

Thumri in Historical & Stylistic Perspective

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(1-52)

CHAPTER ONE

The Literary Aspect of Thumrī Compositions

Classical Hindi Poetry

Thumrīs are generally written in *Braj Bhāshā*, a dialect of western Hindi spoken in the region around Mathura. From the fifteenth through nineteenth centuries, *Braj* was the primary literary dialect of the Hindi group of languages in North India. In particular, it was the language associated with the Krishna Bhakti cult, which was itself centered in the Mathura area (Dwivedi 1966: 1ff.).

Braj Bhāshā is an Indo-Aryan language descended from the Vedic dialect spoken by the Aryan people who migrated to the Indian subcontinent from the west in the second millennium B.C. From these languages developed, on the one hand, Sanskrit, which survived only as a literary and religious language among Brahmins throughout India; on the other hand, the Vedic dialects also gave birth to the Prākṛit languages, which became the languages of the common people by the fifth century B.C. (Dwivedi 1966: 1ff.).

Of the three forms of Prākṛit, Śaurasenī Prākṛit was that spoken in the Mathura area and eastern Punjab. By the eighth century A.D., this language itself had become artificial and decadent, so that it was replaced by Apabhraṃśa dialects; among these in literature was Śaurasenī Apabhraṃśa. Like Sanskrit and the other Prākṛit languages, Śaurasenī Apabhraṃśa too calcified, partially due to the encumbrances of grammarians (Dwivedi 1966: 3), and it gradually was replaced, by the thirteenth century, by the dialects of western Hindi, viz., *Khaṛī Bolī*, *Dingal*, *Kannauji*, *Bangru*, and *Braj Bhāshā*. The subsequent development of vernacular literature throughout North and Central India was a natural consequence of, first, increasing population and rural density which promoted the rise of regional nationalities, and second, the rise of provincial inland commerce, which promoted greater communication, cultural as well as commercial, between villages (K 1975: 334-9).

Dingal was the first Hindi dialect to achieve literary prominence, as long as the epics from the twelfth and thirteenth centuries recorded the exploits of Rajputs in their feuds against the Muslims and, more often, against each other (Dwivedi 1966: 15ff.). When in the sixteenth century, the Braj-speaking region became a prosperous and stable seat of the Mughal Empire, *Braj Bhāshā* eclipsed *Dingal*.

literary language. Tulsidas' Avadhi version of the Rāmāyaṇa, the sixteenth-century *Rāmcharit-Mānas*, and Amir Khusrau's (d. 1325) *Khaṛī Bolī* verse show that other Hindi dialects did have literary traditions. But it was *Braj Bhāshā* that was the most prestigious and popular, as it was the medium for almost all of the Krishna-Bhakti poetry that became the dominant inspiration for Hindi verse until the late nineteenth century (Dwivedi 1966:38). Subsequently, *Khaṛī Bolī*, with a heavily Sanskritized vocabulary, was chosen as the language for modern Hindi prose, and it is this dialect that is now taught and spoken as a standardized *lingua franca* throughout North and Central India.

Classical Hindi poetry is generally divided into two eras: the devotional period (fourteenth to seventeenth centuries), and the *Rīti* period (seventeenth to nineteenth centuries). Medieval devotional poetry can be seen as a product of, and an important vehicle for the spread of syncretic, antinomian, and largely monotheistic religious cults that gained popularity throughout India as a reaction against the perceived decadent sterility of the Brāhman orthodoxy (de Bary 1958: I, 345-7). Seminal figures in these movements were the poet-saints Nānak (d. 1538), the founder of Sikhism; Jāyasī (d. ca. 1542), a Sufi mystic; and Kabīr (d. ca. 1518), who preached a fervent devotionism transcending Hindu-Muslim barriers. Tulsidas' aforementioned *Rāmcharit-Mānas* was the outstanding literary monument of the Vaishnavite Rāma cult,¹ which was centered in Avadh (now eastern Uttar Pradesh). The foremost poet of the Krishna-Bhakti cult was Surdas (d. 1563), a blind ascetic from Agra (Dwivedi 1966: 68). In his verse; as in most Bhakti poetry, his intense devotion to God is presented through the erotic metaphor of Rādhā's impassioned longing for, and final consummation with the divine lover, Krishna. In a somewhat more purely mystical vein are the Rajasthani and *Braj Bhāshā* poems of Mira Bai (d. 1546), whose verse is still extremely popular throughout North India.

Scholars generally agree that the sincerity, depth, and vitality of early Bhakti poetry gave way to artificiality and shallow sensuality in the *Rīti* (loosely, "rhetorical" or "decorative") verse of the following centuries. Dwivedi (1966: 88) writes that early Hindi poetry

... was intimately associated on the one hand with the life of the common man and on the other with spiritual and religious aims of life. Towards the middle of the 17th century, a distinct change occurred. Poetry ... became secular and sensuous. It rapidly lost touch with the common man and instead of trying to tackle fundamental questions and vital problems, it devoted itself to the less laudable task of catering for the sensuous pleasures of the rich.

The change evident in architecture and painting as well as poetry was to a considerable extent a result of the collapse of the Mughal Empire, consequent political chaos, and general economic decline which sharpened class contradictions in

¹ Vishnu is generally worshipped in the form of his two human incarnations: Rāma, the moralistic protagonist of the epic *Rāmāyaṇa*, and Krishna, the deity of the Bhakti cult, warrior/philosopher in the *Bhagavad-Gītā*, and cowherd/divine lover in Bhakti poetry.

late Indian feudalism.¹ Dwivedi (1966: 92) writes that poets were no longer ascetics like Surdas, but dependent on and often sycophantic employees of sybaritic landlords and petty rājās. Their poetry, he argues, was steeped in decadent hedonism of court life and became correspondingly mannered and obsessed with eroticism.

The rise of devotional cults was one of the most important features in religious, and social development of the medieval period. The movement in the north, where it was to achieve the greatest fruition and popularity south, where, by the sixth century A.D., Tamil Vaishnavite and Shaivite largely replacing Jainism and Buddhism. The new creeds stressed a personal love between man and God. As the followers were mostly from lower castes, the Tamil cults were antinomian and progressive in that they rejected the exclusive and parasitic Brāhmanism and also included a number of women (de Bary 1959: I, 345-7).

Kosambi attributes the rise of the new anti-ritual cults to the emergence of classes of free farmers and traders who were no longer bound by tribal and customs. Accordingly, Krishna's protection of cattle also reflected agrarian classes which opposed the wasteful cow slaughter of the pastoral tribes, and the onerous cattle-sacrifices of the Brāhmins and the (Kosambi 1965: 90ff.).

By the eleventh century, the devotional Bhakti cults were sweeping the north. The center was the Braj-speaking Mathura area, said to be the birthplace of Krishna, the dark-complexioned cowherd worshipped by the cult. While the *Bhagavad-Gītā* could be regarded as an obscurantist descendant of the system, the Bhakti cult Krishna was a divine lover, and a cowherd prince. Presumably, this new Krishna was originally the deity of the ferocious Abhiras, a tribe which migrated to Braj from the south. Thapar writes, "More sophisticated symbolism was attached to this cult when Rādhā for Krishna was interpreted as the longing and attachment of the individual for the Universal Soul."²

To women, low-caste peasants, and members of urban professional groups offered, on the religious plane, the promise of immediate communion rather than the endless cycle of rebirths preached by the Brāhmins. At a level, Bhakti constituted a reaction against the caste system, which had been an agent of socio-economic repression (Kosambi 1975: 292, 290-1).

The rise of the Bhakti cult coincided with the rise of Indian Sufrimism. The movements were syncretic, mystical cults with mass followings among lower classes; as such they reflected the shared village life of Muslims and Hindus (Kosambi 1975: 389) and tended to transcend religious barriers. Mu-

¹ The term feudalism is not used here to imply identity with any specific European feudalism. See Kosambi (1975: 326ff.) for a discussion of Indian feudalism.

² Krishna as the divine lover appears in Prākṛit poetry as early as the first century A.D. and was widely worshipped in that guise until much later.

important form of worship and celebration in both the cults, and their popular religious songs became, in de Bary's words, "the forerunners of a musical renaissance" (1956: 347). Indeed, as we shall see, *thumrī* itself grew largely out of the devotional/erotic folk songs of the *Bhaktī* cult.

Language

As stated previously, the great majority of *thumrī* compositions are in *Braj Bhāṣā*, the dialect of the Agra-Mathura region. While *Khaṛī Bolī* constructions and, to a lesser extent, Urdu words are not unusual in *thumrī*, only a handful of *thumrīs* in *Avadhī* and *Bhojpuri* are extant, and still fewer are in *Dingal* or other dialects of Hindi. On the surface, the continued preference for Braj may seem peculiar; evidence suggests that since the Mughal period, the majority of professional urban classical musicians have been Muslims, most of whose mother tongue is Urdu, not Braj. Further, the regional dialects of Lucknow and Benares, where *thumrī* matured in the last three centuries, are *Avadhī* and *Bhojpuri*, respectively, not Braj. Finally, in the last century, Braj as a written language has been totally eclipsed by *Khaṛī Bolī*, which has become the *lingua franca* of North India. The author has also observed that many music listeners who are conversant with *Khaṛī Bolī*-derived Hindi, (whether as a first or second language) often experience difficulty in understanding Braj lyrics in a *thumrī* or *khayāl*. Hence, the persistence of Braj in *thumrī*, where comprehension of the text is crucial to full appreciation, requires some explanation.

Gosvami (1957: 139) asserts that Braj is employed in classical music because, due to its supposed paucity of conjunct consonants, it contains more vowels than other North Indian languages and is therefore more suitable for singing. Similarly, Meer (1981: 91) opines that "the softer and more open sound" of Braj and *Avadhī* are preferred over modern Hindi due to "the lack of long vowels and useful consonants" in the latter. Certainly, insofar as modern literary Hindi borrows heavily from Sanskrit vocabulary, the latter's intractable and harsh conjunct consonants (as in the very word "Sanskrit") render it less appropriate for use in romantic song-texts. Yet this argument does not explain why Braj should be preferred over simple *Khaṛī Bolī* or *Avadhī*. Furthermore, although Braj is indeed a sweet and musical dialect, native speakers (including musicians) of other North Indian tongues, such as Punjabi, *Dingal*, or Urdu, would vehemently (and justifiably) deny that their languages are deficient in inherent musical qualities.

Instead, the predominance of Braj in song-texts may be largely attributed to the fact that before 1800, Braj was the primary literary dialect of Hindi, as well as the spoken dialect of the region where *thumrī* originated. As we have seen in the previous section, from the fourteenth century, Braj assumed predominance among the literary dialects of Hindi. Moreover, as the Krishna cult was centered in the area around Mathura, it is not surprising that devotional *Bhaktī* poetry associated with Krishna was written almost exclusively in Braj (while Rāma-ite verse was generally written in *Avadhī*). Correspondingly, the alleged founder of the Krishna cult, Vallabhācārya (1479–1531), although born and educated in Benares, settled in the Braj region

(Dwivedi 1966: 38); Surdas, the most celebrated poet of his time Mathura and perfected and ennobled Braj as a literary medium (Dwi Although Mira Bai's native tongue was *Dingal*, she composed many which had already become "the official language of *Krishna-Bhaktī* po 1966: 76).

On the rural, folk level, the popular *horī*, *rās*, and *carārī* folk songs the cult were sung primarily in Braj. As we shall see below, *thumrī* de out of these folk songs, and naturally retained their dialect. At the lev classical court culture, Agra, in the Braj region, was the Lodi and Mu; 112 years and the local dialect must have permeated the atmosphere some degree. While Persian remained the dominant court langua matters as well as poetry, court musicians like Tansen composed in said to have had some connection with the Mughal court (Keay 196 became an established tradition for classical poets to write devotio poetry in Braj, whether that was their native tongue or not.

Further, simple *Braj Bhāṣā* does not differ excessively in grammar from *Khaṛī Bolī*, which shares its grammar with Urdu. Hence, musicians and patrons of succeeding centuries, with a little effort, need great difficulty understanding or even composing Braj lyrics. The sam said of *Avadhī* and *Bhojpuri*, which are so distinct from *Khaṛī Bolī* as to b to an Urdu- or Hindi-speaker not conversant with their peculiari

The following well-known *thumrī*, for example, would be labelled as to its use of the vocative "to" rather than the *Khaṛī Bolī* "tum" or "t respects it could be regarded as being in either dialect, and could be eas by an Urdu or *Khaṛī Bolī* speaker.

EXAMPLE 1

Jā main to se nahīn bolūn
Jiyā kī bāt piyā main to se na kahūn.

Go, I won't speak to you;
I won't tell you what's in my heart, O my beloved.

By contrast, *thumrīs* composed in eastern Hindi dialects like *Bhojpuri* a not be easily comprehended by an average Urdu- or Hindi-speak

While *Braj Bhāṣā* by far predominates in the *thumrī* texts, a few co in other regional dialects, notably, *Bhojpuri*, *Avadhī*, and, less often, *D Bolī*.¹ Urdu vocabulary, not uncommon in older (i.e., 18th C.) *barā* example, Sadarang,² also occasionally occurs in *bandish thumrīs*, as in excerpts, where Urdu words are underlined:

¹ A number of Rajasthani *barā khayāls* of the Manarang school are extant; they contain elements of Gujarati, *Avadhī*, *Khaṛī Bolī*, and Braj as well. Cf. Pant 1961

² Cf., e.g., Pant 1961: 139.

EXAMPLE 2

Is bārī mēn na jaiyo re
Is bārī mēn are kyā boyā
ʾishk mohabbat sārī
 (Telang 1977: 60)

Don't go into this garden;
 What is planted there,
 But love and passion.

EXAMPLE 2a

Jiyā kā andesha morā kaisā jāe
Karat arj garj
 (Bajpayee 1977: 64)

How will my heart's torment ever pass?
 I implore you.

Most thumrīs would substitute Hindi equivalents for the Urdu words, e.g., "prem" for "ishk (ishq) mohabbat." Where such Urdu words are nevertheless used, in singing, the Urdu phonemes not extant in Hindi are often rendered in their corrupt Hindi forms, even by Urdu-speaking singers (e.g., "arj garj" and "ishk" in place of the Urdu "arṣ garāṣ" and "ishq," respectively).¹

The fecund and eccentric Lallan Piya composed a few *bandish* thumrīs in Sanskrit (Telang 1977: 84–K).

In general, it may be stated that *Kharī Bolī* and Urdu elements are slightly more common in *bandish* thumrīs, as most of these were composed by Urdu speaking musicians based in Lucknow. Conversely, *Avadhi* and *Bhojpuri* occur somewhat more in the later *bol banāo* thumrīs, since many of these presumably originate from the more provincial towns of Benares (Varanasi) and Gaya, and were more subject to local folk influence (in musical style as well as language). Still, we must reiterate that all but a small minority of thumrī texts are in *Braj Bhāshā*, even if occasionally diluted with elements of neighbouring dialects.

Subject Matter

The subject matter of song-texts in Hindustani classical music has been examined by a few authors; Wade and Meer have analyzed *khayāl* and *dhrupad* texts, respectively, and due to the mutual influence between *khayāl* and thumrī, their observations are worth noting. Wade (1971: 121–2) groups *khayāl* text themes into eight categories:

1. Views of life
2. A patron (king or other)

¹ A similar phenomenon in *khayāl* may be noted on EMI CLP 1308, where Nazakat Ali and Salamat Ali, who are fluent Urdu speakers, render the word "Hazrat" in its colloquial Hindi form "Hajrat."

