

THE PAR EXCELLENCE COMPOSER OF NĀṬYASAṄGĪT: PANDIT JITENDRA ABHISHEKI – A PIONEER AND REFORMER OF MARATHI MUSICAL THEATRE

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ABSTRACT

*Pt. Jitendra Abhisheki, an eminent Vocalist of Gwalior, Agra and Jaipur traditions, emerged as a distinguished musical figure of the twentieth century. His contribution as a composer, constitute a transformative chapter in the evolution of Marathi musical theatre. Possessing a brilliant and imaginative musical mind, Abhisheki crafted compositions of profound melodic and emotional appeal. While widely celebrated for his **Sugama Saṅgīt** creations, his compositional brilliance extended equally to **Khayāl** and **Nāṭyasaṅgīt**, where he explored **bhakti rasa** and **bhāva rasa** with rare sensitivity. His **distinctive gāyaki**, spanning the classical and semi-classical spectrum, came to be recognized as “**Abhisheki Gāyaki**”. The study examines Pt. Abhisheki’s multi-dimensional contribution as a composer who synthesized classical rigor with popular accessibility within **nāṭyasaṅgīt**. Though melodic innovation, expressible lyricism, and a reformist approach to theatrical composition, he not only revitalized Marathi musical stage but also established a new aesthetic paradigm. The research analyzes his compositions in detail, focusing on the techniques underlying his intricate melodic designs that infused dramatic and devotional aspect with depth and authenticity. By integrating both primary and secondary sources, the study offers a deeper understanding of Abhisheki as a composer and reformer who **redefined Nāṭyasaṅgīt**.*

Keywords: Jitendra Abhisheki, *nāṭyasaṅgīt*, composer, marathi saṅgīt nāṭak, Abhisheki gāyaki

INTRODUCTION

The twentieth-century in Indian music witnessed a creative resurgence that blurred boundaries between classical, popular, devotional and theatrical forms. At the heart of this evolution stood Pt. Jitendra Abhisheki (1929-1998), a distinguished vocalist and composer, trained in the Gwalior, Agra and Jaipur traditions of Hindustani music. Combining classical depth with melodic imagination, he redefined *Marathi-Nāṭyasaṅgīt* enriching it with intricate melodic design and emotional intensity. The paper examines Pt. Abhisheki’s compositional vision through the lens of *Nāṭyasaṅgīt*, focusing on how his musical imagination reshaped the aesthetics of twentieth-century Marathi theatre music. It analyzes selected compositions to understand his techniques of melodic structuring, lyric articulation, and emotional treatment, thereby presenting a holistic perspective on Abhisheki as both composer and reformer.

Methodologically, the study draws on both primary and secondary sources including published and recorded compositions and scholarly writings. Analytical focus is placed on melodic contour, rhythmic framework and performance context. The research highlights Abhisheki’s pioneering role in shaping *nāṭyasaṅgīt*, which continues to inspire generations of musicians and composers.

ABHISHEKI AS A COMPOSER OF NĀṬYASAṄGĪT

Abhisheki’s contribution to *Nāṭyasaṅgīt* reflects a rare synthesis of classical rigor and theatrical sensitivity, establishing him as one of the foremost composers in this genre. *Matsyagandhā*, a landmark Marathi *saṅgīt-natak* written by Vasant Kanetkar, marked a turning point in post-independence musical theatre, being both Kanetkar’s first musical play and Abhisheki’s debut as a composer. With this, Abhisheki stepped into the world of musical theatre for the first time, redefining the very essence of *nāṭyasaṅgīt*. The following analysis explores how his musical intellect shaped the dramatic fabric of the play.

Adhering to his belief that music must serve the drama, Abhisheki crafted concise compositions that accentuated both the narrative and emotional depth of the play. From the very outset, Abhisheki marked his unique musical path with the *Nāṇḍī* (prologue), composed in *Mishra-Haṁskinkinī rāga* and set to *Jhaptāl*, where his consecutive *gāndhārs* (*śuddha* and *komal*) created a distinct and elevated effect to the composition. This technique reflected both his artistry and the ancient *jāti-gāyana* tradition of nuanced *swarā* expression.

