

## UNVEILING THE HARMONIES OF GENDER: AN EXPLORATION OF THE THUMRI SINGING TRADITION

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### Abstract

Thumri, a distinguished North Indian classical vocal genre, which has two styles called Bandish Ki Thumri and Bol Banao Thumri, functions romantic lyrics through a female protagonist, often related to love and enthusiasts' separation. There are Predominant objective of this study is to light up the gender relation that exists within the context of the Thumri singing style through an intensive analysis of feminist views and male contributions. This study investigates gender dynamics in the Thumri singing style, revealing feminist perspectives and male contributions using an intersectionality, post-colonial theory and performance theory through a comprehensive literature review approach, focusing on gender. Thumri, a classical Indian music form, is often associated with femininity due to its historical association with courtesans who performed Thumri while having personal relationships with male patrons. However, during music reforms, male hereditary musicians played a significant role, and female musicians faced suspicion and ambivalence. The study highlights the need for a detailed understanding of Thumri's gender dynamics, which significantly influence its feminine identity. Despite progress in female performers, Thumri still faces challenges and stereotypes, and current artists are transforming gender roles. Male and female Thumri singers, inclusive of Bhaya Saheb, Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Gauhar Jan, Jaddin Bai Munawar Ali Khan, Jagdip Mishra, Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, Ustad Barkat Ali Khan, Mausuddin Khan, Abdul Karim Khan, Fiyaz Khan, Saraswathi Bai, Hirabi Barodekar, Zohra Bai, and Malka Jan, Bari Moti Bai and Rasoolan Bai, Begum Akhtar, Girja Devi, Siddheshwari Devi, Shoba Gurtu, Prabha Atre have made great contributions to the Thumri genre, incorporating Thumri additives into their performances and passing on their competencies to the next generation.

**Keywords:** Feminist perspectives, Gender dynamics, Indian Semi Classical Music, Male contribution, Thumri

### Introduction

Thumri is a popular traditional music form, often performed by artists. Originating from the Bhakti cult, it gained popularity during the time of Jaydeva, Ramanuja, and Ramanand. Its peak was during Shri Chaitanyaadeva's Nagar Kirtan, which evoked emotional ecstasy. The evolution of Thumri was inspired by the Vaishnavism cult, particularly Krishna's depiction of divine love.

Thumri style of singing originated from festival and seasonal folk songs in eastern Uttar-Pradesh. Some scholars believe it originated during Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's reign, while others believe it originated earlier due to its classical nature and rhythmic similarity to Hori-Dhamar. Both Thumri and kathak styles were reoriented during Shah's reign in the 19th century. Both

styles are considered classical in literary content and rhythmic similarity.

Thumri is a vocal form in which a solo vocalist interprets a short text with devotional overtones in an improvised style with accompanying instruments. The rags and tals used are likely derived from Gangetic plain folk modes and rhythms (Manuel, 1986). Various views have been presented regarding the origin of this beautiful form of music. The term "Thumri" first appears in Faqirullah's Raag Darpan (1665-66), where he mentions the Indian raga or naghma Barwa as being similar to "Thumri". (Manuel, 2010) Sharangdeva is an explanation of the concept of 'Rupkalapti', the linguistic content of 'rupakas' plays an important role in 'rupakalapti' where the fine nuances of meaning of the words are expressed through tonal changes which is true. Similar to later Thumri. The term "Thumri" may have derived from the Hindi word 'Thumakana', which refers to swaggering when walking. Thumri's origins can be traced back to the royal court of Oudh, where King Wajid Ali Shah, a patron of music, greatly developed all three aspects of music (Geet, Vadya, and Nritya). This theory is widely accepted today. In this instance, Thumri was sung together with dancing for "Abhinaya," which supports the word's association with stylish walking. (Dayal, n.d.)

A comprehensive understanding of the gender dynamics affecting India's most revered musical tradition of Thumri music is far from adequate. Although female artists have historically been more common in Thumri, the complex interplay between gender roles, cultural expectations and artistic expression in this genre has not been extensively explored. This study aims to look at the historical context, cultural influences and current trends of these gender dynamics to provide a comprehensive analysis and understanding, affecting the participation of male and female musicians in the Thumri language

and their identification and aims to contribute significantly to the broader conversation about gender in traditional music by providing a deeper understanding of the impact of gender on practices and reception.

