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Widened Roots of Kirana Gharana in Karnataka

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Abstract

Just a hundred years ago, there was no trace of Hindustani Music in Karnataka. But today Karnataka is tops in the field of Hindustani Music. Most of the Hindustani musicians are from Karnataka, particularly Hubli, Dharwad, Belgaum, and Gadag. Most of these are exponents of the Kirana Gharana. Great vocalists and maestros of Hindustani Classical music, like Bhimsen Joshi, Gangubai Hangal, Mallikarjun Mansur, Basavraj Rajguru and Kumar Gandharva all hail from this region. Rambhau Kundgolkar, popularly known as Sawai Gandharv, who was the foremost disciple of Abdul Karim Khan, also hails from this region. The border region along Karnataka and Maharashtra is famous for the Kirana School of singing. It is interesting that the Kirana Gharana, which originated from Kairana district in Uttar Pradesh, spread its roots in Karnataka and thus imbibed many of the features of the Carnatic tradition also.

The primary objective of this study is to find out the lineage of Kirana Gharana that led this tradition to spread its wide roots to Karnataka. The secondary objective of this study is to find out how the Carnatic Music centric region is a Hindustani Music bastion today and how this Kirana music tradition became influenced by Carnatic Music. For the study of this topic, observational and analytical methods of research are used. Primary and secondary sources are used for the objectives to be achieved.

Keywords: *Kirana, Gharana, Hindustani Music, Karnataka*

Introduction:

Karnataka's contribution to Hindustani Music is glorious. It is all the more amazing as all this has been achieved in about a century. There was no trace of Hindustani Music in Karnataka before this. Radio, gramophone and the stage - these three factors made a tremendous impact on the musical scenario. The radio gave a great promotion by providing musicians opportunities to perform and music lovers to listen. A good recital on the radio immensely caught the attention of the whole nation. The gramophone influenced many musicians like Panchakshari Gawai, Gangubai Hangal, Bhimsen Joshi, etc. in the formative years. The stage was a big outlet for musical talents. Sawai Gandharv, Mallikarjun Mansur, Basavraj Rajguru, Siddharam Jambaldinni, Panchaxariswamy Mattigatti and so on gave come up from the stage.

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100 years ago, there was no trace of Hindustani music in Karnataka. Krishnaraj Wodeyar IV was fascinated by Hindustani music. In his early years, he was fond of listening to Gohar Jan's thumri and strings of Barkatullah Khan's sitar. Once listening to Nathan Khan, the doyen of Agara Gharana, Maharaja was highly impressed. He appointed him his court Musician. After Nathan Khan expired in 1901, there was no Hindustani musician in Mysore court. Regarding this, the Maharaja sent an invitation to Faiyaz Khan, another stalwart of Agara Gharana. But he was already court Musician of Baroda at that time. Faiyaz Khan suggested him for Vilayat Hussain Khan, Nathan Khan's son. Maharaja did so and put some sharp boys already initiated into Carnatic music under Vilayat Hussain Khan for learning Hindustani Classical Music.

Apart from court musicians, Krishnaraj Wodeyar IV used to invite many reputed Hindustani musicians for Dussehra festivals and birthday celebrations and shower praise, money and gifts. Abdul Karim Khan, the founder of Kirana Gharana was also one of such invitees. The Maharaja honored him with the Sangeet Ratna. Musicians considered it a feather in their cap to be appreciated by the Maharaja and thus Mysore attracted Hindustani musicians like a magnet.

These musicians passed through the Hubli-Dharwad on their way to and from Mysore. The *rasikas* of Dharwad used to request these Musicians to take a halt there and wished for their recital. The founder of Kirana Gharana, Abdul Karim Khan, was a frequent visitor to Karnataka. He used to come to Hubli, Dharwad, Kundgol, Belgaum and stayed for many days. Gangubai Hangals's mother Ambabai was a Carnatic singer. Many musicians came to her house and music was the center of discussion. Abdul Karim Khan was also a frequent visitor there.[1] He liked Ambabai's singing, especially her sargams. Abdul Karim Khan, thus influenced by Carnatic music as well, also made intricate use of sargam in his gayaki very beautifully. He incorporated certain *Carnatic* patterns of phrasing the sargam in his *Hindustani* elaborations and employed them without the color of the *Carnatic Gamak* style.[2] Likewise, Dr. Prabha Atre also remained influenced by Carnatic music elements and used them to enhance her *gayaki* as much as possible.[3]

Ramachandra Kundgolkar became Ustad Abdul Karm Khan's disciple and became famous as Sawai Gandharv. Gangubai Hangal, Bhimsen Joshi became Sawai Gandharav disciple and strengthened the roots of Kirana Gharana in Karnataka. Ganpatrao Gurav, another disciple of Abdul Karim Khan was a Court singer at Jamakhandi.[4] He trained his son Sangameshwar Gurav into a fine vocalist. His son Kaiwalya Kumar is carrying on the tradition of the Kirana Gharana.