3. Wedding
4. Religious devotion to a deity other than Krishna
5. Krishna
6. Union with a lover (husband or other)
7. Separation from a lover
8. Miscellaneous

Meer (1980: 86–9) adds to this list the group of songs describing natu spring and the rainy season) and songs imparting musical theory.

Not all of these categories are found in thumrī. Laudatory songs such as Mohammad Shah of Delhi (ruled 1719–48) are totally absent more common in *dhrupad* than in *khayāl*, date from the feudal period and are incompatible with the more personal and romantic character such panegyrics survive at all in *khayāl* (e.g., "Tū hai Mohammad Shāh k Suhā") is testimony less to the persistence of feudalism in India than to meaning of the text in *khayāl* is of practically no importance. It has but the sort of devotion, self-sacrifice, and begging for favors in many thumrī texts reflects a neo-feudal mentality, where the poor, or the dependent upon the "largesse" of the rich in order to survive; certain devotion to Rāma seems modelled on that of a servant to his lord (Dw Nevertheless, no thumrī texts explicitly praise a human patron.

Similarly, texts regarding musical theory do not occur in thumrī, as is not strictly bound by any formal theory. Also absent are compositions weddings, devotion to deities other than Krishna, and the joys of erotic 4, and 6 in Wade's list). Only a very few compositions can be philosophical or ethical.

Some erotic songs contain references to the rainy season, or to the the cuckoo, or to other natural phenomena. Songs describing spring and the vernal *holī* festival comprise an important sub-category of thumrīs, consider later.

The great majority of thumrī texts are amatory, describing either separation, or the playful antics of the vexatious yet ideal lover, Krishna texts fall into these categories as well, particularly as many *choṭā khay* tempo) were originally written in the nineteenth century as *bandish* and thorough examination of these types of compositions is relevant to the as well as thumrī. In what follows, amatory thumrī texts shall be discussed to traditional and contemporary Indian social life in general.

A preliminary observation to be made about thumrī texts is that they are from the perspective of the woman. In this respect they differ from Persian ghazal, which laments the pangs of separation from the male's somewhat different range of emphasis.

Thumrī texts, like thumrī musical style and structure, represent both urban classical and rural folk traditions. The folk element in thumrī is

most conspicuous in the *holī* songs celebrating springtime. Although *holī* songs share their subject matter with *dhamār* songs (a seasonal sub-category of the archaic classical genre *dhruvād*), the textual inspiration for even these austere and rigidly classical compositions may have derived originally from folk music. Similarly, the use of regional dialects like *Avadhī* and *Bhojpūrī*, and the prevailing simplicity of thumrī texts attest to the strong folk influence thereupon. The standard themes of separation and Krishna-worship also pervade the folk music of Uttar Pradesh. Hence many thumrīs, particularly the so-called *horī-dīpāndī* songs, are probably stylized adaptations of anonymous folk songs.

The influence of the classical, literate poetic tradition is, however, perhaps greater than that of folk verse, and is certainly easier to document. As we mentioned above, most thumrī texts are in the Bhakti erotic tradition of medieval poetry, with Jayadev's *Gita Govinda* as an earlier, but primary source of inspiration. Few, if any, thumrīs, however, actually date from that period; rather, most appear to have been composed during or somewhat after the *Rīti* period. Nevertheless, while the Krishnaite sensuality and the use of mixed dialects in *Rīti* verse are certainly evident in thumrī texts, the latter do not reflect the decadent over-emphasis on rhetoric, Sanskrit diction, and rigid and archaic poetics that characterize *Rīti* poetry.¹

Most *khayāl* and thumrī texts were probably written by Muslim musicians, and even their verse reflects some influence of traditional Sanskrit-Hindi aesthetic theory, although it is true that they were generally ignorant of Sanskrit and did not share the pedantic approach to poetry of their scholarly contemporaries. For this reason, thumrī texts have much greater stylistic affinities with medieval Bhakti verse than with *Rīti* poetry. Indeed, the only prominent poet of the *Rīti* period to contribute to classical music was Ghananand (d. 1761), some of whose verse may be found in the voluminous *Rāga Kalpadruma* (1848). Accordingly, his poetry is relatively free of the manneristic and insincere artificialities in vogue among scholar-poets during his era (Dwivedi 1966: 125).

It is safe to assume that most of the anonymous authors of thumrīs that are sung today were primarily musicians, and only secondarily poets. As we shall see, many Lucknow-style *bandish* thumrīs reflect a degree of poetic sophistication and artistry, and some poet-composers, such as Lallan Piya or Sanad Piya, achieved some renown in their lives and are remembered even today. But these compositions, and the Lucknow style as such, are seldom performed today; instead, the texts of the *bol banāo thumrīs* currently in vogue are extremely simple in style, and notably devoid of the mannerisms of the classical *Rīti* poets. However, that is not to say, as Wade (1971: 139) implies, that thumrī poets were totally immune to influence from the Hindu aesthetic theory which so fascinated the classical Hindi poets of their age. Although

¹ This aspect of *Rīti* is denied by Wade, who asserts the *Rīti* period poets "were no longer scholars who could read the treatises, nor were they inclined to investigate the subject of poetics" (Wade 1971: 139). In fact, the prominent *Rīti* poets were obsessed with Sanskrit-based poetic theory, and often devoted more time to writing pedantic aesthetic polemics than actual verse (Dwivedi 1966: 93ff., Pandey 1975: 54-5, and Keay 1960: 95).

much of this system of poetics may strike the Western reader as pedant relevance here because, first, even relatively ingenuous poet-musicians Sanskrit were indirectly influenced by poetics and, second, Indian continue to discuss Hindi verse in terms of the classical aesthetic frame.

In brief then—the foundation of Sanskrit (and later, Prākṛit and Hī was codified in the *Nāṭya Śāstra* (2nd C. B.C.—2nd C. A.D.?), a treatise written by Bharata Muni. Bharata classifies mundane human emotions major enduring states (*sthāyī bhāvas*) such as love, anger, or sorrow, and transient sentiments (*sañcārī bhāvas*), like discouragement, nostalgia or In an effective work of art, these emotions are transformed so experienced as *rasa*, or aesthetic pleasure, on a universal, transcendent there are eight (or, later, nine) *rasas* (corresponding to the *sthāyī* afford a detached pleasure whose attainment is the goal of art. Thus far simple and astute, and bears remarkable affinities to certain modern aesthetic theories, particularly the view advanced most articulately by I that aesthetic emotions are symbolic analogues of mundane, ordinary.

Bharata goes on to classify heroines (*nāyikās*) into eight types² (*b. "dressed up for union," "separated by a quarrel," or "having a sojourn* These eight basic heroine-types constituted the framework for subsequent poems, including contemporary thumrī texts. The list, however, does not Bharata and subsequent theorists³ (including those of the *Rīti* period indulge in veritable orgies of enumeration and classification, as if in knowledge derived from these pursuits.⁴ The particular original intent describe and isolate individual characters and moods so that artists could them in their subtlety. Hence, heroines are further classified according to amorous inclinations (anxious or detached, etc.), age (four stages of social status (queen, aristocrat, or harlot)⁵, and their relation to the lover another's, or a prostitute). The latter three types are subdivided into two and also according to their dramatic role (heroine, supporting heroine personality, their sexual propensity, and so on and so forth, not *ad infinitum* rough figure of 385 heroine-types.

It should not be a matter of surprise, then, that subsequent drama written in accordance with such theories, depict abstract personality rather than personalities, and models rather than genuine characters. In this aesthetic theory may be said to reflect communal and hierarchic features.

² Cf., e.g. Pant (1961: 138), who analyzes a *khayāl* in terms of the four *sañcārī bhāvas*: Shukla (1973: 215-23).

³ Some later theorists added two more types. Cf. Garg 1975: 68-9.

⁴ Rudrat, Bhoj Raj, and Bhanu Mishra are the prominent theorists.

⁵ Indeed, the mundanity of this approach contrasts with and balances the mystical thought.

⁶ The class bias of Sanskrit learning is clearly reflected here: she who is neither aristocrat is a harlot.

rather than the emphasis on individual personality and the ego in a bourgeois capitalist society.

While thumrī singers and composers do not appear to have been preoccupied with systematically portraying all the 385 heroine-types, some educated present-day singers like Naina Devi and Rita Gangoly do stress the relevance and importance of the eight basic heroine-types in thumrī. Hence, Devi writes, "A study of the 'Nayika Bheda' is necessary and is very helpful in rendering Thumrī effectively" (Devi 1975). As we shall discuss below, many thumrī singers consciously attempt while improvising to portray through music the deliberately simple and vague text in as many shades of meaning (e.g., reproach, tenderness, sorrow, etc.) as is possible.

Similarly, most authors of thumrī texts appear to have been influenced, even if only indirectly, by the *nāyikā bheda* theory. More importantly, most traditional thumrīs were written expressly to accompany *abhinaya* (representational dance) in *kathak* dance, which generally portrays a particular *nāyikā*.¹ Hence, while many thumrī composers may have been influenced only indirectly by the theory, most pre-1900 authors appear to have consciously based their texts on the stereotypical *nāyikās* (Garg 1975: 69).

Hence, many thumrīs can indeed be classified into these eight (or ten) sub-types, depending on the character and situation of the heroine portrayed. Naturally, many, if not most thumrīs contain elements of more than one sub-type, and conversely, many do not fit nicely into any of the eight groups. Still, we can conveniently analyze most texts in terms of the traditional classification.

(1) *Vāsakasajjā nāyikā*²—"one dressed up for union." While this *nāyikā* appears often enough in thumrīs, she is seldom the main theme. A good example is a *choṭā ḥayāl* in *rāga* Kedār by Bade Ghulam Ali Khan:

EXAMPLE 3

Re naveli nār
Ban ṭhan nikālī apne mandarva
Piyā ke mandarva
*kār singār katrab nainan mein Sab Rang piyā ke dekhāt.*³

O newly wed bride,
 emerging elaborately adorned from her house to that of her lover;
 sneaking off with eyes decorated,
 she beholds her lover.

(2) *Virahotkanṭhitā nāyikā*—"one distressed by separation." This is perhaps the most general of sub-types, and accordingly appears in the majority of thumrīs. The

¹ The *nāyika bheda*, or male protagonist-type, is only occasionally portrayed in *abhinaya*, and is given less attention in aesthetic literature.

² The first eight heroine-types given here are from the *Nāṭya Śāstra* (Bharata 1951: 467-9).

³ Sung by the composer on Odeon MOAE-5004. The poet's *nom de plume*, in this case, Sab Rang ("all colors"), is frequently inserted in the last line.

composition below is justifiably among the most famous and favorite thumrī Bhairvī.

EXAMPLE 4

Bājū band khul khul jāe
Sānvarīyā ne jādū dāra
Jādū kī pūriyā bhar bhar mārā re
*Kā karegā ved bičāra?*¹

My bracelets have slipped off;
 my lover has cast a spell on me;
 he has struck me with a vessel full of magic;
 what can the helpless doctor do?

Here, the heroine's bracelets have fallen off because in pining for her absence she has refused food and become sick and emaciated.

Of less intrinsic poetic interest, but equally popular, are the many various two texts below.

EXAMPLE 5

Sūratīyā dekh bin nahīn cāin
Kāse kahūn jī ke bain
*Tarpat hūn dīn raīn.*²

I have no peace when I don't see him;
 how can I express the state of my heart?
 I am fretting day and night.

EXAMPLE 6

Kate na birhā kī rāt
Sakhī ke bin joban jāt
Sudhī bistrāī morā, āngana na bhāve
*Kāse kahūn bāt?*³

The night of separation doesn't pass;
 my youth is ebbing without my lover;
 I am losing my senses, the courtyard displeases me,
 how can I express it?

In the tradition of Kalidas' "Megha-Dhut" ("Cloud-Messenger") is the thumrī.

¹ Sung by Bade Ghulam Ali Khan on Hindustan Records 7TJE 228. ✓

² Sung by Padmavati Shaligram on All India Radio, 3/20/81.

³ Sung by Bade Ghulam Ali Khan on Odeon MOAE 5005.

EXAMPLE 7

Saiyyān se sandeśa morā kahiā jāe
 Kāga re jā re
 Yād āvat unki batiyān
 Kal na parat jiyā jā re piyā se sandeśa morā.
 (Telang 1977:50)

O crow, go and bring news of my beloved;
 how I remember his fond conversation!
 I languish without him;
 go and bring word.

The text below was popularized by Begum Akhtar.

EXAMPLE 8

Koeliyā mat kar pukār karejva lāge kaṭār
 Madhūr madhūr tore bain, virhan ke harat cāin
 Bhar bhar āvat nain, hūk uṭhat bār bār.¹

Don't cry out cuckoo, your call is like a dagger in my heart;
 your (the lover's) conversation was so sweet, I've lost all peace;
 my eyes are filled with tears, again and again I am wracked with sobs.

(3) *Śvādhina-bharṭṛkā* (*svādhina-patikā*) *nāyikā*—"one having her husband in subjection." This is the sole *nāyikā bheda* (excluding the rare # 10 below) which does not portray the heroine's loneliness or anxiety. Correspondingly, *thumrīs* in this category are practically non-existent. Shukla cites the following song in *rāga Bihāg*.²

EXAMPLE 9

Laṭ uljhī suljhā jāre bālum
 Hāthan more mehndī lagī hai
 Māthe kī bindiyā bikhar gāi
 Apne hāth lagā jāre bālmā.

Straighten my disheveled locks, dear,
 I've got henna on my hands;
 the dot on my forehead is all scattered;
 put it right with your own hand.

(4) *Kalahāntarītā nāyikā*—"one separated from her lover by a quarrel." This is also among the less common *nāyikās* in *thumrī*, although it may provide the implicit basis for such ambiguous texts as the following.

¹ Sung by Begum Akhtar on Odeon ECLP 2444.

² Garg 1975: 75, in Shukla. Also sung by sitarist Vilayat Khan on tape I-15 of Jairazbhoy collection.

EXAMPLE 10

Piyā to mānat nahīn, kaun jatan se mānāūn?

My lover doesn't believe me, how can I convince him?

More explicit is the text below.

EXAMPLE 11

Bālum tere jhagṛe men rain gāi
 Kahān gae cānda kahān gae badrā?
 Kahān gāi prīt nāi?
 Khul gae badrā chitak rahe tāre
 Soī ab gintī rahī

(Shukla 1973: 34121).

O my beloved, we fought in the night;
 where has the moon gone, where have the clouds gone?
 Where has my new-found love gone?
 The sky has cleared, stars are scattered about;
 now I shall go to sleep counting them.

(5) *Khaṇḍitā nāyikā*—"one enraged by her lover." The heroine's unfaithful lover is fairly common in *thumrīs*; a good singer can oft prodigious effect the despair and even love that may lie behind such. The traditional *thumrī* below in *Khamāj* is a typical example.

EXAMPLE 12

Jāvo kadar nahīn bolo ham se
 Ham se bahuterā tum re dam dam se
 Jhūṭī lagāvat, nahīn mohe bhāvat ho
 Hār jāt tum re jam jam se

(Poochwala 1952: 1)

Go, don't say any more to me;
 I've had enough of your deceit;
 your lies don't soothe me,
 you only lose by talking more.

(6) *Vipralabdā nāyikā*—"one deceived by her lover." Many of this category and the preceding one are mutually interchangeable, as usual cause of the heroine's anger. The text below is typical.

EXAMPLE 13

Sāncī kaho mose batiyān piyā
 Kahān guzārī sārī ratiyān?

Madho Piya tori vintī karat hūn
Ab na chipāvo mose batiyān piyā
 (Telang 1977: 32)

Tell me truthfully,
 where do you spend every night?
 (Madho Piya) I beseech you,
 don't hide anything.