### Literature review

The "invention" of Thumri is often attributed to Wajid Ali Shah, who ruled the state of Avadh (Oudh) from 1847 to 1856, or to musicians in his court at Lucknow. However, references to Thumri can be found as early as the seventeenth century, and its ancestry can be traced far back. Early classical treatises such as Dattilam (ninth century), Abhindvabharata (eleventh century), Natyasastra, and Kalidasa's second century Malavikagnimitra describe light-classical genres similar to modern Thumri. In the late 18th century, it became recognised as a musical genre outside its traditional dance song role. Classical khyal impacted the evolution of Thumri in salons and courts. Although courtesans remained the principal Thumri exponents, male professional and amateur musicians started to show interest in and apply their skills to it, perceiving it as a novel, vibrant, and thrilling alternative to the stern Dhrupad, which was vanishing alongside the Mughal Empire and its nobility. (Manuel, 1986) The upper class' preferred semi-classical form by 1800 was Thumri. (Abdul Halim Sharar & Sharar, 1994) Certain rulers studied and composed Thumri, while instrumentalists developed a new style based on it. Hundreds of nineteenth-century compositions and the names, situations, and styles of famous exponents provide historical context for Thumri. (Manuel, 1986)

"Angs" in "Thumri" refers to particular stylistic characteristics or qualities of expression in the context of music, particularly Indian classical music or Angs defines a specific style of rendering; it is a distinct approach which promptly portrays a particular style with tone

modulation, note treatments, and rhythm. (Dayal, n.d.)

One of the Angs is Purab ang. It was popular mostly in Eastern Uttar Pradesh and Bihar.

This also included two sub-styles:

1. Lucknow style (Bandish ki Thumri) Thumri was traditionally sung in Awadhi and Urdu, popular in Lucknow, India at the time. The words were employed in a rhythmic framework to produce unique patterns. Bandish ki Thumri is a highly structured style of Thumri singing that focuses on the composition or "bandish" of the song. The singer follows the specified melody and beat, and the bandish is often composed in a particular raag and taal. This style also featured Bandish ki Thumri. Lucknow bandish Thumri remained a prominent art style until the early twentieth century.
2. Banaras Style (Bol-Banao)- This style focuses on Bhav in Thumri lyrics to convey subtle emotions through tonal and melodic phrases. In the early 1900s, a new thumri style, known as the bol banāo थुम्री, evolved in Banaras. In Varanasi, India in the late 1800s, a new type of Thumri emerged. This form was known as bol-banao ki Thumri. In bol-banao ki Thumri, the vocalist improvises the song's words and melody on the spot, utilising a special set of syllables known as "bol". The previous bandish थुम्री was finally surpassed in popularity by this. Some of the melodic distinctions between these two forms arose from geography. Banaras-based vocalists added local folk influences into the bol banao थुम्री, distinguishing it from the traditional Lucknow-based form. (Manuel, 1986)

The other Ang of Thumri is Punjab Ang developed in the Panjab era of India. Khan Sahib Bade Gulam Ali Khan is regarded as the leading practitioner of this technique. The most noticeable aspect of this style is its impact on the tappa style, which originated in Punjab, India and is most likely where the style got its name. (Dayal, n.d.) Scholars have extensively studied the transitional period in North Indian classical music, with Janaki Bakhle's book Two Men and Music (2005) detailing the reforms and the roles of prominent reformers and musicians. Eriko Kobayashi (2003) examines the rhetoric of music reformers, highlighting the Hindu nationalist discourse and the modernisation and progress discourse they invoked. Pamela Moro (2004) examines the relationship between musical canonisation and the construction of national culture in India, Indonesia, and Thailand. Amanda Weidman (2003, 2005, and 2006) discusses a similar transition in South Indian music. These scholars have contributed to the understanding of the changes in Indian classical music. According to these findings it is clear that this research area, which focused on gender, has not been explored comprehensively. Therefore, this study explores the complex relationship between gender roles, cultural expectations, and artistic expression in Thumri, a genre predominantly dominated by female artists. It examines historical context, cultural influences, and current trends, aiming to provide a comprehensive analysis of the participation of male and female musicians in Thumri language and their identification.

