

## A PERFORMANCE STUDY OF A BANARAS THUMRI: 'RAS KE BHARE TORE NAIN'

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### Abstract

This paper discusses in brief about the famous Thumri composition 'Ras ke bhare tore nain' performed by various artists of different traditions during different time period. The sample recordings include Banaras artists Gauhar Jaan, Siddheshwari Devi, Rasoolan Bai, Girija Devi and Sunanda Sharma. Differences in the musical as well as performance aspects are discussed eg, the choice of taal, the tempo, method of elaboration-ornamentations, position of sam etc.

**Key words:** Ras ke bhare tore nain, Thumri, Dadra, Banaras, Poorab Ang, Gauhar Jaan, Siddheshwari Devi, Rasoolan Bai, Girija Devi and Sunanda Sharma

### INTRODUCTION

'Ras ke bhare tore nain' is a very famous Thumri composition of Poorab Ang/Banaras. It is traditionally performed in Raag Bhairavi but the usage of Taal, the tempo, elaboration style-Vistaar is found to be varied in different recordings available of this Thumri. These recordings are of different artists active during different time periods starting from early 20<sup>th</sup> century to present time i.e. 2000s. Here in this article, there is an attempt to analyse the performances of selected artists of different time periods of this famous Thumri. It will be interesting to note the differences, if any, in the musical as well as performance aspects. We shall further see whether this analysis can show some changing trends, though this can only give the glimpse as this is a specific case of one particular Thumri and not the entire genre.

For the study, here the samples of performances are retrieved from the online audio-video sharing platform <https://www.youtube.com> in the form of shared recordings. The URLs of each sample recording is provided for the reference purpose.

For the determination of the tempi (sing. Tempo) of the performance, 'bpm' no. has been used which is displayed on the Apple software 'iTablaPro', available on the Apple AppStore.

Most of the recordings are uploaded by enthusiastic music lovers online; the exact release dates of the sample recordings are not available. The approximate release time period is given as 'estimated' time period.

Now let us take a look at the sample recordings one by one:

### 1) GAUHAR JAAN

Source : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SWuuHdf0ssg1>

Duration: 3:35 minutes

Raag: Bhairavi

Taal: Dadra

Tempo: starts with 163 bpm; gradually increases to 169-170 bpm till the end.

Accompaniments used: Taanpura, Tabla, Harmonium

This is one of the earliest recordings not only in the history of Thumri but also in the history of sound recording and reproduction in India. In 1902, in Calcutta, the Gramophone Company of London sent two agents to record the local artists of Indian Music<sup>2</sup> and Gauhar Jaan of Calcutta happens to be one of the first recorded artists of Indian music. This recording is said to have been released in the market somewhere between 1903-1905. The recording quality is poor and therefore some parts are not totally understandable. But major features can be identified.

A story behind this composition is that this Thumri is created by Gauhar jaan for famous Ustad Mauzuddin Khan of Banaaras. But some think that this is just a story and there is no proper evidence to it.<sup>3</sup>

- Stylewise it is more like a dadra than a Thumri. It is fast-paced, contrasting with the slow pace of a typical Bol-banaav Thumri of Banaaras. Almost all the artists of the following years have rendered this Thumri in a proper 'thumri' style rather than Dadra.

- Plenty of use of 'Kahan' (recitation of text using musical notes in a way as if telling during a talk) and frequent use of words like 'Are', 'Haan' indicates a style which is highly emotive, communicative of the feelings expressed through the text, which is main motive of this genre of Thumri-dadra. Eg. At 0:32, 0:49, 1:11, 2:14, 2:33, 2:47 etc.
- Use of different yet relevant text, may be of Urdu 'Sher', is heard. However clarity is lacking so we cannot track down the exact words sung after the Sthayi 'Mukhada' part.
- Use of some swift taans is also found during the performance, indicating Gauhar's training as well as proficiency over taan ang. E.g. At 1:55, 2:02, 2:55 Etc.
- the starting of fast paced 'Laggi' section is not clearly heard due to poor quality. But towards the end at 3:24-3:25, we can lightly hear the Laggi-like strokes before the performance ends with Gauhar Jaan saying the famous phrase "My name is Gauhar Jaan".
- it is quite possible that because of the limited duration of the 78 rpm record at that time, the performer might have chosen to keep the length to be short and therefore choosing the Dadra style instead of slow Thumri style. Instead of Bol-banaav in a typical slow pace, the use of 'kahan' using completely different yet relevant text is employed.
- This recording is an example of the early Bol-Banaav style which was evolved from 19<sup>th</sup> century Bol-Baant style and a precursor of famous Banaaras Bol-Banaav style in Thumri-Dadra.

