

## Critical analysis of the Indian origin of Khyal

**Dr. Atindra Sarvadikar**

Assistant professor

Department of Music, University of Mumbai

Email: [atindra2010@gmail.com](mailto:atindra2010@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*Music is the most abstract and fluid art form. Indian music is considered as Raag Sangeet or Raag Music. Raags have manifested through different musical forms, which evolved at different time intervals. Musical forms like Prabandh, Dhrupad, Khyal have been the vehicles of Raag Music. Each of these forms possesses an independent set of criteria and rules. Today, the most popular musical form is the Khyal. There are various opinions available regarding the origin of the Khyal form. Many scholars believe that Khyal was the brainchild of Amir Khusro and as a result of the influence of Persians. But at the same time, we can find enough shreds of evidence saying that Khyal is originated in India only. Hence, this paper is focused on the analyses of these facts regarding the origin of Khyal.*

**Keywords:** Mukhda Darbar, Alaap, Gayaki, Kavan

### Khyal Etymology:

The Hindi/Urdu dictionary lists the following synonyms of the 'Khyal' - विचार, ध्यान, तवज्जोह, प्रवृत्ति, भावना, जज्ब, मति, राग, स्मृति, याद, सज्ञा, सलग्नता, जुडाव, दुर्भावना, एहतियात, बदगुमानी, भ्रम, वहम, अनुमान, अंदाज इत्यादि<sup>[1]</sup>

The quote few available references indicate that *Khyal* is an Arabic word (there are various opinions on the Etymology of *Khyal*). *Khyal* means thought or imagination<sup>[2]</sup> However, it is evident that the word *Khyal* finds a place in medieval Indian literature, and hence there is cause to believe that it could have an Indian origin. Another grammatical observation supports this argument. The word *Khyal* if written in Hindi does not use the *nukta* (point) below the *kh*. It is ख्याल in Hindi and ख़याल if written or spoken in Urdu.<sup>[3]</sup> Stalwarts like Bhatkhande, Paluskar, Ratanjankar and Vazebuwa have consistently used the former in their literature, indicating an Indian word.

**Scholars suggest the following possibilities about the development of the *Khyal*:**

- a) *Khyal* has originated in India.
  - b) *Khyal* has travelled from outside the subcontinent.
  - c) *Khyal* developed through the confluence of Indian music with its foreign counterparts.
- Now, step by step we shall examine above opinions;

***Khyal* and its origin from the *Rupakalapti*.**

According to a few scholars, Sadarang recreated the *Rupakalapti*, and the birth of *Khyal* followed it. V.R Athavale has the following to say, <sup>[4]</sup>

*"Dhrupad involves improvisation of the Alaap according to nature of the Raag. This improvisation is not related to the concerned Bandish, but it expects following the grammar and rules of the Raag and a specific chronology of the Alaap. However, it restricts the creative imagination of the artist, and it drew them towards Khyal. Rupakalap was the founding principle of the Khyal. The name 'Rupakalap' indicates a specific 'form' of the gayaki. Khyal, on the other hand, expects improvisation as per the nature of the concerned Bandish. However, Alaap's improvisation is based on Rupakalap's principles, and this offers scope for the artists' creative imagination. The Bandish's nature, voice modulations aids the improvisation by following the Raag rules. Hence, Rupakalap is the fountainhead of the Khyal. Bujurg kalakar (senior artists) have always taught us to improvise as per the Bandish's nature. A Khyal might not possess a typical pattern of improvisation or a particular chronology. However, it will follow the heart of the Bandish. It will give rise to multiple facets of a Raag. When we say that a Khyal involves spontaneity and provides scope for an artist's imagination, it is implied that Khyal's improvisation (akin to Rupakalaap) depends on the Bandish's nature. In this way, the restructuring and reorganisation of Rupakalaap gave birth to the Khyal."*

***Khyal*'s mention in Saints' literature:**

If *Khyal* existed in India as an ancient form, it must find its place in documented references. We see its mention in the following verse of Saint Namdev (Born: 29 October 1270 Hingoli, Maharashtra; Death: 1350), who lived in Maharashtra in the thirteenth century.

*"Rajasi Tamasi je Gaan  
Todi Taal, Modi Maan //  
Khyal Gaaye Kamp Swar  
Rizavi Datyache Antar //  
He to Priti Dhanavari  
Arthaa Anarth To Karin //*

*Naama Mhane ha Shastrarth*  
*Arth tochi hoy swarth ||* <sup>[5]</sup>

We must note that Amir Khusro, too, lived in the thirteenth century. (Born: 1253, Patiyali, Died: 1325, Delhi). But the fact that Saint Namdev, one of the most prominent saints of Maharashtra, mentioned and criticised 'Khyal' in his poetry implies that this musical form prevailed among the masses. His verse includes *Rizvi Daatyache Antar*, which perhaps means that the slaves those days sang *Khyal* to please their masters. This verse, hence, offers scope to believe that *Khyal* existed in India before Aamir Khusro.

