INTRODUCTION

It is well known that Hindustani Art/ classical music is fundamentally improvisational. This means that the performer enjoys a great deal of freedom in creating his own musical patterns and colour/ kind of presentation in the developmental process of the song form or musical piece within the framework of _raaga_ and _taala_. These, together with other important factors such as the chosen _laya_ ( tempo ), _gharaana_ ( the overall style or school ) of the performer, _etc_. go a long way in defining the boundaries within which the performer is free to create according to his cognitive, imaginative and psycho-motor resources.

It can be said that improvisation is the very essence, the soul of Hindustani or North Indian Art music\(^1\) where, in a _raaga_ performance of say, about an hour, its pre-composed portion is hardly of about five to ten minutes, where as the improvised or gradual systematic extemporization, of course, within the perimeter of the concerned _raaga_ and _taala_, amounts to the rest, _i.e_., roughly around ninety to ninety five per cent of the recital. It is through this

\(^1\) North India abounds in a considerably wide variety of music, dance, theatre and other performing arts. For the purposes of the present work, North India may be taken to mean the whole geographic territory falling in India to the north of Hubli – Dharwar in Karnataka. It thus includes the northern part of Karnataka, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Orissa, Gujarat, Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, the north-eastern states, Sikkim, Punjab, Himachal Pradesh, Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir. This vast area has an extremely rich musical tradition and wealth, comprising not only art music but also a huge variety of folk music, tribal music and specific regional music in most places, having large popular following and patronage, such as Rabindrasangit, Nazrulgeeti, Kirtan and many other varieties in West Bengal, Bhajan, Geet, Ghasal, Naat and Quawwali in Uttar Pradesh, Tappa, Shabad etc in Punjab, Natyageet, Bhavgeet and Lavani in Maharashtra, and so on. If other present day forms of music like movie music, modern or "Adhunik" music including regional pop/band music, "revolutionary" and patriotic music, advertisement jingles etc. --- all in several regional languages --- are also considered, the list would become truly mind boggling.
very process that the germ of a musical idea / ideas is developed in accordance with the musical form in question as well as the performer’s style and capacity, so that it flowers into a bouquet of alluring musical motifs that make for an artistically successful, enriching performance or concert presentation.

Music is defined as an art, entertainment, or other human activity which involves organized sound. Definitions vary as music, like art, is a subjectively perceived phenomenon and has been attempted to be defined by philosophers, scientists, linguists, teachers, composers, lexicographers, semiologists and musicians.

Music, in general, is organized in time and consists of pitch, timbre, rhythm and harmony. Indian classical music, however, is principally based on melody and rhythm and not on harmony, chords, counterpoint, modulation and other foundations of Western classical music. The twin concept of raaga (a complex melodic structure comprising melodic phrases and other related principles that are difficult to describe quickly) and taala (cyclical rhythm) is India’s gift to the world. Organizing musical sound is universally considered to be part of composition and improvisation.

It is mostly accepted that the present form of Raaga Sangeet or Hindustani classical music is an Indian music tradition that took shape in the northern Indian subcontinent circa the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries AD in the courts of the Delhi Sultanate mainly from an already existing “Maargi” tradition, moderately formalized Gandharvic musical and theatrical performance practices, as well as some “Deshi’ or essentially folk concepts.
However, in the parallel and more rigidly formalized ancient Vedic tradition, the practice of singing based on musical notes was prevalent right from the Vedic times where the hymns of the sacred Hindu text, the *Saama Veda* were sung and not chanted.

Developing a strong and diverse tradition over several centuries, Hindustani Art music has branched out into contemporary traditions established primarily in India but also in Pakistan and Bangladesh that were part of India before its historic Partition in 1947. In contrast to Carnatic music, the other mainstream Indian classical music tradition that is primarily kriti (Hindu religious composition comprising song text set to raaga and taala) based and basically practiced in the four southern states of India, Hindustani Art music was not only influenced by ancient Hindu musical traditions, Vedic philosophy and native Indian sounds but also by the Persian performance practices of the Mughals who ruled India for centuries and patronized the various arts including Art music.

Outside South Asia, Hindustani classical music is often associated synonymously with Indian music, as it is arguably the most popular stream of Indian music outside the subcontinent.

This doctoral thesis seeks to study the nature and techniques of improvisation in Hindustani classical music. Although the term “Hindustani” classical music has not been formally defined anywhere, it has customarily come to mean the serious art music of north India. A custom gains sanctity and
is considered acceptable for the purposes of formal academic study when it satisfies the following two conditions:

I. It must be of immemorial antiquity — no one must be able to definitely recall when and under what circumstances the custom originated, and

II. It must have universal following.²

Since both the above stated conditions are satisfied when applied to the meaning as authoritative, and will be so done in this doctoral work.