## 2) VIDUSHI SIDDHESHWARI DEVI (1908-1977)

Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ezCh\\_bw3UQ4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ezCh_bw3UQ4)

Duration : 6:16 minutes

Raag: Bhairavi

Taal: Kaharava

Tempo: starts with 76 bpm; gradually increases to 80 bpm and Laggi section starts around at 240 bpm gradually increasing to roughly 268-269 bpm.

Accompaniments: Taanpura, Tabla, Harmonium. Harmonium is not clearly heard because of recording quality.

Sthayi: Ras ke bhare tore nain

Aaja saanwariya tohe garwa laga loon

Antara: Gauhar pyari tope bali bali jaun re

Mora jiya tarase re

- The estimated time period of this performance is somewhere between 1950-1960.
- The first Sam is on note Madhya 'Ma', which remain same almost through out the performance. This is quite interesting as none of the other available performances of renowned artists have their Sam on Madhya Ma. So in this way, this is an exceptional case. But this also shows the versatility and potential of the composition and the mastery and expertise of the artist to render a composition in a different yet totally convincing manner.
- Though the Taal chosen here by the artist is Kaharava, it is evident that the tempo is not a fast-paced or drut as in dadra. The performance starts with a medium paced or Madhya lay Kaharava and then gradually increases as the performance progresses.
- Use of Pukar & kaku-prayog (voice modulations) with a highly expressive voice- characteristic of Banaaras/Poorab Ang style. E.g. the part between 0:27 & 1:20. There are numerous such passages where these features are seen. 3:37, 3:45 to 4:08.
- Frequent use of emotive words like 'Eri', 'Are', 'Haan' etc.
- Typical Bol-Banaav technique has been employed to elaborate the text and to convey the meaning of the text. The vistaar - elaboration part and its slow pace suggests some influence of Bada Khyal.
- Some short Taans are also present during elaboration. E.g. at 3:17, 3:30. But in general there is not much emphasis on Taan, instead expressive and emotive varieties of text elaborations using the Bol-Banaav technique are found. During the Laggi part, the number of varieties of Mukhada is sung.

- This is a good example of Mature Bol-Banaav Thumri in its fully developed form.

### 3) RASOOLAN BAI (1902-1974)

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z4-yV6BitXU><sup>54</sup>

Duration: 10:37 minutes

Raag: Bhairavi

Taal: Deepchandi

Tempo: Performance starts at 60 bpm. It is observed that Through out the performance the tempo shows slight variation i.e. it continues to deviate a little on plus-minus sides which is a common occurrence during a live accompaniment. Laggi section starts at around 200 bpm with Tritaal pieces and then continued to Kaharva laggis in an increasing tempo ending nearly at 255-260 bpm.

Accompaniment: Taanpura, Tabla, Saarangi.

Only Sthayi of the composition is rendered in the performance.

Sthayi: Ras ke bhare tore nain

Aaja saanwariya tohe garwa laga loon

- This is an example of typical slow-paced Bol-Banaav Thumri of Banaaras/Poorab Ang.
- The estimated time period of this performance is somewhere between 1940-1960.
- The Artist Rasoolan Bai was a famous Thumri-dadra singer of the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, a contemporary to Vidushi Siddheswari Devi, both considered among the finest artists of Banaaras Thumri in mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- All the important characteristics of Banaaras /Poorab Ang are evident in this performance. A highly expressive emotive voice, a plenty of use of Pukaar, Kaku-Prayog, Kahan are seen. For text elaboration and emotive expression the technique of Bol-Banav is employed. The slow paced Deepchandi Taal is very much useful in elaborate Bol-banaav passages. Here we can observe the step by step elaboration indicating influence of Bada Khyal.

- Frequent use of emotive words like 'Eri', 'Are', 'Haan' etc.
- Some short Taans are also present during elaboration. E.g. at 6:40, 6:50. But in general there is not much emphasis on Taan, instead expressive and emotive varieties of text elaborations using the Bol-Banaav technique are found. During the Laggi part, the number of varieties of Mukhada is sung.
- This also is an example of the mature developed Bol-Banaav Thumri of Banaaras/Poorab Ang.