Another reference is from a poem by the seventeenth-century poet Madhvamuni which mentions *Khyal* and *Tappa*.

*"Kadh Madhe Gauni Khyal Tappa*  
*Setupudhe Maarti Phaar Gappa||*  
*Tappe Khyala Kitek gaati*  
*Yamake Jhali Phukache Kavi||* <sup>[6]</sup>

It indicates that the Saints from the seventeenth century have mentioned *Khyal* in their literature. However, its performance had not attained prestige as we see today.

We also do not have any corroborative evidence to suggest that the *Khyal* mentioned in the said literature is the *Khyal* of today. Hence we can't rule out the possibility of *Khyal* as a completely different form of music that existed back then. Hence we are tempted to wonder what was the nature and the form of *Khyal* in those times, and we need a research-based approach to conclude.

Thakur Jaidev Singh has fetched another reference point from '*Chaurasi Vaishnavab ki Varta*', (16th century) penned by Gokulnath, the grandson of Vallabhacharya. It says:

"और एक समय श्रीनाथजी के भंडार में कुछ सामग्री चाहियत हुती । सो कृष्णदास गाड़ा तेके आगरे को आये। सो आगरे के बाजार में ऐनक वेश्या नृत्य करती हुती। ख्याल, टप्पा गावत हुती। और मीर हुती। सब लोग तमासा देखत हुते ।

Based on this description, Thakur Jaidev Singh has claimed that *Khyal* existed in the sixteenth century. (He has further mentioned that *Khyal* is an Indian art form and it was influenced by folk drama and *geeti*). The above description mentions a prostitute dancing while simultaneously singing the *Khyal*. It means the *Khyal* of today is completely different from the form performed then. <sup>[7]</sup>

We must also consider the fact that Aamir Khusro was a court singer. There is no documented reference of him teaching the *Khyal* to any woman, and his social status wouldn't have allowed it either. All this strengthens the belief that *Khyal* in those days was different from the one we hear today. <sup>[8]</sup>

### **Sadarang's reorganisation of the *Khyal*:**

Niyamat Khan *Sadarang* is considered the originator of the *Khyal*. He was affiliated with the court of the emperor Muhammad Shah. Keshavrao Bhole has written the following,

"When Amir Khusro heard the *Prabandh Gayaki* at the Durbar of Devgiri, he instantly developed a liking for it. He realized that it was more beautiful and organized than the Persian music which he knew. Hence he composed the '*Khyal*', a fusion of the Persian and the then existing Indian form. This new form faced resistance, and Dhrupad came into existence during the time of King Mansingh Tomar of Gwalior. Dhrupad branched into four streams, called *Bani*. Every new form is inclusive of the strengths of the older forms. The duo of Sadarang-Adarang from Muhammad Shah's *durbar* reorganized the *Khyal*, originally conceptualized by Aamir Khusro, which included the musical elements from Dhrupad." <sup>[9]</sup>

This opinion indicates that Aamir Khusro composed the *Khyal* after getting influenced by Gopal Nayak, and Sadarang reorganized this form later.

It further indicates that *Khyal* is originally an Indian style of singing, and Amir Khusro and Sadarang attempted to recreate it during their respective era.

### ***Khyal* in Indian folk music:**

Apart from the ones mentioned earlier, I tried to explore a few more possibilities. Rajasthani folk music has various streams, and one of them is termed *Khyal*. Writer Amik Hanfi says, "In the 18th and 19th centuries, the *qawwals* competed with artists who practised art forms like *Prabandh*, *Vishnupad* and *Dhrupad*. Around this time, *Khyal* was popular in Rajasthan, Jaunpur, Ruhelkhand and Bundelkhand. Its presentation was akin to presenting a *ghazal*, and it included a song, acting and dance. This *Khyal* formed a part of folk music." <sup>[10]</sup>

Apart from this, *Khyal* still exists as a traditional musical form in Rajasthan. I came across a vital reference which is as follows (Reference: Wikipedia - Sangeet Natak Academy). "Forms like *Chidavi Khyal*, *Jaipuri Khyal*, *Kuchamani Khyal*, *Turaklangi Khyal* are still popular

UGC-CARE enlisted & Indexed in EBSCO International Database of Journals

in Rajasthan. Shri. Bansilal Khiladi, an artist who performs this *Khyal*, was awarded the prestigious 'Sangeet Natak Academy Puraskar' in 2008 for the 'major traditions of theatre' category.

