Archival Music, and the Gharanas*

DEEPAK S. RAJA

Over the last decade, Indian recording companies have made large investments in the acoustic re-engineering and marketing of archival Hindustani music. The activity in this market is accelerating. It is important, at this stage, to understand the cultural implications of the additional lease of life granted to archival music by the technology of acoustic restoration, and the large-scale commercialization of archival music.

Vintage music has long been available to serious seekers who could worm their way into the charmed circle of collectors and archivists. What makes this access a significant cultural phenomenon now is the commercial scale on which it has become feasible, and the acoustic quality of the product that can be delivered to the market—both results of technological advances in sound processing and storage media technologies.

I am treating 1975 as an approximate and notional bridge between archival music and the contemporary musician. This is justified by several considerations, the most important being the passing away, in 1974, of the vocalist Ameer Khan, who has emerged as the single most formidable force in the archival music market. This was also the time when two trailblazing vocalists, Pt. Kumar Gandharva, and Smt. Kishori Amonkar, spearheaded what the learned musicologist, Vamanrao Deshpande describes as the Romantic Movement in Hindustani music.

Around the same time, the first generation of post-Independence musicians emerged on the professional scene. As a watershed in the cultural life of the country, Independence is important because it is only at that point and after that the electronic media enabled, and encouraged, musicians to cultivate audiences as a replacement for the patronage-based relationship typical of the pre-Independence era. This transition was fundamental enough to alter the musician-audience relationship and the music that was on offer to audiences.

With this perspective, I refer to music recorded before 1975 as "archival music," and musicians emerging on the professional circuit after 1975 as "contemporary musicians."

Obsolescence in Recorded Music

Music, once recorded, is susceptible to two types of obsolescence with the passage of time—acoustic obsolescence, and aesthetic obsolescence.

· By acoustic obsolescence, we mean the fact that every recording incorporates acoustic values as captured and reproduced by the audio technologies available at the time. These

*This is an excerpt from the author's book *Hindustani Music: A Tradition in Transition*, published by D.K. Printworld, New Delhi, in 2005. The portion excerpted here follows the chapters of the book reproduced in *Sangeet Natak* No. 2, 2005, under the title 'The Hindustani Music Market Today: The Road Ahead for the Music-maker'. Both excerpts, reproduced with the author's permission, belong to Part I of the book, titled 'Culture, Technology and Economics'. The title of the present excerpt is modified from the original.—*Ed.*

values are, presumably, acceptable to audiences of that time. But, with new developments in recording and reproduction technology, these values become progressively unacceptable to audiences accustomed to the acoustic output of later technologies. With the passage of time, therefore, the decline in the perceived quality of older recorded music can reach a stage, which denies it an audience.

By aesthetic obsolescence, we mean the fact that every piece of music represents musical values prevalent at the time when the music was recorded. The music of each era addresses audiences of that era; therefore, the aesthetic values inherent in it can be assumed to be most acceptable when the music was recorded. With aesthetic values in music responding to socio-cultural changes over time, all recorded music will inevitably drift towards unacceptability.

These two notions of obsolescence are, of course, connected. Acoustic obsolescence progressively depletes the size of audiences willing to expose themselves to a piece of recorded music. Aesthetic obsolescence progressively depletes the size of audiences able to relate to the aesthetic values incorporated in a piece of recorded music. There is a numerical relationship between the willing and the able. If we enlarge the number of people who are willing to hear a piece of archival music, we also enlarge—even if not in the same proportion—the number of those who are able to appreciate its aesthetic values.

By utilizing restoration technologies, which enable us to delay acoustic obsolescence, we are potentially also delaying the onset of aesthetic obsolescence. We accept, of course, that the technological life of a piece of recorded music is at least theoretically unlimited, while its aesthetic life is finite. Even a total nullification of acoustic obsolescence, if such is conceivable, cannot ever wish away the reality of aesthetic obsolescence.

The Archival Music Market

Archival restoration and commercialization activity today covers all segments of the art-music legacy since commercial recordings came to India in 1902. 78-RPM recordings, EP recordings, LP recordings, and pre-1975 audio-cassette productions are being re-marketed on a significant scale after being acoustically upgraded/restored. As an aesthetic force, however, the most significant segment of this activity is the commercialization of concert recordings from the pre-1975 period. By virtue of being concert-length, and by virtue of having been recorded during a face-to-face interaction with an audience, these recordings come closest to the "real thing," and therefore have the potential to exercise an aesthetic influence over contemporary tastes and musicianship which neither shorter, nor studio-made, recordings can exercise.

Art-music reportedly constitutes less than 2 per cent of the total recorded music market in the country. It is too small a segment to deserve a differentiated marketing strategy. Therefore art-music is marketed through the same volume-driven strategy as popular music. Given this reality, the large investments in the revival of vintage music would be justified only if it had begun to start selling in much larger numbers than has done for many years hitherto.