## Methodology

This study uses a methodology to analyze the previous studies and academic papers on Thumri

music through a comprehensive literature review approach, focusing on gender. This study aims to shed light on the complex interplay of historical, cultural and performative factors affecting gender dynamics in traditional Thumri categories, performance studies, and postcolonial theory. The impact of colonial history on Thumri music and its gender dynamics is examined with a postcolonial perspective. The creative phase of Thumri is explored through a performance study, which looks at how gender affects expression and reception. Comprehensive knowledge of the multiple relationships and influences of multiple identity markers, including gender, race and class, is in negotiation to explore the complex gender structure in Thumri culture.

### Results and Findings

The current form of North Indian classical music first gained popularity in the early decades of the 20th century. Prior to then, a variety of courtly musical styles were played in private musical gatherings for aristocratic patrons, and these performances would eventually come to be known as North Indian classical music. Thumri was traditionally performed by courtesans. They would sing and dance thumri for male clients, sometimes engaging in sexual intercourse.

Under British colonial control, the feudal aristocracy declined, threatening classical musicians' livelihoods. Meanwhile, new performance settings were arising. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and other self-proclaimed music reformers created unique chances for musicians. These reformers advocated for the preservation of Indian classical music and increased its popularity. They arranged conferences and public performances, built up educational institutions, wrote music treatises and textbooks, collected and notated compositions and urged for fresh attention to old Sanskrit treatises on music. Their efforts led to the popularity of North Indian classical music

among middle-class, rather than aristocratic, audiences. It became a national institution after appearing in public concerts, and radio broadcasts. They popularised Indian classical music as a national heritage, particularly among Hindus, and compared it to Western classical music.

### Male and female roles in Thumri singing tradition

According to Alaghband-Zadeh (2013) Male and female artists performed extremely differently during this period of transition. Male hereditary musicians played a key role in music reforms, attending conferences and promoting the spread of Indian classical music through student teaching. Music reformers treated female courtesans with distrust and ambivalence, despite their inherited status. This was largely due to a variety of social reform groups that emerged in the late 1800s. The "Anti-Nautch" (literally "anti-dance") campaign targeted female musicians and dancers, including tawa'if, thumri's traditional performers, who were viewed negatively due to their intimate availability to patrons. This led to the perception that courtesans were similar to prostitutes. According to Veena Oldenburg (1990: 260-261), the colonial British treatment of courtesans led to their devalue and association with prostitutes. According to Vidya Rao (1996: 288-296), thumri singers experienced a decline in status in the late 19th and early 20th centuries due to associations with adultery and legal sanctions, which eventually led to the closure of courtesans' salons. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, a prominent music reformer, did not invite female performers to his All India Music Conferences. In a letter to a friend in 1928, he explained that they "had to be tabooed for fear that the conference would thereby lose the confidence of the general public" (Chinchore 1990).

Female singers faced a professional setback when All India Radio banned "anyone whose

private life is a public scandal" in 1950, thus prohibiting courtesans. They were also shut down by many music reformers. Formal music education for girls and boys, as well as male hereditary musicians accepting students from outside their families, led to the training of middle-class, non-courtesan women as professional Indian classical musicians (Das Gupta, 2005) According to Daniel Neuman (1990) and Janaki Bakhle (2005), former courtesans faced devastating competition from more respectable women. In her book, Bakhle argues that "by the 1950s, a whole generation of baijis (courtesans) had been replaced by upper-caste women singers, who were respectable, chaste, and asexual in their affect" (2005: 225). According to the research of Alaghband-Zadeh (2013) "What, are you making your daughter into a baiji ?" they asked her father (and initial teacher). Unmarried female musicians have reported receiving criticism and suspicion for remaining single. Women vocalists who play genres traditionally sung by courtesans face additional challenges, as they are typically considered to have a courtesan past, regardless of their true circumstances. Male and female hereditary musicians performed considerably differently in the new, concert-hall focused North Indian classical music, and some genres were more easily incorporated into the new tradition than others. Music reforms centred on the classical genres of *khyāl* and *Dhrupad*, which are typically associated with male hereditary artists. Courtesans' genres, particularly *ṭhumrī*, were considered more problematic. Prior to the music reforms, courtesans would sing and dance in intimate settings for their aristocratic patrons; music was one of the courtesans' seduction tactics. By the early 1900s, considerably more than the music of male hereditary musicians, courtesans' genres were connected with the imagined dissipation, decadence, and immorality of the dying feudal aristocracy.