**Marwari Khyal:** This art form is popular in Rajasthan's Marwad region. The following information is essential:

"Marwari Khyal is a form of folk theatre popular in the Marwar or western region of Rajasthan. The word 'Khyal' is derived from 'khel', which means play (theatre) in Hindi. It involves the narration of a story through song and dance. There are different styles of Marwari Khyal - Kuchamani, Shekhawati and Alibakshi. The cast of 10-12 sings and acts a popular story, myth or folklore. The story is usually derived from gods and local heroes such as Teja ji, Amar Singh Rathore, Harish Chandra, Meera Bai etc. The 'Nagara', a double drum, vigorous and intricate in its exposition, is accompanied by dance and exchange of dialogues and marks the beginning and end of episodes. Traditionally men performed women's roles, which arose from the restriction on women from public appearances of any sort." <sup>[11]</sup>

It means 'Khyal' from the folk arts traces its origin to 'Khel', which includes storytelling combining dance, drama and music. Based on this information, we could conclude that 'Khyal' was a folk form that existed in India for many years, which possessed its poetry and drama and had attained popularity.

The critical document presented by Thakur Jaidev Singh, which points out the prevalence of Khyal in the sixteenth century, mentions that a prostitute named 'Ainak' sang the *Khyal* and *Tappa* while dancing. Saint Namdev, on the other hand, criticized Khyal for its presentation. It points to the fact that *Khyal* in those days possessed an element of dance. These elements are a part of the Rajasthani-Marwadi *Khyal* even today, thus establishing a correlation. Therefore, 'Khyal' was the name of multiple musical forms.

"*Khyal* attaining the classical form was akin to the style of the *Bhajans* from Braj and Awadh developing into the *Thumri*, the *Kafi* from Sindh and Punjab reaching the concert platform, and the *Pahadi* tunes of Himachal and the Rajasthani *maand* becoming a part of classical performances."

However, we cannot trace the origins of the present-day *Khyal* to the *Khyal* of the folk arts.

Another interesting reference is from '*Rajasthani Sahitya ka Itihaas*' written by Purshottam Lal Mainariya, where he has pointed to *Khyal* as a form of poetry.

### **The development of *Khyal* from 'Kavan.'**

"It is believed that at the beginning of the eighteenth century, a new form of poetry developed in and around Agra, named *Khyal*. There were many groups associated with *Khyal* in Agra, and on many occasions, people who composed *Bandishes* entered into intense competition with each other." Apart from this reference, Mainariya mentions that many *Bandishes*, sung and performed in various Raags, possessed an element of dance.

Therefore, *Khyal* was also a form of poetry that was influenced by Urdu.

From the references examined so far, *Khyal*, as found in the folk arts and contemporary literature, could be

- 1) A form of poetry,
- 2) a form of folk music,
- 3) a confluence of singing, dance and drama, or
- 4) a primitive form of today's advanced version of *Khyal*.

However, certainly, *Khyal* in those days did not enjoy a similar status as *Dhrupad*, *Dhamar* or *Prabandh* and enjoyed lesser popularity and prestige. However, it is essential to study every available opinion on this subject.

"A few scholars believe that *Khyal* originated in the Lucknow Darbar and migrated to Punjab, Jaipur, Gwalior, Agra and Delhi. During this process, new artists emerged and taught their students, resulting in the origin and development of *Gharanas*. A few other scholars credit Aamir Khusro as the originator of *Khyal*. While a few others trace foreign origins in the *Khyal* and cite the contribution of fusion of cultures in its development. It is critical to consider all these opinions."<sup>[12]</sup>

### ***Pushtimargiy Vallabh Sampraday* and *Khyal*:**

A few references point out the direct relationship of *Dhrupad*, *Dhamar* and *Khyal* with each other. *Pushtimarg* literature has documented many *Dhrupad Bandishes*, which are today sung in the *Khyal* format. A few examples are as follows:

1. *Gore gore mukh par besar soh nainan kajra* (*Kafi Kanada*)
2. *Udat Bandhan naval laal ke* (*Lalit Pancham*)
3. *Mahadev Shankar Jata* (*Bhatiyar*)
4. *Mero Piya Rasiya* (*Nayaki Kanada*)
5. *Ram Jai man bhawe* (*Komal Rishabh Asawari*)
6. *Bhanwara re phuli ban belriya* (*Basant Dhamar*)
7. *Gauvan ke charvaiya* (*Puriya*)
8. *Itni Jay Kahyo* (*Hameer Kalyan*)
9. *E Radhe tore nainan paan khavabe* (*Bhavsakh*)

10. *Yah Kachchu Kahan Gaye (Sakh)*

11. *Aaj Radhe tore nainan (Ramkali)*

From this information, we can infer that when Khyal was established as an art form, contemporary musicians composed Khyals that included attractive elements from the then established and popular Dhrupad music. They maintained a balance between popular demand and conserved the Dhrupad Gayaki by interpreting its features through Khyal. One such interpretation was 'Mundi Dhrupad.' Before discussing it, let us examine a few historical references.