(7) *Proṣṭabhartṛkā nāyikā*—"one with a sojourning husband." Here there is no explicit suggestion of infidelity or an altercation between the lovers; they are simply separated for one reason or another. Many *thumrīs* in this category could also be classified in #2 above.

EXAMPLE 14

Saiyān bin ghar suna, suna saṁvariya na āe
*Jab se bālum pardeś sidhāre, cain jiya nahīn pāe.*¹

The house is desolate without my beloved, he hasn't come;
 ever since he left, I've had no peace.

(8) *Abhisārikā nāyikā*—"one who moves to her lover." Here the heroine goes at night to meet her beloved, facing the dangers of the dark jungle and, often, detection by her mother-in-law.

EXAMPLE 15

Morā saiyaṇ bulāve ādhī rāt
Hān nadiyā bhārī bhārī
*Sun re mallāḥ hotā terī naya laga di jā re.*²

My beloved has called me in the middle of the night;
 the river is high and deep;
 hear me, o boatman, prepare your boat to take me across.

In a well-known *thumrī* attributed to Khurshid Ali Khan (1845-?), Krishna is urged to visit the heroine while disguised as Radha in order to avoid recognition.

EXAMPLE 16

Tum Rādhe bano Sām
Sab dekhenge brij bāma
Mero kahā tum eko nahīn mātā
Aj paro mose Kānhā

¹ Recorded by Nazakat Ali and Salamat Ali on EMI 6TCS 02B 5040.

² Recorded by Hira Devi Mishra on Odeon ECSD 2748.

Sab sakhiyān milī nāc nācāve
*Yeh hai brij ghan Sām.*¹

Come to me dressed as Radha, O Krishna;
 all the women will be watching;
 you don't listen to anything I tell you;
 but today come to me;
 all my friends will be meeting and dancing;
 this is the dark Krishna of Braj.

Finally, Garg (1975: 69) enumerates two more categories:

(9) *Pravatsyātpatikā nāyikā*—"the heroine who is distressed upon her beloved's departure." The author has not come across any portraying this particular condition.

(10) *Āgataṣatikā nāyikā*—"the heroine who is returning joyfully abode." Such texts are seldom, if ever, found in *thumrī*.

In *thumrīs* expressing the pangs of separation, as in most amato protagonists, whether implicitly or explicitly, are Radha and Krishna; some of those cited above, the beloved is simply referred to as *piyā sajjan*—all ambiguous terms which could denote either a husband or a lover. Correspondingly, traditions differ as to whether Radha and Krishna are not; according to the latter tradition, illicit love is more profound and lovers take greater risks in consummating it. Many *thumrīs*, such as those referred to above, refer specifically to Radha and/or, more often, Krishna.² Again, some common texts are not easily accommodated into the *nāyikā bheda* but are nevertheless frequently found in Hindi verse. One such composition below, which, in its many variants, is a favorite with its scope for expression through *abhinaya*.

EXAMPLE 17

Batā de kaun galī gāyo Sām
Gokul dhūndhā Bindrāban dhūndhā.

Tell me, down which alley has Sām gone?
 I've searched Gokul, I've searched Brindāban.³

In many texts, the heroine is driven mad with love by Krishna; a typical example is this *thumrī* in Khamāj, which was extremely popular in the decades of this century.

¹ Recorded by Parween Sultana on Odeon ESCD 2748.

² Krishna is often referred to by one of his epithets, e.g., *Sāma*, *Ghan* ("dark one"), *Giridhārī* ("holder of Mt. Giri"), *Kānhā*, *Hari*, *Manmohan*, *Rasiyā*, *Nand ke dhātā*.

³ For a much longer version of this text, see Garg 1975: 67. Note how the text has changed in song-texts to "Bindrāban," presumably because the latter is more

EXAMPLE 18

Kānhā murlī vāle Nand ko chail
Basiyā bajāe mān har līno jāe
Mohan murlī ter sunā jāe
Sughar Piya kī arj le mān
 (Telang 1977: 4)

Krishna, the flautist, the mischievous son of Nand,
 has stolen every heart with his flute-playing;
 we hear the call of his flute;
 believe what Sughar Piya says.

A composition of more recent origin is that below, written by Chinmoy Lahiri, and popularized by his disciple, Parween Sultana.

EXAMPLE 19

Rasiyā mohe bulāve
More bādhe lipaṭ rahe, sunī murlī dhūn
Vyākul rahe tan man, nain nīr bahāe.

The libertine (Krishna) is calling me
 but impediments cling to me; hearing the tune of his flute,
 my heart and soul are distracted with yearning and tears flow from my eyes.

An interesting variation of this theme is a popular thumrī in which Radha berates Krishna's flute, as she is jealous that it, rather than she, is always at his lips.

EXAMPLE 20

Murliyā, kaun gumān bhari?
Na sone kī na rūpe kī, na koī ratan jari.¹

O flute, what is this arrogance you are filled with?
 You are made neither of gold nor silver, nor are you studded with gems.

The basic theme of nearly all the texts we have examined above is separation. While the erotic, *śṛṅgāra rasa* predominates in thumrī, it is the pangs of unrequited longing rather than the joys of union that are portrayed. The tradition of depicting the protagonist (in Urdu as well as Hindi verse) as perpetually forlorn and distressed contrasts with artistic conventions in many other cultures (e.g., Western pop), which balance laments with optimistic and jubilant songs. Two approaches may be taken in attempting to explain this concentration on unrequited love. From a purely aesthetic viewpoint, the artists' choice to dwell endlessly on one theme—that of separation—can be seen as a deliberate limitation which affords a singular depth of sentiment and expression, and which further provides a conventional stylistic framework which

¹ Recorded by Siddheshvari Devi on Columbia SEDE 3304.

highlights the individual artist's contribution. Indeed, this approach to many other aspects of Indian art: just as the Hindi poet may devote to describing subtle nuances and shades of unrequited love, so may perform lengthy interpretative passages on a single text phrase; an may spend ten minutes of a performance elaborating three or four developing their melodic potential in extreme depth.

While the concentration on a single theme may be a deliberate artistic choice of the particular theme of separation cannot be regarded as exceptional. While that theme is certainly meaningful to all cultures, some scholars (e.g., Islam 1968: 3) have argued that it is particularly expressive of the Indian condition. First, actual physical separation of couples is common in India; economic hardship often obliges the husband to live and work away from home; disease and other natural accidents may also prematurely claim the husband or partner. Moreover, in much of rural India, men and women live separately, while in the cities the entire joint family may sleep in two rooms, or, in the summer, on the rooftop. Naturally, due to lack of privacy in such situations, sexual intercourse may take place in secret, causing frustration to both parties. Hence, in some thumrīs, the husband is urged to spend the night with her rather than in the courtyard with his father.

At a broader level, the theme of separation and frustration may be particularly meaningful to the Indian whose interests and aspirations are frequently frustrated by the customary demands of family, caste, and society at large. The individual, rather than the individual, has been regarded as the unit of the Indian economic system (Basham 1959: 155). Hence, social cohesion, conventionalized behavior have been stressed at the expense of the individual's autonomy. In many cases, formalization between the sexes often occurs, and the concept of the individual's marital duty may overshadow that of love. Marriages often assume the character of parentally arranged financial contracts, where bargaining over dowry and bride price takes more attention than the potential compatibility of the bride and groom. (The reported "dowry murders" in recent decades would seem to suggest an increasing, especially among the middle classes.) Such a rigid and conventionalized conductive as it may be to a sort of cohesion and order, may naturally result in frustration at the level of the individual, and when his personal hopes are thwarted or narrowly channelled, it should not be surprising that dance, and even painting tend to dwell upon the pain of separation (Islam 1968: 3).

The fear of social castigation is depicted in the numerous thumrīs portraying the anxiety of the heroine that her jingling anklets may wake the sleeping mother-in-law as she furtively sneaks off to meet her lover. Other texts portray Krishna teasing the cowgirl heroine, while she pleads to release her, lest they be seen together in daylight. An example is

¹ An example is Rasoolan Bai's recording (Colum GE 18016) of "Āngan mein mat the courtyard tonight."

EXAMPLE 21

Sab hī nār-nārī dekhāt
Lāj na āve, nit uṭh kahe ko muskyaṭ, aisi
Ab kī jāne de bāt, milūngī rāt, rahūngī sāth, sunūngī bāt
Ghar ko jāne de, ratīyā āne de, sās sunegī to degī gātī
 (Telang 1977: 97).¹

All the women are looking, have you no sense of decency?
 Why are you always leering so?
 Let me go, I'll meet you tonight, and stay with you, and listen to you;
 let me go home, and come in the evening; if my mother-in-law hears she'll abuse me.

Thumrī Texts and the Urdu Ghazal

The phenomenon of the predominance of the theme of separation has also been discussed in relation to the Urdu ghazal,² and the two genres do invite comparison. In ghazal, as in thumrī, expression and consummation of love are always thwarted, and the lover is driven to near madness. Naturally, ghazals, most of which are written as independent poetry rather than mere song-texts, are more sophisticated, subtle, and rich than thumrī texts; but aside from this, one may discern some important differences between the kinds of separation depicted in the two genres. Ghazal is written from the man's perspective, focussing solely on his wretched condition; in thumrī, the female is the speaker and protagonist (although we may assume that most thumrīs were composed by men). The beloved in ghazal is often portrayed as cruel, disdainful, and generally heartless, occasionally even wielding a scimitar with which to behead her lovers, who offer their necks in meek abnegation. This sort of extremism is absent in thumrī; moreover, while in thumrī the beloved is often reproached for his infidelity, he is not portrayed as spiteful. Krishna is mischievous but not cruel, and he is unfaithful but not uncaring.

The difference in tone between the two genres is perhaps due to the even greater social repression and inflexibility of heterosexual relations in medieval Muslim society, and on the other hand, to the tradition of sensuality in Hindu culture which has always pervaded Indian art, and has been traditionally accorded a place in society. In general, the thumrī is less pessimistic than the ghazal; in the latter, there is seldom any faith that union with the beloved will ever be achieved. On the other hand, in thumrī, while the beloved may be out of town, it is implicit that he will return eventually. Again, the model of the *Gīta Govinda* may be cited:³ Radha spends one night in the agony of longing, but the following night Krishna comes and they consummate their love in a night-long ecstatic orgy. This felicitous conclusion may be contrasted with the fate of Majnun, the legendary lover in the ghazal, who dies

¹ *Antarā* only given here. Not the internal rhyme in line 3.

² Cf., e.g., Russell and Islam 1968: 2, or Manuel 1979: 22ff.

³ For a summary of the *Gīta Govinda*, see Alphonso-Karkala 1971: 502-5.

wandering mad and alone in the desert. Yet even in Hindi poetry, Krishna is adulterer rather than husband to Radha may reflect a institution of marriage as a source of fulfilment.

Mysticism and Sensuality in Thumrī

Thus far we have been considering thumrīs of separation as emotional relationships. Yet there are two other aspects of *śṛṅgāra* that need to be examined if we are to fully understand poetry in this hand, there is the important devotional and spiritual element in such other hand, there is the body of thumrīs, now seldom heard, which is sensual and even obscene.

In the previous section we discussed how Hindi poetry combined with mundane eroticism. Thumrī texts naturally share this dual pervades Hindu art in general—for in thumrī, as in much traditional Krishna is the supreme deity as well as the ideal lover, and Radha's model for man's spiritual love for God. What is debatable in the much of Hindi poetry, painting, and sculpture, is the extent to which element rivals the purely erotic element. While some writers attest of Bhakti in thumrī (e.g., Bose 1970: 29-30), others, like Meer (19), such apologists are merely attempting to provide a glossy spiritual mundane eroticism. It is difficult to generalize about the degree of it in thumrīs as a class, except to say that it is a highly variable element according to text, temperament, and even mood of the singer and of the texts we have examined could easily accommodate devotion; their tenor is more overtly mundane. In some thumrīs, however, the more explicit. An example is the text below; the image of the 'he river to meet her beloved is common enough,¹ but here it seems river is to be understood as life itself, the boatman as the spiritual protagonist as the ardent devotee in search of mystical annihilation

EXAMPLE 22

Jhānjhrī morī nāiyā prabhū pār karo
Guṇ nahīn ek bhī, agūṇ bahut
*Chōṭī-sī nāiyā bare bhānj bhaīyo.*²

O God, take my leaky boat across;
 I have not one virtue, only vices;
 the vessel is small, and the current strong.

Munawar Ali Khan gives as an example of a spiritual thumrī the Bhairvī "*Main to tore dāmanvā lagī mahārāj*"—"I cling to your skirt, I

¹ See ex.15 above.

² Source is Dr. Kalyan Mukherjee.

states that a text like "*Bāju band khul khul jāe*" (see above Ex.4) can be interpreted as potentially devotional, while one like "*Ras ke bhare tore nain*"—"Your eyes are filled with passion"—is purely erotic.¹

Some *thumrīs* appear to have been designed by literate authors to suggest multiple interpretations. Perhaps the best example of such a text is the famous *thumrī* of Wajid Ali Shah:

EXAMPLE 23

Bābul morā naihar chūto hī jāe
Cār kahār mil duliyañ mangāvo
*Apnā bigānā chūto jāe.*²

Father, I am leaving my home;
 four bearers are lifting my palanquin;
 my house is becoming foreign to me.

This song admits three meanings (Shukla 1983: 212–3):

- (1) the bride being taken from her maternal home to her husband's house;
- (2) the corpse borne on a bier in the funeral procession, as the soul proceeds to meet its maker;
- (3) Wajid Ali Shah himself departing from Lucknow, whence he was exiled in 1856 by the British.

A few mystical texts were also written for specific saints (e.g., Hazrat Turkman, Nizamuddin Awliya) or to commemorate specific occasions.³

Similarly, the nineteenth century anthology, the *Rāga Kalpadruma*, contains many *thumrīs* which are in purely devotional vein, like *bhājans* (Singh, in Telang 1977: 5).

Most texts, however, are ambiguous, and it is generally safe to infer that from the poetic standpoint, the devotional element is secondary to aesthetic eroticism. Certain singers, such as Abdul Karim Khan and Siddeshvari Devi, are regarded as having expressed the spiritual aspect of their *thumrīs* more than such singers as Bade Ghulam Ali Khan. It would naturally be difficult to analyse and pinpoint the stylistic idiosyncracies that impart devotionism or, conversely, eroticism to such music,

¹ Personal communication.

² Recorded by Girja Devi on EMI ECLP 2334.

³ Hafiz Ahmad Khan relates a story regarding the 19th century vocalist Inayat Hussein Khan of the Rampur *gharānā*. It seems that the Sufi saint Khalil Mian of Sitapur expressed a desire to hear Inayat sing. Hearing of this, the latter scoffed, "What does he know of music? He is but an ignorant dilettante." Nevertheless, Inayat traveled to Sitapur to fulfill the holy man's request, and when he sat before the saint, the latter said, "Of course, I know nothing about music, I am just an ignorant dilettante." Inayat Khan was astounded that Khalil Mian could have telepathically overheard his contemptuous remark, and, paralyzed with awe and shame, he hung his head and was unable to sing. Finally, Khalil Mian bade him look into his eyes; doing so, Inayat Khan was at once overcome with mystical ecstasy and wisdom, and composed and sang on the spot a *thumrī* in *rāga Pīlū* which is still sung by his descendants. In the text (which I was unable to notate), the description of the eyes of the beloved could refer to those of an earthly lover, as well as those of the saint.

although the sensationalistic virtuoso effects indulged in by Bade some of his disciples are cited by Sunil Bose as expressions of the su eroticism in their music.¹ Also the temperament, taste, and style of the listener may certainly influence his own impressions in this regard, natural that if the singer is physically attractive, like Parween Sul Girja Devi, the erotic element in her art may be more strongly a listeners.

