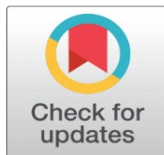
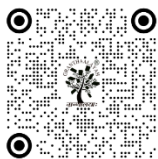


CONCEPTS OF RAGA ELABORATION IN INDORE GHARANA: AN ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The gharana system occupies a central position in the evolution and transmission of Hindustani classical music, shaping stylistic identities within the broader framework of raga performance. Among these traditions, the Indore Gharana, most prominently associated with Ustad Amir Khan, is distinguished by its introspective, vilambit-oriented, and architecturally expansive approach to raga development. This paper examines the conceptual foundations and performance techniques underlying raga elaboration in the Indore Gharana, with particular emphasis on alap, bol-baant, nom-tom, and taan structures.

Through analytical study of selected recordings, textual sources, and musicological commentary, the research explores how the Indore style constructs a gradual and meditative unfolding of the raga. Special attention is given to its emphasis on slow tempo (ati-vilambit), meend-dominant melodic movement, merukhand-based permutation techniques, and the restrained yet intricate use of taans. The study also investigates how bol-baant and nom-tom elements are integrated into khayal performance to enhance structural coherence and aesthetic depth.

By situating these practices within the larger discourse of gharana tradition, the paper argues that the Indore Gharana represents a distinctive model of raga vistaar that balances rigorous structural logic with profound emotional expressivity. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of stylistic individuality within Hindustani music and highlight the continuing relevance of gharana-based aesthetics in contemporary performance contexts.

Keywords: Merukhand, Ati Vilambit, Jhoomra Taal, Persian Tarana, Aesthetics

1. INTRODUCTION

Raga is a dynamic melodic entity that develops via playing an instrument or singing, rather than just a scale. Raga elaboration, as used in Hindustani classical music, is the interpretive process through which a musician progressively unveils the emotional and structural core of the raga. The Indore Gharana is distinguished from other artistic lineages by its architectonic, meditative raga unfolding. This gharana places more emphasis on depth, tonal purity, and structural clarity than performance traditions that value virtuoso taans or rhythmic dynamism.

The major distinctive features of the Gaayaki of Indore Gharana are as follows :

- Ati Vilambit Laya i.e. slow-tempo raga development
- improvisation mostly in lower and middle octaves

- tendency towards serious and expansive ragas like yaman, Darbari, Malkauns etc.
- emphasis on melody
- bol alap and sargam using merukhand patterns
- sparing application of murki and other embellishments to preserve introspective quality
- use of kan Swaras in all parts of performance
- rare use of tihai
- careful enunciation of text of bandish
- multiple laya (tempo) jatis in a single taan
- mixture of taan types in a single taan
- use of rubaidar tarana (a blend of persian and Arabic literature) considered similar to chhota khyal

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Recordings available on the YouTube of Ustad Amir Khan, Pandit Amarnath Chawla, Pandit Tejpal Singh, Pandit Baldev Raj Verma and Vidushi Shanti Sharma along with the other artists of Indore gharana have been examined and analysed to get the conclusion. Also, the scholarly publications of Pandit Amarnath, Pandit Tejpal Singh and Kumar Mukherjee have also been referred to understand and analyse the gayaki. Interviews of the academicians and artists have also been taken.

3. METHODOLOGY

Analytical method has been used for study.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following discussion critically interprets the findings of this study, situating the distinctive approaches to raga elaboration within the aesthetic, philosophical, and structural framework of the Indore Gharana, and examining their broader implications for Hindustani khayal performance practice.

4.1. SLOW AND MEDITATIVE ELABORATION

The recordings of Ustad Amir Khan reveal the magnificence of his musical ideas. He adopted a meditative style during the height of classical music's popularity, which included fast-paced Taankaari, loud voices, hefty gamaks, and a tendency for high-pitched singing. He pursued his thoughts of unhurried elaboration in a leisurely speed, showing little care in what the audience thought at that time. His rendition of several raagas, like Lalit, Yaman Kalyan, Baageshree, and many more, especially when the Vilambit Khayal is included are excellent examples of the gradual development that results in a spiritual rendering of the raaga. The recital stays serene and contemplative even if the bandish's Sahitya suggests Viyog Shringaar Rasa, as in the composition of Yaman Kalyan, i.e., Kajara Kесе daaru, Piya na aaye more mandirwa (Raju Asokan, 2015). Pandit Amarnath's recordings support this as well. The similar idea of raaga elaboration can be seen in the video of his DD National program, where he recited raag jaijaiwanti. Ae Maayi Saajan Naahi Aaye Kaho Kесе Katego Unn Bin Ratiya is a Sahitya of Viyog shringaar rasa, however the rendition is still serene and contemplative (Pandit Amarnath, 2018). Both Vidushi Shanti Sharma and Pandit Baldev Raj Verma, disciples of Pandit Amarnath, developed their Aalaapchaari in the same way by following in their guru's footsteps. There is a systematic approach and elaboration even in the Madhyalaya khayals sung by B.R. Verma in Raaga Vachaspati, Madhukauns, Pancham Kalyan (Hindustani Classical Music, 2019; Hindustani Classical Music, 2020; Dr. Rahul Prakash, 2015). Similarly, in Shanti Sharma's performance of Lalit, the Sadra composition—Nisadin Tu Jap Le, Jap Le Sahib Ko Naam—follows the patient elaboration (Ahsan habib chowdhury, 2015).

