THE VOCAL AESTHETIC ON STRINGS: EVOLUTION AND PEDAGOGY OF *GAYAKI ANG* ON SITAR

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ABSTRACT
This paper explains gayaki ang and tantrakari angas stylistic approaches (ang) in Hindustani instrumental music with special reference to the sitar. Gayaki ang in sitar has been mainly linked with Ustad Vilayat Khan and the Etawah Gharana. Today, many gharanas include this style in their playing. This study explores how gayaki is used in sitar performances beyond the traditions known for it. It reviews definitions, historical origins and developers. the technical and musical capabilities required to perform in gayaki ang, instrument choices and modifications that support it (including the surbahar and sitar-types), daily/practical exercises and practice regimens, representative sitarists known for gayaki ang, and short notational examples (compact gats/phrases) that illustrate the idiom. The goal is a compact, evidence-based guide useful to performers, teachers and researchers.
Key Words: *Gayaki, Tntrakari, Ang, Meend, Imdadkhani,*

Introduction

Hindustani instrumental music is mainly performed in two related styles, called gayaki ang and tantrakari ang. Gayaki ang is a vocal-based style. In this approach, the instrument (mainly Sitar) is played in a way that imitates the human voice. It focuses on smooth phrasing, delicate note bends, slides, and ornamentation, similar to khayal and other vocal forms, so that the instrument appears to "sing."

*Tantrakari ang*is an instrument-oriented style. It highlights technical skill, such as fast finger movements, clear and sharp strokes, rhythmic precision, and complex patterns that are specific to the instrument rather than copied from vocal music.

Both styles are found in many instruments like sitar, sarod, bansuri, and violin. A performer may use elements of both angs in their playing, but the distinction between *gayaki ang* and *tantrakari ang* is still an important way to understand and describe different performance styles.

Hindustani instrumental performance has long used two complementary idioms or "*Angs*": *Gayaki ang* (vocal-like style) and *Tantrakari ang* (instrumental/technical style). *Gayaki ang* aims to reproduce the phrasing, microtonal slides, ornamentation and expressive inflections of the human voice—especially those of *khayal* and other vocal genres—so a listener perceives the instrument as "singing." *Tantrakari ang* emphasizes idiomatic instrumental virtuosity: rapid right-hand articulation, percussive strokes, crisp rhythmic phrasing and technical displays that are less directly modelled on the voice. Both styles exist across instruments (sitar, sarod, bansuri, violin, etc.) and may co-exist within a player's approach, but the *Gayaki—Tantrakari* distinction remains a primary analytic tool for stylistic description.

Understanding the concepts of Gayaki ang and Tantrakari Ang.

A performance approach that attempts to imitate vocal music's expressivity: smooth glides (*meend*), controlled oscillations (*andolan*), subtle microtonal inflections (*shruti* variations), and vocal ornamentation such as *kan*, *gamak*, *murki* and *taan*-like phrases. During the "15th Baithak: Musical Artistry of Etawah–Imdadkhani Gharana, Part 01," Ustad Shahid Parvez answered Pt. Arvind Parikh's query about Gayaki ang and clearly explained its correct understanding on the sitar. He said " गायकी अंग का ये मतलब नहीं होता कि गाने की कॉपी हो रही है ये बिलकुल मकसद नहीं है ,गायकी अंग का मकसद ये है कि गले से जब आप कोई चीज निकालते हैं , तो जितनी पूरी तरह से निकलती है वैसे ही साज़ में भी निकले। गायकी अंग का मतलब ये है कि जिस तरह गले से अदा होता है। गले से जो अदा होता है वह नेचुरल है….."1
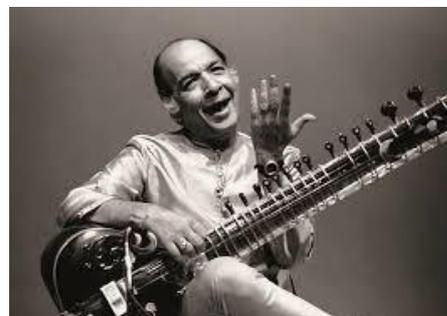
On fretted, plucked instruments such as the sitar,G*gayaki ang* places special emphasis on left-hand slides and delicate string-bending so that single melodic lines sound continuous.