राग – मिश्र हंस किंकिणी, ताल – झपताल, मध्यलय
ॐ कार मय वाणी, श्रीकार गुणखानी
जल तेज नभ धरणी, मन बुद्धि पद पाणि ॥
शक्ति शिव अभेद, षडशस्त्र श्रुति देव
लय एक वच भेद, स्थिर अचल हे प्राणी ॥

१	२	३	४	५	६	७	८	९	१०
ग	सा	ग	म	प	म	ग	गु	रे	सा
ॐ	ऽ	का	ऽ	र	म	य	वा	ऽ	णी
नी	–	सा	ग	प	पध	म	ग	गरे	सा
श्री	ऽ	का	ऽ	र	गु	ण	खा	ऽ	नी
प	प	प	धम	प	नी	ध	प	म	ग
ज	ल	ते	ऽ	ज	न	भ	ध	र	णी

The character of *Satyavati* is musically highlighted through key compositions such as *Balkavi*'s “*Gard sabhoṭī rān..*” and *Girish Kanetkar*'s “*Tava bhās antarā jhālā..*”. *Abhisheki*'s treatment of “*Garda sabhoṭī rāna..*” illustrates his sensitivity to poetic nuance: rather than adapting it to a conventional *Lāvāṇi* or *Bhāvagīta* forms, he employed *Rāga Bairāgi*, introducing it for the first time to Marathi musical theatre. His composition strikes a careful balance reflecting the emotional tone of the scene and preserving the lyrical elegance of *Balkavi*'s poetry. The rhythmic framework, set in *Kehrwa-laggī*, reinforces the dramatic mood while maintaining musical integrity.

The first song of *Matsyagandhā*, “*Devāgharche Jnyāt Kunālā..*” composed in *Yaman*, immediately reveals *Abhisheki*'s distinctive approach, with an unconventional yet striking feature that made musical theatre history. The *mukhdā* was exceptionally crafted, reflecting *Abhisheki*'s skill in creating compelling and memorable *mukhdās*. While the placement of the “*sam*” on “*tivra madhyam*” added subtle tension, he further enhanced it by weaving a difficult and intricate *tāna* just before the *sam*, making it extraordinary, a nuance often overlooked in common analysis.

पर्मगरेगर्मधनीसांनीध पर्मगरे मंग गमप मंगरे – सा
देऽऽऽऽऽऽ वा घरचेऽ जाऽतऽऽऽ कुणाऽ ला

The song “*Sāda Deṭī Himsīkhare..*” is composed in *Rāga Vṛṇḍāvani Sārang*, set in *Drut Ektāl*. In the second *antarā*, “*Swapna Rangale..*” *Abhisheki* creates a distinct melodic effect through a deliberate *nyās* on *komal nishād*, giving it more prominence, subtly altering the tonal framework of the *rāga*. This produces a unique melodic color and reflects *Abhisheki*'s skill in integrating *rāga* aesthetics with dramatic intent.

Following the success of *Matsyagandhā*, *Yayāti ani Devyāni*, once again drew upon an epic theme, allowing him to explore mythological emotions through new melodic experiments, marking yet another milestone in Marathi *nātyasaṅgīt*. Among the compositions in this play, “*Sarvātmakā Sarveśwarā..*” exemplifies *Abhisheki*'s ability to weave classical depth with devotional expression. *Abhisheki* gently removed the barriers of words and embraced the underlying devotion with equal dedication. The song's base *rāga* is *Komal-Rishabh Asavari*, while specific phrases incorporate *Bairāgi* (“*Gaṅgādhārā Shivasundarā..*”) and *Mishra-Bhairavī* (“*Mājhe mhaṇā karuṇākārā..*” and subsequent lines), all of which share *bhakti*, *karuṇa*, and *śānta rasa*, creating a rich, *multi-rāga* texture and conveying the very limits of heartfelt yearning.

