

Expression of Advaita Philosophy through the Compositions of Khayal in Hindustani Music

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Abstract

India has always been having music with spirituality at its foundation. Due to the medieval period of foreign invasions, the music system in northern India got influenced by the Persian Islamic rulers, which is known as the 'Hindustani music system' today. It is said that this system lost its connection with spirituality and 'Bhakti' Rasa was replaced by 'Śṛṅgāra' Rasa. However, the core of the Indian thought process could not be changed so easily; that is why the change is seen in the presentation and not in the intention or spirit. Khayal genre of vocal music, which evolved in the 15th century, was not an exception to it. The compositions in Khayal appear to be phrased as Nāyaka-Nāyikā Bhava (Hero-Heroine relationship), but they are just metaphors. They actually lead to Kṛṣṇa-Rādhā or Jīva-Śiva Bhava as the path of Advaita does. In Carnatic music, Vāggeyakāras (music and lyrics composers) were mostly saints, which was not the case in Hindustani music. They were kings, court musicians, and mainly Gurus. They did not take music as a path toward salvation. Still, the Advaita philosophy reflects in their works, which shows how it is deep-rooted in Indian culture. Though music went from temples to courts, the language changed from Sanskrit to Braj, Viṣṇupada changed to Dhṛvapada or Dhṛpada transformed into Khayal, Advaitic thought is invariably seen interwoven into it. It was certainly nurtured by alternative music systems from time to time, such as the Bhakti movement, Haveli Sangeet, Sikh Gurmat Sangeet, Sūfī music etc.



The research paper aims to reveal the Advaita thought hidden in Khayal Bandishes (compositions). The research will span from the first Khayal composer 'Sadāraṅga' to contemporary composers. It will find which principles of Advaita are imbibed into them and analyze why so. The paper will deeply study Khayal lyrics to find expressions of Advaita.

Keywords: Khayal, Bandish, Vāggeyakāra, Advaita

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Introduction:

Art is a reflection of real life. Concepts and ideologies of real life are seen to be reflected in each art form. If there is spirituality in life, it is reflected in the arts invariably. Music is an expression in the form of sound. In vocal music, both the forms of sound i.e., Śabda and Svara are used for expression. Classical arts, particularly classical music in India is deeply rooted in spirituality. That is why the lyrics used are filled with spiritual teachings and philosophy. Advaita Vedanta has been a most influential spiritual path and it is interesting to find it expressed through classical music compositions.

Analysis:

The Khayal Bandishes have been analyzed to find the major concepts of Advaita. The purpose of the Bandishes was musical, not spiritual. That is why, it is obvious that each and every principle of any philosophical school cannot be seen incorporated in them. Still, it is interesting to see that philosophical teachings were there in the thought process of the musicians. In the analysis of Khayal compositions, the following major concepts of Advaita were found intertwined:

1. Consciousness

In Advaita, consciousness associated with this totality is called ‘Sūtrātmā, Hiranyagarbha, and Prāṇa’ etc., because it is immanent everywhere and because it identifies itself with the five great uncompounded elements endowed with the powers of knowledge, will, and activity. What is defined in Upaniṣadas, like ‘Sarvaṃ khalvidaṃ brahma’¹ “All this is verily Brahman” or ‘Tasmai sarvaṃ tataḥ sarvaṃ sa sarvaṃ sarvataśca saḥ’² is also found in the Khayal Bandishes. The following Bandish in Raga Vrindavani Sarang, which is composed by Tansen, describes the all-pervading Brahman and the themes described are very close to the concept of the ‘Sūtrātmā’.

Tuma raba tuma sāheba, tumahī karatāra, ghaṭa ghaṭa pūrana jala thala bhara bhāra |

Tumahī rahīma tumahī karīma, gāvata gunī gaṇḍharva sūra nara sūra nāra |

Tumahī pūrana brahma, tumahī acala, tumahī jagataguru, tumahī saradāra |

Kahe miyāṃ tānasena, tumahī āpa, tumahī karata sakala jaga ko bhava pāra ||³

Through the phrase ‘Tumahī āpa’ the concept of ‘Soham’ is suggested, which is nothing but Oneness. Another Bandish in Raga Komal Rishabh Asavari, given below conveys the similar meaning.

