

# Northern Indian Semi-Classical Music form Thumari: In Context of Instrumental Music

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## SUMMARY

Indian classical music is a unique and most favourite art form of Indian Culture that expresses emotion and feeling without using any words and this special quality of Music makes it a universal language which can be understood in across cultures. Unlike pure entertainment, it is deeply rooted in spirituality and devotion, which gives it a distinct identity worldwide. Over time, it has evolved in response to changing social and cultural environments, giving rise to many vocal forms such as Prabandha, Dhrupad, Khayal, Tappa, Thumri in Hindustani music, and Varnam, Kriti, Ragam-Tanam-Pallavi, and Javali in Carnatic music.

Indian classical music, while Dhrupad represents the spiritual tradition, the Khayal singing style was patronized by the royal court. But with the passage of time, the taste of music among the people started changing and as a result, the Thumri singing style, which flourished in the court of King Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Lucknow, got popularized. There has been a very close relationship between Thumri style and Kathak dance. Thumri is known for its romantic and devotional themes, such as the depiction of Radha Krishna's Raas. Since classical rules are relaxed in this genre, ornamentation such as meend, murki, krittan, khatka, etc. are used to create an emotional composition.

Thumri consists of three main elements swar (melody), laya/taal (rhythm), and sahitya (text), sometimes combined with abhinaya (expression). However, in modern times, the importance of lyrical content has decreased in many vocal forms, with greater focus on melodic development. Despite this, Thumri retains its essence through its emotional and decorative style.

It is debated whether Thumri can be performed on instruments since sahitya is absent, but it is generally accepted that if melody and rhythm are properly expressed, instrumental Thumri remains authentic and effective. Thus, Thumri continues to be a flexible yet classical form blending structure with emotional freedom.

**Keywords:** Classical Music, Thumri, Semi Classical, Instrumental, Vocal

## INTRODUCTION

The beauty of music is not associated with any a specific constituent element. It is the combination of emotion and feelings. Music is the only language that has no words, yet it is used by the whole world. Across the world Indian classical Music has its different identity because Indian classical Music is not for the subject of entertainment. Spirituality and devotional aspect is one of the main sources of Indian classical music. Over the years Indian classical music has been expressed through many forms, evolved and developed in keeping with the social environment and level of cultural discipline the art forms were revived to be subject to, Prabandha Dhrupad Khayal, Tappa, Thumari are some popular forms of Northern Indian classical music where as varnam, Kriti, Ragam Tanam Pallavi, Javali are the south Indian classical music forms.

Over the years, Indian classical music has been expressed through many forms, evolved and developed in keeping with the social environment and level of .cultural discipline that art forms were required to be

subjected to. Dhrupad - the dignified, spiritual and in a sense, celestial form music was evolved-and nourished' during a period in which music had a prime place in temples and artistes offered prayers in praise of Almighty. In the later period, Khayal form of, music was performed in Courts of Kings and musicians vied with each other in praising and eulogising their' patrons. Irrespective of the period when the Thumri form of singing was invented, it is commonly agreed that it became popular and highly patronised during the reign of Wajidali Shah - in Lucknow.

### **Introduction of Thumri:-**

There are many vocal genres which is cultivated by classical musicians . One of the most important of these is called thumri. Although there are assuredly antecedents to this style, it was at the nineteenth-century court of Nawab Wazid Ali Shah in Lucknow where thumri received special character and development as an adjunct to Kathak dance. It is filled with shringar ras in a chanchal (restless) mood. A short text of two to four lines was usually composed about the raslila, the amorous play of Lord Krishna with the Gopis, especially with his chief consort, Radha. The lines are repeated with new creation, sometimes with an asthai- antara form. An important aim in the thumri is the new shades of meaning which the artist can bring from a single line of text by vocal inflections and melody changes-a process known as bolbanava. It is a highly ornamental form, with a lot of melodic filigree and tiny quick turns (murki) and shakes. It is not easily taught; in fact, it is usually said that "thumri is learned, but not taught." Thumris are set in a slow taal such as chautal or a sixteen-beat dipchandi with occasional lively drum interludes (in duple meter) called laggis. There are now several different broad styles of singing thumri, the most prominent being the Punjabi, Purabi (Lucknow, literally "east"-that is, of Delhi), and Benares styles. Because of the importance of the lyrics, sometimes people say that thumri cannot be played on instruments. It is a moot point; the parallel style that is highly cultivated by modern instrumentalists uses the whole musical vocabulary of thumri without the lyrics. Thumari is always composed and sung in small ragas like Khamaj, Jhinjhoti, Desh etc it uses meend, khatka, murki and all light graces and is elaborated with bols.

