



# Evolution And Emergence Of The Bandish In Hindustani Music From Ancient To Modern Times: A Concise Study

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## Abstract

The melodic and structural basis of Hindustani classical music is the Bandish. It possesses a conceptual and structural lineage rooted in ancient Indian musical traditions, while being widely acknowledged in its contemporary form as a defined melodic composition inside a raga. The paper traces the historical evolution of Bandish, from the early Sāma-gāna and Prabandha-gāna traditions to the medieval Dhrupad and Khayal genres. It examines the evolution of the concept of metrically bound music over time, incorporating linguistic, artistic, and cultural influences from ancient texts such as the Nāṭyaśāstra, Bṛhaddeśī, and Saṅgīta Ratnākara. The study shows that the Bandish is not just a way to write music, but also a living example of how Indian music has changed and stayed the same over time.

## Key Words:

Hindustani Classical Music, Bandish, Prabandha, Sāma-gāna, Dhrupad, Khayal, Indian Musicology, Music Evolution

## Introduction:

This study looks at how the *Bandish* has changed as a musical idea and a way of composing over time, taking into account changes in language (from Sanskrit to everyday language), changes in taste, and changes in social settings. The *Bandish* is more than simply a kind of music; it's an element of Indian culture that displays how India's music has changed over time, from the Vedic period to present.

## Objectives of the Study:

The study aims at tracing the evolution of *Bandish* from the very Vedic roots to its modern form in Hindustani music. It also tries to explore its theoretical foundations in various musical texts and analyze the structural and linguistic transformation from *Prabandha* to *Dhrupad* and *Khayal*. It also tries to examine the socio-cultural and linguistic influences shaping its form and reflecting the continuity of tradition and creative innovation in Indian music.

## Methodology:

The study employs a qualitative, historical, and analytical methodology, incorporating textual analysis of Sanskrit, Hindi, Braj, and Urdu sources to elucidate the evolution of *nibaddha gāna* and *Prabandha* into the modern *Bandish*. It employs comparative and contextual analysis to compile literary, musical, and cultural evidence elucidating the origins and development of *Bandish* in Hindustani music. The word "*bandish*" comes from the ancient *gāna* tradition and means "a structured composition." *Prabandha*, *Vastu*, and *Rūpaka* are older types of *nibaddha gāna* that it comes from. *Prabandha* is the most well-known of these.

## Ancient Roots: The Concept of Gāna

In general, the word *gāna* means "to sing," but in a special sense, it is associated with *Gandharva Gāna*—the celestial form of music mentioned in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*. In ancient times, metrically organized melodic compositions were termed *gīta*. The oldest form of structured singing was *Sāma-gāna* (the singing of the *Sāma* Veda), where musical chants were performed by three singers—*Prastotā*, *Udgātā*, and *Pratihartā*. The *Udgātā* was the principal singer, while the others supported him. The singing began with vocalized syllables known as *hūṅkāra*, much like how singers today begin with *ākāra* (vowel-based improvisation).

The *Sāma-gāna* opened with a section called *Prastāva*, which was sung with an *Omkāra*, resembling the *mukhda* (refrain) of a modern *Bandish*. The subsequent section, *Ud-gītha*, formed the main body of the song, followed by the *Nidhana*, which marked the conclusion. These parts were further divided into sub-sections (*bhinnasandhayah*) such as *Hunkāra*, *Prastāva*, *Ud-gītha*, *Pratihāra*, *Upadrava*, and *Nidhana*. The *Ud-gītha* and *Pratihāra* can be considered precursors to what later evolved into the *sthāyī* and *antara* of a modern *Bandish*.

Thus, the structural segmentation of a composition, which is a hallmark of the *Bandish*, can be traced back to the divisions within *Sāma-gāna*.

## The Development of Prabandha

Alongside *Sāma-gāna*, *Chhanda-gāna* (metrical singing) also flourished. It is said that Sage Vālmīki taught *Chhanda-gāna* to Lava and Kuśa, as mentioned in the *Rāmāyaṇa*. Later poets like Kālidāsa also reflected this musical tradition. By the time of Matanga's *Bṛhaddeśī* (c. 8th century CE), the term *Prabandha* came into use to describe structured musical compositions, of which Matanga mentions forty-eight varieties.