Indeed it should be remembered that *thumrī* was traditionally that of the courtesans, and that it evolved in their salons. Until the prominent *thumrī* singers were practising *ṭawā'ifs* (courtesans) who sold themselves largely through their music. Hence, a *ṭawā'if* might perform erotic *thumrīs* in order to excite her all-male audiences so that wealthy customers.² Now that *thumrī* has moved from the red-light stage, and is sung by "respectable" women and men rather than the erotic element is naturally less overt. But due partly to this original function of *thumrī* (to attract customers), eroticism was fostered explicitly and deliberately emphasized, particularly through such

Moreover, as mentioned earlier, many texts were overtly erotic. In such texts, the *lemon* was the standard euphemism for the male. The traditional "*Tote na nimbua . . .*"—"Such is my misfortune that the lemon is on my lap . . ." Many such songs were reportedly sung by male musicians even prominent artists like Faiyaz Khan, who was celebrated for "*Paiyān parkūngī palkā na carhūngī*"—"I'll fall at your feet, (but) I'll be bed." Kalyan Mukherjea relates:⁴

Faiyaz Khan would sing such songs and twirl his moustache and and Ata Hussein Khan would be trying to hide behind the *tānpā* and would see this and say, "Hey, Khansaheb, what are you as

Some songs of this nature were particularly suitable for rendering such as the following piece of juvenilia:

EXAMPLE 24

Kaise yeh horī khilāi
Sām' mohe corī lagāi re
Khelat gend girī Jamunā men
Kin ne morī gend curāi?
Hāth dār angiyā bic dekhūngī
Ek gāi do pāi

(Telang 1977: 118)

¹ Personal communication.

² See below pp. 132ff.

³ Personal communications with Anil Biswas and Dr. Kalyan Mukherjea.

⁴ Personal communication.

How Krishna plays horī;
 he steals from me.
 While we were playing with the ball, it fell in the Jamuna (river);
 who stole my ball?
 Well, I'll look in my bodice—
 I lost one ball but found two!

Another more subtle example is the following text:

EXAMPLE 25

Sovat nīnd jagāe ho
Jab main rahī bārī na bhārī
Tab sāiyān lā gavan
Jab main bhālī bār taras ke
Tab sāiyān calā bides.¹

You woke me up from my slumber;
 when I was young and unripe,
 my husband came and took me to his village;
 now when I'm passionately craving him,
 he goes off and leaves me.

Some obscene thumrīs were written from the male's perspective rather than the female's. The composition below in Khamāj is typical:

EXAMPLE 26

Zarā dhīraj dharo bālum
Jo hai choṭī-sī ban jāegī
Jaise bāgche mein palat nimbūwā, vaise vaise hī.²

Be patient, dear,
 what is small now will become
 like that lemon ripening in the garden, just like that.

Such songs are part of the long Indian tradition of frankness regarding sex that surfaces most notably in Sanskrit verse, in treatises like the *Kāma Sūtra*, in classical painting, and in sculpture such as that adorning the famed temples of Khajuraho. The medieval ancestors of thumrī and *kathak* were evidently performed and refined in temples, courts, and salons primarily by courtesans. As discussed above, from the mid-seventeenth century on, political and economic decadence contributed to the rise of patrons and poets whose aesthetic values were more hedonistic and sensual than spiritual. The metaphors and format of Bhakti poetry were retained, but in their verse

¹ Sung by Begum Akhtar on Odeon ECLP 2444.

² Source is Dr. Kalyan Mukherjea.

... the sensuous element is sometimes so pronounced that the an avowed religious purpose seem to stand on the very threshold. Spirituality becomes a mere pretext for indulgence in grossness (Dwivedi 1966: 95).

This trend became even more marked in the 19th century. Lu attained prominence and maturity. The explicit eroticism in his period was paralleled by what is generally regarded as the dimmest of contemporary Urdu poetry, most notably the verse of Jur' unpubhishable Mirza Rafi. Now that thumrī is sung on stage by the prudish bourgeoisie, such thumrīs are never heard.

Miscellaneous Themes in Thumrī

A great many thumrīs, particularly older ones, depict nei romance, but Krishna the cowherd teasing the peasant women go to the Jamuna river to fill water-jugs. Often Krishna would break clay pots on their heads:

EXAMPLE 27

Kānhā morī gagariyā phorī re
Dekho dekho rī langarvā ne kinhī bārajorī.
Hūn Jamunā jal bharan jātī thī
Bic langar mose kinhīn bārajorī
 (Telang 1977: 152).

Krishna has broken my water-jug; see how this mischievous I used to go to the Jamuna to fill my pot, but Krishna

Another favorite prank portrayed in many miniatures was the clothes as they bathed.

EXAMPLE 28

Cunariyā de de morī Syām
Bār bār kar jorat tum son
Tan man morā kānpān lagī dekho murārī
Āvat dekhat sab jan ham ko
Jay sās ghar kahe sab unko
Hāth daiya ab kaise karūn rī
 (Telang 1977: 48).

1. For example:

Gorī gorī bhārī bhārī haīn sīrīn yeh gol gol
Cherhne ko jinke kyā hāth phailā jāe hai.

"Those round buttocks are white and heavy; how the hand sidles (Matthews and Shackle 1972: 76-7).

Give me back my bodice, Krishna,
I beg you again and again;
look, my heart and soul are trembling;
all the womenfolk will come and see,
and they'll go to my house and tell my mother-in-law;
alas, what shall I do?

Many such *thumrīs*, especially those of Binda Din Maharaj (d. 1917), were written expressly to be rendered together with *kathak abhinaya*; these compositions, which generally contain physical imagery suitable for interpretation through mime, are sometimes referred to as *artha-bhāva thumrīs*. *Thumrīs* describing Krishna teasing the cowgirls are numerous but highly stereotypical, so there is no need to quote more.

The final important thematic group of *thumrīs* to be considered are those which deal with celebration of the vernal *holī* festival. Such compositions are generally referred to as a separate category of songs, called "holī" (= *horī*), and their evolution is to a certain extent discrete from other *thumrī* texts. However, they are in every aspect but theme identical to *thumrīs*, and hence are best considered a subcategory of *thumrī*.

The arrival of spring is in itself a considerable cause for joy. To most Indian peasants, it means the end of bitterly cold winter nights spent shivering under tattered blankets; moreover, the *rabī* winter crop is standing ready for harvest in the verdant fields. Like May Day in Europe, *holī* was originally a fertility rite, dating from the late stone age (Kosambi 1975: 199). It is currently celebrated throughout India by throwing colored water, colored powder, and water-balloons at passers-by and neighbors. Village untouchables hurl mud at the local Brahmins, while in the cities, bands of male college students seize the opportunity to harass and molest their female colleagues.

Holī songs typically commemorate the exasperating but charming antics of Krishna as he bespatters the cowgirls with color.

EXAMPLE 29

Vaṣhī vāle se khelūngī main to holi
Mohe rang meṇ karī aur jhakjhorī
Dahī more khāy maṭkiyā phorī
Lāj sarm sab torī
Braj kī sakhī kar rahī bājorī
Nāhak bahiyān marorī

(Kulshreshtha 1978: 19).

I'll play *holī* with the flautist (Krishna);
covering me with color, pulling and tussling,
he broke my curd-pot;
he shattered all my decency;
he teases the women of Braj and unjustly twists my arm.

EXAMPLE 30

Āj khelo Śyām sang holī
Pīckārī rang bhari kesar kī
Abīr gulāl kī dhūm maṭāī
Khelat Rādhā sang Kanhāī
(Kulshreshtha 1978: 5).

Today play *holī* with Krishna;
he squirts saffron about;
making a stir with rose-water,
Krishna and Rādhā play *holī* together.

*Thematic and Structural Differences between Bandish and Bol Banāo*¹

Thus far we have been discussing thematic content in *bandish* *thumrīs* together insofar as the two sub-genres share an emphasis on Krishnaite *śṛṅgāra rasa*, and an avoidance of certain topics encountered in *dhrupad*. Nevertheless, *bandish* and *bol banāo thumrīs* do differ in subject matter, as well as in their rhetorical and musical style. *Bandish* songs, often written to accompany dance; emphasis is on light, lively songs, often written to accompany dance; emphasis is on leisurely, and sober melodic improvisation, but rather on fast *tāns* (rhythmic manipulation of the text in fast tempo). Hence *bandish* tends to be correspondingly light and playful, and their rhetoric tightly knit, and making prodigious use of alliteration and internal rhymes.

Based on an examination of a large number of *bandish thumrīs* although around one fifth of *bandish thumrīs* do express the sorrow of Krishna's teasing of the cowgirls, a greater number (nearly one half) describe Krishna's teasing of the charming flute-playing. *Bol banāo thumrīs*, on the other hand, bases for serious affective text elaboration in slow tempo; the text even) an aurally sonorous, catchy limerick, but a vehicle for precise expression through melodic improvisation. Hence, trivial descriptive pranks are far outnumbered by portrayals of loneliness and longing. As we shall discuss, *bol banāo* texts are simple, stereotypical, and in comparison with the *bandish thumrīs*, but they offer far more serious representation.

We may illustrate the different emphases in subject matter by comparing ninety-two *bandish thumrīs* from the anthology *Thumrī Sangrah* (Tej Singh 1978) with forty *bol banāo thumrīs* I have culled from various recordings. *Bandish thumrīs* naturally contain elements of more than one theme (e.g., *holī*, and K

¹ Out of the total 103 songs in the collection, I have omitted two Sanskrit *thumrī* songs. There are no substantial published anthologies of *bol banāo thumrīs*, present texts are of less intrinsic poetic interest, and, more importantly, their melodies can be easily identified because of their rather loose structure.

I have attempted in the conclusions below to select the dominant subject in each case.

THEMATIC CONTENT

	<i>bandish thumrīs</i>		<i>bol banāo thumrīs</i>	
	number	percent	number	percent
Krishna teasing cowgirls	29	32	1	2
longing, separation	19	21	31	78
Krishna's flute-playing	15	16	3	7
adoration of Krishna	13	14		
reproach and jealousy	11	12	5	13
obscenity	2	2	0	0
warning against love	2	2	0	0
description of women	1	1	0	0

The reader will note that the theme of separation is far more predominant in the *bol banāo thumrīs* than in the *bandish thumrīs*, a plurality of which deal instead with Krishna's boyish pranks.

The different musical styles of the two types of *thumrī* are also reflected in their respective lengths. In the *bandish thumrī*, as the name "*bandish*" ("composition") itself suggests, much of the emphasis is on the composition as an integral part of the musical performance; by contrast, the emphasis in the *bol banāo thumrī* is on the emotional expression of a text which is in itself insignificant, acquiring emotional meaning only when the singer interprets the words and infuses them with poignancy through melodic improvisation. Since *bandish thumrīs* as compositions are of considerable importance in performance, many of these are longer than *bol banāo thumrīs* in terms of number of lines. Many have multiple *antarās* (secondary sections, based in the upper region of the octave) and thus assume a strophic character if the entire text is sung (which need not be).

Again using the *Thumrī Sangrah* compositions as a representative sample of *bandish thumrīs*, the chart below illustrates the tendency of these songs to be longer than *bol banāo thumrīs* (while the length of a performance of a *bol banāo thumrī* may be much longer than that of a *bandish thumrī*).

It should be evident from the variety of lengths shown on p. 27 that although *bandish thumrīs* tend to be longer than *bol banāo thumrīs*, there is no single standardized format for either sub-genre. While four-line structure is the most common single form, a majority of compositions are in other forms. Similarly, the length of the lines themselves may vary somewhat within a single text (e.g., see ex. 7 on page 12 above),

LENGTH OF COMPOSITIONS

number of lines	<i>bandish thumrīs</i>		<i>bol banāo thumrīs</i>
	number	percent	number
2	1	1	1
3	8	8	10
4	32	31	14
5	19	18	4
6	23	22	4
7	11	11	2
8	6	6	1
more	3	3	0

The chart may be simplified thusly:

number of lines	<i>bandish thumrīs</i>		<i>bol banāo thumrīs</i>
	number	percent	number
less than 4	9	9	12
4	32	31	13
more than 4	62	60	11

particularly in the more loosely constructed *bol banāo thumrīs*, which lack systematic use of meter.

Rhyme and Rhetoric

Use of rhyme is correspondingly irregular and far from standardized. A large percent of *thumrīs* have no rhyme at all, while the rest display a wide variety of schemes. Most texts contain some sort of end-rhyme. In *bol banāo thumrīs* end-rhymes are generally present, they are not always noticeable in the text. For example, the last line in an *abcb* or *aba* text may be delivered as much as two lines after the initial line with which it rhymes. The free-rhythmic character of the text delivery and the absence of a strophic melodic refrain make the rhyme less present, even less conspicuous, so that it is somewhat surprising that rhyme is in fact present in some form. To some extent, rhyme in *bol banāo thumrīs* constitutes an anachronistic survival from the *bandish thumrī*, which is structurally far more important due to the more rapid and rhythmic delivery.

Among the four-line compositions, *aa:ba* is the most common scheme.

latter two lines constituting the *antarā*. *Aba* is also fairly frequent in *bol banāo* *thumrīs* of three lines.

Considerable variety of rhyme schemes is evident in the chart below; here I have employed a rather liberal definition of "rhyme," encompassing the counterfeit device of outright repetition of a word at the ends of two lines (e.g., "... *bāl* / ... *bāl*"), and the not uncommon gratuitous insertion of the non-lexical interjection "rī" at the ends of two lines which would otherwise not rhyme.

RHYME SCHEMES

	<i>bandish thumrīs</i>		<i>bol banāo thumrīs</i>	
	number	percent	number	percent
every line rhymes	6	6	6	12
no line rhymes	13	12	4	8
<i>aa:ba</i>	10	9	4	8
<i>a:ba</i>	0	0	5	10
closing rhyme of				
some other sort	67	63	27	57
multiple rhyming <i>antarās</i>	11	10	1	2

This chart does not reflect the occurrence of internal rhyme, which is an equally common, and certainly more conspicuous phenomenon in *thumrī* than is end-rhyme. A good example is the text below of Lallan Piya.¹

EXAMPLE 31

So nāī nār nayo rang dhang chāl bal
Vo dekho ālī āyī rangilī rasilī chavī
Nainan kī cālān pherat cītāvan cīt
Cor mān haran heran nīrālī āe ālī!
Lallan Piya pyārī pyārī chavī pāī vārī
Vārī mukh mayank dutī mukhra ajab so nāī nār
 (Telang 1977: 28).

This flirtatious woman in ever-new colors and fashions;
 look at her colorful and voluptuous appearance;
 her eyes darting about mischievously;
 seeing her, the thief in my heart takes over;
 Lallan Piya sacrifices himself to her lovely shadow,
 to this moon-faced, bright-faced, wondrous nymph.

¹ This is one of the very few *thumrīs* which present the male rather than female perspective.

Alliteration and internal rhyme are both extremely common in where they serve to decorate and punctuate each line with lively respect they may be said to enhance further the emphasis on rhythmic setting itself. Obviously, then, such texts are better appreciated when simply read.

In some cases, the alliteration reaches manneristic extremes, as Lallan Piya.

EXAMPLE 33

Kūken koiliyā karo kuṭil kaṭhor kūkdar
Kukāmīna katuk kaḥan kūt kārī kārī
Kaṇt kou kāmīnī kī kāmna karat
Keli kalkārī kirman kī
Kartūlī kahā kahūn
Kāyā kalah kaṭārī kārī
 (Bajpayee 1977: 102).¹

Equally indicative of the *bandish thumrī*'s stress on sound over compositions called *adhar-band* (literally, "(with) fixed lips"); their due to the absence of labials, the entire text is pronounced without. The author of the composition below is again Lallan Piya.