Tū hī āda, tū hī bhēda, tū hī gunasamudra kirapā karō rē |

Tū hī nāda nirañjana nirākāra, tū hī bahma pāra karō rē ||⁴

¹ Chāṇḍogya upaniṣada 3.14.1

² Yogavasiṣṭha, 6.48.23

³ Kramik Pustak Malika – Part 3 P. 530

⁴ Traditional composition

Many Bandishes in Khayal describe the Ultimate as the Ādi-madhya-amṭa taking reference of any popular God form as Śiva or Vishnu. An example of such is given below using a Bandish in Raga Madhuvanti, set to Zaptal. It calls the Śiva, Jogī as well as Bhogī at the same time, meaning he is dispassionate in the original form, but passionate in Jīva form.

Śiva āda madha anta, balavanta jōgī dēta āśiṣa bhavatārana bhōgī |
Saṅga liyō cātraka kārana bhavatārana kāna mē mudrā triśūladhārī ||⁵

Thus the Bandishes try to describe the Brahman which is all pervasive. But if it so, why there is so much sorrow in the world? This is due to ignorance, known as ‘Māyā’. The same s also found described in some compositions.

2. Concept of Māyā

The identity of Jīva and Brahman is an established fact, therefore it cannot be acquired afresh as a result of human endeavor. But though such identity is always present, it remains unrealized in the state of ignorance. Brahman alone is real, and ignorance and the entire material phenomena of the world which are its products are only superimpositions upon Brahman. Ādiśaṃkarācārya used the words ‘Avidyā’ and ‘Māyā’ for this Ajñāna. See the Bandish below, from the Raga Nata Bihag:

Kaisē kaisē bōlata mōsō lōgavā dēkhō saiṃyā tēhārē bōlana bina puchē nahī sāṃsa
nanada kōū bāta |
Janama jōbana yūṃ hī jāta ‘raṅgīlē’ tēhārī māyā tē nisadina jiyā dukha pāvē ||⁶

In this Bandish, the Nāyikā complains about her in-laws who don’t let her meet or unite with her husband. This is the most popular metaphor used in Khayal Bandishes, where the husband is Śiva, Nāyikā is Jīva and the people who are troubling her are Ṣaḍripūs or Vāsanās. In the Antra, she complains about the Māyā, due to which her life is being wasted. Another Bandish given below describes the material world as a net of Māyā and preaches to the mind to stay away from it and do Sādhana by praising the Ultimate.

Raba guṇā gāya rē tū manā, kāhē bhaṭakata phirē nisadinā |
China bhaṅgura saba jagata pasārā, māyājāla birathā kalpanā ||⁷

While describing Māyā, the element of ‘Viveka’ is also seen coming along in these lyrics. Continuing the similar thought, the Bandish below is addressed to mind to be awake, careful all the time and stop itself from indulging in Māyā.

Manuvā tuma jāgata rahiyō, māna lē mōrī bāta |
Jaga jhūṭhā saba māyā jhūṭhī, kōī nahī tērā ‘guṇīdāsa’ yā jaga mē ||⁸

⁵ Traditional composition

⁶ Kramik Pustak Malika – Part 5 P. 190. Composed by Ustad Ramzan Khan ‘Rangeele’

⁷ Kramik Pustak Malika – Part 3 P. 258. Raga Des

⁸ Raga Ahir Bhairav. Composed by Pt. Jagannathbua Purohit ‘Gunidas’

Thus, Avidyā or Māyā is described in Khayal compositions as a root cause of all the sorrows. But who will guide to destroy this Māyā? Here comes the role of a Guru.