This conclusion suggests a structural change in the generational composition of the

music market. This suggestion is supported by the observation that the music industry is now investing even more feverishly in the revival of vintage popular music than it is investing in vintage art-music. Obviously, music lovers above the age of 45 today, who were below 20 in 1975, have now become a large, fast-growing, and profitable market.

Life expectancies of the Indian population are growing and re-defining the market for cultural products, along with other markets. According to one estimate, the 45+ population is projected to become about 24 per cent of the population by the year 2025. If we focus these estimates more sharply towards the urban middle class, which has better access to healthcare, the 45+ age group could be heading for becoming one-third of the Indian population by 2025. This estimate can be sharpened further, even if only on a speculative basis, to support the hypothesis that as much as half of the classical music market could soon be above 45.

In any event, the 45+ age group is the natural hard core of the market for art-music for two reasons. The meditative-contemplative character of Hindustani art-music will tend to appeal primarily to audiences who have outgrown the need for frivolous music. In addition, it takes several years, indeed decades, of exposure to develop a level of comfort with Hindustani art-music. These facts automatically define the generational profile of the art-music segment as predominantly middle-aged and above.

The recent emergence of a youth market might have marginally corroded this dominance. But, the youth segment is unlikely to outnumber the "grey" segment in the near future. The importance of the "grey" market is enhanced further by its superior knowledge and discernment, which enables it to influence the preferences of the younger generations of audiences. This market would justify a product range that enables its members to grow old with the music with which they grew up. In both segments—classical and film/popular—the recording industry could be encashing the same nostalgia of the middle-aged for their youth, and the accompanying sclerosis of aesthetic values.

Generations as "Markets"

A musician does not consciously address any particular generation of audiences. However, by virtue of belonging to his/her generation, he/she represents its aesthetic values along with the values inherited as a part of the artistic tradition. The process by which these values interact to acquire a significant constituency for an individual musician's art is mysterious and variable. However, it can be argued that the constituency of every musician—no matter how popular—will be limited to a certain generational profile. At every stage in his/her performing career, a musician will inevitably fail to address, and will thereby forfeit access to, a substantial part of the art-music audience, which is either too young, or too old.

This proposition is a little easier to enunciate from the point of view of audiences. It can be observed that, in Hindustani music, audiences relate most intimately to the music that dominated their music-scape between the time they were about twenty, up to the time when they are about fifty. They remain loyal till the end to aesthetic values of music absorbed during these three decades of their lives, and find it difficult to relate to music that represents earlier or later aesthetic values.

This could be the defining paradigm of the current phenomenon. Because people are now living longer, a large volume of archival music, with a substantial residue of aesthetic life, is seeking to encash its commercial potential by enhancing its acoustic acceptability to match, or at least approximate, contemporary standards.

While this might define the commercial aspect of the present phenomenon, the issue of generations as markets, and the finite aesthetic life of music, is far less cut-and-dried than I might have appeared to suggest. In the case of music, perhaps more than other artistic expressions, artistic values are not disseminated entirely, or even largely, through direct voluntary exposure. Secondary and involuntary exposures, and even referrals and prestige suggestions, play a significant role in enhancing receptivity and creating preferences.

The osmotic potential of obsolescent aesthetic values is aided by the foundation of continuity in Hindustani music. This foundation consists of the raga and tala systems, and the accompanying architecture (raga-presentation protocol), all of which ensure that, within limits, any recording of Hindustani music, from any era, has a decent chance of evoking willingness to exposure amongst contemporary audiences, provided its acoustic standards are acceptable. The archival music phenomenon could, therefore, be more significant than merely a technological answer to the commercial opportunity in servicing the "nostalgia" market.

Continuity and Change

Having been triggered off by demography, and made viable by technology, the archival phenomenon now participates actively in the complex interplay between continuity and change in three important ways. Firstly, it is providing competition to the recordings of the post-Independence generation of musicians. Secondly, it is reviving, in a demonstrable way, a yardstick of musicianship, which would have departed with the creators of this music, were it not for the possibility first of recording, and later, of restoration and commercial scale marketing. And, finally, it is providing valuable study material for future generations of musicians, scholars and researchers. We may now look at each of these individually.

The Challenge from the Graveyards

Pre-recorded music has taken over, from the concert platform, the primary function of delivering art-music to its audiences. On approximate reckoning, an average listener of art-music spends at least 10 times as many hours a year listening to music recordings as he spends in concert halls. According to music industry reports, recording fees now function increasingly as a lump sum multiple of an artist's rating in terms of concert fees, rather than a sales-based royalty. It would therefore appear that in geometric proportion to their market rating, contemporary musicians depend substantially on recording fees for their livelihood.