'The term "Gayaki anga" refers to that facet of Ustad Vilayat Khan's music that enabled him to simulate the experience of vocalism in all phases of the rendition. The classification distinguishes his music from the "*Tantkar Anga*" (the idiom of the

plucked instruments) which was performed on the Sitar until the era of his father, Ustad Enayet Khan. The "Tantkar Anga," being fundamental to the technology of music making on the sitar, can never be jettisoned. Any sitarist of stature has to be a master of the "Tantkar Anga" before he can do anything more with the instrument. If he decides to move towards vocalism, he can, at best, create an illusion of a vocal recital by transcending technical limitations. And, this is precisely what Vilayat Khan achieved.'*

An instrumental idiom that foregrounds the instrument's unique strengths: crisp right-hand rhythmic patterns (bols), fast picked passages, block-note articulations, drones and chordal or double-stop effects. *Tantrakari* often exploits the sitar's sympathetic strings, resonance and percussive plucking; it favours articulation that would not typically be sung.

A Brief Technical Overview of *gayaki ang* on the Sitar:

On the sitar, *gayaki ang* is making the instrument sing like a human voice using smooth slides, bends, and expressive playing.:

- **Extended *Meend* :** long, continuous pulls across frets to create a smooth glide between notes as a vocalist would via portamento. This requires considerable left-hand strength, finger flexibility, knowledge of microtonal destinations and lateral finger control so the pitch rises evenly.

- **Controlled *Andolan* :** small slow shakes around a pitch, emulating vocal oscillation (vocal vibrato-like ornament).

- ***Kan, Gamak, Murki*:** these quick grace-note figures are executed by precise hammer-ons, pull-offs and micro-bends.

- **Right-hand tone control:** using the *mizrab* (plectrum), the player varies attack, finger angle, and damping (left-hand muting) to get vocal-like timbres and sustain.

- **Vilambit Alap:** phrasing is shaped to imitate the breath and cadence of khayal or dhrupad singing—phrases that breathe, expand and resolve as a singer would.

Acoustically, *gayaki ang* reduces the emphasis on bright, percussive attacks and increases attention to sustain, spectral richness and microtonal control so pitch transitions sound continuous rather than discretely fretted.

Evolution of Gayaki ang on the Sitar

The Imdadkhani or Etawah gharana (Imdad Khan → Enayat/Imrat → Vilayat/Imrat and descendants) played the decisive role in shaping the *gayaki ang* on sitar and surbahar. Historical evidence points to Ustad Imdad Khan's experiments in adapting vocal *khayal* aesthetics to plucked strings, and his descendants (notably Enayat Khan, Imrat Khan and Vilayat Khan) consolidated and popularised the approach. The surbahar (bass sitar) tradition in that family also informed the deeper, voice-like alap work that underpins *gayaki* on sitar.

Ustad Vilayat Khan (1928–2004) is widely credited with codifying and popularising *gayaki ang* on the modern sitar. He emphasized vocal phrasing, developed specialized left-hand bends and articulation techniques, and crafted a concert practice where the sitar's opening elaboration and bandish presentation closely mirrored vocal khayal performance. Many later players adopted or adapted aspects of his approach while interacting with other gharana traditions.

Through the 20th and into the 21st century, *gayaki ang* spread beyond a single gharana. Players from other lineages incorporated vocal-like devices; modern pedagogical exchange (recordings, radio, festivals) diffused these practices. Simultaneously, contemporary players often blend *gayaki* with *tantrakari* passages to balance singing quality with instrumental virtuosity. Recent analytical studies confirm that *gayaki* elements now permeate several sitar traditions.

Essential Abilities for Playing Gayaki ang on Sitar

When the sitar is played in a manner that creates the impression of singing *(Gayaki ang),* certain essential aspects must be carefully observed. First, the resonance of the sitar should remain unbroken and be sustained for as long as possible. Second, mizrab strokes should be minimal, well-balanced, and applied with control rather than force. Third, the instrument itself should possess the ability to retain resonance (āns), which is enhanced by a thicker tabli and a thicker bāj kā tār.

A musician aiming to perform credibly in *Gayaki ang* must combine technical skill with stylistic knowledge. Key capabilities:

- Microtonal pitch control: precise intonation and the ability to place pitches between frets (true microtonal shaping), including reliable execution of long meends.

- Left-hand dexterity and stamina: sustained pressure during slides, subtle lateral motion for andolan, and controlled damping.

- Right-hand tonal shaping: flexible mizrab strokes, muting and selective use of sympathetic strings to model vocal sustain and decay.

- Vocal repertory literacy: intimate knowledge of vocal ornaments, khayal and thumri phrasing, typical cadences and the rhetorical arc of vocal alap and bandish. The instrumentalist must be able to translate these into idiomatic sitar gestures.