It should be noted that Khan Sahab hardly ever explained the raag's Swarop before beginning the Vilambit Khayal. Before the Vilambit khayal, his first Aalaap typically comprised of a few brief sentences in that raag's mandra saptak. He frequently sang "Laa" in reference to Allah. The recitals of Singh Bandhus and Pandit Amarnath both contain the same

brief introductory exposition. On the other hand, before the Vilambit, Shanti Sharma elaborated more than the previous maestros. On the other hand, Pandit Baldev Raj has done a good job of fulfilling the original elaboration, which included the Bols of NOM-TOM and comprised of particular phrases that defined that particular raag (Hindustani Classical Music, 2021).

The fact that Ust. Amir Khan didn't care as much about the audience was also mentioned by Ustad Amjad Ali Khan during a program in which he revealed that both of them performed at the home of Delhi's first LG, Aditya Nath Jha. Ustad Amir Khan became so engrossed in his recital that, after a while, all of the guests took their dinner, but AN Jha and Amjad Ali Khan remained seated until Khan Sahab concluded his recital (New India, 2018).

4.2. LAYA AND TAAL

Being crucial components of all musical genres, laya and taal hold a special place in khayal gayakee since they determine the kind of khayal and its tempo. In the same Ati Vilambit laya where Khan Saheb had sang, the early musicians of the Indore Gharana adopted the founders' idea of using jhoomra taal for their vilambit performance. Madhya laya khayals, in addition to the vilambit in Jhumra, hold a prominent position in Indore Gharana. To Madhyalaya Teental, a number of compositions are set, such as Man Sumirat Nasidin tumharo Naam in Raag Bairagi (Subrata Chowdhury, 2015). Amir Khan's well-known composition of Raag Jog, Ho Balma, is set to Roopak Taal (Subrata Chowdhury, 2015). Amir Khan has also used Jhaptal to sing compositions raagas like Bhairav and Bhatiyar. Pandit Amarnath's composition in Ahiri Todi, Bhaag Jina De Change have set to madhyalaya ektaal (Ra Maxim, 2022). Already mentioned that Shanti Sharma has also sung a Composition in Raag Lalit which is set to Jhaptal. Baldev Raj Verma has also used madhyalaya in Ektaal, Jhaptal and Teental for his compositions in Various Raagas. It should be mentioned that Jhoomra was selected as the perfect taal for Vilambit because Amir Khan resented tabla player improvisations, particularly during the Vilambit. Additionally, Jhoomra's four TIRKIT bols, with the final one occurring on the final beat of the taal cycle, limited the opportunities for rhythmic improvisations in the Ati Vilambit Laya. Regarding the laya and taal preference Pt. Amarnath has said that "it is your personal capacity. But be careful about the aesthetics of the music, and clarity of the words, their understandability. They should always be understandable, even in vilambit. What speed suits which raaga, which style. Suppose it is Darbaaree. Its aarohi is Sa, Re, Ga, Ma, Pa, Dha, Ni Sa. Avrohee-Sa Dha Ni Pa Ga Ma Re Sa. How speedy can you afford to be, as in the avrohee the aandolan at Ga and Dha are like speedbreakers on the road. If you don't slow down, your vehicle will jump. So you are forced to go slow for your own safety and the same is the situation with plenty of other raagas also. There are different types of problems with raagas like Pooriyaa, Multaane, Megh, etc. So considering the safety of the raagas first, you can be adventurous with speed, but within limits." (Bindu Chawla, 2004)

With times changing the trend of singing the vilambit majorly in ektaal has impacted the indore gharana as well as we see that Pandit Baldev Raj has majorly sung the Vilambits in ektaal while he said that "while learning I learned the vilambits in Jhumra only but to me ektaal is more convenient as not much tabla players enjoy playing the Ati Vilambit Jhumra and also some interest of the audience has also been kept in mind to do so. The bharaav before the mukhda becomes more attractive while singing in ektaal" Baldev(2026). Pt. Naresh Malhotra and Acharya Gokulotsav Maharaj's recitals exhibit remnants of Ust. Amir Khan's taste for laya and taal, since they chose the same tempo for their presentations as Ust. Amir Khan would. Although Shanti Sharma has sung the Vilambit in both Jhumra taal and ektaal, her choice of laya in Jhumra is faster than what Amir Khan used to set.