If this is true, the contemporary musician must increasingly reckon with competition from archival music on the shelves of the music stores. The challenge is more severe because recording companies have tended to sell contemporary music and archival music at the same price, and often even at lower prices. In addition to such commercial disadvantages, the

contemporary musician is denied the "nostalgia premium" of the "grey" (45-plus) market, and its influence over the purchasing decisions of the younger generations of audiences. While it is possible that the flood of re-engineered archival music is expanding the art-music market as a whole, it is almost certain that it is also eating into the sales potential for the music of contemporary musicians.

The dead are, indeed, leaving less breathing space for the living. With a shrinking market share of the recordings market for contemporary music, the big contemporary names will inevitably consolidate their hold over the market, restrict the growth of the most promising second-liners, and impede the entry of fresh talent. Even if this pressure does not convert itself into a depletion of revenues in the short run, it will do so in the medium term. This is inevitable because, fundamentally, the contemporary musician is competing for the discretionary time of the music lover, and not merely for his purchasing power. Art-music is not Muzak. It is a "leisure consumption" product, and requires undivided attention—it cannot be listened to as "background music." For any given customer, the discretionary time available for art-music will always be finite. To this extent, any *a priori* preference for archival music will deny an opportunity of exposure to contemporary music. Because of this, even if the strugglers amongst contemporary musicians manage to sell more copies of recordings, this does not guarantee them proportionate exposure to further their careers.

Market access for struggling contemporary talent is being restricted not only by deceased musicians, but also by the recordings of the ageing stalwarts of contemporary music made during their peak performing years. The releases of such recordings have now emerged as valuable "retirement plans" and "pension schemes" for the ageing stalwarts of contemporary music.

The disadvantage to contemporary talent may also be aggravated by the fact that today's environment permits the exceptionally talented to access the recording and concert markets very early in life, even before their music has matured fully. In the pre-recorded market, therefore, their hesitant individuality has to struggle for acceptance in comparison with the authoritative solidity of archival music, recorded mostly during the peak performing years of the old masters.

This prognosis for emerging talent is justified by the burgeoning importance of pre-recorded music to the art-music business in its totality. To today's musician, the commercial recording is his/her advertisement, his/her "sample pack," as well as the product itself. It has now replaced the radio as the basic launch vehicle for art-musicians, and also functions as the primary builder of a national and even international presence. Without such a presence, a musician cannot develop the concert market; and without a significant presence in the concert market, he/she cannot either develop or sustain the interest of the commercial recording market, which is his/her primary source of income.

Without the spiralling effect of this interactive relationship between the concert market and the pre-recorded music market, struggling talent is tempted to gatecrash somehow, even anyhow, into the concert market, and entice the recording companies through an established

concert-market presence. Such gatecrashing has to be engineered through the mass media—the undiscerning media, such as the lay press and television. This route to success requires musicians to exploit those facets of their personalities that are unrelated to their competence as art-musicians, and to invest a major part of their energy into "marketing" themselves as "brands," leaving less and less energy for their growth as musicians.

Admittedly, the relationship of the living with the living is a tough barrier for the dead to penetrate. Contemporary music therefore, can never be completely swamped by archival music. The dead cannot compete with the living for a presence on the concert platform and in the lay media. Nor can the dead reshape their music for superior acceptability with present-day audiences. But, the dead can now put the living under pressure by claiming a substantial and growing share of the purchasing power and time resources of the audience. From this perspective, archival music is now restructuring the market largely, though not solely, along generational lines. In the short run, it is putting contemporary music under economic pressure. In the long run, however, it will inevitably affect the yardstick by which audiences distinguish between good and bad music.

The Yardstick of Musicianship

Hindustani music is an improvisation-dominant art form. The role of the pre-composed element has been shrinking steadily for over two centuries now, with its current durational share being as low as 10-15 per cent in the totality of a rendition. This, too, is only a notional ratio because the relationship of the pre-composed element to the improvised element is unique to each rendition. A piece of Hindustani music, as rendered, is therefore is a totally unique event, impossible to recreate, most of all by the musician himself. If it is true that the validity of any art is entirely contextual, it is true of Hindustani art-music more than any other major art-music tradition.

The continuity-and-change model of Hindustani music is inherent in its continuation as an aural tradition. The tradition has never either intended, nor attempted, to preserve even an approximate record of performed music either for replication or as a pedagogical device. And, the utility of whatever documentation was done could never go beyond an aid to memory. The aesthetic and musical values of this tradition were always intended to be transmitted from one generation to another only through what a musician performed, and what he taught during his lifetime. Having passed them on, the individual musician disappeared from the scene, allowing the interaction between future generations of musicians and audiences to shape their own musical relationship.

This model of continuity and change, "appropriate" for an individualistic and improvisation-dominant art form has now been "distorted" by technology. Aesthetic values of a bygone era are now acquiring a relevance unsupported by the contemporary socio-cultural environment. That era cannot be considered either superior, or inferior, to contemporary conditions in terms of any objective yardstick. It was simply different, and cannot be recreated. But the parameters of musicianship which it enabled have now been given an additional, and if you like, "unnatural," lease of life—first by recording technology itself, and

then by the technology of acoustic re-engineering of archival recordings. Consciously or otherwise, contemporary audiences could now begin to hold contemporary musicians accountable to these parameters of musicianship that are holdovers from a previous era.