3. The necessity of a Guru

A spiritual guide, called Guru is required to dispel the darkness of Avidyā. Instruction from a proper teacher is absolutely necessary for the Knowledge of Brahman. Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣada says ‘Ācāryavān puruṣo veda |’⁹ A man who has accepted a teacher obtains true Knowledge. According to Muṇḍakopaniṣada, a true Guru is “learned in Vedas and lives entirely in Brahman”.¹⁰ Khayals do have compositions praising the music of Gurus. But many times, it is seen that the Vāggeyakāra talks about a spiritual Guru, as in the following Bandishes:

Bandish 1:

Namana kara catura śrīgurucaraṇā, tana mana nirmala kara bhavataṛaṇā |
*Jōī jōī dhyāvata śubha phala pāvata, janama maraṇa dukha saba nistaraṇā ||*¹¹

Bandish 2:

Guru bina jñāna na pāvē, mana mūrakha sōca sōca kāhē pachatāvē |
*Sataguru kī saṅgata kara lē rē jñānī, taba guniyana mē gunī kahāvē ||*¹²

Sometimes, the importance of Guru is described using metaphors. In the following Bandish, ‘Raṅgareza’ or a cloth dyer is a Guru. A Jīva approaches him with the cloth of mind and asks to dye it just like ‘Piyā kī pagarīyā’, turban of the beloved. There is an element of ‘Mumukṣatva’ too.

Raṅga dē raṅga dē raṅgarējavā, jaisē mērē piyā kī pagarīyā |
*Aisī raṅga dē suraṅga cunariyā, jaisē mērē piyā kī pagarīyā ||*¹³

Thus, the importance of a spiritual guide is found highlighted in Bandishes. The Guru gives Sādhana to the disciples for removing the ignorance.

4. Sādhana-catuṣṭaya

A Guru guides the aspirant to adopt the following four Sādhana for the purity of mind and attainment of spiritual knowledge.

A) Nityānitya-Viveka: Discrimination between things permanent and transient - this consists of the discrimination that “Brahman alone is the permanent Substance and that all things other than It is transient.” Khayal Bandishes describes how the material world

⁹ Chāṇḍogya Upaniṣada, 6.14.2

¹⁰ Muṇḍakopaniṣada, 1.2.12

¹¹ Kramik Pustak Malika – Part 2 P. 26. Raga Bhoopali. Composed by Pt. V. N. Bhatkhande

¹² Traditional composition. Raga Marwa

¹³ Traditional composition. Raga Madhamad Sarang

is temporary, just like a dream. They preach Viveka, without actually mentioning it. See the following Bandish in Raga Shivaranjani as an example:

*Mana bharama chāṇḍa dēhō sukha sampada, chīna bhara kō sapanō, ēka harī nāma binā
kachu kāma na āvē |*

*Suta dārā saṁsārā jagata pasārā māyā jāla saba, jyōlō ghaṭa mēm prāṇa, anta samē
kāma na āvē ||¹⁴*

The Antra of following Bandish highlights the impermanence of human life.

Taja rē abhimāna, jāna guniyana kō, guna kī sēvā na māna apamāna |

*Kauna jānē kaba miṭē jāyē sāṁsa tana kī china nahī bharōsā, tana sē guna kō dēta jaga
māna ||¹⁵*

Another Bandish here seconds the same thought.

Raina kā sapanā rī mai kāsē kahūṁ rī |

Sōvata sōvata āṅkha khulī jaba, kōū na pāyō apanā ||¹⁶

Bandish literature, again and again, underlines how transient human life is, which leads to the concept of Nityanitya-Viveka in Vedanta.

B) Vairagya – Vairagya is renunciation or dispassion. The Nāyikā in the following Bandish takes the path of Sanyasa to find God.

Kita dhūṇḍhana jāū, ālī rī sarabana dhūma āī |

Bhūṣaṇa curī utārī kē, aṅga babhūta ramāyē, bairāgana bhaī ||¹⁷

C) Ṣaṭ Sampatti – Vedanta describes six treasures, the virtues without which the aspirant cannot feel eagerness for Freedom. Shama, Dama and Uparati is restraining, which is found in the following compositions-

Mata kara māna gumāna khala mana, pala china kā hai tana mana jōbana |

Naratanu pāvata bāra bāra nahī, nidadina harīguna kō kara gā mana ||¹⁸

A dialogue with the own mind is seen in such Bandishes.