Any form of vocal music presentation is composed of three major elements viz Swar Laya/Taal and Sahitya. Thumri also - - naturally has these three ingredients. Some forms of Thumri called Abinayatmak thumri may contain a fourth element of the dance form - i.e. Abhinaya - It is self-evident that instrumental music can present or cover only two of these elements i.e., Swar and Laya/Taal. The question therefore is, whether a presentation devoid of Sahitya can be called Thumri? Left us seek to analyse this aspect a little more deeply and keenly.

### **Classification of Thumri Based on Style**

Based on stylistic characteristics, Thumri is broadly classified into two major categories: Bol-Banav Thumri and Bol-Baant Thumri.

#### **1. Bol-Banav Thumri**

Bol-Banav Thumri is a slow, expressive, and highly emotive style of Thumri. It places great emphasis on the expression of bhāva (emotion) and the subtle interpretation of the lyrics. In this style, a single word or phrase is elaborated through extensive melodic variations, ornamentations, and improvisations, allowing the performer to explore the emotional content of the composition in depth. The style is particularly associated with the musical traditions of Banaras and Lucknow. Ragas such as Khamaj, Kafi, Pilu, and Bhairavi are commonly employed in this form of Thumri.

#### **2. Bol-Baant Thumri**

Bol-Baant Thumri is comparatively more rhythm-oriented and focuses on the rhythmic division and manipulation of the lyrics. This style is characterized by intricate layakari (rhythmic play), dynamic improvisation, and a greater emphasis on the interaction between melody and rhythm. Unlike Bol-Banav Thumri, where emotional expression predominates, Bol-Baant Thumri highlights rhythmic creativity and

virtuosity. This style is closely associated with the Lucknow Gharana and is often accompanied by lively and energetic tabla patterns that enhance its rhythmic appeal.

## A. Regional Classification of Thumri

### 1. Purab Ang Thumri

Purab Ang Thumri developed primarily in the cultural centers of Varanasi and Lucknow. This style is renowned for its emotional depth, lyrical beauty, and expressive treatment of the text. It emphasizes subtle nuances of bhava and romantic devotion, and is predominantly associated with the Bol-Banav style of singing. The leisurely tempo and elaborate melodic improvisation allow performers to explore the emotional essence of the composition in great detail.

### 2. Punjabi Ang Thumri

Punjabi Ang Thumri evolved under the influence of Punjabi folk music traditions. Compared to Purab Ang, this style is more dynamic and rhythmically vibrant. It is characterized by the use of fast taans, intricate murkis, and lively melodic movements. The influence of folk melodies lends this style a distinct freshness and energy, making it particularly appealing in performance.

## B. Classification Based on Rasa or Bhava

### 1. Shringara Thumri

Shringara Thumri is centered on themes of love, romance, beauty, and emotional intimacy. It portrays various aspects of human and divine love, often expressing the feelings of longing, attraction, and union between lovers.

### 2. Bhakti Thumri

Bhakti Thumri focuses on devotion and spiritual surrender. It is particularly associated with the divine love of Radha and Krishna, portraying the devotee's yearning for union with the divine. Such compositions combine devotional sentiment with the expressive beauty of the Thumri tradition.

### 3. Viraha Thumri

Viraha Thumri expresses the profound emotions of separation, longing, and yearning. The compositions depict the pain of distance from a beloved or the anguish of unfulfilled love. This form is marked by intense emotional expression and is considered one of the most poignant manifestations of bhava in Thumri.

**Decreasing Importance of Sahitya In Vocal music Forms:** we all agree that the wording or literary content of the Bandish in the Khayal form has lost its significance to a great extent. In some Gharanas, the Bandish has practically no value after the same has been sung once. It is the Swar - Vistaar or melodic unfoldment which has become primarily important. In spite of this overwhelming treatment of the melodic content of the raag presentation, the Khayal remains a Khayal.

Thumri, Dadra, Ghazal and Qawali could be one division of light classical forms which have been influenced by Muslim culture and value priorities. It is interesting to assess the literary content and its importance in each of these forms and then juxtapose the same with Thumri which relies heavily on the differing melodic content, in each - melodic content and relatively I emphasize relatively.

## Thumri with an Instruments:-

It can be said that although instrumental music does not have lyrics and is based on melody (svara) and rhythm (laya), the influence of a vocal genre such as Thumri can still be effectively expressed through

instrumental performance. Even in the absence of words, the emotional depth, lyrical quality, and aesthetic essence of Thumri can be communicated through instruments.

### **Interview with Prof Rajesh Shah.**

According to Prof Shah from a historical perspective, the performance of Thumri on musical instruments is almost as old as the tradition of Thumri singing itself. With the development of the gayaki ang (vocal style) in instrumental music, particularly on instruments such as the sitar, artists began adapting Thumri compositions for instrumental performance. As a result, Thumri became an important expressive element within instrumental music traditions.