EXAMPLE 34

Sakhī saiyān kī suratiyā jiyāra hare
Aiso nayanā aniyāre
Sanjan se khare
Cārū heran catur adhik
Lalit dayan hāsan nyārī
Darsat ras rang so
Kahi na sakat sughartāī
Lallan chail rasiya rangilī thāro tūr tarū tare
 (Bajpayee 1977: 46).

O friend, my soul is seized by the appearance of my beloved
 such wondrous eyes, sharper than a knife;
 he looks about mischievously, appears laughing strangely, in different moods;

I can't describe his grace;
 O you charming rake, Lallan, wait for me under the tree.

Such compositions may be said to exhibit the same belabored sophistication that characterizes much of nineteenth-century Lucknow and Urdu poetry as well. Indeed, it is because of this sort of mannerism

¹ Adequate translation of this text was beyond the powers of my Hindi-speaking self.

detract from their musicality, that thumrīs like these are seldom sung today except as curiosities; they are clever rather than expressive, and quaint rather than timeless. Like the massive plaster and cement edifices erected by the Avadh nawābs, their durability is limited. Like all works of art, they were products of a particular class at a particular time; in chapter IV we shall attempt to examine some of the factors contributing to the uniqueness of this particular class, i.e., the Lucknow aristocracy, and the relative transience of their aesthetic tastes.

The Role of the Text in Singing

Thus far we have been discussing thumrī texts primarily as literary works. Judged in this perspective, they are not great masterpieces of art; although many reflect ingenuity or quaint charm, they are generally stereotyped, simple, and often pedestrian. But it must be remembered that they were not written as poems, but as song texts, and should be appreciated as such.¹ For when a poem is set to music, it loses its literary status and becomes part of the music, with a purely musical function and value. Suzanne Langer (1953: 153) has articulately described this phenomenon, which she calls "the principle of assimilation." It is because the song-text becomes a musical rather than poetic element that, in Langer's words, "trivial or sentimental lyrics may be good texts as well as great poems." Thumrī texts are fine examples of verse which is in itself undistinguished, but which forms an excellent vehicle for musical elaboration. Here we are discussing their meaning, more than their mere sound-value, for the goal of thumrī is the musical expression of the sentiment of the text.

The simplicity and breadth of thumrī texts are assets rather than a hindrance to expression. Langer (1953: 154) has noted how a great poem may not lend itself to musical rendering, as the text is so complete, autonomous, and self-contained that it "will not give up its literary form." Thumrī singer Rita Gangoly made a similar observation:

If there is a lot of concrete poetic imagery, then the obligation of the poetry to be expressed in music may become so great that the musician loses his freedom to improvise. That's why the text has to be simple, and that sort of simplicity is difficult to acquire in music, and in life . . . and that's why a simple *sāhitya* [poem], full of scope, is the ideal composition in *khayāl* and thumrī. Since the aim is music, not literature, if the literature is complete, then there's no scope for the singer. So the literature used is of such a type that it leaves a lot of area to be filled in.²

Thus, the most popular and effective thumrī texts are simple, open-ended statements expressing often in oblique terms a relatively broad and general emotional condition which a good singer can illuminate and present in an infinite variety of shades and forms. Typical examples are excerpts such as "*piyā bin nahīn āvat ěain*"—"I find no

¹ In this respect, thumrī differs from ghazal.

² Personal communication, 4/81.

peace without my lover"; "*ras ke bhare tore nain*"—"your eyes are or, even more suggestive and oblique, "*bājū band khul khul jāe*" slipped off."

Munawar Ali Khan has aptly likened the text to a telegram that has died," which in itself may convey little emotion, but carries prodigious emotional expression in the course of melodic development.

The general, broad nature of the thumrī text may be illustrated with some verse more specific, concrete, and explicit in imagery—for example, express in simple terms a general feeling of loss:

Kaṭe na birhā kī rāt

Mañ kāsē kahūñ jiyā kī bāt.

I cannot endure this night of separation

To whom shall I explain the state of my mind?

Contrast these lines with Shakespeare's sonnet no. 27, which carries the same emotion, but with incomparably greater prolixity, space:

Weary with toil, I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;
But then begins a journey in my head
To work my mind when body's work's expired;
or then my thought, from far where I abide,
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide,
Looking on darkness which the blind do see;
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which, like a jewel hung in ghastly night,
Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.
Lo, this by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee, and for myself, no quiet find.

Although superior as poetry, such verse would not be suitable for thumrī, whether in part or in its entirety, because the imagery is so specific and closely interrelated that a vocalist would be unable to improvise and highlight different shades of interpretation.

In the process of *bol banāo*, which we shall examine in greater detail, the singer may elaborate and develop a single line or phrase for as long as he wishes. Hence, there is no need for thumrī texts to have strict internal coherence; different lines depend on each other for coherence, musical elaboration is difficult, as the singer would be obliged to improvise simultaneously on more than one line segment of text. As a result, most *bol banāo* thumrīs

¹ Personal communication, 4/81.

atomistic structure, where although the lines are interrelated in so far as they may express the same general sentiment, each single line is complete and self-contained, and thus can be used by itself as a basis for improvisation. Examples 1, 4, 5, 6, 17, and 18 above are illustrative of this characteristic.¹ *Bol banāo* elaboration and reinterpretation often occur on a single phrase, such as "*khelat gēnd*" ("playing with the ball") or "*koel bole*" ("the cuckoo cries") or even a single word, such as "*dard*" ("pain") or "*ḥain*" ("happiness"). Thus, in *thumrī* texts, the "patchy" quality, or the lack of sustained development of a single idea, is not the result of the poet's inability to stick to one thought, but is rather a deliberate (whether ingenious or not) effect rendering the text suitable for *bol banāo*.²

To clarify and summarize—a good *thumrī* text is "incomplete" in that its expression of emotion is sufficiently broad, simple, and general so that the singer can interpret it in innumerable ways. At the same time, each line is "complete" and autonomous in that the emotional thought, however simple, is expressed within that one line, and does not require two or more lines in order to be clear.

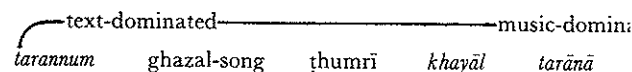
In this respect, *thumrī* may again be contrasted with *ghazal*, where the meaning extends over two full lines (a couplet); as the singer develops a line, he builds up suspense in anticipation of the final dramatic moment when the closing rhymes (*radīf* and *qāfiya*) are delivered and the sense and rhyme of the couplet at once become clear. This sort of suspense is essential to the *ghazal-song*, but is totally absent in *thumrī*.³

Further, in *ghazal*, the text is of higher and more autonomous poetic quality, and, consequently, it retains more of its purely literary significance in singing. The text is less assimilated, less a part of the musical product than in *thumrī*. Thus, *ghazal* texts are longer, more complex, and more independent than *thumrī* texts, while the melodic substance of a *ghazal-song* is much more limited than that of a *thumrī*. For this reason, *ghazal* does not exist as an instrumental form, but *thumrī*, whose interest is more inherently musical, is an important musical genre. (Conversely, *thumrī*, unlike *ghazal*, does not exist as a literary form.) The contrast is even more marked in *tarannum*, in which a *ghazal* is recited, without accompaniment, to a simple, strophic, un-elaborated melody. Here the melody serves only to render the text more accessible and its meter more apparent, though it has minimal aesthetic interest in itself.

Correspondingly, *thumrī* may also be contrasted with the vocal form *khayāl*, where the text is important less for its meaning than for its sound. Text delivery is often blurred, broken, and generally unintelligible, for what is required is more a "semblance of speech" and not a coherent semantic expression; the emphasis, rather, is on pure, abstract, melodic improvisation.⁴ That is, the *khayāl* singer is interested in

a phrase like "*piyā bina*" ("without my lover") only as a set of phonemes *thumrī* singer will explore the meaning in this phrase. In the vocal form *nom-tom ālāp*, which employ non-lexical syllables, the semblance of more remote than in *khayāl*. *Tarāna* and *nom-tom ālāp* are stylistically *khayāl* and *dhruṇpad ālāp*, respectively; but here, the texts exist as concatenations of phonemes, having little or no semantic value.

The relation between text and music in these genres may be seen as the diagram below:



¹ Indeed, for this reason, many lines tend to recur in different *thumrīs*. For example, versions of "*kāse kahun jī kī bāt?*"—"To whom shall I express the state of my mind?"—occur in literally dozens of *thumrī* texts.

² In *bandish thumrīs*, where the *antarā*, or even the whole text is delivered faster and as a unit, there is often greater poetic continuity. Cf., e.g., exx. 21 and 24 above.

³ Cf. Manuel 1979: 83–4.

⁴ Cf. Langer 1953: 151.

¹ *Tarānā* syllables may have originally derived from Persian texts; many *tarānā* are Persian.

CHAPTER TWO

The Origins of Thumrī

Early References to Thumrī

The origin of thumrī has been popularly ascribed to the court of Wajid Ali Shah of Lucknow, or more specifically, to the nawāb himself, or to certain of his court musicians. Wajid Ali Shah governed Lucknow from 1847 to 1856. Although little interested in administration, he was a great patron of the arts, and during his reign, music, dance, poetry, drama, and architecture flourished abundantly, partly through his lavish patronage. Wajid Ali Shah personally made many contributions to the arts; he was a fine Urdu poet, and may be regarded as the father of Urdu drama; he was also an accomplished *kathak* dancer, dramatist, and, above all, a singer and composer of thumrī (Sharar 1975: 60ff.). Some of his compositions (e.g., ex. 23 above) are widely sung even today. Wajid Ali Shah had a particular fondness and talent for thumrī; moreover, it was during, and somewhat before his reign that thumrī matured as a light-classical form and achieved tremendous popularity. Hence it is not so surprising that his name has come to be associated with the origin of the genre.

Sadiq Ali Khan (1800–1910), a renowned thumrī singer of the *qawwāl bacche ghārānā*, is said by others to have invented thumrī; certainly he was a seminal figure in the development in the art of thumrī singing, as virtually every prominent thumrī singer of the following generation was a student of his (Shukla 1983: 49). Together with Wajid Ali Shah, he played an important role in popularizing and refining thumrī. However, invention of the genre is another matter; indeed, aside from the unlikelihood of one or two men being able to invent such a major art form as thumrī, research reveals that thumrī, as a recognized genre with the same name, predates these men by two centuries. Not only this, thumrī appears to be the product of a long, gradual, and continuous process of evolution dating back to the Gupta period (4th to 6th C.'s A.D.), if not earlier.

The most obvious proofs of thumrī's existence prior to 1850 are the explicit references to it in a number of works. First, in 1834, Captain Augustus Willard (1962: 64) has mentioned thumrī in his "Treatise on the Music of Hindostan." Ranking thumrī after *dhruṇpad*, *khayāl*, and *ṭappā* in importance, Willard describes it as a song of mixed *Braj Bhāshā* dialect. *Bandish* thumrīs from Willard's time are also extant, including some by Mān Singh, the Mahārāja of Jodhpur from 1803 to 1843, and Javan Singh, the Mahārāja of Kisangarh and Naghdar in the 1830s (Shukla 1983:

50). Moreover, the *Rāga Kalpadruma* of 1848 includes texts of *doz* (specifically labelled thus) in light *rāgas* which are currently used for *ṭitārīst* Ghulam Raza Khan, who flourished in the early decades of the century, is said in an 1855 text to have based his *ṭitār* style on thumrī have achieved such importance and prominence, thumrī must have existed thirty years previously. In fact, its history goes back much further.

Thumrī is mentioned in the 1803 *Rādhāgovind Saṅgītsār* (RGSS), a composition by the Mahārāja of Jaipur, Pratap Simha. The RGSS describes a *rāga*, not a genre; this confusion presumably derives from the association of the genre with the distinctive modes in which it was sung, which were heptatonic, employing both raised and lowered forms of the third and seventh degrees (as in *rāgas* Kāfī, Ghārā, Pīlū, Janglā, Pahārī, Zilla', etc).

The thumrī of the nineteenth century evidently bore little stylistic resemblance to the modern *bol banāo* thumrī, which is sung in slow tempo, emphasizing the portrayal of the text through a leisurely elaboration. In the nineteenth century "thumrī" instead denoted a piece in medium or fast tempo *ṭintāl* (or *octāl* or *ektāl*) stressing *bol bānt*, a set of techniques whereby the text is made fragmented as a vehicle for *visṭār* (ālāp-like passages), *tān* (fast melodic *layakārī* (rhythmic manipulation) (Bajpayee 1977: un-paginated). Although the *bol bānt* or *bandish* thumrī resembled *chōṭā khayāl* in tempo and compositional structure, it differed from it in the following ways:

1. it was associated with *kathak* dance;
2. it employed a specific set of light *rāgas*;
3. its style was technically less demanding than *chōṭā khayāl*, and it required less command of virtuoso *tān* techniques and strict adherence to the rules;
4. nineteenth century *bol bānt* thumrīs were written primarily by a different group of Lucknow composers, all using the pen name "—Piya," (e.g., Lall, Piya, etc.).¹

But the fact that thumrī as a composition was identical to *chōṭā khayāl* suggests that the evolution of the two genres was closely related. While the predominant classical court genre until the eighteenth century, since the fourteenth century, *khayāl* had evidently been evolving as a rhapsodic, and light alternative form, emphasizing fast *tāns* rather than *bānt* *layakārī* or *dhruṇpad*. *Khayāl* is said to have received early important contributions of the poet-musician Amir Khusrau (1253–1325) and the Hussein Shah Sharqi (sultan of Jaunpur 1457–83, sultan of Bihar 1492–1505) (Nijenhuis 1974: 88). However, it was not until the eighteenth century that Mohammad Shah of Delhi (ruled 1719–48) that *khayāl* became the favored genre, presumably constituting a more lively alternative to the perceived

¹ The use of the pen name "Piya" is not in itself an entirely reliable distinction, as many composers contain such signatures.

rigidity and sterility of *dhruvād*. The contemporary *khayāl* was evidently sung only in medium tempo (M.M. = ca. 80–180), as is the custom, for example, among exponents of the Jaipur *gharānā* (such as, for example, Mallikarjun Mansur); the *atī-vilambit* (“extremely slow”, i.e., M.M. = ca. 12) apparently did not emerge until the twentieth century, originally in the music of Abdul Karim Khan (cf. Meer 1980: 52n).

Mohammad Shah, ruler of the decimated Mughal Empire, was, like Wajid Ali Shah, an inept administrator but an ardent patron of music. It was during his reign that *khayāl* finally began to rival, if not surpass, *dhruvād* in popularity. The popularization of *khayāl* is attributed in part to the court musician Neamat Khan “Sadarang” and his cousin “Adarang” (Jairazbhoy 1971: 21), some of whose *khayāls* in praise of their patron are still sung today, primarily in *choṭā khayāl* style.¹

In the early eighteenth century, Delhi was still the cultural center of North India (Russein 1962: 268). While the Mughal court was the most visible source of musical patronage, the bulk of classical and semi-classical musical activity presumably took place in the homes of noblemen and merchants, and in the salons of the courtesans. Evidence suggests that Delhi supported hundreds of *ṭawāʿīfs* (courtesans) who were accomplished musicians, and it was the courtesans who, from the Mauryan period on, cultivated the interpretative song and dance forms that evolved into *thumrī* and *kaiḥak*. We may infer that male classical musicians like Sadarang supported themselves partially or entirely through teaching these *ṭawāʿīfs*, who themselves probably stood to earn more as performers and concubines than comparable male artists could solely as performers.