Arē manā tū bhaja rē bhaja rē sāhēba kō nāma |

Jyā kāranē tōhē bidhā nē racyō hai, sō tū nāhī karata kāma ||¹⁹

Uparati is very well depicted as -

¹⁴ Abhinava Geetamanjiri Part - 2 P. 258

¹⁵ Traditional composition in Raga Bilaskhani Todi

¹⁶ Kramik Pustak Malika – Part 4 P. 513. Raga Lalit

¹⁷ Raga Sampoorana Malkauns. Composed by Pt. Nivruttibua Sarnaik

¹⁸ Raga Malkauns. Composed by Vidushi Kumudini Katdare

¹⁹ Kramik Pustak Malika – Part 4 P. 518. Raga Lalit

Aura nahī kachu kāma kī, mai tō apanē rāma kī ||²⁰

Titiksha or forbearance is the endurance of heat and cold and other pairs of **opposites** (respect and contumely, gain and loss, weal and woe etc.), portrayed beautifully here -

Sādhō mana kā māna tyāgō, kāma krōdha saṅgata durajana kī yātē ahanisa bhāgō |

Sukha dukha dōnō sama kara jānō, aura māna apamānā, harṣa śōka sē rahē atītā, tina jaga tatva pacānō ||²¹

Samadhan or self-settledness is the constant concentration of the mind. Vāggeyakāra delineates how it is achieved.

Harī kē caraṇakamala nisadina sumara rē, bhāva dhara sudha bhītara bhavajaladhi tara rē |

Jōī jōī dharata dhyāna, pāvata samādhāna, hararaṅga kahē jñāna abahum cita dhara rē ||²²

Shraddha is faith in the truths of Vedanta as taught by the Guru. The composition urges to have faith in Guru, also describing the benefits of it.

Gurana kī sikha sēcī māna lē pyārē, milata hai yā sē jñāna aura dhana |

Lāgaḍāṭa aura lahaka haka mē ‘dilaraṅga’ upajata nāhī tāna bandhana ||²³

D) Mumukṣatva – Mumuksha is the yearning for spiritual freedom. The most popular metaphor used for this is that of the ocean. Jīva urges Śiva to help to cross the ocean of Samsara.

Pāra karō dīnadayālu bhavasāgara mōrī naiyā, tuma bina kauna khēvaiyā |

Māta tumhī, tāta tumhī, bandhū tumhī, guru tumhī, sakhā tumhī, saba tumhī, lāgū jī tōrē paiyā ||²⁴

No doubt that Sāadhanā Chatushtaya is important, but ‘Ishwarpranidhana’ and ‘Satsangati’ also help in the same way, as per this Bandish -

Jinakē jiyā mē sirīrāma (śrīrāma) basē, una sādhanā aura kiyō na kiyō |

Jinha santacaranaraja kō parasā, una tīratha nīra piyō na piyō ||²⁵

When the aspirant is equipped with the above-mentioned Sāadhanās, he cannot but have a strong desire for liberation. Then alone does he become fit to receive from the spiritual guide the Absolute Knowledge.

5. The Steps to Self-realization:

For the realization of Consciousness, Vedanta gives the steps such as Shravana (hearing), Manana (reflection) etc. out of which, Nididhyasa is found described in Bandishes most

²⁰ Kramik Pustak Malika – Part 4 P. 662. Raga Darbari Kanada

²¹ Traditional composition in Raga Miyan Ki Malhar

²² Kramik Pustak Malika – Part 3 P. 375. Raga Shree. Composed by Pt. V. N. Bhatkhande

²³ Traditional composition in Raga Shree

²⁴ Raga Abhogi Kanada. Composed by Vidushi Kumudini Katdare

²⁵ Malaniya Gund Lavo Ri P. 79. Raga Darbari Kanada. Composed by Pt. Anant Manohar Joshi

commonly. The teachings of Saguna Upasana should be the reason for this. In many compositions, the Bhakta is seen pleading for Sagun darshan of God.