The "yardstick" notion has two dimensions. Firstly, it refers to the phenomenon of something acquiring *a priori* value merely by virtue of having once been lost. It is not subjected to critical evaluation before it is accorded a premium. It is considered valuable merely because it cannot be revived or replicated, and is beyond reach. Secondly, we are dealing with the unstated assumption that everything in this world is drifting away from being "as it was intended to be," and the farther back you go into the past, the closer you are to "things as they were intended to be." By implication, therefore, whatever is closer historically to the "original" is assumed to be closer to the ideal.

With a substantial co-existence of archival music along with contemporary music on the shelves of the music stores and in our homes, this generalized "nostalgia premium" acquires a power beyond the validation of personal experience. This extra-experiential racial nostalgia operates through the agency of the 45+ age group of audiences, who wield great influence over the tastes of the younger listeners, and validate musical values that go much farther back into history.

As an operative reality in the cultural process, this premium to antiquity, divorced from the socio-cultural context of music, has been made possible by the acoustic acceptability of vintage music to contemporary audiences. As a result of this intervention of technology, the contemporary listener is willing to give vintage music an equal chance of shaping the values that enable the mind to distinguish good music from bad. Consequently, the balance between the forces of continuity and the forces of change is being tilted in favour of the former.

The "Virtual Guru"

Perhaps the most significant facet of the phenomenon under review is the emergence of archival music as study material for aspiring musicians. In this role, archival music is filling—even if only partially—the large vacuum in the availability of competent gurus.

It is obvious that recorded music cannot function as a total substitute for a competent guru. It can only provide a stylistically coherent model of performed music. It cannot inculcate, in the student, either the ideation process or the principles of music-making which make that music possible. Under ideal conditions, therefore, archival music should be a supplementary source of guidance, complementing the efforts of a real-life guru.

The optimal use of archival music as study material might require a quality of personalized guidance even rarer than a traditional guru. Such a revolution in the process of grooming Hindustani musicians is inconceivable for quite some time to come. Therefore, archival music will influence the music of future generations driven largely by the individual predilections of aspirants. This scenario might appear pregnant with highly unmusical consequences. However, the results may not be uniformly unseemly.

The most obvious results of such a situation could be the mushrooming of Xeroxes, and even laughable caricatures, of the great musicians of the past. Such tendencies are already

visible with respect to the influence of some of the modern masters, who are no more. This is not too frightful a prospect.

The guru-sisya *parampara* in Hindustani music was not very different from a reliance on pre-recorded music in its explicit intent. In that system of aesthetic indoctrination, a substantial amount of teaching and learning energy was invested in shaping the sisya as a decent Xerox of a guru. Mercifully, the endeavour failed in most cases because of three human imperfections: imperfect perception, imperfect retention, and imperfect reproduction. Because of these imperfections, the traditional system became an effective instrument of continuity within change. Because of the possibility of repetitive exposure, a pre-recorded archive removes some of these imperfections, and enhances the risk of producing Xeroxes and even caricatures.

With a much larger volume of each departed musician's archive being commercially available, there is bound to emerge a breed of musicians which can adopt, from archival music, the principles of music making, and evolve an expression without the need to ape the archival cliche. Even if this prospect did not exist, this risk need not bother us because the Hindustani tradition has always refused to grant any credibility to Xeroxes. Moreover, for every hundred Xeroxes, the tradition would still be capable of producing one brilliant original.

The other obvious consequence of the emerging scenario is the possibility of aspirants indiscriminately absorbing a multiplicity of stylistic influences from archival sources. This has the potential for shaping music that is no more than an incoherent patchwork of cliches, lacking in substance. But, since we cannot wish away the onslaught of technology, we might look at the more acceptable possibilities arising from it. History will bear witness that the Hindustani tradition has consistently produced great originals who could integrate diverse influences into an aesthetically coherent whole. Indeed, the greatest names in pre-Independence music were, almost without exception, disciples of multiple stylistic lineages.

The intervention of technology in effect enables the Hindustani tradition to resume the transmission of aesthetic values and the skills of musicianship, disrupted for over two generations because of a growing shortage of competent gurus. Even if the conditions for the exploitation of archival material as a pedagogical device are not ideal, its availability on a commercial scale constitutes a definite empowerment of every aspiring musician.

Optimism about the intelligent, rather than mindless, utilization of the archival resource is justified by the emerging profile of musicians. Increasingly, professional musicians belong to highly educated families, and have acquired significant academic credentials, though not necessarily in music. They have the intellect, and the keenness, to establish an interactive relationship with scholarship in the field of music, and to acquaint themselves with its output. Such a profile greatly reduces the risk of absurd results.

