

Gharana: The true meaning

- Gundecha Brothers

Our probe of the term 'Gharana' may be incomplete if we dwell only on the literal meaning of the term. Hence the in-depth examination is a must. It should be kept in mind that, musical 'Gharana' (or tradition, in a general sense) is born out of the genius of a master and his creative abilities. Even then, gharana imbibes the traits of some auxiliaries; which are not necessarily a gharana of their own. It can easily be seen to be a current of musical thoughts and the perpetuation of the tradition. Thus said, we should never attempt to fit an immobile frame. The only address of such a current will be a stream of creative thoughts. But, it has been a wrong practice to recognise and preach the term gharana as a fixed entity. The gharana itself is a product of such a stream. Also, it will be an injustice to perceive the stream of music with a fixed set of concepts.

A contemplated study of a musical gharana will reveal us that it were the product of a master; his creative thoughts, his perceptions, his aesthetic thinking, his nature and even his limitations. After the master, his gharana propitiates such type of music only. A good study also tells about a gharana's specialities like: the voice culture, tempi of singing, perception of ragas, compositions, the improvisation of text as well as rhythm etc. All such faculties compile and give rise to a gharana which has a flavour of its own. Amongst all, the voice culture maintains the highest importance in any gharana. This further leads us to know the finer nuances of the voice culture. It is a known fact that, no two people have the same voice. The voice cannot be lent, since it is the sole untransferable property of the singer. Perhaps this is the biggest drawback of the popular concept of gharanas. Therefore if the creative stream of gharana deviates and sidelines this very fact, it ends up in imitating the voice of its mentor. This unnatural trait essentially ceases the growth of that tradition. So the imitation is rather the disintegration of the gharana. On contrary, if a performer utilises the nuances of the gharana and grows under his own natural traits of voice, that inevitably becomes the true representation of the tradition, the gharana. Any creative change happening in the gharana must be therefore welcomed since it is the very nature of our music. Imitation oriented conservation of a gharana is essentially a flaw of the system and it should be understood before considering the creative stream of ideas as opponents to gharana. This is the true insight of our tradition.

A few practical examples demonstrate these facts well. Ustad Amir Khan's music is considered to be an indispensable stage in the history of our music. His music imbibed many delicacies of earlier times. We consider him to be an epitome of Kirana gharana. The other legend of the same tradition was Ustad Abdul Karim Khan. He had an altogether different musical trait. Kirana gharana's greatness lays in the truth that, two different maestros have nurtured it by their creativity and the gharana gave them an opportunity to do so. This is the righteous flow of the gharana. Amir Khan stood an epitome in the 60s. Majority of musicians have been strongly influenced by him. All of them have 'imbibed' (not imitated) Amir Khan in their own way. This is the true perception of the gharana. Evidently, we should perceive the gharana not as a mere name or form, but as a thought.

Smt. Kishoritai Amonkar doesn't stenograph the earlier Jaipur singing. She treats the core of Jaipur with her creative abilities. This is the tradition of true Jaipur gharana. Such a creative treatment must not be rejected as a sheer deviation, rather, it must be clearly understood that, it is the righteous flow of the Jaipur tradition. Even though her music is based on Jaipur gharana, it never obstructed her creative exploration. Pt. Mallikarjun Mansoor gives his music a new touch. His musical interpretation is creatively different than his elder contemporary Surshri Kesarbai Kerkar. His music is nurtured by his voice and his thoughts. If not, it should be thought as the disintegration of Jaipur gharana. Similarly Pt. Kumar Gandharva's music has imbibed the best of Gwalior gharana and further had a touch of his creative mind.

We need to essentially understand the true insight of the Gharana and not to get dwelled at drawing boundaries to the flow.