PREFACE

Improvisation as the fundamental principle and primary tool for the development of the raaga in Hindustani Classical Music has always fascinated me. Therefore, it automatically came to the fore when I decided to do research so as to relook at this technically well explored, yet philosophically, sociologically and psychologically near uncharted territory or phenomenon of music. In so doing one has had to trace back to certain key pathbreaking factors and happenings in the history of North Indian Classical Music that have indeed decided its future course, eventually moulding it to its present state and form. This has made for some riveting exploration and study both from the written word as well as exchanges and interviews, some of which are also recorded digitally on CD in MP3 format. In this regard the first and formost name that comes to my mind is that of the Late Dr. Bimal Roy, the poineering musicologist of Bengal under whose direct tutelage and guidance I have collected and collated invaluable information and insight relating to my chosen topic for a period of over three years before his passing away in 1994. As a result of this a major portion of this thesis contains many findings, interpretations and ideas of Dr. Bimal Roy’s years of dedicated personal research.
I must acknowledge the contributions of many celebrated senior musicians, musicologists and fellow artistes who have inspired, given valuable information and ideas, as also suitable demonstrations as examples relating to this topic starting with my respected guru, Padmabhusan Dr. Prabha Atre, the profundity of whose original ideas have influenced me deeply Dr. M.R. Gautam and Shri Raghavendra Rao for their valuable and enlightening inputs about the nifty gritty of Carnatic Music. Dr. C.M. Rath for valuable inputs and insight into Western Classical Music. Shri Kalyan S. Roy for folk music particularly that of Bengal, the libraries of NCPA, Mumbai, SNDT Women's University, Mumbai and ITC SRA, Kolkata. And above all, Prof. Anupam Mahajan for taking time off from her busy routine and guiding this work with valuable suggestions and inputs as and when necessary.

Purpose of study:

The purpose of this study is to understand the nature, scope and consequence of this phenomenon through a thorough examination of the various material ---- either documented or present in oral tradition, available to us. To evaluate the primary and secondary sources and the differences within their respective approaches if any from various angles. See to what extent the enlisted and described tools of alankaran (ornamentation) are being employed today. To find out whether or not any hitherto unknown elements have come into present day improvisation vis a vis Hindustani music.

To understand and chronicle the myriad types of improvisation Empirically and ascertain their relevance to a particular song form / more than one song form and / or gharaana or school of musical thought and expression. Also, their relevance to a society, culture and sub culture, eg. as experienced in places of religious nature like Hindu matths, temples and havelis, Sikh gurudwaaras, Muslim dargaahs, then common jalsaaas, auditorium soirees, street shows, dance parlours, hotels and bars etc. etc.

Attempt will also be made to critically evaluate on parameters of authenticity of genre and style, recorded music of classical, semi classical and even light categories that may fall under the broader classification of
Hindustani music. Film music, however, will not be included due to its essentially hibridised nature.

**Aims and Objectives of the study:**

To evaluate the various improvisational tools and techniques that constitute the ‘arsenal’ or stock material of improvisational tools a gharaana or individual may use to enhance or optimize his / her / its performance. A style / gharaana is also the deciding factor as to how and when such ‘arsenal’ may be used and to what extent. Besides quantity, the style concerned also governs the qualitative aspects of such usage, *eg.* if *gamaks* and *zamzamaas* are being employed, how vigorous or soft, fast, moderately fast or slow they might be. Thus, this work will also endeavour to study the finer points and demands of a style, whether individual or that of a recognized gharaana or anga (अंग). True, these are out and out empirical (of practical category) in nature, but despite limitations, effort will be made to document them as best as possible in this endeavour.

Sincere effort will also be made to enumerate and analyze the myriad alankaars, both varna yukta as well as varnaatirikta (those ornaments / embellishments that are based around varnas or small set of notes and those without ), and gamaks found in the various texts by way of illustration. Two exhaustive appendices will be prepared for the above
stated purposes. These will also serve as ready material for further research on this subject.

**Primary sources:**

Since this is an empirical subject, it is the first hand sources such as interviews with performers and authorities of various *genres* of ‘raaga sangeet’, *i.e.*, *khayaal, thhumri, dhrupad etc.* as well as the lighter forms like *daadraa, ghazal, quawwaali* and *bhajan* that are often associated with the pure classical forms mentioned above either structurally or as finishing / last concert items, that will mainly feature under this heading. As *khayaal* is the principal representative *genre* of Hindustani classical music today, a critical analysis of the philosophy, quality and quantity of improvisation in the main *gharaanas* available will be attempted on an empirical, first hand basis as well as the material – written and / or recorded, available on them.

**Secondary sources:**

Will be the texts, mainly medieval, in Sanskrit, Persian and Urdu as well as relevant recorded music. Some of the texts are: ---

* Sangeet Ratnaakar by Sharangadev (13th century AD)
* Sangeetopnishadasaar by Sudhaakalash (14th century AD)
* Sangeetsaar by Harinayak (15th century AD)
* Sangeet Paarijaat by Ahobal (16th century AD)
* Raaga Darpan by Fakirullah (17th century AD)
Raaga Tarangini by Lochan Jha (17th century AD)

Sarmaa-e-Ishrat by Sadiq Ali Khan (Seni Gharaanaa){1756}

Raaga Tarang by Radha Mohan Sen (1818)

Additions and omissions to the above list will remain open until completion of the proposed thesis.