The Big Picture

Essentially, the archival revival movement corrects a significant discontinuity imposed on the Hindustani music tradition by the growing shortage of competent teachers in the post-Independence period. In the cultural process, the forces of continuity have now been strength-

ened through an infusion of a powerful source of traditional aesthetic values. As recording companies encash the commercial opportunities opened up by the demographic patterns of the market, Hindustani music could now be revitalized by the restoration of the continuity, which was lost during the second half of the twentieth century. Contemporary musicians may now find it possible, and even necessary, to forge a stronger link between the music of the present and the music of the past. Such a link may become a prerequisite to establishing their credibility amongst the influentials of the music market. The forward march of romanticism and post-modernist tendencies could now be arrested, at least for the moment. These pressures are primarily the creations of the technologies of acoustic restoration of archival recordings, and the feasibility of their low-cost commercialization and distribution on a national scale.

This phenomenon also has larger implications for the contemporary music-scape, which the contemporary musician should welcome, rather than fear. The present music scene reveals three categories of impoverishment in comparison with the pre-Independence era. The variety of genres represented by quality musicianship has shrunk drastically. The pre-modern Dhrupad and the semi-classical Thumri, for instance, stand considerably depleted. Within each genre, there is a diminution in the variety of gharanas represented by quality musicianship. And, across genres and gharanas, the total number of ragas and Bandisas being performed on the concert platform, or available on pre-recorded media, is dwindling. All these losses may be partially recovered by the return of vintage music to the shelves of the music stores.

A serious musician, at any level of accomplishment, remains forever a student of music. He seeks and values a "reference library" that aids the ideational process, and enables him to enrich the musical product that he delivers. To this extent, the accelerated commercialization of archival music can be expected to enrich the totality of the environment for Hindustani music through its influence on listeners as well as contemporary musicians.

What we are witnessing today is a market-driven phenomenon. The logic of the recording companies will necessarily be different from that of those who are concerned about the preservation and revival of the artistic tradition. The music community can, therefore, expect only limited and slow benefits from the initiatives of the recording companies. If faster or sharply focused results are desired, the music community will have to take the initiative in converting the rewards of technology into a trigger for a veritable renaissance.

A REQUIEM FOR THE GHARANAS

Over the last half a century, stylistic pedigree and genealogy have emerged as the least clearly understood, and the most insidiously exploited facet of our musical culture. The truth or otherwise of gharana claims made by individual musicians is not the issue, because these are verifiable in every case. The issue is whether the claims carry any substance in terms of

musical value, and what we may legitimately infer from gharana linkages in the contemporary context.

What is a Gharana?

The word gharana is used to denote a distinctive style of rendering raga-based music in the modern genres of Hindustani music. The gharana system or tradition is most clearly defined in the Khayal genre of vocalism, and has been a formidable force in shaping Hindustani music for two centuries. The gharanas had their forerunners in the four *banis* (literally, dialects) of medieval Dhrupad music, which ruled Hindustani art-music between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries. But, even pre-Dhrupad music recognized several *matas* (literally, ideologies), acknowledging the existence of diversity.

Stylistic diversity in musical expression is virtually written into the script of Indian culture because of the large number of racial-ethnic-linguistic groups that inhabit the subcontinent. A degree of homogeneity was probably achieved during the Mogul era, when musician communities were concentrated in and around Delhi, and were supported by the patronage of the Imperial court. After the Mogul Empire disintegrated, musicians migrated to the smaller principalities under British protection in search of alternative patronage. Once art music was allowed to intermingle with the local cultures under conditions of relative isolation, the essential diversity of Indian culture re-surfaced effortlessly and got crystallized in the form of gharanas.

Considering the powerful forces working in favour of diversity, it is truly remarkable that the essential core of Hindustani music has remained uniform throughout non-peninsular India, and stable for centuries, with diversity manifested largely in the manner of rendition. The melodic and rhythmic content of Hindustani music originates in the ragas and talas of the system, which are common to all *banis* of Dhrupad and the gharanas of post-Dhrupad genres. The architecture of raga-presentation is determined by the genre that is performed. It is only in the manner and mode of rendition that the tradition exhibits considerable diversity. This diversity needed names for identification. The word gharana emerged as the most appropriate for this purpose.

The word gharana is derived from *ghara* (house/home, from the Sanskrit noun: *grha*). In Hindi and Urdu, gharana is a collective noun denoting those who live under the same roof; therefore, a family, a lineage, a clan. The first significance of the term is thus derived from heredity, or ties of kinship.

The names of gharanas are most commonly the names of places, such as Agra, Rampur, Gwalior, Jaipur, Atrauli, Kirana, Indore, etc. The second significance of the term, therefore, derives from the place of origin. Because the nomenclature implies the existence of distinguishing features, it recognizes that the distinctiveness of each gharana is attributable, in considerable measure, to its place of origin.

