

GENRES OF MUSIC

Music during the Mughal period represented a gradual synthesis of South Asian with Central and West Asian musical traditions on the one hand, and the gradual indigenisation of Mughal court music and dance on the other. Musical forms like *dhrupad*, *khayal*, and *ghazal* and instruments like the *sitar*, *sarod*, and *tabla* can be traced to the thirteenth century in India. *Dhrupad*, the earliest form of Hindustani music, is difficult to date exactly, but it is alleged that by the time of Amir Khusrau, it had become one of the main forms of classical music in north India. Its beginnings can then be fixed between the twelfth and early thirteenth century. Amir Khusrau is credited with modifying *dhrupad* by adding Persian melody and beat to it, and thus creating another musical style, namely *qawwali*. *Dhrupad* was first introduced to the royal court by Raja Mansingh Tomar of Gwalior (1486–1517) and reached its pinnacle during the reign of Akbar. *Dhrupad* compositions and style were serious and mostly in Sanskrit phraseology. It was during the reign of Humayun that it was adopted as the main style of

court music in north India; *dhrupad* singer and composer Nayak Bhakshu was, at the time, in his service. Later, 1,000 of his lyrics were collected by Shahjahan, known as *Sahasras* or *Hazar Dhrupad*. Several prominent *dhrupad* artists flourished in the court of Akbar; of these, Tansen is the most popularly known. Tansen reshaped the entire genre of *dhrupad* by the addition of new Persian ornamentations like *meend* and *gamaka*. *Meend* in Hindustani music refers to a glide from one note to another. It is an essential performance practice and used often in both vocal and instrumental music. *Gamaka*, also known as *gamak*, means 'ornamented note' in Sanskrit. It refers to the ornamentation used in the performance of Indian classical music. *Gamaka* involves a variation in the pitch of a note, using heavy forceful oscillations between adjacent and distant notes. Each *raga* has standard rules on the types of *gamakas* that might be applied to specific notes, and the types that may not (see Image 7.3).

Tansen also developed the *rabab* (*rudra-veena*) and created several *ragas* (melody patterns with a characteristic rhythm and style that set forth a certain tone or mood to a musical phrase) that remain the foremost *ragas* of north India. Some of these are *darbari Kanada*, *darbari Todi*, *miyan ki Malhar*, and *miyan ki Sarang*. Tansen was not seen as belonging to a particular *gharana* (a school of music), but after his death, his work was attributed to the *Senia gharana* from the Gwalior school of music. The tradition of *dhrupad* was continued by Tansen's son Bilas Khan, known for his style *bilas Todi*. Swami Haridas, *guru* of Tansen, was also a court musician during Akbar's reign; other musicians of this period included Baiju Bawra, Ramdas, Tanrang, and others (see Plate 6).

Dhrupad continued to dominate, although later, the emphasis shifted more towards beautification and ornamentation. Several disciples of Swami Haridas and Tansen became court musicians in different *subas* (province) and *sarkars* (subdivision of a *suba*) of the Mughal Empire during the reigns of Jahangir and Shahjahan, for instance in Jaipur, Punjab, Gwalior, Lucknow, and others. Akbar's period also witnessed the synthesis of music and devotional literature by poets like Surdas,

Image 7.3: Akbar, Todarmal, Tansen, Abu'l Fazl, Faizi, and Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khana in a court scene (sixteenth century CE)



Source: [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Akbar, Todarmal, Tansen and Abul Fazl, Faizi and Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khana in a court scene \(16th century AD\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Akbar,_Todarmal,_Tansen_and_Abul_Fazl,_Faizi_and_Abdur_Rahim_Khan-i-Khana_in_a_court_scene_(16th_century_AD).jpg).