4.3. USE OF MERUKHAND IN AALAP AND TAANS

4.3.1. MERUKHAND

Many names, including Khandameru, Sumerukhand, Merkhand, Meerkhand, and Swara-Prastar, are used to refer to Merukhand. Its first reference can be found in Sharangadeva's thirteenth-century work Sangeet Ratnakar, where the seven notes are blended in five thousand forty distinct ways using this mathematical technique of arranging the swaras in a definite, systematic order. The sequence of notes dictated by this rule is so systematic and established that once the sequence number is determined, a particular swara expansion may be recognized, referred to as 'Nashtoddisht Kriya' (Simha & Aroṇ, 2005). No expansion is duplicated, and no note is used more than once in any expansion. This approach elucidates the number of distinct variations of the swara expansion that are mathematically feasible within a specified fixed quantity. This method effectively elucidates alap, sargam, taan, and other elements inside diverse raga expansions.

For merukhand Pandit Amarnath has said that “Merukhand is in the beginning a mathematical attitude. When it is applied in the raagas it becomes a philosophy. It is a life-consuming work” (Bindu Chawla, 2004). Pandit Amarnath has also analysed the merukhand explaining that how we can attain the phrases which supports the structure of the raaga for its elaboration by explaining the tistra, chatusra, khand and Mishra jaati phrases.

4.3.2. APPLICATION OF MERUKHAND IN ELABORATION OF RAAGA.

In addition to taans, the gayaki of Indore Gharana also exhibits the merukhand element in the aalap. Amir Khan's extensive repertoire demonstrates his skill. This is demonstrated in his recital of Malkauns, where he elaborates the raag employing the merukhand swar prastaar and other components like khatka gamak and meend. Using various elements while singing the same phrase resulted in a more elaborate and appealing performance. Pt. Tejpal Singh's study on Ust. Amir Khan also makes reference to this. He was able to perform a lengthy alaapchaari employing numerous merukhand patterns during his approximately 55-minute recital of Baageshree. (Subrata Chowdhury, 2016) It is surprising to note that, although he did not break the raga's structure, he employed quite different phrases in this 26-minute recital of Baageshree. (AIR Raagam, 2022)

The same pattern of the elaboration was applied by his disciples. Singh Bandhus imitating the patterns in their voice and Amarnath following the master's footsteps was the closest to the gayaki of Amir Khan. Vidushi Kankana Bannerjee has used merukhand beautifully in her recital of raag nand. It is surprising that Acharya Gokulotsav, the eklavya Shishya of Ust. Amir Khan is able maintain the same dialect in both alaapchaari and merukhand structures even in the taans as well. This can be seen in his khayal performances. (Raju Asokan, 2016)

Examining the Merukhand in more detail using the gayakis of Baldev Raj and Shanti Sharma by using their recordings of Todi, Yaman etc. Both have employed the merukhand for structural elaboration, however Baldev Raj Verma manages to maintain the soulfulness of his recitals despite the employment of intricate merukhand patterns. Even in the taans, Pandit Baldev Raj has been melodic, while Shanti Sharma has demonstrated the artistry of speed (Hindustani Classical Music, 2019a; (Ahsan habib chowdhury, 2019). Both of these musicians' work can be considered an advancement and transformation of the merukhand in Indore's gayaki, as they not only executed it technically but also considered melodically what would be more appropriate for the specific emotion when performing the khayal.