Gharanas named after their places of origin almost always have the names of one, sometimes two, towering personalities treated either as their founders, or landmark personalities. The Kirana gharana of the Khayal is, for instance, associated with the name of Abdul Kareem

Khan, considered the fountainhead of the distinctive style. Likewise, the Jaipur-Atrauli gharana of Khayal reveres Alladiya Khan as its founder, and the Etawah gharana of the *sitar* and *surabahar* treats Imdad Khan as its landmark personage.

Thus, we have three different, historical factors, converging to define a gharana as a stylistic distinctiveness or an ideology of music making, exhibiting signs of continuity over several generations. In plain language, once upon a time, there was a great musician, whose music was different from those who lived in other villages or cities. He groomed his sons as musicians and they sang a lot like him; and their music was also different from the music of those who lived in other places, and in the same respect as their father's was. And, this went on for several generations, as long as conditions were favourable.

Favourable Conditions

This caveat is important—"as long as conditions were favourable." Conditions do change, and often change radically enough to nullify the cultural meaning we attach to certain historical facts. This is why we need to examine the conditions that favoured the perpetuation of certain well-defined styles in the rendition of Hindustani music.

The scrutiny must relate to the basic notions defining gharanas. It is easy to appreciate the appearance of a great musician whose style influenced many other musicians of his own generation as well as the next. But, beyond this, the phenomenon requires some exploration. Why did the sons and nephews of musicians need, or want, to become musicians? And, why did the style of a musician from Gwalior, and his sons and nephews, need to be, or end up becoming, distinctly different from that of their corresponding generations from Agra or Jaipur?

Hereditary musicianship was a creation of genetic, familial, as well as economic factors. Genetic factors were conducive to the transmission of the musical sensibility, subject to the naturally determined pattern of probabilities. The risks associated with this mode of transmission were systematically reduced by a preference for marital alliances between the progeny of professional musicians. The concern for this risk was so great, especially amongst Muslims, that the community of professional musicians even permitted marriage between first cousins. The notion of the art as an asset, and the desire to keep it "in the family" encouraged in-breeding.

The children of musicians thus grew up in an environment dominated by the practice of music. Familial factors ensured that a great deal of learning of music took place involuntarily. The voluntary aspect of hereditary musicianship responded to the attractions of feudal patronage. The employment of *nawabs*, *maharajas*, and *zamindars* under British protection, promised lifelong economic security, and constituted the most attractive market for musicians. Patrons were few and the supply of talent was unlimited, resulting in an intensely competitive situation for musicians.

The greatest amongst musicians were, of course, wooed by the most powerful amongst princes; but the rest struggled for survival. The "market" for art music was too small to

support its pursuance as an independent self-employed profession. Under these conditions, it was natural that patronage be regarded as an "asset" to be protected and, if possible, bequeathed to direct descendants. The incentive for doing so arose from the lack of widespread access to formal education, and the predominantly feudal-agrarian economy, which severely limited career options.

For musicians enjoying feudal patronage, the chances of bequeathing the patronage asset were perceived to be the greatest if they could turn their children into their own musical clones. The patron's heir, also chosen by heredity, and aesthetically nurtured on the senior musician's art, would—in all likelihood—also accept the heir to the musician's stylistic legacy. This likelihood made it attractive for the sons of musicians to be inducted early into the ownership of the art-asset and put through a rigorous process of aesthetic indoctrination. This process struck deep roots in the musical culture because the "market"—feudal patrons—rewarded its products. It often became a matter of "national" pride. A king could legitimately boast of his army, his elephants, his jewels, his palaces and even his gharana of music.

Even without its cloning intentions, hereditary musicianship would have qualified as an eminently suitable vehicle for the Hindustani tradition, which requires the musician to perform the simultaneous roles of composer and performer. The demands of this duality have grown exponentially over the second millennium, as the role of the pre-composed element has shrunk, and that of the improvised elements has grown. As a corollary, the notion of a raga has risen to progressively higher levels of abstraction. The combination of these tendencies has left the art with no effective mode of transmission other than the aural. Involuntary familial exposure to the art during the most formative years, accompanied or followed by a voluntary submission to the rigours of grooming, was therefore uniquely promising as a pedagogical culture.

Predictably, heredity could not retain exclusive control over the music world for long. Despite the painstaking "genetic engineering" practised by professional musicians—and perhaps also because of it—heredity turned out to be an unreliable guarantee of musicianship potential. In all probability, patronage also became progressively disenchanted with heredity, and more categorically committed to musicianship. Therefore, with the exhortation of patrons, and often under their orders, musicians began to groom promising talent beyond the orbit of kinship. But, since the nature of the art demanded intensive and involuntary exposure, and the "market" demanded stylistic continuity, the mentor-pupil relationship cast itself into the parent-child model of co-habitation, and total subordination verging on servility.