According to the research (Manuel, 1989) the *ṭhumri* genre survived a transition period due to a transformation that made it more acceptable to new classical music audiences. Musicians abandoned the seductive movements of courtesans, claiming a purely abstract musical value. This allowed them to claim the genre's value. The new performance contexts neutralized negative associations, as it was now sung by both men and women in public, achieving greater respectability. This allowed the genre to gain acceptance from a new audience.

### **Thumri and musical mediation of gender**

According to the research done by Alaghband-Zadeh (Alaghband-Zadeh , 2013) Zadesh asked Sunanda Sharma about her experience with singing *ṭhumri* and asked her if singing *ṭhumri* was different than singing *khyal*. She provided a detailed description of the technical aspects of *khyal* style. She said, But when it comes to *ṭhumri*, I feel very feminine. She goes on to say, Even the male singers, when they sing *ṭhumri*, they feel they are feminine; they feel their femininity. Sharma is not alone in describing *ṭhumri* as a feminine genre, as many other performers and music-lovers do. (Alaghband-Zadeh , 2013)

According to Lalita du Perron Du Perron “in a gendered discussion restricted to only these (*Dhrupad* and *khyal*), *Dhrupad* tends to be conceptualized as masculine whereas *khyal* may be cloaked in a feminine garb, its ornateness juxtaposed to *Dhrupad*’s austerity.” However, she writes, “When discussed in relation to *ṭhumri*’s perceived femininity, ... *khyal* can once again assume a masculine and serious role” (2002: 173)

“*Thumri* is liberal and feminine in temperament while *Khayal* is abstract and austere in nature, using a bandish primarily as a peg to hang notes on” (Vajpeyi, 2008)

According to Mohan Nadkarni (1990)) the seminar left attendees with nostalgic memories of a bygone era when Thumri was the queen of Hindustani music and Khayal was the king. Shanti Hiranand, a semi-classical singer, argues that khayal gayaki is the king of traditional Indian singing, while Thumri is the queen (2005:109). According to The Statesman (Alaghband-Zadeh, 2013), thumri resembles the female face of khayal.

This visible femininity stems in part from the genre's historical link with courtesans and the fact that most of the most prominent practitioners of thumri, both those who come from a courtesan background and those who don't, have been women. The romantic or sensual musical ethos of thumri is linked to a particularly sensuous style of femininity because to its significant affiliation with female singers in the past, even when sung by men. (Alaghband-Zadeh , 2013)

According to Mohan Nadkarni's biography of classical vocalist Bhimsen Joshi, thumri is better suited for female singers due to its romantic aesthetic. With a distinct appeal and defiance, each of these song forms—Thumri, ghazal, and dadra—expresses an essential poetic tradition. Their lyrical richness and flexible style provide great opportunity to convey even the most nuanced emotions.

The core of these forms is sensuous romanticism, and the singer must possess a great lot of skill and aptitude to portray the lyrical fineries and melodic beauty of these interpretations. Not for nothing were Thumri, ghazal, and dadra originally reserved for female vocalists, whose voices and personalities these genres perfectly suited. (Nadkarni, 1994)

However, there is a stronger correlation between Dhrupad and male performers and thumri and female performers. There have been a lot of well-known male thumri singers throughout the 20th

century. Several singers Zadeh interviewed with stated that thumri is not at all a feminine genre because it can be sung by both men and women, in response to the question about why the genre is frequently labelled as “feminine.” Nonetheless, the majority of artists and listeners link thumri with female vocalists, especially when they contemplate the genre's background, and women are significantly more represented among well-known thumri singers than among well-known khayal or Dhrupad singers. (Alaghband-Zadeh, 2013)

Many commentators associate thumri's sensual mood with its femininity, even when they don't mention courtesans or female performers directly. For instance, the musicologist Ashok Ranade highlights the "gentle and feminine eroticism." (Ashok, 1999)

“Eroticism and love released themselves in feminine sense and sensibility, in feminine delicacy and fury, with all the attendant spasmodic twists of the wrist, of the waist, jinglings of the ghumgharu, cracking of the bangles and the jerky pulling of the garments.” (Madura Ramaswami Gautam, 2001) Though he does not specifically name them, his discussion of dance in reference to the contemporary sung form of thumri makes one nostalgic for the courtesans who sang and danced the genre. He believes that the sensual aesthetic of thumri provides an explanation for the genre's apparent liberty from musical limitations in comparison to classical genres. (Alaghband-Zadeh , 2013)