Although the compositional base of *Sarvātmakā Sarveśwarā*, draws from multiple *rāga-aṅgās*, to the casual listener, it may superficially appear as a *Bhairavī* composition. This misperception often extends to performers as well, who tend to announce and render it in *Bhairavī* without engaging with its deeper *rāga* structure. Consequently, many performers begin with a conventional “*Bhairavī ālāp*”, which fails to align with the internal melodic logic and the specific *chalan* of the composition.

In contrast when *Abhisheki* performed *Sarvātmakā Sarveśwarā*, his *ālāp* was designed in accordance with the composition's *rāga-aṅgās*, ensuring a seamless integration between the *ālāp* and the song. This alignment not only preserved the integrity of the piece but also enhanced its evocative power. Therefore, performers must approach this composition with sensitivity to its inherent *rāga-aṅgā* framework, rather than superimposing traditional “*Bhairavī-ālāp*” maintaining its original coherence.

Another notable composition from *Yayāti ani Devyāni*, “*He Surāno Chandra Vhā..*” conveys tender emotions of longing and love rarely explored on the musical stage. The lyrics, “*He Surāno Chandra Vhā, Chāndaṇyāche Kōṣ Mājhyā Priyakarālā Pōchavā..*” request the musical notes to become the moon and deliver its light to a beloved lost in darkness. *Abhisheki* chose the lush *Charukeshi rāga* set in *Rupak tāla*, whose serene and meditative quality perfectly underscores the song's themes of

separation, yearning and divine intervention. The composition evokes *sānta*, *bhakti* and *karuṇa rasas*, reflecting the emotional depth of the scene. Through this sensitive *rāga* treatment, Abhisheki seamlessly merges melodic expression with the lyrical sentiment.

In *Katyār Kāḷajāt Ghuslī*, “*Gheyī chhanda makaranda..*” exemplifies Abhisheki’s genius in using *rāga* to articulate character psychology. Composed in two distinct *rāgas* for two opposing characters, the piece becomes a musical dialogue between humility and ego. For *Panditji*, Abhisheki employs *Rāga Sālagvarālī Toḍī*, its restrained melodic motion and gentle *tānas* reflecting meditative discipline and inner serenity. In contrast, *Khānsāheb*’s version, set in *Rāga Dhānī*, brims with energy and assertiveness; the brisk tempo and bold *tānas* that project ego and restlessness. The same lyrical text thus acquires two entirely different emotional dimensions through melodic treatment alone. Similarly, in “*Surat Piyā Kī Chhin Bisarāye..*,” a *Rāga-Tāla-Māla* presented during the *saṅgīt-spardhā*, *Panditji*’s contemplative rendering contrasts sharply with *Khānsāheb*’s vigorous style, showcasing Abhisheki’s mastery in shaping character through music.

Following his experiments with melodic duality in *Katyār Kaljāt Ghusli*, Abhisheki composed music for *He Bandh Reshmāche*. One of the most celebrated songs of the play, “*Kātā Rute Kuṇālā..*” set in *Bhimpalāsī* and *Dādrā tāla*, exemplifies his ability to infuse lyrical depth with musical expression. Abhisheki shaped the couplets to reflect both poetic weight and emotional resonance. The *antarā* lines “*Sāṅgū kaṣṭ kuṇālā, Kaḷ ātalyā jīvāchī..*,” transform personal anguish into a universal pathos, allowing the audience to experience the character’s inner turmoil. His emotional rendering ensures that the music carries the psychological and dramatic intensity of the narrative. The final *Bhairavī*, “*Path jat dharm..*” composed in *Sindh-Bhairavī*, embodies the play’s central theme of enduring human bonds. He captures both poignancy of separation and the resilience of love, using melodic nuance to emphasize empathy, compassion, and the triumph of human connection over societal divisions.