Although stylistic cloning was the explicit intent of this art transmission system, it could not possibly have been its result. In addition to the "generation gap," such as might have existed, three imperfections inherent to aural transmission took care of the element of change—imperfect perception, imperfect retention, and imperfect reproduction. Therefore, by and large, the system did not produce clones; but it did produce musicians who explicitly attempted continuity, while inevitably representing change. Depending on the quality of talent

each gharana produced, the strong bias towards continuity resulted in the progressive refinement and enrichment of the salient features of its style, in addition to giving the music a greater degree of aesthetic coherence. These processes yielded a variety of musical styles defined by a genealogy of tutelage, only partially coinciding with heredity.

Such an outcome was possible because, by and large, each lineage pursued its special interests relatively insulated from other lineages. Partial protection against dilution and disorientation came from the self-righteous and dogmatic attitudes that were cultivated during the period of grooming. These fortifications worked because of the appalling backwardness of the country in terms of transport and communications. Even early twentieth century accounts of great musicians report that they took leave of their princely employers to go on concert tours, that could last several months, and even a couple of years.

The Golden Age of Hindustani Music

The gharanas thus came to be distinctive stylistic lineages of post-Dhrupad art music, shaped by feudal patronage, heredity, a rigorous pedagogical environment relying substantially on aesthetic indoctrination, and a backward economy starved of education, career options, transport and communications. The result they delivered was a variety of distinct musical styles within the same genre of music, with each style possessing an aesthetic coherence arising from a set of fundamentally held and assiduously cultivated musical values. The distinctive features of the gharanas have been the subject of considerable scholarly attention.

V.H. Deshpande (1987 2nd edn.) offers a conceptual framework for the aesthetic classification of the gharanas of Khayal music. He classifies gharana styles on a continuum defined by rhythmic orientation and melodic orientation as the two polarities. Amongst the gharanas considered by him, he places the Agra at the rhythmic orientation polarity, and Kirana at the melodic orientation polarity. At the exact mid-point of the continuum, he places Alladiya (Jaipur-Atrauli) as a complex fusion, and Gwalior as a simple fusion of the two orientations. Patiala is placed towards the melodic orientation pole, but considerably short of Kirana. The Indore/Bhindi Bazar gharana of Ameer Khan, falls between Patiala and Kirana, close to the melodic orientation pole.

This blossoming of the Khayal genre in various hues and fragrances, represented by towering musicianship in all the gharanas, made it possible for the century preceding India's Independence (1947), to be described as the "Golden Age of Hindustani music." However, the gharana system had exposed its limitations even before Independence.

Chinks in the Armour

Deshpande (1987) points out, with stunning validity, that the greatest vocalists of the Golden Age had been, almost without exception, disciples of multiple gharanas. Evidently, the gharana system was incapable of supporting the flowering of true genius, and forced it to seek a diversity of exposure in search of its own voice. This phenomenon suggested that stylistic loyalty to a single gharana was no guarantee of quality musicianship and could,

indeed, be an inhibitor of exceptional potential in so highly individualistic an art as Hindustani music.

Chinks in the gharana armour expanded into gaping holes from the dawn of the twentieth century, when the print and electronic media weakened the hold of the personalized guru-sisya relationship over the art-transmission process.

In the first quarter of the century, V.N. Bhatkhande published his near-encyclopaedic re-interpretation and documentation of the Hindustani music tradition. From a pedagogical perspective, the most important aspects of his work were the development of an eminently usable notation system, the documentation of raga grammar, and the publication of a large repertoire of Bandisas with notations. His contemporary, Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, also published highly reliable documentation of raga grammar and Bandisas. Paluskar, however, made a more immediate impact on the accessibility of musical knowledge and performing skills by setting up Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, India's first music university. In its early years, this university trained a virtual army of musical missionaries to run music schools all over the country.

Collectively, Bhatkhande and Paluskar provided a large part of the knowledge-base and the institutional framework to create an alternative pedagogical environment. They partially liberated the art transmission process from the one-to-one, personalized, guru-sisya relationship. But, even within the one-to-one relationship, they freed it partially from aural transmission. Their work enabled ample and unselective access to musical knowledge, made it less dependent on aural transmission, took some of the tyranny out of the teacher-taught relationship, and thus weakened the forces, which created the "cloning effect" characteristic of the gharana phenomenon.

The momentum of homogenizing forces in the musical culture was greatly enhanced by the appearance of the radio and the gramophone record in the early years of the twentieth century. The electronic media ended the isolation of the different gharanas from each other by making the music of every musician accessible to every other musician and aspirant to musicianship. These media also enlarged the market for art music. By the time the cost-effective audio-cassette made its appearance with concert-length recordings in the 1960s, pre- recorded music was emerging as a "virtual guru." Hereafter, technology and commerce worked in tandem to demolish traditional barriers to the acquisition of musical knowledge and skills, talent's entry into musicianship, and to the public's access to music.