- Aural imagination and phrasing: the ability to "think vocally" so that melodic sentences breathe like sung phrases—knowing where to pause, to take "breath" (or its instrumental equivalent), and how to shape a melodic sentence.

- Riyaz (disciplined practice) and repertoire knowledge: daily technical exercises and study of both vocal recordings and instrumental masters.

Practical Approach to Gayaki ang

A regular and focused daily practice routine is important for developing **Gayaki ang** on the sitar. You can practice in one long session or divide it into two shorter sessions. Begin with a warm-up for 20–30 minutes by playing a slow alap on a single note to improve tone quality and pitch stability. Also stretch your left hand with long and smooth meends across 2–5 frets on Sa and Pa to build strength and control for vocal-style slides. After that, spend 30–45 minutes on technical exercises. Practice meends by sliding smoothly between notes, and work on andolan by gently oscillating one note to improve microtonal control. Then practise kan and gamak to develop quick and clear note movements, starting slowly and increasing speed gradually. In the final part of your routine, dedicate 30–45 minutes to phrasing and vocal imitation. First sing short musical phrases and then play them on the sitar to match the vocal feel. Listening to recordings of alap or khayal and trying to reproduce small melodic ideas on the instrument will also help you understand and express the vocal style more effectively.

Recommended Sitar for Gayaki ang Expression

For Gayaki ang, the sitar should support smooth, vocal-like expressions such as *meend , gamak,* and *andolan*. Therefore, a sitar used for this style is usually modified to produce a softer, more resonant, and expressive tone.

Key features of a suitable Gayaki ang sitar:

Feature	Importance for Gayaki ang
Long and flexible meend capability (up to 6–7 notes)	Helps imitate vocal glide and emotional expression
Fewer frets compared to Tantrakari style	Allows wider bending of strings
Thiker Tabali	Enables longer and more stable Aans while playing.
Thicker main playing string (Baj Tar)	Produces warm and sustained sound
High-quality pumpkin (Tumba) and resonant wood	Enhances vibration and tonal richness
Smooth fret surface and precise fret setting	Allows accurate intonation during long meend
Jawari set slightly round (not too sharp)	Creates a softer, more vocal sound

Difference from Tantrakari Sitar

Gayaki ang Sitar	Tantrakari Sitar
Softer tone	Brighter, more percussive tone
Focus on imitation of voice	Focus on instrumental virtuosity
For alaap and lyrical expression	For fast taans and jhala
Long meend possible	Limited meend

Notable sitarists who play in *gayaki ang:*

Several musicians are historically or stylistically associated with Gayaki ang on the sitar. Ustad Vilayat Khan of the Imdadkhani/Etawah gharana played a central role in developing and codifying this vocal-like style. Ustad Imrat Khan, known for both surbahar and sitar, preserved the surbahar tradition and focused on vocal-oriented elaboration. Earlier figures like Ustad Enayat Khan and Ustad Imdad Khan helped shape the family style by adapting elements from vocal music. Ustad Shahid Parvez is recognized today as one of the leading exponents of Gayaki ang. Shahid performs at a level that seems unbelievable. He says "I believe that what you play spontaneously should be perfect. Whatever comes into your mind, you should be able to play it on the sitar. It is now a complete instrument – by which I mean you can replicate any aspect of vocal music on it".

Many contemporary sitarists also incorporate vocal idioms, showing how Gayaki ang continues to influence modern performances. Each of these musicians has recordings and concerts that clearly demonstrate their approach, which can be explored through artist archives and published studies.

Discussion and pedagogical implications and Conclusion

The *gayaki* approach demands integrated training: technical ability (meend, andolan, right-hand control) must be paired with vocal repertoire study. Teachers should combine vocal exercises (singing khayal phrases) with instrument-specific drills (meend ladders, andolan control). Given the cross-penetration of styles in modern performance, serious students benefit from exposure to recordings across gharanas—not to copy superficially, but to widen expressive vocabulary and to learn how *gayaki* is integrated with *tantrakari* passages in concert practice. Recent analytical studies corroborate that *gayaki* elements have diffused across traditions and that acoustic measurements (sustain, spectral centroid) distinguish *gayaki* from *tantrakari* performances—a point of interest for empirical musicology and pedagogy.

Gayaki ang on sitar is not simply a set of techniques; it is an aesthetic choice that shapes instrument set-up, practice methodology, repertoire selection and musical identity. Rooted historically in the Imdadkhani/Etawah family (with major articulation by Imdad/Enayat/Imrat/ Vilayat Khan), the approach demands committed technical work (especially meend and microtonal control) plus deep familiarity with vocal phrasing.

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