In *Gora Kumbhār*, Abhisheki used classical idioms with thoughtful precision to express the devotional essence of saint poetry. The *abhangās* in this play are composed in a way that enhances the emotional and spiritual continuity of the narrative. Among the most notable compositions, “*Avaghe Garje Paṇḍharpur..*” in *Rāga Jaunpuri (Bhajani tāla)* exemplifies the collective exaltation of *nāmasmaran*. Abhisheki beautifully brings out its *bhakti* and *karuṇa rasa* through *rāga Jaunpuri*. The *Bhajani* rhythm and graceful contours of the *rāga* blend with devotional intensity making it one of the most soul-stirring compositions in the *Marathi Vārkarī* tradition today.

COMPOSITIONS INSPIRED BY CLASSICAL BANDISHES

Abhisheki skillfully adapted *bandishes* of *rāgas* into his *nāṭyasaṅgīt* compositions, blending them with theatrical requirements. This approach allowed him to maintain classical depth while shaping melodies that served the drama, creating a cohesive framework to explore each composition individually. For instance, in *Matsyagandhā*, the composition “*Saṃsāra sukh nase bhāḷī..*” draws inspiration from the *Devchandhār bandish*, “*Barjori nā karo..*”(Tritāla). Similarly, in *Katyār Kāḷajāt Ghuslī*, “*Yā bhavanātil gīta purāṇe..*” draws inspiration from the *Bihāgaḍā bandish*, “*Pāti na Bhejī..*”(Tritāla), thus reflecting Abhisheki’s creative use of *bandish* structures within a dramatic framework.

Abhisheki introduced and popularized the South Indian *Rāga Amritvarshini* in Hindustani music, composing both *badā-khyāl* and *chotā-khyāl bandishes* in this *rāga*. He brought it to the theatrical stage for the first time in *Dhāḍilā Rām Tine Kā Vanī* drawing inspiration from his own *chotā-khyāl bandish*, “*Kā Saṅg Kīnhi Prī..*” to compose *Sitā*’s, “*Levū Kaṣṭ Valkalā..*” set in *Jhaptāl*. The *bandish-inspired* melody seamlessly integrates with the dramatic context, highlights the *rāga*’s emotional essence of *śṛṅgāra* and *sānta rasa*, translating lyrical sentiment into an emotionally resonant expression of *Sitā*’s introspective devotion and simplicity.



Figure 1 – During the music rehearsals of “Dhāḍilā Rām Tine Kā Vanī - 1976 (Mukund, 2024, p. 149)

In *Mīrā Madhurā*, Abhisheki drew inspiration from *bandishes* he had learned from *Swararāj Chhota Gandharvā*, skillfully transforming them into theatrical compositions. Three major songs in the play: “*Swapnāt Pāhile je..*”, “*Chandhra Havā..*”,

“*Ānanda Sudhā..*” and “*Ashi Sakhī Sahacharī prañaynī..*” were based on the classical *bandishes* “*Boond Boond Lāgi*” (*Gaud Malhār, Ektāl*), “*Miyākī Fauj Jhoom Rahī*” (*Nāyaki Kānadā, Addha Tritāl*), “*Ānand Bhayo*” (*Nand, Rūpak Tāla*) and “*Baraj Rahī*” (*Sampūrṇa Mālkauns, Jhapāl*) respectively.

In Kadhitari Kothetari, Abhisheki composed “*Cheḍūn gee madhuar svāra vimala..*” in the uncommon Rāga Pratāpvarālī, in Tritāla. Similarly, “*Chhata ākāśāce..*” is inspired by the Bhimpalāsi bandish “*Tumi so lāgī..*”

While their melodic inspiration stemmed from these *khayāl* compositions, it reflects Abhisheki’s deep understanding of how a *bandish* could be reimagined within a theatrical context, revealing how Abhisheki thoughtfully adapted the *bandish* to the *nāṭyasaṅgīt*.

INTRODUCTION OF UNFAMILIAR RĀGAS TO THE THEATRICAL STAGE

A defining aspect of Pt. Abhisheki’s reformist contribution lies in his exploration and introduction of unfamiliar or rarely performed *rāgas* into the domain of *nāṭyasaṅgīt*. At a time when Marathi musical theatre largely relied on a limited set of accessible and familiar *rāgas*, Abhisheki ventured beyond convention to expand its melodic and emotional range. His experimental approach not only enriched the aesthetic appeal of the form but also redefined the possibilities of theatrical composition.