Tulsidas, Kabir, and Mirabai. Their devotional *bhajans* have become immortal and continue to be popular in contemporary times. Aurangzeb was trained in music and while he banned vocal music, he patronised instrumental music in the court, particularly the *veena*. Music continued to be popular with the elite and a number of books on the history and theory of Indo-Islamic music were written during this period. One of the most famous was *Rag-Darpan* (The Mirror of Music) written by Fakirullah (Saif Khan), who was earlier the Governor of Kashmir.

Khayal blended Indian musical theory with Persian musical expression. These were composed in the common spoken language and the theme was mostly romantic. The style of singing was leisurely, ornamental, and improvised. Since it was not a part of religious ritual or sung in places of worship, the *khayal* had an element of physical pleasure. Its origin can be traced to the court of Muhammad Shah Rangila (1720–48). Bahadur Shah Zafar II (1837–57) was himself a patron of music and literature; in his court lived Ghalib and Zauq. *Thumri*, another genre of music, developed in the court of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Awadh (1847–56). In contrast to symbolic representations of divine longing, which constituted the theme of earlier forms of music, *thumri* focused on human love and made a sensuous appeal through the repetition of words and musical phrases. *Tappa*, on the other hand, found inspiration in folk music that was earlier ignored by court music.

The political decline of the Mughal Empire did not affect the patronage of music and musicians. Musicians from different regional kingdoms participated in royal competitions, constantly researched and improved their *gayaki* (the style of presenting a song), innovated and studied deeper aspects of music. One such art form that evolved and flourished during the eighteenth–nineteenth centuries was *ghazal*. It was essentially the poetry of romance, introduced in Persia around the tenth century. With its aesthetics derived from Persian–Arabic Islamicate literature, the genre was developed in north India and became popular with the emergence of Urdu as the prominent language of poetry in the Mughal court. *Ghazal* is a form of rhymed verses that comprise couplets, the number of which could vary according to the composition. Each couplet or *she'r* is complete in form and meaning, but the *ghazal* does not always represent a single mood; often the mood of one *she'r* in a *ghazal* differs from, or is opposed to, that of another. It is essentially oriented towards musical rendering; therefore, singing all the couplets (*ash'ar*) of a *ghazal* in the same format is contrary to its nature.

It is pertinent to understand the gender politics of the early modern *ghazal* and appreciate the issues inherent in *rekhta* and *rekhti*. An average enthusiast would know that *ghazal* is a love lyric composed in two-line *she'r*s, and that its main subject is *ishq* (idealised love) and *ashiq* (the lover). But it is equally important to understand that in earlier times, Urdu poetry was called *rekhta* (the 'scattered' idiom) because it was expressed in a combination of Persian and the local vernacular languages of north India. It is a literature narrated in the masculine voice, 'spoken' by a masculine *ashiq* to a grammatically masculine *ma'shuq*; although s/he may in fact be female, any forthright specific reference to the grammatical feminine is avoided. The sub-genre of poetry called *rekhti* was considered *rekhta*'s counterpart; it manifests itself through a feminine narrator and usually a feminine addressee and explains gender politics within the world of Urdu culture. Although it follows a number of classical conventions, it is not considered normative. Composed

in the form of a *ghazal*, *rekhti* clearly defined the expression of desire and was associated with the domestic life of the upper strata, socially elite, secluded women during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It claimed to speak in *begamati zaban*. This would explain the reason for linking *rekhti* with the *zenana*. Its explicit gender and social cosmos distinguish it from *rekhta's* understanding of the universality of expression and relevance.

Rekhti was introduced in Lucknow by Sa'adat Yar Khan 'Rangin'. 'Rangin' is said to have adapted *rekhti* from the style of the not so well-reputed women, with whom he had consorted in his youth. By the end of the eighteenth century, Lucknow emerged as an important *markaz* (cultural centre), although perhaps second in status to Delhi. Some of Delhi's former aristocrats were involved in 'perfecting' Urdu in Lucknow to nurture an indigenous literary language that would surpass Persian. Although *rekhti* was well-received as a literary genre, twentieth-century critical writings on *rekhti* are characterised by moral judgements and subterfuge.