It is also to be observed that sometimes he has used merukhand patterns which were not always according to the structure of the raaga like using Sa Re Ga ma (shudh) Ga Re Sa and Ma (tivra) Pa Dha Ni Dha Pa in Raag Yaman Kalyan but Baldev raj and Shanti Sharma has avoided these aspects in their performances. (Raju Asokan, 2015)

4.3.3. LAYAKARI IN TAANS

The gayaki of several gharanas frequently features Layakari with the aid of Bol-Baant, but not in Indore. In indore gharana the layakari is in the form of sargam taans. As analysed the sargam phase arrives after the alaapchaari of the composition. As stated by Amir Khan in an interview, it begins with a tardy sargam in all three octaves and then transitions into taankari by improvising the sargam's laya instead of engaging in a duel with the tabla player. Throughout the Vilambit, the tabla would instead continue to play in a single laya, and the vocalist would improvise in the Tistra, Chatusra, Khand, and Sankeerna jaati. The vocalist would also sing his taans in a way that made them sound like intricate layakari. In his recital of baageshree where he begins the sargam taan at the 32nd minute and goes till 43rd minute of the recital demonstrates how he has communicated his ideas about sargams while altering the laya, yet the laya of the table hasn't altered at all (Subrata Chowdhury, 2016). This pattern has been there in Gayaki of Indore gharana since then. The layakari and the patterns are seen the recitals of all the artists of this gharana.

4.4. COMPOSITIONS

4.4.1. KHAYAL

Be it a Vilambit or a drut composition, it is the base of the Raag Elaboration as it is the poetry on whose literature the swaras are improvised with the elements. In the Gayaki of Indore gharana much emphasis is given on the clear pronunciation of the poetry. As Amir Khan said in an interview that he is not fond of the mis-pronunciation and vulgarity of the words being used in the poetry (Niranjan Sarkar, 2015). This led him to make and sing such compositions which were either based on spiritual theme i.e. Bhakti Rasa and Compsotions which were of Viyog Shringaar Rasa. Amir Khan

composed many compositions mainly in the above-mentioned Rasa. His composition in Malkauns – Jinke Man Ram Biraaje, Guru Bin Gyaan in Marwa, Aur Nahi Kachu kaam ke in darbari are some of the few popular compositions (Singha & Aroṛā, 2005). This thought of clean literature is followed since date. Pt. Naresh and Pt. Baldev Raj when asked about this aspect answered quite same that, “the composition is one of the aspect on which gharana’s identity depends upon and since we consider this art as our bhakti and sadhana we always prefer to sing spiritual compositions or shringaar rasa composition which doesn’t consist any vulgarity” Baldev (2026), Naresh (2026). The compositions of Pandit Amarnath are also an example of the spiritual literature being preferred in this gharana. His composition in Raaga rageshri –

Sthayi - Chain dhoondhe jogi

Chain naa Hi Paave,

Man me Jo Raam Base

Aatam(Aatma) Rijhaave

Antara – Aalam me Chain Kahan

Chain Wahaan Raam Jahaan

Mann ke Mit Anga Laage

Param Sukh Paave.

shows us the spiritual and philosophical approach to the poetry. Following this Pt. Baldev Raj as also composed compositions of Bhakti rasa and Viyog Shringaar in many raagas.

Since many of this gharana's proponents have written several pieces, the composing aspect is an entire field of study.

4.4.2. THE ANTARA MISSING FACTOR

Indore’s recitals are majorly found without the Antaras. There is mention in Kumar Mukherjee work namely the lost world of Hindustani Music about khan saheb not knowing the Antaras but Tejpal Singh in his work tells that Amir Khan knew the Antaras of many composition but the best possibility of him choosing not to sing them is that the poetry of the sthayi felt complete to him and also the kind of elaboration it is there is less aesthetical requirement of the Antara(Mukhopādhyāya, 2006; Singh & Aroṛā, 2005). The lineage after Amir Khan choose not to sing the Antara as well. Although Pandit Baldev Raj has sung antara in few of his performances. In His All India Radio National Programme broadcast, he has sung the Antara of the Vilambit Composition in raag Yaman Kajara Kaise Daaruu. The Antara is – Bina Piya Kajara Nahi Bhaave, Aur Na Sohe Haathon Me Gajara. Similarly he has choosen to sing Antara in his recitals of Miya Ki Todi, Darbari Kannada, Bihag, Nat Bhairav (Hindustani Classical Music, 2019a; Hindustani Classical Music, 2022).

4.4.3. TARANA

The tradition to perform khayalnuma tarana was being introduced by Amir Khan Sahab. He composed taranas using Persian Literature which lead it to become a meaningful composition while earlier it people considered it as a meaningless composition. He says that “its mentioned in some books as well as that tarana is meaningless composition but when researched on tarana I found that these are mainly persian and Arabic literature and hence is meaningful. For example For example, 'Ye yali yale yala yalalle' is derived from Arabic. 'Ya Ali' becomes 'Yali' in its short form; similarly 'Ya la la' is sung as 'Alla': "Tu daani' is sung as "Tadaani.