He incorporated *rāgas* from Carnatic traditions, an innovative gesture for the Marathi stage. For instance, his adaptation of *Rāga Amritvarshini*, originally a South Indian Rāga, into Hindustani music stands as a striking example of creative synthesis. By composing new *bandishes* and theatrical songs in such *rāgas*, he not only popularized them among audiences but also lent them **distinct dramatic vitality**. To cite few examples, “*Strī-premā-viṇa jvāna avaghe jhāle mātī-mol..*” in *Rāga Jogakāṁsa* set in *Addhātāla*, “*Saṁsāra sukha nase bhāḷī..*” in *Rāga Dev Gandhāra*, set in *Addhātāla* and “*Pitāmaha tū hoṣīla kurukulācā..*” in *Rāga Śāhanā Kanādā*, set in *Ektāla*, all from *Matsyagandhā*, then, “*Yā bhavanātīl gīta purāṇe..*” in *Bihāgaḍā* set in *Addhātāla* and “*Tejonidhī loha gol..*” a *Rāgamālīkā* in *Lalit-Pañcama* set in *Madhyalaya-Ektāla*, both from *Kaṭyār Kāḷajāt Ghuslī*, then, “*Levū Kaṣī Valkalā..*” in *Rāga Amritvarshini*, set in *Jhaptāl*, “*Kadhī bheṭen vanavāsī..*” in *Rāga Sūryakāṁsa*, set in *Rūpak tāla*, “*Manda ye samīr..*” in *Rāga Devatā Bhairav*, and *Jogiyā*, set in *Ektāla*, and “*Janalokā Vismaya hā..*” in *Rāga Mīyā kī Sāraṅga*, set in *Tritāla*, all from *Dhādīla Rām Tine Kā Vanī*, then, “*Tujhiyā ge caraṅicā jhālo..*” from *Mahānandā*, in *Rāga Madhurañjanī*, set in *Aṣṭa-Dīpacandī Tāla*, and “*Cheḍūn gee madhura svāra vimala..*” from *Kadhitari Kothetari*, in *Rāga Pratāpvarālī*, set in *Tritāla*.

Abhisheki broadened the expressive vocabulary of *nāṭyasaṅgīt*, introducing a rare diversity of melodic color to Marathi musical theatre. Each of these *rāgas* was not chosen arbitrarily, but carefully aligned with the **emotional tenor of the scene and character**. For instance, the composition, “*Gheyī chhanda makaranda*” was composed in *Dhāni* in such a way that it reflected pride and intensity of *Khānsāheb* as explained above. Such thoughtful selection and innovative treatment reveal Abhisheki’s deep analytical understanding of both *rāga* aesthetics and dramatic psychology.

Through these innovations, Abhisheki effectively dismantled the perceived boundary between classical *rāgdaari* and theatrical composition, giving *nāṭyasaṅgīt* a new melodic dimension and intellectual depth. His pioneering use of these *rāgas* continues to shape contemporary approaches to theatrical music composition, reaffirming his stature as a reformer who expanded both the emotional and structural canvas of Marathi musical theatre.

ABHISHEKI’S EXPERIMENTATION AND HIS DIFFERENT APPROACHES IN BHAIRAVI, MAAND AND PAHADI RĀGA : AN ANALYSIS

Abhisheki was always interested in structural and melodic possibilities. This inclination was nurtured through his training under *Ustād Azmat Hussain Khan*, who encouraged experimentation within the bounds of *rāga*. Abhisheki often recounted how his *guru* would shift the “*sam*” from one *swar* to another, for example placing it on “*pancham*” instead of “*dhaivat*”, while maintaining the melodic integrity of the *bandish*. This subtle play with “*sam*” placement created freshness without disturbing the *rāga* character or flow of the composition. He applied this technique in several of his compositions, one of the most well-known *nāṭyasaṅgīt*, “*Devāgharche Jnyāt Kunālā..*”, as explained above.