[1] Karnataka's Hindustani Musicians, Sadanand Kanavalli, p. 6
[2] On Music and Musicians of Hindoostan, Ashok H. Ranade, p. 160
[3], Swaryogini Dr. Prabha Atre- Ek Bahuaayaami Vyaktitwa, Dr. Chetna Banawat p. 81
[4] Karnataka's Hindustani Musicians, Sadanand Kanavalli, p. 6

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Panchakshari Gawai, who was visually impaired and highly talented, used to come to Hubli from Shivyogmandir in Badami taluk of Bagalkot district to listen to Hindustani singers. He was trained in Carnatic music. Being aware of his interest in Hindustani Music, Hangal Kumarswami, his mentor, invited Kirana Gharana maestro Abdul Wahid Khan to Shivyogmandir.[5] Panchakshari Gawai learned from him from 1917 to 1922 and became Ubhay Gayanacharya.[6] His hunger for knowledge was never satisfied. Along with it, he imbibed the specialties of many renowned artists by listening to and observing them. Thus, Panchakshari Gawai's singing was a blend of the excellence of several gharanas. He started a music school in Shivyogmandir, the first formal music school in South India. The number of disciples continued growing. To meet the demand, he started a mobile school. During his visit to Navalgund of Dharwad district with his mobile school, he found Puttaya, who later on became popular as Puttaraj Gawai, and accepted him as his disciple. He trained many disciples. Among them were Puttaraj Gawai, Basavaraja Rrajguru, Panchakshariswamy Mattigatti and Siddharam Jambaldinni. Puttaraj Gawai also did everything possible to run the music school started by Panchakshari Gawai. He also shaped countless disciples including the present stalwart of Kirana Gharana Pt. Venkatesh Kumar. Panchakshari Gawai and Puttaraj Gawai were an illustrious guru-shishya duo.[7] Veereshwar Punyashram of Gadag is an educational center established by Panchakshri Gawai where, along with general education, students are taught vocal music, tabla, violin, and harmonium, irrespective of their caste, creed and disability.

Another factor that was responsible for the spread of Hindustani music in Karnataka was the Marathi dramatic troupes of Balgandharva and others who toured Karnataka to earn plenty of money. They made an impact on the musical scenario of Karnataka with their classical stage songs. Dramatic troupes of North Karnataka followed the Marathi model and went fully musical. If the actor or actress stood there would be a song, sitting down there will be another and if they made an entry or exit yet another song. So, songs in the play for every situation, and hence there used to be 40 to 80 songs in a play.

Kundgol is a small town 90km south of Hubli. Ramchandra Kundgolkar brought fame to the musical map of India. Once he had an opportunity to listen to young Abdul Karim Khan at the Railway club, Hubli. Ram Chandra listened with rapt attention to the soulful music and filled his heart with a desire to be his disciple. Nadiger's were music-loving landed Gentry. Ramachandra's father was a clerk there. The Nadiger family gave patronage to Ramachandra Bhau[8]. It was during this time that Abdul Karim Khan, the founder of Kirana Gharana, toured Karnataka often and generally stayed with Nadigers for days on end. On one such trip,

[5] Karnataka's Hindustani Musicians, Sadanand Kanavalli, p. 26
[6] Karnataka's Hindustani Musicians, Sadanand Kanavalli, p. 7
[7] Karnataka's Hindustani Musicians, Sadanand Kanavalli, p. 63
[8] Interview with Shri Kumar Mardur

Ramchandra hovered around Abdul Karim Khan, humming one of his famous compositions *Jamuna ke teer*. It caught Abdul Karim Khan's ear and he asked "*who is that boy? His voice is good."* Ranganngowda Nadiger pounced upon this opportunity and said that he is our clerk's son and he wants to learn music from you. Fortune smiled on Ramchandra Bhau, and Abdul Karim Khan accepted him as his student in 1901. Abdul Karim Khan didn't want his name to be spoiled by his disciples learning haphazardly. So, he made a contract with them that they would learn from him for at least eight years. Poverty, the glamour of stage life, Gopalrao Marathe's insistence and offer of an attractive salary brought Rambhau to the Marathi stage in 1907, which was much against the will of his guru. When Balgandharva was blazing the Marathi stage like a superstar, Rambhau's performance also carried audiences away with his excellence. He was issued exclamation Sawai Gandharv by his admiring Rasikas. He said goodbye to the state in 1931 as he was losing confidence that he would not survive in concert singing. These 25 years of stage experience added greater charm to his singing. He learned how to grip the attention of the listeners from beginning to end. His singing became more mature and more charming. Sawai Gandharv added a new sheen, a new dimension to Abdul Karim Khan's style gayaki. His memory lives on through his disciples like Firoz Dastoor, Gangubai Hangal, Bhimsen Joshi and Basavraj Rajguru.

Pt. Firoz Dastoor learned from K. D. Jawkar of Kirana Gharana for 7 years. In 1933 he went to Sawai Gandharv and learned from him for more than four years. After that, he learned from Balkrishna Buwa Kapileshwari. Thus, he learned in Kirana Gharana for almost 12 years.