According to Alaghband-Zadeh (2013) Some analysts make fewer direct connections between sensual femininity, Thumri, and an amorous or romantic attitude. For instance, a 1961 reviewer writes about Begum Akhtar's semi-classical concert, saying that "Begum Akhtar's Thumri and dadra were charmingly sung." The combined effect of these pieces was both fascinating and

thrilling, with subtle and refined elements mixed with sensual and warm elements. Even while this assessment focuses solely on one specific performance and one specific singer's approach, it nevertheless supports a broader correlation between sensual singing and semi-classical genres. For instance, such a description would never be considered for a review of a Dhrupad recital. Similarly, a week prior, Nirmala Devi, a semi-classical music expert, reviewed a concert for the same journal. Her voice is described by the reviewer as "husky, sensuous, full of pathos and melodious charm" in addition to being "sweet, soft, and mellifluous." Here, one performer's voice embodies characteristics that are frequently linked with *ṭhumrī*, like sensuality (Times of India, 2nd March 1961). In these instances, the sensuousness connected to the female performers of *ṭhumrī* also plays a role in how femininity is constructed as sensual in culture and how romance and eroticism are associated with femininity.

Regarding *ṭhumri*, Alaghband-Zadeh proposes that the seeming conflict also arises from a conflict between two distinct forms of female identity. Discussions on the feminine qualities of murki and *ṭhumri*'s distinctive ornamentation usually highlight their softness, subtlety, and delicacy. However, discussions on *ṭhumri*'s emotional character suggest no such musical restraint. Instead, then emphasising small details, musicians are more likely to discuss the unrestrained emotional outpouring that occurs when they celebrate emotional expression in *ṭhumri*, such as singers' usage of pukar. These concepts contribute to two rather distinct characteristics of the conventional feminine: the unrestrained outpouring of strong emotions is associated with the latter, whilst the former suggests feminine tenderness and control. The musical implications of every feminine model are extremely diverse. This may be heard when comparing, for instance, the quiet and delicately

decorated *ṭhumris* of Begum Akhtar or Shanti Hiranand with the extrovert emotional outpouring of *ṭhumris* by Rasoolan Bai.

According to Alaghband-Zadeh commentators see a feminine delicacy not just in the ornamentation used by *ṭhumri* singers, but also in their vocal quality, namely in their perceived "sweetness". "It is conventionally described as a style par excellence for women, as it lends itself naturally to their temperamental make-up and relatively sweeter voice," writes Gurudev Sharan in a 1968 newspaper article explaining why "Thumri was once the exclusive preserve of female singers" (Times of India, March 3rd 1968). It is possible to associate femininity with sweetness while referring to a male singer's voice.

One critic notes of a concert featuring male semi-classical expert Kamal Singh, "He studied under Ustad Vilas Khan and was keen on vocal music from the tender age of five." However, his teacher soon realised that little Kamal was born with a beautiful, almost feminine voice—exactly what was needed for Thumri and dadra. After that, Kamal left for Banaras, where he lived for about ten years. (September 20, 1953, Times of India). Seven years later, on October 1st, 1960, in the same journal, a reviewer chastised Kamal Singh for his "persistent tendency to make excessive use of soft and delicate notes" and called his voice "rather unusual for a male singer." Three more years later, the Times of India published an article about one of his concerts that read, "If the music of young Kamal Singh carries a tremendous appeal with the not-so-high-brow votaries of the art, it is largely because this popular vocalist, with his dainty tones and pleasant timbres, is able to achieve an acceptable blend of lyricism and sensuous charm to a remarkable degree."