His explorations in *Bhairavī* were equally striking. *Bhairavī*, being one of the most explored *rāgas* across India, carries distinct regional interpretations, each colored by local musical idioms and emotional sensibilities. The *Sindhi*, *Punjabī* and *Bengali* styles of *Bhairavī*, each display distinct *uccāra* (accent), reflecting how the *rāga* transforms across geographical regions. Abhisheki’s reimagining of *Bhairavī* revealed his analytical depth and his creative courage. He possessed a natural, intuitive ability to explore new melodic directions within *Bhairavī*, and his creativity is evident in many of his compositions. Abhisheki expanded its scope by incorporating *shuddha-swar*, a move that introduced a new aesthetic dimension. This addition transformed the *rāga* into what is now broadly referred to as *Mishra-Bhairavī*, enriching its expressive potential without violating its emotive essence. For

instance, in “*Sarvātmakā Sarveśwarā*,” his use of *Shuddha-Rishabh* gives the *rāga* a distinctive hue, **differentiating it from *Komal-Rishabh Āsavari***.

Similarly, in “*Kaivalyāchyā chāndanyālā*,” Abhisheki shaped the melodic framework echoing the *aroha* of *Bilāskhāni Toḍī*. His deliberate use of *Shuddha-Rishabh* on the lyric “*Candra vā ho Pāṇḍuraṅga*” subtly alters the tonal gravity of the phrase, infusing it with rare luminous quality, demonstrating his intuitive ability to transform emotional resonance of the song. Though the base remained *Bhairavī*, his selective use of *Shuddha-Rishabh* and distinct melodic patterns still creates a sense of intrigue for the listener, a momentary ambiguity about whether the *rāga* truly belongs to *Bhairavī* or not. Interestingly, in the closing lines, “*Carācara pār nyā ho, jāhala uśīr, Pāṇḍuraṅga..*” the *swarās* are of *Malkauṅs*, yet remains steeped in *Bhairavī-aṅga*. It becomes an embodiment of *sānta* and *bhakti rasa*, blending serene renunciation with devotional intensity.

One of his most intricate and imaginatively crafted compositions in *Bhairavī* is “*Haravale Madhu Muralīche Sūra*” from the musical drama, *Katyār Kāljāt Ghuslī*. While the base *rāga Bhairavī*, Abhisheki weaves delicate shades of *Toḍī*, *Kīrwanī*, and *Bilāskhāni Toḍī*, achieving a rare melodic synthesis. These *rāgas*, traditionally associated with *karuṇa* and *bhakti rasa*, deepens the song’s emotional and devotional surrender expressed in the lyrics and drama. The phrase “*Karāt urālī kevaḷa muralī*” reflects the **influence of *Kīrwanī***, conveying gentle melancholy. In “*urāt he kāhūra*”, the melodic contour leans towards *Toḍī*, expressing spiritual anguish. The line “*veṇu miravato vakṣī*” momentarily touches *Bilāskhāni Toḍī*, heightening emotional tension, before “*daivagaṭīne, tocha jāhalā*” returns to the *Toḍī* space, deepening the mood of surrender. Finally, in “*vidhvamsācā sāksī, bhāsato javaḷ asonī dūra*”, the melody resolves into *Bhairavī*.

Abhisheki’s seamless blending of these allied *rāgas* without disrupting the structural framework of *Bhairavī*, reflects his remarkable skill and sensitivity as a composer. The melodic transitions are so fluid that the listener perceives the emotion underlying the composition rather than any overt change of *rāga*. Through this approach, Abhisheki not only widens the scope for melodic elaboration within the composition but also extends the expressive potential of *Bhairavī* itself. Moreover, it also reinforces the dramatic essence of the scene: *Uma*’s inner turmoil, where the song, set in a moment of emotional desolation, mirrors both spiritual and musical silence as portrayed in the play’s narrative.