However, even before this development, Independence and the launch of a parliamentary democracy had demolished the bulwark of the gharana system—the feudal aristocracy. The demise of the feudal aristocracy was far more significant than is commonly recognized. In addition to the dispossession of a patron class, this transition took away an important quality control mechanism operating in Hindustani music. In the feudal era, only the finest musicians secured sinecures of patronage. And, once they were appointed in the service of a court, they became models of musicianship for the laity, with the most promising talent within their territories gravitating to them for grooming. This process of automatic

matching of talent to opportunity took a beating when the princely states were abolished.

Democratic India forced musicians to migrate from the smaller towns to the big cities. Economic development started offering musicians' children alternative career options. Heredity, already abandoned as the exclusive entry criterion, gave way to a talent-based selection system for grooming. But, the anonymity of urban life could not guarantee the automatic gravitation of the most promising talent towards the greatest musicianship. Even when such relationships did get forged, the stresses of managing self-employment left the greatest musicians depleted of energy and time for teaching. With the best of intentions, the rigorous institution of personalized tutoring, that had sustained the gharana system in the feudal context, could not be supported in the urban context.

These factors, coupled with easier access to music through the electronic media, corroded the two most important features of the gharana system—stylistic distinctiveness of the different gharanas, and the aesthetic coherence in the music of each musician nurtured by a gharana. These trends obliged Prof. Bonnie Wade (1984) to observe that the epitaph for the gharana system was about to be written, if it had not been written already. This observation was valid not only for Khayal vocalism, for which it was intended, but also for the lineages of instrumental music, which have exhibited a comparatively lower level of stylistic diversity.

The Gharana "Brands" Today

In the contemporary context, then, what does it mean, when a musician claims your attention as a stylistic descendant of Miyan Tansen, or as the twentieth generation in an unbroken lineage of musicians?

First, what it does mean. It means that the musician has not drifted into music purely because of heredity, or by the absence of alternative careers, but chosen music as a voluntary pursuit. It also means that he has submitted himself to apprenticeship under an "authorized" teacher of a particular gharana, and has been formally accepted into it. It implies that he accepts his accountability for adherence to the stylistic features for which his lineage is known.

Now, let us consider what his claim does not necessarily mean. It does not mean that his tutelage with his guru has been sufficiently long and intensive for him to internalize the aesthetic coherence and stylistic distinctiveness for which the lineage is respected. And, it can certainly not mean that his music is substantially free from all stylistic influences other than seniors of his own lineage.

A majority of musicians born in free India will be embarrassed into silence by this interpretation of their gharana claims. Amongst the leading Khayal vocalists of the younger generation, there is, admittedly, still a reasonable presence of gharana linkages. In most cases, however, either the tutelage links are tenuous, or the lineages themselves are stylistically blurred, or the music flouts the hallmarks of the professed gharana. These facts do not detract from their outstanding musicianship on dimensions of aesthetic coherence or stylistic distinctiveness. But they do demonstrate the marginalisation of the gharana

as a determinant of style.

From the trends we observe, we are obliged to infer that, increasingly, the lineage of a musician can only be as relevant as that of a lawyer or a medical specialist, whom we, in India, trust in relation to his heredity, education, and apprenticeship. What do we need to know before we permit any of them to prove their worth to us? Whose son is he? What is his education? Whose student/apprentice is/was he? Did his father/mentor have a track record of producing illustrious proteges? What is/was his father's/mentor's specialization? And, what is his specialization?

Even if all these questions are answered satisfactorily for a musician, they do not, and cannot, establish a musician's talent, competence and integrity, any more than that of a lawyer or a surgeon. These, we can assess only by the manner in which they conduct themselves, and the competence with which they relate to our needs. This is, no doubt, bad news for music lovers who are looking for easy short-cuts to assessing musicianship, and imagined gharana affiliations to be the key to it. Their only consolation is that misjudging musicianship is far less hazardous than misjudging the competence of a medical or a legal consultant.

Beyond two generations of probable relevance, gharanas are now little more than misleading history for audiences, and an academic indulgence for critics. This truth calls for neither lament, nor rejoicing. Hindustani music is built on the foundations of continuity within change. This reality will remain operative as long as Hindustani music remains an improvisation-dominant tradition, impossible to transmit without a substantial dependence on the aural experience. The same is true of stylistic diversity. It existed before the gharanas emerged, and will remain as long as India remains a multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-linguistic subcontinent.

With the fading away of the gharanas, one model of continuity and diversity is being driven into history by political, social and economic changes. An alternative model, or perhaps a multiplicity of models is replacing the gharana model, even if the emerging configuration of forces cannot yet be conceptualized. In the future, as in the past, the balance between continuity and change, and between homogeneity and diversity, will be decided by how audiences want art-music to relate to the world around them, and to their inner worlds.