable differences from Khayal**

While most *Khayal gharanas* resemble *Dhrupad* to a great extent, they also differ in several respects. *Khayal* (imagined improvisation), despite its flexibility is also considered a classical form of north Indian music. *Khayal gharanas* are primarily known for their singing or *gayaki*. Some of the *Khayal* schools include Gwalior, Jaipur-Atrauli, Bhendi-Bazaar, Patiala, Kirana and Indore. A characteristic of Khayal singing is unobstructed open mouthed *aakaar*. This is essentially enunciating the syllable *Aa* to perform complex note combinations called *taans*. In contrast, *Dhrupad* does not permit such enunciation directly. Each note must be pronounced with a palatal of nasopharyngial sound such as *Re, Nom, Tom, Ri* etc. or as *bol-taans* within the composition. Furthermore, while the latter part of most *khayal* performances may reply purely on *aakaar* based *taans*, this is not usually the case for *Dhrupad* performances where the improvisations are restricted to constructions around the verse. This style of *badhats* or *bol-taans* are seen in certain *khayal gharanas*. Format-wise, it may be observed that in Khayal singing, the *alaap* is followed by a *vilambit* (slow tempo) *khayal* and perhaps a *madhya laya* (medium tempo) *khayal* or a *drut* (fast) *khayal*; however in the case of *Dhrupad* recitals the *alaap* is followed by a single fixed composition usually not followed by another composition. It is worth mentioning that perhaps one of the oldest *khayal gharanas*, the Gwalior *gharana* had primarily *Dhrupad* singers until around the time of Tansen and perhaps a few generations after. This evidences a direct link between *Dhrupad and Khayal* singing.

**Dhrupad gharanas today**

The Dagars are regarded as the most noted exponents of *Dhrupad* music. More recently, the Gundecha Brothers have promoted *Dhrupad* having learnt it from the Dagars themselves. Other *gharanas* include the Darbhanga *gharana*, the Talwandi *gharana* and the Bettiah *gharana*. Some of the exponents of Dhrupad teaching outside India include Brunori, Nicoli, Céline Wadier and Marianne Svašek.

**References**


[4] Dagar, Rahim Fahimuddin [Manuscripts]. Manuscripts of Rahim Fahimuddin Dagar