Ē harī dēhō rasa darasa (result - phala), naina rahē tarasa bina darasa |

Sarasa bēda paṭhata huṃ, nāmajāgara (reflection- manana) kīrtana karata huṃ, raṭata (repetition - abhyāsa) japata dhyāna dharata namana karē ||²⁶

The eightfold practice (Yama, Niyama etc.) is given to reach to the stage of Samadhi (absorption), out of which, Dhyana is used in Bandishes most frequently.

Tērō dhyāna dharata dina raina, mōhē parata nā caina |

Prāṇapiyā mana lāgata nāhī, kisa bidha rākhō jiyā, bhara bhara āyē naina ||²⁷

But there are some obstacles to Samadhi like Laya (torpidity), Vikshepa (distraction) etc. The Bhakta requests God to ignore his bad qualities such as distraction.

Rabbā mērē hō, auguna cita nā dharō |

Augunahārī guna nahī mōmē, sāt apanō karama karō ||²⁸

Another obstacle, known as Kashaya or attachment means failure of the mental state to rest on the absolute, owing to the numbness brought on by impressions (the lurking desire for pleasures once experienced). Again, the most popular metaphor of Abhisarika Nāyikā is used here. A bride (Jīva) who wants to unite with her husband (Śiva), but cannot do so due to different obstacles which are nothing but attachments or desires. This is the most popular theme used in Bandish literature. Only one of such compositions is presented here, for example.

Jhana jhana jhana jhana pāyala bājē mā, jāgē mōrī sāsa nanadīyā aura dauraniyā hā rē jēṭhaniyā ē mā |

Agara sunēgō, bagara sunēgō, aura suna paiyā mōrī saṅga kī sahēlīyā mā ||²⁹

One more obstacle known as Rasasvada or enjoyment is the tasting by the mental state of the bliss of Savikalpa Samadhi owing to the failure to rest on the Absolute. A bee is enjoying the nectar from a particular flower is depicted here in a similar sense.

Bhaṃvarā rē mada piyē, phūlana sō guñjata dārana mō |

Nayī kaliyana bhūlata guñjanasō, dēta apanō anamōla rasa, nahī jānata yē kapaṭa rīta rasa pivana kī ||³⁰

If all the obstacles are removed with the help of Guru and Sādhana, Self-realization happens just like a sunrise, as described in the following Bandish.

²⁶ Raga Jait Kalyan. Composed by Pt. Babanrao Haldankar 'Rasapiya'

²⁷ Pran Piya Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan P. 96. Raga Dhanashree

²⁸ Traditional composition in Raga Multani

²⁹ Traditional composition in Raga Nata Bihag

³⁰ Raga Bahar. Composed by Pt. Yashwantrao Mahale

Jāga manuvā hōta ujjārē antaraṅga pūraba kē nyārē |

*Jñāna prabhāta hōta rahī hai, gurubōdha hai yē sūraja yahī hai, 'prīta' kara dhyāna
dhara pyārē ||³¹*

6. Nadanusandhana:

‘Prabodha-sudhaakara by Ādiśaṃkarācārya mentions ‘Naadaanusandhaana’, in which the concept of ‘Anahat Nada’ is explained beautifully. Anahata is the sound that arises out of nothing being struck. This is the sound that yogis are said to hear within themselves and it is said to mark spiritual progress.³² Khayal Bandishes also describe it in a similar fashion.

*Āhata anahata bhēda nāda kē, prathama bhēda śrūtīyana sē hōvē, anahata munijana
dhyāna dharata jaba ||³³*

Musicians believe that their ultimate goal is to reach Anahat Nada through music.

Anahata nāda aparaṃpāra jē jē gunī jānē tē tē hu alaṅkāra |

Kāma karē tē tē hu gāvē dhurupada (dhṛupada) bāta karē tē tē hu vidyābāda ||³⁴

7. The concept of Utkramana:

The eschatological views of Kevaladwaita-Vedanta are discussed in Brahmasutra Shankarabhashya. The purpose of Utkramanashastra is to create detachment from samsara in the mind of the sadhaka and to create an inclination for liberation.³⁵ It is interesting to have found a Khayal Bandish with the same concept.