Next, the term “classical” may be clarified in the context of this thesis. In Western music, “classical” has two meanings: one particular and the other general. In its particular sense, classical music refers to music composed during the period between 1750 A.D. and 1830 A.D.,³ which was the so-called “classical” period of Western art, literature and music. In its general sense, however, classical music means “art” music, in contradistinction to folk music, pop, rock and jazz music or even movie music. Thus, at the risk of using somewhat obsolete terminology, it may be said that classical music generally means “court” music, meant for the royalty and the nobility. It is “learned” music, and even “bourgeois” music and not the music of the proletariat. In essence, it is “grammar based” music. In India, the expression “classical” music is used in this general sense, called, as it is, “Shaastriya Sangeet”, meaning music created along the lines dictated by formalized and established

² The word, ‘custom’ is a technical one, and is the subject of close scrutiny in such disciplines as sociology, anthropology and jurisprudence. The characteristics of custom cited here are well known ones, vide any standard authority on jurisprudence like Dias, Salmond, Bodenheimer, etc.

³ Refer any standard work on the history of Western music, such as William Lovelock’s ‘History of Music’ or the entry under ‘style’ in Collins Encyclopedia of Music by Westrup and Harrison (1976).
rules of musicology and aesthetics. As such, it reveals a few peculiar characteristics, *viz.* ----

1. Unlike folk music, it is not music by the unlettered for the unlettered. Here “unlettered” means, of course, “musically unlettered”. Classical music demands a fairly long period of very intensive training for music making; likewise, it is only the “knowledgeable” listener who can appreciate it fully.

2. It reflects Gandharvic influences and traditions in the sense that it is formalized largely according to natural acoustic principles of sound, such as the principle of ‘Samvaad’.4

3. It has not only been handed down through the ages by means of an oral tradition but has also, at every period of its evolution and development, been the subject of intensive scholarly analysis in many authoritative musicological texts such as the Naatyashastra, Brhaddeshi, Dattilam, Sangeet Ratnakar, Sangeet Paarijaat, Maanasollaas, Hrdayprakaash and many more.5

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4 Gandharvic laws of music such as the division of the octave into twenty-two *shrutis* and adherence to them in the course of raga presentation, rules of *vadi, samvadi, vivadi* notes, time theory, and so on are scattered all through the famous musicological Texts, listed in (5) below.

5 A detailed list of such Texts is neither necessary nor practicable here. However, some important ones are: ----

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Text</th>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Dated (Century)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Naaradiya Shiksha</td>
<td>Naarad</td>
<td>4th B.C.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Naatyashastra</td>
<td>Bharat</td>
<td>2nd B.C. to 4th A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Brhaddeshi</td>
<td>Matang</td>
<td>5th A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Bharat Bhaashiyam</td>
<td>Naanyadev</td>
<td>10th A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Abhilaashitaarth Chintaamani</td>
<td>Someshwar</td>
<td>12th A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>or Maanasollaas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Sangeet Choodamani</td>
<td>Jagadekamalla</td>
<td>12th A.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Sangeet Ratnaakar</td>
<td>Shaarangdev</td>
<td>13th A.D.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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4. It is music that is not merely “based on” raagas, but is truly representative of the raagas themselves as it actually involves their very elaboration or musical development. As such, it is almost entirely improvisational.

The last point in the preceding discussion leads directly to the subject matter of this thesis, which is, as already enunciated, concerned with the domain of improvisation. Improvisation, also called extemporization, in the case of music, refers, as the very term implies, to the art of creating music without preparation. And, in Hindustani classical / raaga music improvisation is of paramount importance. In fact, the mettle and caliber of a performer may well be judged chiefly by his or her ability to improvise, and improvise well.⁶

Of course, even though classical Hindustani music is fundamentally improvisational, so that the performer enjoys considerable freedom in creating his or her own personalized musical patterns, thereby infusing the colour of his / her individuality into the presentation, it should be remembered that

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⁶ In a concert of, say, one hour, the actual effective time taken in presenting the fixed composition or bandish may be no more than, say, five to ten minutes; the rest of the time is spent in improvising.
unfettered licence is not allowed in the process of spontaneous creation. The creation must be, at all times, disciplined creation; not only should it be grammatically correct from the viewpoint of the *raaga* and *taala* in force at that time but should also be aesthetically sound from the viewpoint of that which pleases the qualified and sensitive listener. This thesis has among its aims a review of this discipline of improvisation, and, where applicable, the evaluation thereof.

Musical improvisation per se is a fairly complex phenomenon as it is a function of several variables, such as ----

1. The ‘cognitive domain’: The intellectual ability / knowledge of the performer ---- How intellectually sound is his / her music in performance? How facile and original is his conceptualization for example, his / her productivity of musically stimulating ideas in weaving note and rhythmic permutations as also in building the general framework of the form. How logical is his / her handling, structuring and organization of musical ideas in such a framework?

2. The ‘affective domain’: the emotional level of the performer ---- To what degree does the performer “feel” the music? How is he disposed towards the overt expression of emotion, that is to say, is he of restrained temperament, subscribing to the view that “art lies in concealing art” and so limits the manifestation of unbridled emotion in his music, or is his temperament one of
abandonment and pure romanticism so that his music reflects his emotional urges without fetters of any kind.\footnote{Here, the word “romanticism” is used in the technical sense. The two words, “classical” and “romantic” refer to two opposing schools of aesthetics ---- in the first, the prominent consideration is form, balance and harmony of design with emotions reined in and kept secondary, while in the second, the emphasis is on giving unfettered expression to personal feelings and emotions, with less consideration for formal structuring of the artistic ( musical ) material into time-honoured moulds.}

3. The imaginative conditioning of the performer ---- What is the nature of the sum total of the performer’s past exposure, habits, beliefs, aspirations, \textit{etc.}? What kind of creative urges does he experience due to his social, economic, religious and individual background? What attitudes, values and convictions does he harbour in his personality \textit{vis-à-vis} the environment, \textit{i.e.}, his music?