Pt. Bhimsen Joshi was born in Gadag. He ran away from his home in his early stage and wandered almost all over India in search of knowledge and a guru. At Harivallabh Conference, Bhimsen Joshi met Vinayak Rao Patwardhan who was surprised and said "Why did you come so far off in quest of a guru, when you have Sawai Gandharv near your home?" [9] Bhimsen Joshi returned to the home and went to Sawai Gandharv. He accepted him as his student and tested his patience thoroughly. Sawai Gandharav's teaching methodology produced the Legend of Kirana Gharana, Bharat Ratna Bhimsen Joshi.

Gangubai Hangal's mother Ambabai was a Carnatic singer, but sensing her daughter's inclination toward Hindustani Music, she gave up singing so that there wouldn't be confusion in her mind between Hindustani and Carnatic Music. Gangubai also wanted to learn from Sawai Gandharv but it was a difficult proposition as he was a busy stage artiste in Maharashtra. His close friend Dattopant Desai persuaded Sawai Gandharv to accept Gangubai as his student.[10] The Gandabandhan ceremony was held at Kundgol. Sawai Gandharv came to Kundgol once or

[9] Swarbhaskar, Shankar Vasudev Abhyankar, p. 65
[10] Swar Sarita Magazine, January 2014, p. 9

twice a year to collect rent for his land. Gangubai learned during those few days and kept practicing whatever she was taught until his next visit.

Basavraj Rajguru was gifted with a golden voice. He lived with his guru Panchakshari Gawai for eleven years at Shivayogmandir and toured the whole of Karnataka with the guru's mobile school. During these years he mastered both Carnatic and Hindustani singing. His singing style became a triad of Kirana, Gwalior and Patiala Gharanas. This was the result of collecting honey like a bee from eleven gurus – Panchakshari Gawai, Wahid Khan, Sawai Gandharv, Sureshbabu Mane, Neelkanthbuwa Mirajkar, Bashir Khan, Mubarak Ali, Latif Khan, Inayatullah Khan, Roshan Ali and Govindrao Tembe.

Abdul Karim Khan, Abdul Wahid Khan, Sawai Gandharv, Behrebuwa, Suresh Babu Mane, Hirabai Badodekar, Firoz Dastur, Gangu Bai Hangal, Bhimsen Joshi, Sangameshwar Gurav, Prabha Atre span three generations of Kirana musicians and their disciples are keeping up this tradition. Niaz Ahmed Khan- Faiyaz Ahmed Khan duo, Shakoor Khan (sarangee player), Pt. Mani Prasad, Mashkoor Ali Khan, Arshad Ali Khan, Jayateerth Mevundi, Venkatesh Kumar, Kavalya Kumar Gurav, Vinayak Torvi are carrying the baton of rich tradition. Kumar mardur, Jayateerth Mevundi, Kavalya Kumar Gurav, M Venkatesh Kumar, Vinayak Torvi, Sulabha Neeralagi and Gayatri Deshpande, all from Dharwad district, have carved a niche for themselves in the world of Hindustani music.[11] The Gangubai Hangal Gurukul, established in Hubli, is set up with all the facilities to accommodate 6 gurus and 36 students and is administered by a trust committee formed by the Govt. of Karnataka. The Regional Commissioner of Belgaum region is the President of the Gurukul trust and The Deputy Commissioner of Dharwad is the Co-Chairman of the trust. There is a separate expert committee working under the guidance of Gurujis of the Gurukul for the selection of students and other academic procedures.[12] At present, Pt. Mani Prasad and Kaiwalya Kumar Gurav of Kirana Gharana are producing more talents there, keeping the tradition of Hindustani Music alive.

Conclusion:

The four main currents of Hindustani Music – Gwalior, Agra, Kirana and Jaipur are flowing full stream in Karnataka. It is more interesting that Mysore, the bastion of Carnatic Music, triggered the spread of Hindustani Music in Karnataka. The Maharaja of Mysore used to invite Hindustani musicians from all over India. In this context, Abdul Karim Khan, founder of Kirana Gharana, frequently visited Karnataka and used to stay in Hubli, Dharwad, Kundgol, and Belgaum for many days. Thus, Ramchandra Kundgolkar became his disciple. Gangubai

[11] https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/hubballi/Torch-bearers-of-kirana-gharana-and-their-followers/articleshow/7356191.cms

[12] https://drgangubaihangalgurukul.com/home.php

Hangal, Bhimsen Joshi became Sawai Gandharva's disciple, who became the foremost reason for the strengthening of Kirana Gharana roots in Karnataka. This guru-disciple tradition has followed many generations, and in present Karnataka has become the bastion of Kirana Gharana Musicians. Panchakshari Gawai and Puttaraj Gawai were illustrious Guru-shishya duo. Both were blind but transcended their handicap and became a light to the world. Both did a tremendous service to humanity. Their contribution to spreading Hindustani as well as Carnatic Music in south India can never be marked less.

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