Ānā vē mila jānā vē, sabhī dēsa bēgānā vē |

Candana kōṭa kā baṅgalā banāyā, tā para palaṅga bichānā vē ||³⁶

8. Advaita:

The central teaching of Advaita is the oneness of the individual soul (jīva) with the Absolute (Brahman). It affirms the nonduality of Brahman, the nonreality of the empirical world, and the non-difference between the individual soul and Brahman (brahma satyam, jagan-mithyā, jīvo brahmaiva naparah). A Khayal Bandish below states the same in the Antra, saying there is no difference between ‘Alif’ (Allah) and ‘Meem’ (Jīvatma).

Bhāvandā yāra dā jōbanā, dūjē najara nahī āvandā |

Alipha (allāha) mīma (jīvātmā) bica pharaka na kōī, alipha mīma bana āvandā ||³⁷

³¹ Raga Bhairav. Composed by Dr. Swapnil ‘Preet’

³² Advaitamrutam - P. 142, Yogic contents in Prabodha-Sudhakara – K S Kannan

³³ Kramik Pustak Malika – Part 2 P. 31. Raga Yaman

³⁴ Traditional composition in Raga Savani Nat

³⁵ Advaitamrutam – P 93, The Utkramana Concept in Kevaladvaita-vedanta – Shakuntala M. Gawde

³⁶ Traditional composition in Raga Puriya Dhanashree

³⁷ Kramik Pustak Malika – Part 4 P. 500. Raga Lalit

9. The Jīvanmukta

Liberation is a change of perspective. Thus, the jīvanmukta is one who lives in the world but is not of it. In the Bandish below, very close to this concept, the Sadhaka says that since she is married to ‘Nirguna’, she is just like a bachelorette.

Rahē raina piyā sautana saṅga jarē mōrā jiyā |

Māta pitā niraguna kō bihāī, kuvaranasī mai tō piyā ||³⁸

Conclusions:

It can be seen that many important concepts of Advaita are found in the lyrics of Khayal Bandishes. Sometimes the Advaitic terms are used directly to explain the philosophy and sometimes it is expressed with the use of metaphors.

Unlike Vāggeyakāras from Carnatic Music who were Hindus and saintly people, many Hindustani Vāggeyakāras were from the Muslim religion and it is very surprising to have Vedantic teachings in their compositions. The reasons for this might include - Dhrupad impact, the connection of Guru Parampara with Swami Haridas, spiritual nature, conversion to Islam from Hindu origin, their patrons being Hindu kings, target audience being Hindu, the tendency of following popular trends in lyrics, lack of literacy leading to the usage of same older text and themes, impact of Bhakti movement and Sūfī music, etc.

Advaita Vedanta is a most impactful way of spirituality that is found deeply rooted in every aspect of Indian life and thought process. It is thus expressed through arts such as classical music.

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Glossary:

1. Khayal: The word Khayal literally means thought or imagination. Khayal is the most popular genre of north Indian (Hindustani) music, in which a Raga is presented as per the thoughts and imagination of the vocalist and it is a musical form based on a Hindi song in two parts that recur between expanding cycles of melodic and rhythmic improvisation.
2. Bandish: Bandish (Baṇḍīśa), also called Cheez (Cīza) is a composition or song used to present a Raga. The Bandish is divided into two parts, Sthāyī and Antra, which generally include poetry of 2 to 3 lines each.
3. Vāggeyakāra: A person who composes the Bandish is known as Vāggeyakāra. He does the musical as well as the lyrical composition himself. Some Vāggeyakāras use their pen name in their Bandishes e.g. ‘Guṇidāsa’ – Pt. Jagannathbuwa Purohit.
4. Advaita: Vedantic nondualism that denies the separateness of any aspect of reality from the impersonal oneness of Brahma.