B. R Deodhar has written the following about Sadarang:

"Every Khyal of Niyamat Khan are romantic. He chose a unique way to win Muhammad Shah's trust. The protagonist in his composition is a woman who tries every possible way to please the *Badshah*. He described Muhammad Shah as '*Sada Rangeele*' meaning perennially joyous, and in the process inserted his pseudo-name *Sadarang* in those compositions. Sadarang played the *Been* and was trained in Raag and Dhrupad - Dhamar. Initially, these compositions were termed 'MundiDhrupad' as they possessed only the *Sthayi* and the *Antara*." [13]

This gives us an idea of the Mundi Dhrupad and its origin.

Sadarang trained his students with these compositions, and this training was in the *Khyal gayaki*. They presented these compositions in the *Darbar*, and consequently, the feud between Sadarang and Muhammad Shah came to an end. The *Badshah* became the *gandabandh shagird* of Sadarang. These compositions attained fame and spread far and wide.

### **Mundi-Dhrupad:**

This musical form consisted of characteristics of both, Khyal and Dhrupad. In this form, Dhrupad was sung, including features from the Khyal.

The *mukhda* of the Bandish is presented like the Khyal, and the rest is Dhrupad.

Shri Chinchore, a senior artist from the Gwalior Gharana, says the following about Mundi-Dhrupad:

"In the Gwalior tradition, the presentation of the Dhrupad by including Khyal features is termed Mundi-Dhrupad. It does not tamper with Dhrupad. Instead, the presentation is different, and hence the term Mundi-Dhrupad is used with respect." [14]

UGC-CARE enlisted & Indexed in EBSCO International Database of Journals

This form had come into existence during the initial days of Khyal, during the congruence of Dhrupad and Khyal. The Mundi-Dhrupad prevailed in the Gwalior Gharana, and the same Gharana is also the beginning or the first Gharana of Khyal music. Therein lies the link in this journey of Raag music from Dhrupad to Khyal.

**Conclusion:**

After examining all the available references, we can conclude that 'Rupakalapti' existed as an organized art form in medieval times, which was similar in stature to the Khyal of today. Artists like Gopal Nayak were able and successful performers. Amir Khusro followed this by introducing compositions in Prakrit into this art form and taught them to his students. This renewed art form was later developed as Khyal. We could say that the word 'Khyal' prevailed in both Indian languages and Persian. Later, Khyal gained popularity, thanks to the efforts of Sadarang. However, the origin and development of an art form like Khyal is a process. It is not the creation of one person. We also examined that folk traditions named 'Khyal' also existed in India. However, except for their name, there is no similarity between them and the Khyal of today.

**Glossary:**

1. Mukhda – lyrics or tune preceding sam of the first line
2. Darbar – King's court
3. Alaap – improvisation of the raga in slow pace.
4. Gayaki – specific singing style
5. Kavan – small poems

**Reference:**

1. Urdu Hindi Shabdakosh, Uttar Pradesh information department, Khyal edition, 1976, page 147
2. Atre, Prabha. *Suswaralee*. Bookmark Publication, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Dec 2004, page 107
3. Ameer, Hanfi. *Ustad Rajab Ali Khan*, first edition, 1982, Published by Ustad Allauddin Khan Sangeet Academy Bhopal, page 24
4. Athavale, V.R. *Tarang naad*, Nitin Publication, Pune 33, first edition, 2000, page 39
5. Namdev Gatha, Central Government Press 1978, Shlok 1817 page 703
6. Poems of madhwa muni, Marathi, PV Gubbi, Pune 1933, page 130
7. Mathur, Nishi. *Bhartiya Sangeet Kalakar*, Publication skim Jaipur, first edi. 2001, pp. 19-20
8. Interview with Prof. Sulabha Thakar on 21 March 2015



**UGC-CARE enlisted & Indexed in EBSCO International Database of Journals**

9. Bhole, Keshavrao. *Astai*. Mauj Publication Girgaon Mumbai, third edi.1 June 2012,
10. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sangeet\\_Natak\\_Akademi\\_Award](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sangeet_Natak_Akademi_Award)
11. <http://khamayati.org/communities/marwari-khyal/>
12. “Kirana Gharana – analytical study, Proceedings of the seminar on Kirana Gharana April 2014, Publisher Dr. Narendra Kadu, Vice-chancellor University of Pune.
13. Deodhar, BR. *Thor Sangeetkar*, Popular publication, ISBN13: 9788171853656, article on Balkrishnabua Ichalkaranjekar, page 56
14. Marulkar, N.R. *Sangeetatil Gharani*, page 47, published by Shantabai Marulkar 1962.