An examination of available recordings and documented performances reveals that the type of Thumri most frequently rendered on instruments is the Bandish Thumri, particularly the Bol-Baant style. This style is comparatively more rhythm-oriented and structured, with a stronger emphasis on the composition and its tala framework. Because of its clearly defined melodic and rhythmic patterns, it is easier to translate onto instruments than more improvisatory and Bol Banav forms of Thumri.

Although instrumentalists cannot employ lyrics, they successfully evoke the character of Thumri through techniques such as meend (glides), murki (ornamentation), gamak (oscillation), and expressive rhythmic treatment. These elements enable the performer to convey the emotional and stylistic nuances associated with Thumri. Consequently, Bandish Thumri and Bol-Baant Thumri have had the most significant influence on instrumental music. In You Tube Platform we can listen 18<sup>th</sup> century thumari style bandish on sitar which is oldest example of Thumari on Sitar.

If we present Thumri on instruments, there is no impairing or prejudicing its intrinsic values and discipline, if care is taken to ensure that melody and rhythm elements are correctly and adequately presented. (May be, one can argue that it would be difficult to present a Ghazal or Dadra on instruments as they rely predominantly on the Sahitya element). A few words therefore, regarding each of these elements may be relevant to establish, that it is quite possible to present these two disciplines through instruments if the player takes the required care and has the requisite knowledge as well as the temperament of Thumri from.

If we divide the melodic content of Thumri singing into two major sections i.e. matter and manner, it would easily be understood that each has its own system of unfoldment and technique. As the development of a melody in Thumri only loosely follows a raag pattern, the Thumri singer has greater freedom to unfold it without worrying too much about the rigid discipline and grammar of the raag structure. The rules of Badhat can be followed more in terms of phrase development rather than individual note development. Again it is the mood of the presentation that dictates the treatment of melodic phrases and their position in the scale. The matter projected therefore will be dictated by the imagination and skill of the musician.

The manner of treatment of the notes in Thumri as compared to the classical forms like Khayal, is more ornamental and angular using several phrases with Kana-treatment. Arid no wonder the form is called light classical - the treatment being lighter, at the same time retaining its classical base. Thus Thumri form lends itself to a lighter treatment, giving a greater freedom to the musician both in terms of the raag discipline as well as the treatment of and attitude towards musical notes.

Rhythms have their own special importance in the light classical forms. Every Thumri composition is set to a particular rhythm keeping in view the required tempo, time cycle and emphasis. I would like to dwell on this aspect briefly as the Thekas used in Thumri are well-known and in fact, surprisingly established and standardised. It is in the realm of Dadra and more so in Ghazal singing that confusion and cheapening has come about .in recent times. In fact, many include Dadra form in the more generous forms of Thumri - thereby avoiding display of ignorance and resultant allegations of the knowledgeable.

As far as Ghazal is concerned, what we hear more often these days is Ghazal in Geet style.

In conclusion, the influence of Thumri on instrumental music extends beyond more adaptation of compositions. It has enriched instrumental performance by enhancing its expressive potential, emotional depth, and development of the gayaki ang. Among the various forms of Thumri, the Bandish and Bol-Baant styles have contributed most significantly to the evolution of instrumental music

If, therefore, the instrumentalist is adequately trained and equipped, he can certainly play Thumri using the melody and rhythm, studiously conforming to the rules and norms as prescribed. It is true that Sahitya element would be wanting, but can we say that if melodic and rhythmic elements are properly expounded, this shortcoming could be indiscernible and perhaps dispensable? If a Thumri Khamaj or Pilu is played on an instrument with proper treatment of melody, meticulously accompanied by the Taal used in Thumri singing, it would certainly be as enjoyable as when sung. Maybe, if the player bases his basic Mukhada, to follow a very well-known Bandish - the listeners could even visualise the words as if they are sung.

## CONCLUSION

We can easily realise that sometimes Thumri when played on instruments is often called a "Dhun". sometimes it is deliberate recasting of the melodic and more importantly, the rhythmic element that converts Thumri into Dhun. In fact, the elements and shades of different forms of light classical music are mixed up. Taals with heavy accent and "easy to follow" lilt etc., are usually used by instrumentalists these days, when playing a lighter piece, after a heavy raag.

I firmly believe that if the Thumri discipline of melody and Rhythm is properly and fully followed, a Thumri presentation on instruments would certainly remain Thumri and not a Dhun. I have therefore stated that it is a deliberate change that instrumentalists have brought about, knowingly and in keeping with the public requirements.

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