O daani he knows.

Toh daani (God or Khuda) you know

Khansahab explained, 'When fitted in rhythm, these words change their true form and get distorted. I have also composed a taraana, "Yare man biyaa biyaa" [O friend please come as fast as possible.]'

Dartan tadeem-come within my body

Tome I am you

Dar-inside

Tanandaraa-inside my body and heart

Daraa-come inside

Tandardaani-one who knows the heart and body

Naadirdaani-you know the most. (Singh & Aroṛā, 2005; Niranjana Sarkar, 2015)

The taranas composed by him are widely sung by all the artists of indore gharana. The tarans of Indore gharana are shown below (Singh & Aroṛā, 2005):

Table 1

S.No.	Taraana Composition	Raga	Taal
1	Taa Nom Tanana	Hamsadhvani	Teentaal
2	Na Dir Dir	Jog	Teentaal
3	Deem Tanana	Chandrakauns	Ektaal
4	Dere Na Deem Ta	Suha	Teentaal
5	O De Tana Dere Na	Abhogi	Teentaal
6	Yaare Man Beeya Beeya	Darbari Kanada	Ektaal
7	Ta Deem Ta Deem Ta De Na	Megh	Ektaal

5. CONCLUSION

This study has examined the concepts of raga elaboration in the Indore Gharana through an analytical exploration of performance practices, stylistic features, and philosophical orientations established by Ustad Amir Khan and carried forward by his lineage. The findings reveal that the Indore Gharana represents not merely a stylistic variant within Hindustani khayal, but a consciously articulated aesthetic ideology grounded in introspection, structural rigor, and spiritual sensibility.

At the core of this tradition lies the principle of slow, meditative elaboration. In contrast to performance practices that foreground virtuosity and rhythmic display, the Indore approach privileges gradual expansion, tonal depth, and architectural clarity. The vilambit khayal becomes a space for contemplative immersion, where the raga unfolds organically through carefully measured progression across registers. Even when compositions articulate Viyog Shringaar Rasa, the emotional treatment is sublimated into philosophical serenity rather than overt dramatic expression. This transformation of emotional content into meditative reflection constitutes one of the gharana's defining aesthetic contributions.

The study further demonstrates that laya and taal function in this tradition as aesthetic disciplines rather than arenas for competitive display. The preference for ati-vilambit laya, particularly in Jhumra, reflects a deliberate attempt to create expansive temporal space for raga development. Rhythmic improvisation remains internally controlled, with layakari emerging through sargam-based subdivisions rather than bol-baant confrontation with the tabla. Even as later exponents increasingly adopted Ektaal for practical and contextual reasons, the foundational commitment to aesthetic restraint and clarity of sahitya has remained intact.

A central structural pillar of the Indore Gharana is the systematic application of merukhand. Drawing conceptually from theoretical foundations traceable to Sangeet Ratnakar by Sharngadeva, merukhand in this lineage transcends mathematical permutation to become a philosophical method of swara exploration. Its integration into alap and taan enables expansive yet grammatically disciplined improvisation. Importantly, subsequent artists have refined its application, ensuring that technical complexity never compromises raga swarup or emotive coherence.

The compositional dimension of the gharana further reinforces its philosophical orientation. Emphasis on clear diction, spiritual themes, and refined poetic content reflects a conscious aesthetic choice. The bandish is treated not as a mere compositional framework but as a vehicle of bhakti and introspection. The selective omission of the antara in many performances underscores the primacy of structural sufficiency over formal convention, while occasional retention of the antara by later artists illustrates interpretative flexibility within tradition.

The reinterpretation of tarana within this lineage marks another significant contribution. By foregrounding its Persian and Arabic textual roots, Amir Khan restored semantic depth to a form often considered abstract or syllabic. The khayal-numa tarana thus became an extension of the contemplative ethos rather than a display-oriented finale.

Collectively, these findings establish that the Indore Gharana embodies a synthesis of intellectual design, spiritual inwardness, and disciplined improvisation. Its aesthetic rests upon balance—between mathematics and emotion, structure and spontaneity, tradition and innovation. While later exponents have introduced adaptive modifications in tempo preferences, taal choices, and interpretative nuance, the foundational ideology remains consistent: raga elaboration as an inward journey rather than an outward exhibition.

In conclusion, the Indore Gharana occupies a distinctive position within Hindustani khayal qis sublimated, rhythm is internalized, and structure is philosophically grounded. The gharana's contribution lies not only in stylistic features but in redefining the very purpose of elaboration—as a meditative, architectural, and spiritual act of musical realization.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

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