Methodology:

After attempting a proper scientific definition of ‘improvisation’ at the very outset, this work will proceed to outline its path along the lines specific to Hindustani classical music which, as the title suggests, is the core of this study. An attempt will be made to conduct a historical survey of the above mentioned and other relevant ancient and medieval texts that may also serve as performance manuals. The proposed thesis will further proceed to enumerate and examine the various aspects of the numerous alankaars, alankarans, gamaks and taanas enlisted and described in these texts as tools of embellishment, ornamentation and expression, all of which fall under the broad category of improvisation.

This work will further seek to explore the various important avenues of Hindustani Art music’s unique phenomenon, viz., improvisation. Thus, psychological considerations, sociological aspects, aesthetic angles involved in the process of music making which, in the case of Hindustani art music, is the same as improvisation.
As mentioned earlier, improvisation related to style or gharaanaa will be critically analyzed to ascertain how the demands of a particular style shapes a performance and leads to its suitable accessorization through their choice of graces, kaaku (flavour of expression), ornaments, note phrases, note clusters and taanas.

Comparison between improvisation within genres of Hindustani classical song forms, Hindustani classical music and Western classical music, Hindustani music and Carnatic music inter alia, will be tackled further on in the proposed thesis.

Chapterization:

Introduction: This chapter will, among other things, primarily deal with the scope of the proposed thesis. It will also acquaint the reader with the background of the subject matter.

I. Kinds of improvisation: This chapter will endeavour to cover the various types of improvisation falling under the broad categories of Planned and Creative Improvisation.

Techniques of improvisation: It is but natural that in a system of music as sophisticated as Hindustani raaga sangeet many intelligent and creatively enriching techniques will be employed in its aesthetic and content matter development. Sincere effort will be made to enumerate and analyze these in a scientific manner. Some such techniques consist of
improvisation through (a) varying note lengths (b) changing order of the notes (c) changing direction (d) varying rhythmic patterns (e) varying timbre and vowels (f) varying volume dynamics etc. etc.

**Psychological basis of improvisation:** The mainstay of this chapter will be improvisation resulting from the subconscious mind. One of the major aims of this chapter will be to examine and analyse how differences within learning patterns affect a musician’s performance capabilities and creative output.

**II. Sociological Context of Improvisation Aesthetics:** Dealing mainly with sensibilities, socio-cultural or group-bound, that are crucial in the shaping up of a performance. As Hindustani classical music performances are essentially interactive and quite dependent upon audience reaction that serves, to all practical purposes, as dialogue between the performer and the listeners. This automatically would lead to issues like social utility and relevance of improvisation.

**Improvisation in different Gharaanaas & styles:** This chapter may well be an extension of the previous one in some respects as the celebrated gharaanaas of Hindustani classical music espoused and propagated their individual musical philosophies and styles mainly with the help of such techniques and tools of improvisation that they believed in, and which in turn, despite certain commonalities, set them apart from one another.
Only the five major gharaanaas of khayaal gaayaki which is the most popular representative genre of Hindustani vocal music today and has been so for almost a couple of centuries now, are being chosen for an in-depth study of their improvisation techniques including certain whys and wherefroms. These are:

- the Gwalior gharaanaa
- the Aagraa gharaanaa
- the Kiraana gharaanaa
- the Jaipur - Atrauli / Allaadiya Khan gharaanaa
- the Patiala gharaanaa.

Some light on the improvisational tools of string instruments of the medieval period as per the Vaadanbheda given by the erstwhile musicologists and authors of the likes of Ahobil, Somnath and the gamaks of Shaarangdev, Paarshwadev and Saadiq Ali Khan will also be thrown by way of analytical enumeration. Further on, this thesis also seeks to examine the two major contemporary sitar gharaanaas, viz. the Maihar and the Imdaadkhani / Etaawah gharaanaas, in detail.

**III. Comparative improvisation:** The proposed thesis will further strive to evaluate improvisation on a comparative basis between (a) Indian and Western musics (b) khayal and dhrupad (c) khayal and thumri (d)
Hindustani classical and light, folk and tribal musics and (e) Hindustani and Carnatic music.

IV. **Improvisation through *Alankaar* and *Alankaran***: It is well known that in classical Indian music improvisation occurs primarily through *Alankaar* – clusters of note patterns and *Alankaran* – graces that land mood and character to notes. An attempt will be made to make an exhaustive enumeration of such types given in ancient medieval and relatively modern texts.

V. **Improvisation through *Taans***: On similar lines of the previous chapter this too will seek to enumerate types of *taans* given in the texts.

Since the nature of this proposed thesis is basically empirical or practical oriented, there is not much scope of arriving at a conclusion or drawing some sort of inference, except perhaps, that our hypothesis or initial premise that Hindustani Art music is essentially and substantially improvisational, is proved, authenticated and suitably reinforced.

I am hopeful that this proposed work, which for me is a labour of love, will be recognised as an authentic piece of research and prove to be of much help to future researchers as well as musicians and music lovers.