Perron's article explores the association of femininity in Hindustani music, specifically thumri, a female vocal style. Factors contributing to this association include relaxed musical grammar, folk song, emotionalism, romanticism, accessibility, traditional performers being songstress-courtesans, and romantic mood. The primary reason for this gendered association is the first-person female heroine in thumri texts, which is of greater significance than in khyal, as the latter's texts are often similar or even identical. Perron explores the role of the "female voice" in thumri, a text that portrays a female heroine's anger and desperation towards Krishna, who is harassing her. She notes that this text is often interpreted as Krishna expressing love for Krishna, rather than a despairing woman begging for respect. Perron suggests that this is because in India, contact between the sexes is actively discouraged, and the only opportunity for boys and girls to interact is through teasing. Love and desire are understood through a socially and culturally understood medium of feigned outrage at harassment, which is actually an expression of love. The text discusses the female persona in bandish thumri texts and the lovelorn themed texts of bol banao thumri. The female persona is portrayed as voicing sentiments appropriate to a certain poetic and cultural idiom, placing her in a disempowered position. This raises issues for feminist scholars who try to understand the justification of female harassment. The nayika in lovelorn themed thumri is more assertive, but she is also defined by her mate. The text also explores how thumri's lyrics can be interpreted in different contexts, suggesting different forms of feminine expression. Perron discusses the "female voice" of thumri, arguing that it is not an empowered woman's voice but rather a patriarchal voice, the nayika, that expresses women's feelings in the realm of excitement for men. She questions whether a woman's art with a female narrator, despite being constructed by an overarching patriarchal ideology, is still female, as the lyrics

are usually attributed to male authors. (Du Perron, 2002)

Vidya Rao, a thumri singer and scholar, highlights that Thumri is a form constructed in the male gaze, with women singing to express female desire. However, this form is also patriarchally constructed, with the audience consisting of men, who the singers entertain not only musically but also sexually. (Rao, 1990)

Thumri, a traditional Indian music form, was largely confined to the courtesan society, with the kaklas serving as the hub of urban musical life. Many professional female singers were tawaifs, as it was considered inappropriate for respectable women to practice music as a profession. However, many prominent male singers were also products of the courtesan's salon, congregating in salons and imitating the erotic and seductive mannerisms of tawaifs. This influence was evident in musicians like Pyare Saheb and Anant Nath, who sang Thumri in falsetto, while Faiyaz Khan, despite his gruff, virile voice, reproduced blandishments of the courtesan style.

According to Anil Biswas the style of Thumri remained basically that of the kotha (Courtesan dwelling). Naturally the male singer copies this to an extent although because his voice is different, it may seem a different style. It is heard that in the old days' male singers got their training primarily in the kotha-listening to, or learning from the same teachers, or perhaps in order to get renown they would learn from a big tawaif like Bari Moti Bai. Of course, if a man is singing, then nakhra is a bit inappropriate, because in Thumri, it's the woman, Radha, who's speaking. Still, Faiyaz Khan used to do nakhra, because it's considered essential to the "Thumri-ness" of Thumri. Khyal singers like Amir Khan, Abdul Karim Khan, Abdul Wahid Khan, and Bade Ghulam Ali Khan were raised in the kotha

environment until recently. These singers were from Mirasi families who taught courtesans and accompanied them on the sarangi. The stylistic exchange was mutual, with courtesans singing what their teachers played, and khalaliyas from sarangi families incorporating the kotha style. Bhaya Saheb Ganpat Rao, a prominent figure in Thumri during the transitional period from 1870-1920, received extensive training in Dhrupad and khyal from his mother and Binkar Bhande. Bade Ali Khan, becoming enamored with the vogue Lucknow Thumri. Bhaya Saheb was renowned for his exceptional talent in capturing all the nuances of vocal Thumri. Bhaya Saheb, a prominent expert on Thumris, popularized the genre in North India. He composed numerous Thumris, which are still sung today. His students, including Gauhar Jan, Jaddin Bai, and others, became prominent Thumri singers. Saheb also shaped and popularized Bol Banao Thumri. Jagdip Mishra, along with Bhaya Saheb, is considered a co-founder of the Benares bol banao style, popularizing slower tempo Thumri singing with text elaboration. Mauzuddin Khan, a courtesan of Calcutta, is considered the foremost Thumri singer of the following generation. Gauhar Jan, a celebrated courtesan of Calcutta, is a standard character in puppet performances in Rajasthan and Punjab. Mauzuddin's Thumri discs showcase both fast tans and tempo of bandish Thumri and the vistar typical of bol banao Thumri. Despite her strong voice and technique, her recordings lack the variety and expressiveness of Mauzuddin's.

Malka Jan and Zohra Bai, prominent courtesans of Agra, recorded Thumris, Ghazals, and Dadras similar to Gauhar Jan's style.