Mohammad Shah himself composed a number of *khayāls*, and is also supposed to have written some *thumrīs*, including one set, like most *bandish* *thumrīs*, to *ṭintāl* (in Shukla 1983: 55–6). We can infer that *thumrī* and *khayāl* were closely allied forms at this point, strongly influencing each other as they continue to do even today. This influence appears to have grown as the effete and impotent Mughal emperors succeeding Aurangzeb (d. 1707) took less interest in the sober *dhruvād*, and greater interest in lighter forms like *khayāl* and *thumrī*. *Thumrī*, as a folk-derived dance song performed by *ṭawāʿīfs*, began to acquire classical features and receive recognition in the courts. At the same time, it seems evident that *choṭā khayāl* began to resemble *thumrī* even more closely as its tempo accelerated.

The *thumrī* of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was probably closely related to *janglā*, a popular melody mentioned in *Maraka-e-Delhi*, a text written in 1739 by Nawāb Dargah Quli Khan on contemporary music and musicians of Delhi (in Shukla 1983: 57). While Quli Khan does not mention *thumrī*, he refers to a courtesan and a barber as being expert singers of *janglā*.

Janglā is the name of a now virtually extinct *thumrī rāga*, characterized, like many light *rāgas*, by having both raised and lower third and seventh scale degrees. It is thus a mixed *rāga* of the sort which distinguished *thumrī rāgas* like Ghāra, Pilū, Khamāj,

and Zillā; indeed, the word “*janglā*” is occasionally used in a “mixed”,¹ more specifically, it probably derived from a Persian melody which was popular at one time in the Delhi area.² Shukla (1983: 57) word from the Persian “*janglā*,” meaning “ankle-bells,” and he in corresponding mode, or practice of mixing modes was thus associated with dance music, and in particular, with the incipient *thumrī*. That *janglā* courtesans in the early eighteenth century would tend to support the

Two earlier references to *thumrī* establish clearly that the genre became popular by the mid-seventeenth century in the Doab, or the area between the Ganges and Jamuna (Yamuna) rivers, encompassing the Braj-speaking area. *Rāga Darpan* is a 1665 Persian free translation by a Kashmiri subedar, Faqirul Karim, of a musical treatise, the *Mānkutūhal*, written a few decades earlier. Faqirul Karim “*Barvā dhun*” is called “*thumrī*” by some people (in Shukla 1983: 58). In the present, a somewhat uncommon *rāga* classified under the Kāfī *thāt* using both raised and lowered third and seventh degrees. *Thumrī* is not a *rāga* *Barvā*, but it is sung in *rāgas* which are similar to *Barvā*, such as Ghāra, Pilū. As in the RGSS, *thumrī* is mentioned specifically not as a genre but as a *dhun*, that is, a folk-derived melody or modal type. We may infer that it had not come into common usage to denote a specific kind of dance song loosely applied to the distinctive modal types used by courtesans in interpretative Braj dance songs—modal types like *Barvā* and *Janglā* predominated in those areas.

The second seventeenth century reference to *thumrī* is in *Tofat-ul-Hind*, a text written in 1675 by Mirza Khan Ibn-e-Fakhruddin Mohammad. In this text *thumrī* is again referred to as a modal type, here a *rāginī* of the Bharatī classification system. According to this school, *rāgas* and *rāginīs* are classified into major *rāgas*: Bhairav, Mālkauns, Hindol, Dīpak, Śrī, and Megh. *Thumrī* is the third *rāginī* of Śrī *rāga*, sung mostly in the Doab (in Shukla 1983: 58). The *saṅkīrṇa* or mixed *rāgas*, containing elements of *rāgas* Śaṅkarābharatī and

While the precise structure of these seventeenth century *rāgas* is not clear, Shukla (1983: 58) how the *thumrī rāginī* must have had some affinities with *rāgas* Kāfī and of which are popular *thumrī rāgas* today. First, in the *Tofat-ul-Hind*, Pahari *thumrī rāginī*, stated to be a mixture of Śaṅkarābharatī and Mārū; second, like the *thumrī rāginī*, a *rāginī* of Śrī *rāga*, and is a mixture of Śaṅkarābharatī and Gaurī. Mārū and Gaurī themselves were closely related, as Gaurī, Parā, and Mārū were the components of Mārū (Shukla 1983: 58).

Again, *thumrī* emerges as a mode evidently containing elements of Kāfī and Bilāval *thāts*. *Rāgas* Śaṅkarābharatī and Mārū would presumably be Bilāval *thāt* (no flats); the modern *rāgas* Pahari (in its instrumental version) contain both raised and lowered thirds and sevenths. Modern Sorāṭh, or Ga (the third degree), has both raised and lowered sevenths. Seventeenth

¹ E.g., “*Tū hai Mohammad Shāh ke darbār*” in *rāga* Sūhā, recorded by Bhimsen Joshi on HMV EALP 1528.

² Personal communication with Dr. Kalyan Mukherjee, 3/81.

³ Personal communication with Munawar Ali Khan, 3/81.

Paraj lay in the Khamāj *thāt* (roughly corresponding to the Mixolydian mode).¹ Neither *Tofat-ul-Hind* nor *Rāga Darpan* name any prominent exponents of *thumrī*, although the *Darpan* enumerates many *dhrupadiyas*, *khayāliyas*, *qawwāls*, and instrumentalists.² Clearly, *thumrī* had not at this point achieved the status of a light-classical aristocratic genre of the "Great Tradition," but was rather a regional model type and/or perhaps an entertainment genre sung primarily by the courtesans of the Braj area.

The Precursors of Thumrī

No references to *thumrī* earlier than in the *Rāg Darpan* have been discovered, and we may conclude that the word did not come into common usage outside the Doab until the seventeenth century. Yet we can glean much information about the origins and predecessors of *thumrī* by examining various medieval genres which corresponded to *thumrī*, or had important affinities with it, and hence may have been its ancestors. These genres include both "Great Tradition" forms as well as regional folk genres of the Braj area. As *thumrī* has always been a semi-classical form, it has been susceptible to influences from both folk and classical music.

Let us review the salient characteristics of *thumrī* which distinguish it in its twentieth-century form:

1. it is used traditionally as a vehicle for interpretative dance;
2. it has an erotic text, in *Braj Bhāshā*, stressing the pangs of separation, with Krishna-Bhakti overtones;
3. scrupulous adherence to the correct delineation of the *rāga* is secondary to the emotional rendering of text;
4. it employs a particular set of *rāgas*, most of which are found in embryonic form in North Indian folk music;
5. it employs a particular set of *tālas* also found in folk music;
6. the composition is in two-part *sthāyi-antarā* form;
7. it was traditionally sung primarily by courtesans, as recently as the early twentieth century;
8. in the case of the sub-genre *holī*, there is a clear association with the Vaishnavite springtime festival.

Most, if not all of these characteristics may derive from folk music, and the exiguity of references to *thumrī* and allied forms predating the eighteenth century stems from the fact that most classical musical treatises concentrate on classical rather than folk music.³

¹ Modern Paraj is in the remote Pūrvi *thāt*, but the Khamāj-*thāt* Paraj survives in the folk music of Gujarat and Rajasthan.

² *Dhrupadiyas*, *khayāliyas*, and *qawwāls* are exponents of *dhrupad*, *khayāl*, and *qawwālī*, respectively.

³ By "folk music" we are referring to regional, predominantly rural traditions which may be performed collectively or by folk specialists.

First, let us briefly examine interpretative dance forms in medieval discussion of dance in the *Nāṭya Śāstra* (NS) of Bharata shows that by writing (second century A.D.), a sophisticated and mature classical drama had evolved incorporating music, verse, and interpretative dance. Bharata distinguishes three types of presentation: *nāṭya*, or drama incorporating music and dance as ancillary elements), *nṛtya*, or interplay (invariably accompanied by music), and *nṛtta*, or pure, abstract dance (music). In Sanskrit drama, *nṛtya*, which is of greatest interest to us, was certain points during a standard presentation. *Nṛtya* could be either strong *tāṇḍava*, or the feminine and sweet *lāsya*. *Lāsya* was a solo accompanied by female singers and an ensemble including *vijā*, flute (double-headed drum). According to Desai (1976: 43), the dancer, through movements and gestures the sentiment of the *catuspadī* song, which described the lover, or the heroine's complaints about him, as in modern *tālas* used (*śāccatputa*) were of eight or six beats, and hence roughly to modern *kaharvā* and *dādrā tālas*, which are frequently used in *thumrī*. rendered in a soft, *kaisikī* style rather than a vigorous one. Bharata (1911) describes in great detail the techniques of *abhinaya*, or the expression of sentiments or scenes through dance. These sentiments include the erotic and rowful *karuṇa rasas* which predominate in *thumrī* today.

Mukund Lath (1978: 142-3) calls particular attention to the *gāndhārva* discussed in the *Dattilam*, a ninth century text. *Pāṇika* was a "feminine" used to accompany *lāsya* in the *pūrvarāga* prologues of *sukumāra* plays. dominant sentiments were the erotic and the comic. Lath writes:

It seems likely that forms like the *pāṇika* stood in the same relation to *gāndhārva* [a serious classical form] as does the *thumrī* with the classical forms of today, the *khyāl* and the *dhrupad*. The *thumrī* is as classical as the more austere *khyāl* and *dhrupad* is a 'light' classical form, more plaint and feminine in structure and spirit.

Lath, however, contrasts *pāṇika* and *thumrī* by stating that although *thumrī* is younger than *khayāl* and *dhrupad*, *pāṇika* was probably of origin than other medieval genres (1978: 142-3). Yet this very antithesis demonstrates how genres analogous and antecedent to *thumrī* date to the ninth century; hence, while the name "*thumrī*" may not predate the seventeenth century, its probable ancestors may be as ancient as those of *dhrupad*. Naturally, *thumrī* has changed so radically in the last century that its century exponents might not even recognize it as such; but *khayāl*, too, has undergone considerable transformation in the same period.

In the second act of Kalidasa's *Mālavikāgnimitra*, a Sanskrit play of the fifth century, the heroine, Mālavikā, sings a *catuspadī* song, and then interprets the meaning of the song through dance. In the *catuspadī*, as in a *thumrī* text,

young nubile girl, pines for her absent lover.¹ The narrator praises Mālavikā's dance:

Mālavikā has expressed the meaning of the song by her gestures. Her foot-work was in union with the Laya [rhythm] and Tala [meter]. The gestures performed by her limbs were of 'soft' kind, etc. (Desai 1976: 46-7).

It is obvious that the aesthetic function and effect of Mālavikā's performance were identical to those of *thumrī* in *kathak*.

The eleventh century scholar Abhinavagupta wrote a commentary on the *Nāṭya Śāstra* entitled *Abhinavabharata*. In it he describes some interpretative dance forms like *lāsya* which are also strikingly reminiscent of *thumrī*. Of particular interest, notes Chaitanya Desai, is the *ḍombika* dance, which, although possibly of folk origin (like *thumrī*), was performed as a solo interpretative dance in courts and temples. The name of the dance suggests that it may have been the specialty of the *Dom*, a transient ("gypsy") untouchable caste whose traditional occupations have included singing and dancing. Generally, the *ḍombika* was performed by professional *Devadāsī*-type courtesans (Desai 1876: 43-5). According to Abhinava's description of *ḍombika* as interpreted by Desai (1976: 48), the dance ended with a *ḥallimārga* section corresponding to the *laggī* in *thumrī*, where the tempo accelerates and the singer repeats the first line of the song.²

In the Mughal period there are many references to dancing-girls entertaining in the court and in the home of the nobles. Abul Fazl (1948: 273), the chronicler of the sixteenth century court of Akbar, has described one female interpretative dance:

[The akhara] is an entertainment held at night by the nobles of this country, some of whose [female] domestic servants are taught to sing and play. Four pretty women lead off a dance, and some graceful movements are executed. Four others are employed to sing, while four more accompany them with cymbals; two others play the *pakhāwaj*, two the *upang*, while the Dakhani *rabab*, the *vina*, and the *yantra*, are each taken by one player.³ Besides the usual lamps of the entertainment, two women holding lamps stand near the circle of performers. Some employ more. It is more common for a band of the *natwas* to be retained in service who teach the young slave-girls to perform. Occasionally they instruct their own girls and take them to the nobles and profit largely by the commerce.

The dance of the Mughal period was presumably the predecessor of the modern *kathak*, the classical dance of North India. Insofar as the ancestors of *thumrī* were

¹ The Sanskrit song (in Desai 1976: 47) may be translated: "I seldom see my beloved any more; o my poor heart, don't hope for him. I am so distraught that my left eyelid twitches uncontrollably. I met him long ago but how can I reach him now? O God, I am possessed; you must know and accept my thirst" (translated privately for the author).

² Desai (1976: 49) also opines that a fifteenth century reference (in the *Saṅgita Darpaṇa*) to a dance-song *thumrī* is in fact *thumrī*. But while the genres may be related, the two words are of different etymology and denote two quite different forms today.

³ The *upang*, *rabab*, and *vina* were presumably lutes.

presumably dance songs closely allied with early *kathak* forms or genres, some examination of the early development of *kathak* and its roots would be relevant at this point.

✓ *Kathak* is an art of demonstrably great antiquity. Its oldest professional story-tellers, called "*kathaks*" who related Hindu epics in the pre-Christian era. The word "*kathak*" appears in the epic *Mahābhārata* (ca. fifth century B.C.) and in the *Brahmamaṇḍapūrāṇa* (ca. ninth century A.D.) where Vyas (1963: 2), it denotes a category of actors, singers, and dancers. In medieval and Mughal periods, *kathak* flourished in temples and courts. It was the dramatic presentation of Vaishnavite myths and stories by song and accompaniment (Vyas 1963: 5ff.). In the eighteenth century *kathak* was extremely popular in Lucknow, paralleling the rise of *thumrī* in

Throughout the evolution of *kathak*, *thumrī* and its forebears were to accompany the interpretative portions. Hence, both *kathak* and *thumrī* have been hand-in-hand under the same aesthetic theories, discussed above. I ✓ imbedded with Vaishnavism, specializing in the portrayal of the ✓ amorous joys of Radha and Krishna: Krishna's impudent teasing and Radha's passionate longing. The founder of the Lucknow *gharāna* Ishvari Prasad Mitra, was a fervent Krishna devotee, and accordingly guided to create and perfect *kathak* by the image of Krishna appeared before him in his dreams (Shukla 1983: 34).

✓ Both *kathak* and *thumrī* developed in the Braj region, which was the Krishna-Bhakti cult. Both are stylized and refined versions of the songs of the area, some of which even today show strong affinities with *kathak*. In particular, Shukla argues convincingly that two related genres, *rās* and *ḥārī*, were the folk sources of the raw materials for *kathak*.