#### 4) PANDITA GIRIJA DEVI (1929-2017)

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HJS6Em8y3VU6>

Duration: 19:44 minutes

Raag: Bhairavi

Taal: Deepchandi

Tempo: Performance starts at around 50 bpm. Laggi starts with at around 100 bpm Tritaal piece and then carried forward by Kaharva laggis starting at around roughly 120 bpm and then increased till around 146-148 bpm.

Accompaniment: Taanpura, Tabla, Saarangi.

Sthayi: Ras ke bhare tore nain

Aaja saanwariya tohe garwa laga loon

Antara: Din naahi chain rain naahi nindiya

Naahi parat man ka chain

- The estimated time of this recording is believed to be around late 1970s or early 1980s.
- This performance belongs to one the most acclaimed and highly esteemed Female Thumri-dadra artist of Banaaras Gharaana of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century- Padma Vibhushan Shrimati Girija Devi.
- This performance represents a time when Banaaras Thumri was already established and it was highly influenced by the khyaal-style slow paced elaboration. The Thumri singers cleverly incorporated some of the khyaal

techniques without compromising on the emotive qualities and highly expressiveness of the genre.

- All salient features of Banaaras Thumri can be found here. A slow paced Deepchandi provides plenty of space for Elaborative Bol-Banaav. Pukaar, Kaku-Prayog, Highly expressive and emotive voice, emotive words like 'Eri', 'Are', 'Haan' etc. are freely used. At the same time, we can see the increased amount of cleverly used taan like phrases or taans, just in the right proportion and position.
- In general, this is an example of the modern Bol-Banaav Thumri prevalent in late 20<sup>th</sup> century to the present date in its typical form, with the cleverly incorporated khyaal style ornamentations making them apt for the nature of Thumri.

## 5) SUNANDA SHARMA

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hlaT4iCyEC07>

Duration: 7:48 minutes

Raag: Bhairavi

Taal: Punjabi Tritaal

Tempo: starts with roughly 117 bpm. The tempo does not change much during the performance.

Accompaniment: Taanpura, Tabla, Harmonium.

Sthayi: Ras ke bhare tore nain

Aaja saanwariya tohe garwa laga loon

Antara: Din naahi chain rain naahi nindiya

Kaase kahoon jeeke bain

- This performance is published on July 15, 2018. So we can say that the actual time of performance is not later than July 15, 2018. It can be anywhere between the 2010-2018. So it is one of the examples of Banarasi Thumri in 21<sup>st</sup> century.

- The performing artist is Sunanda Sharma who is a renowned disciple of late Shrimati Girija Deviji. She is a promising name among the Thumri-Dadra performers of 21<sup>st</sup> century.
- Here the interesting thing to note is the use of Punjabi Tritaal for this traditional composition. She herself has sung this Thumri in vilambit Deepchandi in another performance.<sup>8</sup> Here she chooses to experiment. The surrounding atmosphere or a small closed audience of present times, unattracted towards slow paced tempo, might have played a role in such decisions or experimentations to take place.
- Another striking difference is the complete lack of Laggi section. Again this is not common as traditionally Laggi section always follows the performance.
- Bol-Banaav, Pukar, voice modulations etc. are used to elaborate the text and emote through the music.
- So, basically this is a special case scenario where the artist has followed a traditional way of text-elaboration while experimenting with its structure by singing it in a different Taal and forgoing the Laggi section completely.

## CONCLUSION

- After examining the above mentioned sample examples of the Traditional Banaaras/PoorabAng Thumri 'Ras ke bhare tore nain', we can see some common features and each version is different in one or the other way.
- Stylistically each version follows the bol-banaav method of text elaboration, but the bol-banaav itself seems to be evolving, maturing and establishing itself through the times.
- Usage of different Taals is particularly conspicuous. This shows the versatility of the composition.
- The comparative decrease in the tempi as the increase in the years is also evident.
- The text of Sthayi remains uniform but there are different versions in the text of Antra. The version of Siddheswari devi includes the name of Gauhar Jaan as 'Gauhar pyari', the versions of Girija deviji and Sunanda



Sharma have minor differences in the Antra. Rasoolan Bai doesn't sing Antra at all.

- Thus all the examples above indicate the course of evolution of famous Banaaras Thumri. This analysis also suggests that the genre of Thumri-Dadra is incorporating the experimentations during the performances without losing its original features which ultimately can contribute to further development of the genre.

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