Just as *Bhairavī* becomes a field for his melodic experiments, *Māṇḍa* and *Pahāḍī rāgas* too drew Abhisheki’s attention for its fluid and emotive appeal. Both are folk-derived melodic forms that later evolved into accepted *rāgas*. They offer flexibility to use some *swarās* like *komal-nishād* in both, and *komal-gandhār* in *Pahāḍī* (like G-g-G-R-S). However, its expressive quality lies in limited use of these *swarās*, which adds subtle color without disturbing its folk-charm. In “*Tava bhās antarā jhālā..*” Abhisheki draws upon this shared folk-ethos of *Māṇḍa* and *Pahāḍī* while weaving in **delicate shades of *Shankarā* and *Haṁsdhwani***, both belonging to *Bilawal-Thāta*. **Certain *uthānas* reflect *Pahāḍī* and *Haṁsdhwani* contour**, while the melodic elaboration revolves primarily around *Māṇḍa*’s *uttarāṅga* domain. In the second verse, **use of *komal-nishād* more prominently** than is customary in either *Māṇḍa* or *Pahāḍī*, demonstrates his distinctive compositional imagination and his tendency to emphasize *swarās* that are typically understated.

In “*Lāgī Kalejvā Kaṭūr*” from *Katyār Kāljāt Ghuslī*, Abhisheki bases the composition in *Pahāḍī*, **while seamlessly blending elements of *Māru Bihāg*, *Khamāj* and *Māṇḍa***. The first *antarā* reveals shades of *Māru Bihāg* and *Khamāj*, the latter emerging naturally when *Pahāḍī* is rendered with *śadja* as the tonal base, allowing for *komal-nishād* and hence a *Khamāj-like* color. The second *antarā* subtly drifts into *Māṇḍa*, maintaining the folk-like warmth and emotive tenderness of *Pahāḍī*. Abhisheki’s ability to move fluidly between these allied *ragās* without disturbing the underlying *Pahāḍī-dhun* demonstrates his refined melodic sensibility and command over *ragā-dhun* synthesis.

The *Dadrā*, “*Guntatā hṛdaya he..*” from *Matsyagandhā* exemplifies Abhisheki’s lyrical and spiritual depth in *Khamāj rāga*. While *Khamāj* traditionally treats *komal-nishād* sparingly, Abhisheki gives it expressive prominence, especially in the third line of both *antarās*, alongside *dhaivat*, creating a distinct emotive pull. The melodic movement occasionally touches *Shankarā*, broadening the *chalan* and enriching the *rāga*’s texture, leading to its identification as *Mishra-Khamāj*. Through these subtle inflections, Abhisheki heightens the song’s reflective and devotional mood, blending classical restraint with poetic tenderness.

Thus, Abhisheki’s treatment of *Māṇḍa-Pahāḍī* reveals not only aesthetic refinement but also a deep sensitivity to the psychological subtext of the dramatic moment.

PRECISION IN LYRICS AND PRONUNCIATION - ABHISHEKI SHAILI

Abhisheki was deeply particular about the pronunciation and meaning of the lyrics, whether in a *bandish*, *nāṭyasaṅgīt* or *sugama saṅgīta*. Hence, he ensured that **each syllable was articulated with clarity and infused with *bhāva***. Before composing *bandish* or *nāṭyasaṅgīt* he would first **understand the lyrical meaning in depth, and only then set it to tune** keeping the **emotional core of the scene** in mind. His commitment to **precise pronunciation** and emotional integrity left a lasting impression on his disciples, who imbibed this meticulous approach later recognized as the “*Abhisheki Shaili*” or “*Abhisheki Gāyaki*”. His

nuanced attention to phonetics and clarity of expression consistently deepened the emotional resonance of not only his compositions but his overall singing style.