In the twentieth century, India entered modernity with the rise of the middle class and modern technology, significantly affecting music, including Thumri. Initially, the Victorian puritanism of the bourgeoisie and its constituents'

ignorance of fine arts made them reluctant to patronize music and dance, which were stigmatized by their association with prostitution and the feudal elite. 20th century Thumri underwent significant changes due to socio-economic developments, with patronage sources shifting from courtesans' salons to public concert halls, affecting their profound impact.

From 1920 to 1960, Hindustani vocal music reached its peak, with Thumri reaching unprecedented heights. Early recordings of Thumri singers like Mausuddin Khan, Abdul Karim Khan, Fiyaz Khan, Saraswathi Bai, Hirabi Barodekar, Zohra Bai, and Malka Jan from 1902 to 1940, while recordings of Bari Moti Bai and Rasoolan Bai show the flourishing of Benares tawa'ifs. Girja Shankar Rao Chakravarty, Zamiruddin Khan, Abdul Karim Khan, Faiyaz Khan, Shankar Rao Pandit, Pyar Khan, Vilayat Hussein Khan, Latif Khan, Mahamud Khan, Mushtaq Hussein Khan, Rehmat Khan, Kesar Bai Kerkar, and Begum Akhtar were influential Bengali singers who popularized and refined the Thumri tradition. Abdul Karim Khan popularized a distinctive approach to Thumri singing, which was widely imitated and trained by disciples. Faiyaz Khan adopted a different style. Other khayliyas who excelled at Thumri included Pyar Khan, Vilayat Hussein Khan, Latif Khan, Mahamud Khan, Mushtaq Hussein Khan, Rehmat Khan, Kesar Bai Kerkar, and Begum Akhtar.

Two Punjabi vocalists named Bade Gulam Ali Khan, his brother Barkat Ali Khan, and his son Munawwar Ali first appeared in the 1940s. As far as male Thumri singers go, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan is the best of this century. Another renowned female Thumri singers of this era were Vidhyadhari Bai, Bari Maina Bai, and her daughters Rajeshvari Bai and Husna Bai, Rasoolan Bai, Siddheshvari Devi, and Bari Moti Bai. (Manuel, 1989)

## Conclusion

Early in the 20th century and there was a revolutionary shift in the development of North Indian classical music and specially in the Thumri singing style. Thumri was originally only performed in courtly settings by courtesans and was connected to private shows for male guests. The livelihoods of classical musicians were threatened by the decline of the feudal aristocracy during British colonial administration. At the same time and new performance spaces appeared and supported by music reformers such as Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and which helped make North Indian classical music more accessible to middle class listeners.

This study's main focus was Thumri's complex interplay between gender norms and cultural expectations and artistic expression. During the changeover period and there were significant distinctions between male and female roles in the Thumri singing tradition. While female courtesans and or traditional Thumri performers and experienced social obstacles as a result of campaigns like "Anti Nautch and" which associated them with poor stereotypes and male hereditary musicians played a significant part in music reforms.

Midway through the 20th century and restrictions imposed by All India Radio and music reformers led to the closing of courtesans' salons and which was a blow for female Thumri singers. Middle class and non-courtesan woman were trained as professional musicians in part because of formal music education for both genders and acceptance of students from outside hereditary lines. Once associated with the aristocracy's alleged decadence and Thumri found acceptability in public performances and music halls after adapting to new environments.

According to the study and which examined how people perceive Thumri based on their gender and some people identify its sensual atmosphere as feminine. Male vocalists claimed experiencing a sense of femininity when performing Thumri and while female singers frequently regarded the genre as a feminine expression. The emotional depth of the genre and its historical association with courtesans contributed to its perceived femininity. A noteworthy point that both male and female performers acknowledge is Thumri's perceived femininity. Sunanda Sharma's statement that she felt "very feminine" when singing Thumri emphasised how expressive and emotive the song is. Male vocalists also exhibit a touch of femininity when singing Thumri and proving that the genre is not just associated with female musicians.

Even with the advancements that woman in Thumri have made and there are still some obstacles and a long-standing connection between Thumri and female performers. Stereotypes surround genres typically sung by courtesans and unmarried female musicians receive criticism. A more nuanced understanding of cultural transitions and artistic manifestations is made possible by the subtle dynamics of gender roles in North Indian classical music and which are exhibited by the complex interplay of historical views and changing educational settings and the evolution of Thumri. The interaction of gender dynamics in Thumri offers a rich field for further investigation and critical analysis and contributing depth to the larger conversation on gender roles in Indian classical music.

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