The term "*ḥārī*" (= *ḥārī*, *ḥārī*) in the medieval period denoted a folk-derived dance form as well as the type of song and meter to accompany it. An obvious relationship to *thumrī* is suggested by etymological affinity between "*ḥārī*" and its derivative, "*ḥārī*" stem from the Sanskrit root of motion "*ḥar*" (cf. Hindi "*ḥālā*"—"to dance" also means "a joyful cry" or "play," and "celebrating *holī*," as we see in dance and music genres (Shukla 1983: 71). (The word "*thumrī*" also verb of motion, denoting stamping the foot; thus both words reflect with dance. Cf. Shukla (1983: 17).) *ḥārī*, as we have seen, is fourteen- or sixteen-beat *tālā* most commonly used in *bol banāo* *thumrī* presumably derives from the folk music of North India, as such *tālā* by the same name, in Gujarat, Haryana, Bihar, and especially Uttar Pradesh. Although less common than *kaharvā* or *dādrā*, *ḥārī*'s fourteen-beat may also be called "*jat*" in folk music) is frequently used in genres *phagvā*, and *holī* (Upadhyaya 1974: 35). It is particularly associated with celebrating *holī*, themselves often called "*ḥārī*" (Shukla 1973: 120) stylized and refined in the sub-genre of *thumrī* known as *holī*, *horī* or

latter name reflects the use of *dīpāndī tāla* (=cāncār) in the genre. *Holī* differs from *thumrī* only in that its texts depict Krishna playing *holī* with the peasant girls, spraying them with water and colored powder (see above pp. 24–5); accordingly, *holī* songs are sung only during spring. Folk *holī* songs are evidently the sources not only for the semi-classical *holī dīpāndī*, but also for the “*horī dhamār*,” a class of *dhruvād* songs celebrating *holī*, and set to *dhamār tāla* of fourteen beats. *Dhamār*, *cāncār*, and the *khayāl tāla jhūmrā* may all derive from the same seven or fourteen-*mātrā* (beat) folk *tāla*.¹ Hence their *theḱās* (skeletal mnemonic structures) are very similar:

<i>cāncār</i> :													
1	2	3	24	5	6	7	8	9	10	311	12	13	14
dhā	dhin	–	dhā	dhā	dhin	–	tā	tin	–	dhā	dhā	dhin	–
<i>dhamār</i> : ²													
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	311	12	13	14
dhā	ge	tā	dhi	tā	dhā	–	tā	ki	tā	ki	tā	tā	–
<i>jhūmrā</i> :													
1	2	3	4	5	6	7							
dhin	dhā	tirakita	dhin	dhin	dhāge	tirakita							
8	9	10	311	12	13	14							
tin	tā	tirakita	dhin	dhin	dhāge	tirakita							

Each of these three *tālas* is subdivided into 3+4+3+4 or 3+(2+2)+3+(2+2) beats; in each, a *khālī* section (without left hand strokes) commences on beat eight, and *tālī* sections (with left hand strokes) commence on beats one, four, and (excluding *dhamār*) eleven.

Jhūmrā is presently performed only in *barā khayāl*, in *ati-vilambit* (extremely slow) tempo, i.e., M.M.=ca. 12; *dhamār* is performed in medium tempo, accompanying *dhruvād* style; *cāncār* in fast tempo (M.M.=ca. 200) occurs in folk music and the early *bol-banāo* *thumrīs*; in the modern *bol-banāo* *thumrīs*, the tempo is usually about M.M.=50. Numerous references to *carārī* in classical treatises reveal it to be of considerable antiquity. Sanskrit plays such as *Ratnāvalī* of the seventh century depict *carārī* as an erotic interpretative dance with song, performed by women, celebrating the springtime (in Shukla 1983:72–3).

The *Saṅgitaratnākara*, an important musical text of the thirteenth century, has described “*carārī*” as a kind of song in Hindol *rāga*, itself set to *carārī tāla* of sixteen beats, or to *carārī* *chanda* (poetic meter) (in Shukla 1983: 74f–5). That its language was the common Shauraseni Prakrit, rather than the literary Sanskrit, suggests that

The names of each of the *tālas* may also come from folk music; “*dhamār*” would appear to be related to folk genres called “*dhamāl*” in Rajasthan and elsewhere, and to the eight-beat folk *tāla* “*dhumālī*”. *Jhūmrā* may derive from “*jhumar*,” a folk genre of Uttar Pradesh sung in *dādrā* or *kaharvā tālas* (Upadhyaya 1974: 35).

² This *theḱā* and another more common one are given in Nijenhuis (1974: 70).

the genre was of folk origin. As we have seen, *Braj Bhāshā*, the language of *thumrī* is written, evolved from Shauraseni Prakrit.

Medieval *carārī*, like the incipient *thumrī* of the seventeenth century have been sung predominantly in modes similar to the modern *rāga* Kāfi. *rāga* Hindol of the SR’s period corresponded roughly to that of Kāfi. Fifteenth century *Saṅgitarāja* of Maharana Kumbha specifically states the song in *rāga* Vasant, which also appears to have resembled the present asserts Shukla (1983: 180). Hindol, Vasant, and Kāfi *rāgas* are all associated with the springtime.

The medieval *carārī tāla* of sixteen beats could be regarded as corresponding (or two) repetitions of *rās tāla*. *Rās tāla* was of four or eight beats; the shortened form of the medieval *ādi tāla*, of eight beats (Shukla 1983: 1). The modern South Indian *ādi tāla* also has eight beats.) The modern Hind eight beats, *kaharvā*, is commonly used in *thumrī*.

The medieval *nṛtiya* drama *carārī* was closely related to, if not synonymous with, the folk dance-song genre celebrating the *holī*. A fourteenth century, by Vema, a king of Andhra, has described *carārī* as one of the three types of the previous century, the *Upadesar-asathana* of Jinapalopadhyaya equated it with the folk dance-song genre celebrating the *holī*. The words “*rās*” and “*rāsak*” are Sanskrit “*rasa*,” meaning “taste, relish, pleasure.” *Rāsak*, as a folk dance, is evidently a circular, erotic fertility dance dating from prehistoric times. The description of *rās* and a related genre, *chalik*, in the second century *H* suggests that they were erotic dances with accompanying songs in Shauraseni performed with drama, and archetypically by courtesans (in Vats: 194–7). In particular, *chalik* was an interpretative erotic female dance which derives from the Sanskrit “*chal*,” meaning “deception, cunning, deception involved may be, first, that of the dancing courtesan, who ensnares men by her seductive art and feigned longing. As the Krishna popularity, the *rās* fertility dance became associated with Vaishnavism; the *Purāṇas*, and especially the *Bhāgavat Purāṇa*, describe *rās* in some detail. It may also refer to Krishna, the archetypal mischievous *chaliyā*. These the inspiration for the *rās līlā*, which from the sixteenth century emerged as a Bhakti folk dance celebrating the *holī* festival (Shukla 1983: 108). *Rās* has been depicted in sculpture, painting and drama, as well as music, dance, and poetry. The *līlā* of many *rās* and related folk songs—from the medieval period on—has been parallel in the vulgar and abusive songs sung by peasant women and also in the obscene *thumrīs* discussed above. *Rāsak* songs were set to the eight-*mātrā* *rās tāla*, which presumably corresponded to the modern *thumrī*.

Although the folk dance-drama *rās līlā* itself matured in the sixteenth century with the spread of Vaishnavism, it is clearly related to earlier forms of *nāṭya rāsak*, *carārī*, *chalik*, and especially *hallisak*.¹ A specific caste of p

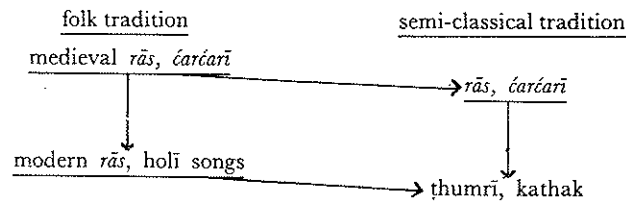
¹ Vatsyāyana (1968: 194) asserts that *rās* and *hallisak* featured singing and dancing, and a sort of opera incorporating song, instrumental music, and dance.

Rāsdhārīs, evolved as traditional exponents of the genre, which combined song and interpretative dance in portraying episodes from Krishna's affairs with the *gōpīs*, or cowgirls of Brindavan. *Rās līlā* was traditionally performed in the courtyard of a temple, although at present it is often presented in other locations. Originally, the musical accompaniment consisted of *dhrupads* and *kīrtans*, which were Vaishnavite songs expressly written for dance, often containing passages of mnemonic drum syllables. While Awasthi (1963: 55) acknowledges the dearth of concrete evidence connecting *rās līlā* with *kathak*, he does note that the two genres share a number of important features, in particular, the Krishnaite thematic material, and certain central *gats* (*abhinaya* sequences) and drum *bols* (patterns). That the *rās* group dance of the Kumaun district is called "*čarčārī*" today (Garg 1975: 240) also suggests a relationship with *thumrī*.

Thus, the numerous parallels between *rās*, *čarčārī*, and *thumrī* strongly suggest that *thumrī* developed out of the former genres. Like *thumrī*, *rās* was a folk-based form of *nṛtīya*, performed especially by women, and depicting the amorous exploits and pranks of Krishna; popular modes and *tālas* were used, and the predominant dialect was that of the Braj area. The association of *rās* and *čarčārī* with vernal festivities has its modern parallel in the sub-genre of *holī dīpčandī*, itself set to *čāncār tāla*.

A remarkable combination of the folk *rās* and the semi-classical *thumrī* occurred in Wajid Ali Shah's *rahas*, a dance-drama produced by the nawāb, inspired by *rās* folk dances (Sharar 1975: 64); in this colorful pageant, Wajid Ali Shah himself is said to have danced and played the role of Krishna.

References to *čarčārī* and *rās* in classical treatises like the *SR* reveal that the *thumrī* did not suddenly emerge in the eighteenth century out of these pure folk genres; instead, while these genres may have been primarily folk forms, they were evidently appreciated in the courts as well, although certainly in stylized forms. Thus, although *thumrī* continued throughout its evolution to draw directly from the folk music of the Doab, and in particular from the *rās* and *čarčārī* songs and dances, its direct antecedents and influences were the semi-classical *rās* and *čarčārī*, as performed by the courtesans. These genres, of course, were themselves drawn from earlier strata of folk music, which were also the folk ancestors of the modern folk *rās* and *čarčārī*. Thus, the probable interaction of the influences may be shown as below:



We can assume, in fact, that throughout *thumrī*'s long evolution, semi-classical and folk styles continued to co-exist, drawing influences from classical music and folk music, respectively.

Prem Lata Sharma (1970) has shown that another important feature of *thumrī*—the lack of emphasis on scrupulously correct exposition of *rāga*, its place in certain medieval court genres, although again, this feature predated its place in contemporary folk genres. Matanga's *Brhaddesi* (ca. eighth century) describes a genre *nāḍavati*, an erotic song rendered in *vibhāṣa gītī*, or *śrī*, where the artist was free to transcend melodic regulations. The loose elaboration of *nāḍavati* is also evident in the *SR*'s description of *thumrī* (1970: 75–7) interprets the relevant passage thus:

... in certain *rupakas* (compositional forms) the melody structure is endowed with novelty through new *sthayas* which may be somewhat extraneous to the intrinsic structure of the *raga* concerned.

This element of novelty is supplied by either the latent potentiality of the *mulaja bhasa* or by the regional melodies known to the people (*bhasa*), or by the shadow of a different *raga* (*chaya bhasa*), or by the number of *ragas* (*sankiran bhasa*).

This passage, despite the antiquity of the *SR*, constitutes an excellent illustration of the manner in which extraneous modal elements are introduced into *thumrī*.

The *SR*'s discussion of certain styles of *rūpakālāptī* (viz., *pratigrāhāṇī*, *bhāṇjāṇī*, and *rūpaka bhāṇjāṇī*) also invites comparison with the *bol ban* *thumrī*; in both, the artist's attention is concentrated more on music than on the sentiment of the text rather than on meticulously and systematically following the *rāga*, and hence deviations from the *rāga* frequently occur (Sharma 1970: 266–7).

The fifteenth century *Saṅgitarāja*'s explication of *rūpaka* stresses the dramatic expression to heighten the effect of the song; such practices are as analogous to the use of *bol banāo* and *bhāv* (here, gestures) in *thumrī* (Shukla 1983: 266–7).

Finally, the concept of *pratigrahanika* mentioned in the *SR* corresponds roughly to the modern practice of *tek*, where the *mukhya* of the composition is repeatedly sung with variations (Shukla 1983: 266–7).

Courtesans and Music

Courtesans played an especially important role in the development of *thumrī* music, as they seemed to have constituted the major conduit for the transmission of musical ideas and stylistic features between urban and regional folk cultures. Courtesan groups like *kančān*, *naṭ*, *dhārī*, *dom*, *kaṭ*, etc., have often retained strong rural roots and affiliations which may be seen in their music.

It has been mentioned that the early folk and semi-classical forms were absorbed into *thumrī* were, like traditional *thumrī* itself, sung most typically by courtesans. Indeed, as we shall discuss further, such women appear to have been largely responsible for the blending of Braj folk music and the

Tradition" which resulted in the emergence of *thumrī*. In order, then, to understand the evolution of *thumrī* in its social as well as musical perspectives, it is necessary to examine the role of these courtesans in the social and musical life of classical India.

A courtesan is not a plain and simple prostitute; she is one who combines the practice of "the oldest profession" with more sophisticated forms of entertainment. From at least as early as the Vedic epoch,¹ a class of courtesans specially trained in music and dance had evidently arisen in India. Until the thirties, it was these courtesans who rivalled, or even surpassed the male professional musicians in the role of custodians and practitioners of Indian classical and semi-classical music and dance. Mujeeb's elucidation of their function in society is worth quoting in full:

There was no ideal of companionship in married life. . . . The man, if he wanted companionship, would have had to look for it among men or among such women as were technically classed as courtesans, but were often given an education which was much wider both as regards knowledge as well as experience than that of the "free" women. They could, if they had the disposition, be friends and companions, because the restrictions which kept the free woman within her house did not apply to the courtesan. Of course, courtesans were brought up in a certain way. They were taught to distrust men, to take advantage of all their weaknesses and use every possible means to accumulate resources in the form of cash or jewellery that would enable them to pass their old age with as much freedom from care as possible. There were courtesans of all types, but whatever the type, they were expected to fulfil the needs of what we understand today by social life. They could converse, they could amuse, in their houses they could provide men with opportunities of coming together and talking freely. Though because of their profession they were not considered a part of respectable society . . . [it was not considered] wrong or reprehensible even for respectable men to enjoy the company of courtesans (Mujeeb 1967: 227).

While courtesans undoubtedly existed in Vedic society as well, their real proliferation and prominence in India came somewhat later, accompanying the dramatic deterioration of the status of women which occurred in the Mauryan era (fourth to second centuries B.C.). In the Vedic period, when tribal influences and traditions were strong, women were generally not married until the age of sixteen or more; upper- and middle-class girls were encouraged to study literature and the fine arts before their marriage, so that they could provide intelligent and cultured companionship to their husbands (Altekar 1956: 9-18).² In the Mauryan period, partly due to the spread of the custom of bride-price, pre-puberty marriages began to predominate, and they became standard by A.D. 200 (Altekar 1956: 56). Since education after marriage was considered improper, most girls, having married before

¹ The famous "dancing-girl" statuette unearthed at Mohenjo-Daro may have depicted a courtesan from the Indus valley period (3000-1500 B.C.).

² Prominent Vedic-period scholars included a few women (Altekar 1956: 12).

they were eleven, had no opportunity to study, and hence could not procure cultured friendship to their spouses. While a courtesan class arose to fulfil the functions of the gentry wives were reduced to procreation and housework as they have remained until recently.

The administration of the Mauryan Empire acted as a huge state monopoly which dominated all commerce and agriculture (effectively the rise of private capital which, in Europe, eventually led to the rise of feudalism with capitalism). Hence the state, rather than discouraging it, established a ministry of prostitution to regulate and tax them. Kautilya's manual of government, describes how *ganikas* were to be professional musicians, dancers, painters, and even conversationalists. (Wives, meanwhile, were mere "leather bags," i.e., for holding the seed (Sinha 1976: 1447).

The courtesans performed for entertainment in the temples, the homes of the nobles. They also provided music for auspicious occasions and son-births, and hence they came to be known as *māṅgalmukhis*, or "face-ward."