Transitioning from this aspect of linguistic precision, it is equally significant to note Abhisheki's discerning involvement with the lyrical structure in *nāṭyasaṅgīt*. He often engaged with lyricists and playwrights, suggesting subtle substitutions or omissions of words to ensure that the text aligned seamlessly with the *tāla* framework and dramatic emotion of the scene. His sensitivity to both poetic and rhythmic balance reflected his broader vision of *nāṭyasaṅgīt* as an integrated aesthetic form, where lyrics, melody and emotion were inseparably bound.

For example, in "*Vāsavdatta*", the original line "*Aika puṣpamālike, duḥkha-bhāra sāhatā..*" did not satisfy Abhisheki's aesthetic sensibility. He felt the word "*puṣpa*" lacked depth, and suggested "*gandhamālike*" instead. A similar refinement occurred during "*Katyār Kāljāt Ghuṣṭī*". The original lyrics "*Yā bhavanāṭīl kavan purāṇe..*" was modified at Abhisheki's suggestion to "*Yā bhavanāṭīl gīt purāṇe..*", a small yet effective alteration that enhanced the melodic phrasing and thematic relevance of the song. While composing "*Sāda detī himasikhare, yā śubhra parvatāchī kramīn vāṭ ekākī, mī brahma-sādhanechī..*" for *Matsyagandhā*, Abhisheki suggested omitting the words "*ya*" and "*mī*" to achieve metrical precision. Lyricist *Vasant Kanetkar* accepted the change, and the final version set in *Rāga Vṛndāvani Sārang* and sung by **Ramdas Kamat**, attained popularity (Mukund, 2024, p.93, 159)

CONCLUSION

Abhisheki's compositions for *Nāṭyasaṅgīt*, reflect his profound understanding of both the dramatic situation and the inner psyche of each character. For him, musical drama was a complete aesthetic experience, where music, poetry and emotion coexisted in perfect harmony. He often collaborated with playwrights and directors, suggesting changes in lyrics whenever necessary to enhance dramatic coherence. From composing tunes for *AIR-Konkani* section to creating music for *Katyār Kāljāt Ghuṣṭī*, Abhisheki had, even before reaching forty, ushered an entire "*Abhisheki Era*" on the Marathi musical stage. His first play *Matsyagandhā* revitalized *Marathi Nāṭyasaṅgīt* and marked a turning point in its evolution.

As Abhisheki engaged with stronger scripts and diverse themes, his music evolved correspondingly. Abhisheki endeavored to **explore new possibilities** in *nāṭyasaṅgīt*. In his works, the synthesis of tradition and innovation occurred with effortless grace. Drawing deeply from classical music, **he created compositions that carried a fresh and vibrant identity**, suited both the stage and the concert platform.

He was also acutely aware of the changing sensibilities of the audience and therefore **crafted concise, well-structured compositions**, while still leaving ample scope for elaboration. His works introduced **remarkable variety in rāga, tāla, and mukhadā design**, enriching the expressive vocabulary of Marathi musical theatre. Two key aspects define Abhisheki's musical genius. First, his **melodies**, whether based derived from a *rāga* or inspired by the *bandish*, possessed a **distinctive emotive depth**. Rooted in classical tradition, yet dynamically responsive to dramatic needs, his compositions unfolded organically from the opening line, reflected his mastery in crafting *captivating mukhdās*.

Abhisheki's contribution to *nāṭyasaṅgīt* marks a decisive phase of reform in Marathi musical theatre. By employing **familiar rāgas with unprecedented versatility** and **introducing unfamiliar ones to the stage**, he expanded the expressive vocabulary of the form. His approach demonstrated that theatrical music could retain classical integrity while evolving with contemporary aesthetics. He did not merely redefine the creative parameters of *nāṭyasaṅgīt*, he **redefined nāṭyasaṅgīt itself**. By reshaping its compositional structure and performance aesthetics, Abhisheki established a new benchmark for the genre. Today, his name remains inseparably linked with *Nāṭyasaṅgīt*, positioning him as both an **innovator and a reformer of nāṭyasaṅgīt**.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I express my heartfelt gratitude to my father **Pt. Mohan Darekar**, disciple of **Pt. Jitendra Abhisheki**, for his valuable insights and guidance throughout this research.

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