4. The inborn / inherent faculties of the performer --- With what kind of voice (for a vocalist) is he naturally endowed. Is it inherently rich, sweet, flexible and of large compass or is it weak, soft and good only in certain registers? Does he suffer from any physical ailments that cause shortness of breath, unsteadiness of voice or any other limitation which he must take into account, and provide for, during a performance?

5. The ‘psycho-motor domain’: the skill of the performer ---- How proficient is he technically in his musicianship? What levels of virtuosity has he reached with relation to the various areas of his craft? How deft is he in translating his imagination and ideas into practical performance?

6. The \textit{Gharaanaa} or the musical background of the performer – Which particular style of music making has the performer imbibed as a student?
Which other musical influences, if any, have shaped the nature of his performance, and to what extent? How extensive is his musical vocabulary?

Each of the above factors goes on to determine the nature and quality of improvisation in a performer’s recital.

Hence, this thesis will necessarily discuss, at some length, these points. In addition, it will also endeavour to arrive at a resolution of the following issues that automatically spring to mind when analyzing the question of improvisation in Hindustani music -----

1. Are all improvisations of the same class or kind or is it possible to categorize improvisational techniques or improvised phrases and passages under different heads?\(^8\)

2. What are the psychological foundations of improvisation?\(^9\)

3. What are the social foundations and effects, if any, of Improvisation?\(^10\)

4. How may improvisation be viewed from the aesthetic angle?\(^11\)

5. What are the different practical methods employed in the craft of improvisation?\(^12\)

6. What are the differences in approach to, and application of, improvisation in the different gharaanas of Hindustani Music?\(^13\)

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\(^8\) To be discussed in Chapter II ---- Kinds of Improvisation.

\(^9\) To be taken up for discussion in Chapter III ---- Psychological Considerations in Improvisation.

\(^10\) To be discussed in Chapter IV ---- Sociological Context of Improvisation Aesthetics.

\(^11\) Same as above.

\(^12\) To be discussed in Chapter V ---- Techniques of Improvisation.

\(^13\) To be taken up for detailed analysis in Chapter VI ---- Improvisation in the Gharaanas.
7. How does improvisation in Hindustani music compare and / or contrast with that in Carnatic music?\textsuperscript{14}

8. To what extent and in which manner or manners does Western music admit improvisation?\textsuperscript{15}

9. How do respective improvisations compare / contrast with each other in ( i ) khayaal and dhrupad, ( ii ) khayaal and thumri, ( iii ) classical music and light music, including folk and tribal genres?\textsuperscript{16}

It will not be out of place to state here that no attempt will be made in this work, for considerations of space and with a view to keeping this study within reasonable bounds, to explore how improvisation has been featuring in the long and varied history of Hindustani classical music. From the days of Jaati-gaayan through the periods of prabandha-gaayan and dhrupad-gaayan right down to the present day khayaal-gaayan, Hindustant music has been through processes of both evolution and change,\textsuperscript{17} in responsiveness to changing times and a myriad social, political, religious, philosophic, economic, scientific, technological and cultural influences. To trace the progress of improvisation as practiced over a span of about twenty-five centuries\textsuperscript{18} cannot obviously be the subject of a thesis such as the present one. Yet, to indicate and

\textsuperscript{14} To be discussed in Chapter VII ---- Comparative Improvisation.
\textsuperscript{15} Same as above.
\textsuperscript{16} Same as above.
\textsuperscript{17} The words “evolution” and “change” are technical words in Sociology, and have different meanings. There is evolution when one stage leads to another through the passage of time, but there is change when, due to the imposition of a totally new environment on the existing one, the existing stage becomes extinct and a new stage, not relatable to the old but drawing from the new superimposed environment, takes shape.
\textsuperscript{18} Not considering the Vedas, about the dating of which there is some controversy, the earliest recorded Text with a formal discussion on music is Naradiya Shiksha, which was written around the 4\textsuperscript{th} century B.C., from which period to the present day is a span of nearly twenty-five centuries.
illustrate briefly the very rich, interesting and instructive background of the evolution of musical improvisation in our culture, an analysis will be made, at the appropriate place, of the manner in which two important tools in the task of improvisation, viz. (a) alankaars / alankaran and (b) taanas have grown over the centuries, as revealed both in musicological texts as well as the oral tradition.19 However, in spite of this, this thesis will restrict itself primarily to the present day practices only. It will apply itself to questions on improvisation and its methods as are actually encountered in present day practical performances of aesthetically developed, technically skilled and theoretically sound performing artistes who have already gained universal acceptance.

19 To be given in Appendix I and Appendix II