With the decline of the Mauryan Empire and its vast network of state capital in the second century B.C., India settled into a static, semi-mode of production" (cf. Thapar 1966: 207ff.). This condition was characteristic of self-sufficient villages without need for trade or cash. The villages of timeless and static mode of life while, for two millennia, dynasties rose and fell like troubled waves on the surface of an otherwise dark sea. Throughout the atomized countryside and the comparatively isolated temples became the centers of economic, social, and cultural life. With the resurgence and the relative prosperity of the Gupta period (fourth to sixth A.D.), temples proliferated, and so did the courtesans attached to them. Women, euphemistically called "*devadāsīs*" or "servants of God," bequeathed or sold to temples as children. The more talented studied dance in order to supplement their prostitution with artistic entertainment. Urban temples maintained hundreds of such women; the Somnath temple employed five hundred *devadāsīs*, while that at Tanjore (Thanjavur) employed a hundred (Altekar 1956: 183). The courtesans' earnings were a source of revenue for the temples (Kosambi 1965: 68), which advertised their explicitly erotic sculptures on the walls. Westerners who find an anomaly of prostitution in a sacred place should appreciate that the temple was, even primarily, a place of worship, but was the economic, cultural, and social center of the village, or, from a less charitable perspective, the center of the poor and women of the village. Generally, the temple was a land-holder, usurer, employer, school, and "concert-hall" as well as a place of prostitution (Altekar 1966: 33-1). (Temples in ancient Egypt, Greece, and Babylon may be similarly.) The state supported the temples, recognizing, according to the Brahmanic philosophy of submission and resignation preached through them, their pacifying effect on the peasantry (Kosambi 1975: 31-3).

The combination of eroticism and spirituality in thumrī texts has precedents in the music of the *devadāsīs*, which, while nominally glorifying the deities of the temple, must also have served to attract male customers. The erotic nature of the songs of contemporary courtesans was attested to by Bāṇa in the seventh century, who wrote of them:

Whispering softly like cuckoos, in low passionate tones, they [dancing girls] sang the words of vulgar mimes, ambrosia to their lovers' ears. . . . Like waves of passion's flood, they gleamed all resonant with the cries of anklets adding music to their steps. As to what was proper to be said or not, they were as void of discrimination as the childish play of happiness (Saleore 1943: 459).

Not all courtesans were temple *devadāsīs*; many lived independently in the cities. The role of courtesans in Gupta society is well described in Vatsyayana's celebrated *Kāma Sūtra*, which may, from one perspective, be regarded as a sort of manual for the Epicurean enjoyment of life and, in particular, sex. The bulk of the text appears to be written for the affluent urban gentleman who, entirely free from financial concerns, has essentially nothing to do but entertain himself. The courtesans played a crucial role in the amusement of the wealthy; such diversions as picnics, parties, or drinking bouts were reserved for men and courtesans, rather than their wives (Vatsyayana 1961: 31). Music and dance were essential talents of a cultured woman; while wives of nobles were free to dabble in the fine arts, only courtesans could perform them professionally.

The sixth chapter of the *Kāma Sūtra* consists of advice to courtesans: how to please, and at the same time, dominate their clients; how to extract the maximum money from them while feigning affection, and so on. Again, among the sixty-four arts which a courtesan is enjoined to master, singing and dancing are the foremost (Vatsyayana 1961: 25).

Courtesans in the Muslim Period

Between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, most of North and Central India was conquered by Muslim invaders from Central Asia, who established a series of dynasties that dominated the sub-continent until the advent of the British in the late eighteenth century. Under Muslim rule, the practice of *pardā*, or the seclusion of women, became widespread, even among Hindus (Majumdar et al. 1967: 393). This custom must have rendered married women even more naïve and ignorant of the outside world, and thus it may have further contributed to the demand for courtesans and to their importance in society.

With only a few exceptions, the Muslim rulers tolerated Hindu practices (Majumdar et al. 1967: 394), and thus many temples continued to be centers for the arts and prostitution. Indeed, dancing-girls and prostitutes are still associated with some temples. Yet partly because the Muslims sacked larger temples such as those at Srīnath and Mathura, and because they themselves were such enthusiastic patrons of the fine arts, the temples evidently began to decline gradually as cultural centers;

music and dance flourished instead in the secular arenas of the courts, the nobles, and the urban courtesan districts. Early Muslim potentate Bahmani king Mohammad Shah II (d. 1397) often imported hundreds from North India, Persia, and Khurasan (Bajinath 1963: 20). The century visitor Tavernier reported that over 21,000 were employed in the Deccan, performing frequently for the king (Mujeeb 1967: 369).

Bajinath (1963) attributes the importation of dancing-girls from early Muslim rulers to the shortage of such women in India at the numerous references to dancing-girls and courtesans in classical Indic suggest that they were not at all uncommon in pre-Muslim India; rather, it is probable that early Muslim dynasts imported Persian and Khurasani and *nāc-wālīs* (dancing-girls) because they themselves were of Central Indian origin, and felt more cultural and linguistic affinities with the Muslims. It is not surprising that a potentate like Mohammad Shah II would prefer Persian songs and dances to the local arts which might have seemed distasteful to him. The preference of such rulers, as well as that of later rulers like Ranjit Singh of the Punjab (d. 1839) for Persian, Pathan, and Kashmiri also can be attributed to the traditional fondness for fair-complexioned women.

The Mughal emperors ardently patronized courtesans, and European travelers like Manucci and Bernier commented on the proliferation of "female dancing women" in the reign of Shah Jahan (ruled 1627–57). Bernier relates the emperor's fondness for the courtesans of the "kenchen" (*kančān*) caste, who were invited to the court, often spending the whole night in the seraglio.

... They were not indeed the prostitutes seen in bazaars, but the private and respectable class, who attend the grand wedding of Mansebdars, for the purpose of singing and dancing. Most of them are handsome and well-dressed, and sing to perfection, and their limbs are supple, they dance with wonderful agility, and are always correct in their movements (Bernier 1935: 274).

Kančāns, along with three other communities of performing women—*and natwās*—are also mentioned in the sixteenth century *Ain-i-Akbari* (33–4). Kančān women are still active as courtesans, especially in the Punjab (Nagar 1979: 76).

Shah Jahan's abstemious successor Aurangzeb (ruled 1658–1707), a tolerant and syncretist forebear, was a zealous orthodox Muslim who curbed Hindu influence at the court as well as Epicurean activities like drinking which offended his puritanical temperament and that of his advisors (cf. Majumdar et al., 1967: 488–9). Hence he banned music and attempted to curtail its popularity in the major cities. Mulla (1935–6), a contemporary traveler, reports that, nevertheless, the emperor always had to entertain in his place, for the diversion of the queens and ladies.

several dancing and singing women." Manucci then names thirty-three "overseers of music," each bearing the surname "Bac" (a standard surname still given to courisans, among others); each overseer was in charge of around ten apprentices, and each group was assigned to a particular queen, princess, or concubine.

Conclusions Regarding the Early Development of Thumrī

In this chapter we have examined the early origins of thumrī in the classical period and discussed the role of its most prominent exponents, the courtesans, in Indian music and culture. Before proceeding to the development of thumrī in the last two centuries, we may first recapitulate by reconstructing its probable roots and origin from the evidence presented above.

Sanskrit dance-drama contained not only the sober gandharva songs, but also lighter forms which were in function and style analogous to the thumrī of today. The *panika*, for example, was a semi-classical erotic female song used to accompany *lāya*, or interpretative female dance. Similar *śatuspadī* songs were set to simple, folk-derived *tālas* of six or eight beats, and their language was the common regional dialect of the Braj area. Texts generally portrayed the heroine's anguished longing for her lover; some texts, especially those performed by urban courtesans, were explicitly erotic, or even obscene. In genres like *nāḍavati*, strict adherence to the correct rendering of the mode was considered secondary to the emotive expression of the sentiment of the text. All of these characteristics are typical of the modern thumrī.

From the Gupta period on, the erotic, semi-classical dance songs of the courtesans and dramatic performers drew liberally from folk songs of the Braj area, particularly the genres *śārārī* and *rās* (*rāsak*); these were erotic songs and dances, often celebrating *holī*, with distinctive *tālas* and probably loosely defined modes. Classical theorists like Saṅgadev noted the popularity of these genres and applied the names *śārārī* and *rās* to their characteristic modes and *tālas* as well. By the eleventh century, the custom of concluding or punctuating folk and semi-classical songs with accelerated *laggī*-type sections was already evidently in vogue, just as is the case today in thumrī and much of North Indian folk music.

During the medieval and Muslim periods, the devotional cults' "counter-reformation" provided the basis for much of modern Hindustani classical music (Mukherjee 1948: 18). In particular, *horī dhamār* and the incipient *khayāl* and thumrī drew considerable literary and musical inspiration from Braj Krishnaite folk poetry, music, and dance.

At the same time, erotic interpretative dance and song were the natural specialty of the courtesans that proliferated in the temples and bazaars throughout the north. Most of the courtesan groups mentioned in Muslim texts survive even today, although some have dwindled in recent decades as fine arts patronage passed from feudal to bourgeois hands.

In the sixteenth century, courtesans had popularized *jāglā*, a folk song genre of the Doab region, set to a typical local mode which was evidently heptatonic, with both raised and lowered forms of the third, seventh, and possibly sixth degrees, thus

corresponding roughly to modern *rāga* Kāfī. By the following century "thumrī" began to be used to denote such songs and modes; in particular, it came to signify those semi-classical courtesan dance-songs which, loosely structured *rāgas* like *Jāglā* and *Barvā*, differed from the *śāhī* in that, while the latter pertained specifically to the spring festival, the former, in general in content, depicting the longing of the distraught heroine.

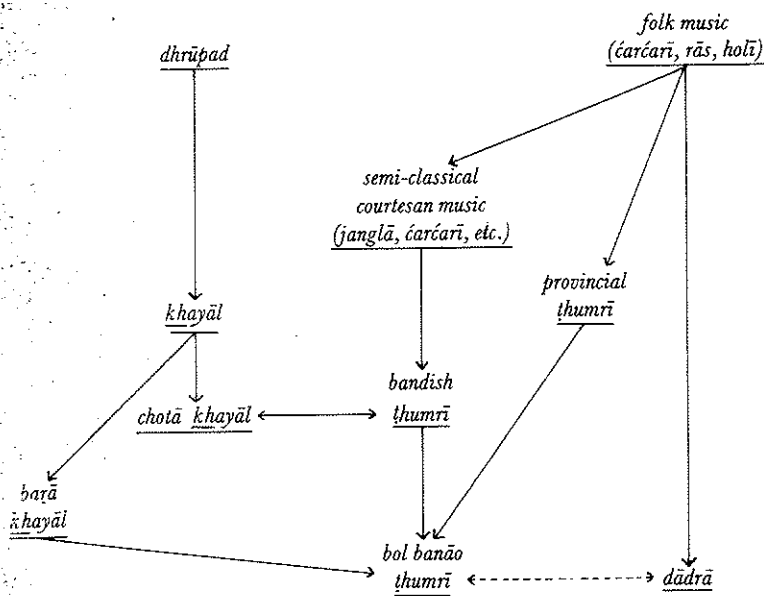
Some of the scalar evidence linking the incipient thumrī to heptatonic modes is admittedly hypothetical, consisting of assumptions that seven *rāgas* *Barvā* and *Jāglā* resemble their nineteenth (and twentieth) century counterparts. That the *Tofat-ul-Hind's* description of thumrī *rāga* admits scalar intonation until the *RGSS* (1804) can we be apodictically certain of the link between the Kāfī-*thāt* modes.

We may assume that until the mid-eighteenth century, thumrī was used for accompanying dance. Presumably, singers were neither encouraged to indulge in the rhapsodic coloratura *tāns* nor sophisticated developed later, and might have distracted a contemporary dancer. Even *bandish thumrī* is used to accompany *kathak*, the vocalist simply repeats and limits his improvisation to simple ornamentation of the melody. If a dance song had little opportunity to develop as a mature genre, the seventeenth century version, would probably seem plain and artless to modern thumrī.

It appears that in the latter part of the eighteenth century, thumrī was appreciated and cultivated as a musical genre in its own right, independent of its traditional function as a dance song. In the salons and courts, one evolved thumrī started to be influenced by the emerging *khayāl*. In this new thumrī, the more classical *śrīrāg* eventually replaced the similar *śrīrāg* meters, as is seen from the early *bandish thumrīs* set to *śrīrāg*. Male amateur musicians began to take interest in and apply their talents to it a fresh, vital, and exciting contrast to the austere *dhruvād*, which was with the Mughal Empire and nobility. The *choṭā khayāl* and the *bandish thumrī* developed together, the latter stressing lively rhythmic improvisation simple *rāgas* rather than difficult technical acrobatics and strict aesthetic distinctions.

Meanwhile, a less polished, less classicized strain of thumrī, retaining folk modes and meters, probably persisted in the provincial towns like Gaya. Indeed, it appears to have been this less aristocratic thumrī which formed much of the basis for the *bol banāo thumrī* which emerged in the nineteenth century after the decline of the courts of Delhi and Avadh. The early thumrī, then, may be depicted as in the diagram on page 52.

By 1800, thumrī had become the favored semi-classical form of the Instrumentalists based a new style on thumrī, and some rulers, in the tradition of performing music, studied and composed thumrīs. Hist this point, thumrī emerges into daylight, as hundreds of nine



compositions are extant, and the names, circumstances, and to some extent, styles of its prominent exponents are known. We may, then, proceed to the final development and flowering of thumrī.

CHAPTER THREE

Thumrī from 1770 to 1870

Historical Background

In the seventeenth century, Delhi, as the large and prosperous capital of the Mughal Empire, was the center of classical music in India. The fiscal and political decay that began to rot the vitality of the state under Aurangzeb¹ does not have immediately vitiated the performing arts and poetry. Indeed, for a time, the effete nobility in the twilight of the empire evidenced its interest in music, as the élite squandered their dwindling riches on dancing-girls and music. The model and inspiration for this attitude were provided by the late Mughal emperors—particularly Jahandar Shah and Mohammad Shah, who were more interested in administering their empire than in enjoying music and dance (et al., 1967: 521ff.). For the nobles, this sybaritic patronage of the fine arts was previously stimulated by Aurangzeb's policy of expropriating all estates at the death of the owner. This practice—itsself a desperate attempt to get more revenue—effectively discouraged all productive investment of capital (e.g., in roads, bridges, schools, or irrigation works); since nobles could not even pass on their wealth to their progeny, they lavished it on tombs, mosques, and music (Sarkar 1974: 382). Thus, Aurangzeb's myopic fiscal policy, while contributing to the uniquely static quality of late Indian feudalism, appears to have indirectly stimulated the development of music for a certain time, as well as the construction of innumerable exquisite tombs which adorn Delhi, rendering it perhaps the most magnificent necropolis on earth.

By the mid-eighteenth century, however, Delhi's socio-economic decline had begun to enervate its cultural life as well. After Aurangzeb's death in 1707, the empire disintegrated rapidly. Within a few decades, the Imperial treasury was depleted through frivolous palace expenditures, fratricidal wars of succession, and the dismemberment of the kingdom as Jats, Marathas, Afghans, and Sikhs established independent suzerainties. The pillage and general massacre by the Persian invader Nadir Shah in 1738 was but the first in a series of disasters which ravaged Delhi in the decades to come.² The city was repeatedly

¹ Cf. Sarkar (1974: 349) for a discussion of the deterioration in the character of the Mughal nobility.

² Cf. Majumdar et al., 1967: Chapter V.