In Bharata's *Nāṭyaśāstra*, seven kinds of *gīta* are described, and the *śuddha-gīta* of that treatise is considered a direct ancestor of the *Prabandha*. The *dhruva*, originally associated with drama and dance, evolved into an independent form when music began to separate from theatrical performance.

In these treatises, *Prabandha* is also referred to as *Vastu* or *Rūpaka*. It was defined as a composition containing four *dhātus* (core components) and six *aṅgas* (elements). If fewer elements were present, it was called a *Vastu*. As Pandit Omkarnath Thakur explains, the *Vastu* of ancient texts roughly corresponds to what we today call a "piece" or *chhiz* in Hindustani music.

According to *Saṅgīta Ratnākara*, the six essential *aṅgas* of a *Prabandha* were:

1. Svara (musical notes)
2. Viruda (praise or descriptive words)
3. Pada (textual or lyrical unit)
4. Tenaka or Tena (metrical embellishment)
5. Pāṭa (rhythmic syllables)
6. Tāla (metric framework)

Sharṅgadeva personified these six *aṅgas* as parts of a human body—*svara* and *tāla* were the legs, *pada* and *tena* the eyes, and *pāṭa* and *viruda* the hands.

The *Prabandhas* were further classified according to the number of *aṅgas*:

- Medinī or Śraddhā (six *aṅgas*)
- Ānandini or Nīrā (five *aṅgas*)
- Dīpanī or Senā (four *aṅgas*)
- Bhāvanī or Kīrti (three *aṅgas*)
- Tārāvalī or Campaka (two *aṅgas*)

Likewise, based on the number of *dhātus*—the structural segments *Udgrāha*, *Melāpaka*, *Dhruva*, and *Abhoga*—the *Prabandhas* were categorized as *Dvidhātu*, *Tridhātu*, and *Chaturdhātu* compositions. The *sthāyī*, *antara*, *sanchari*, and *abhoga* of *Dhrupad* directly correspond to these four parts.

### From Prabandha to Bandish

By the 13th century, *Prabandha* was widespread and influential. Its structural framework laid the foundation for later musical forms such as *Dhrupad*, *Dhamar*, *Khayal*, and *Tarana*. Many medieval texts—like *Bṛhaddeśī*, *Saṅgīta Ratnākara*, *Saṅgīta Rāja* (by Rana Kumbha), and *Saṅgīta Dīpikā* (by Sudhākara)—elaborate on these early systems.

Gradually, as musical traditions evolved and simplified, *Prabandha-gāna* gave way to *Dhruvapada* and later to *Khayal*. The *Dhruvapada* of the 14th–16th centuries retained the essential *Prabandha* form but in a more concise structure. Texts such as *Rāga Taranginī* (1662 CE) by Lochana Kavi describe the *Prabandha* as the prototype for *Dhrupad* compositions.

Pandit Omkarnath Thakur remarks that although many varieties of *Prabandha* have disappeared, modern *Bandishes* in Hindustani music still carry the vestiges of those ancient forms.

### The Mughal Period and the Rise of Khayal

Between the 16th and 18th centuries, under the Mughal rulers, Indian classical music underwent a major transformation. Contact with Persian and Arabic culture introduced linguistic and stylistic influences. Sanskrit ceased to be the dominant medium, and compositions began to appear in Hindi, Braj, Urdu, and Punjabi.

During this cultural synthesis, the *Khayal* genre emerged. Although often thought to be of Persian influence, evidence suggests that the *Khayal* style was an indigenous evolution from earlier *Rūpakānudatta* forms mentioned in ancient treatises. The Persian word *Khayal* (meaning “imagination”) eventually replaced this Sanskrit term.

The *Khayal Bandish* developed as a two-part structure—*sthāyī* and *antara*. Depending on tempo, they are sung as *vilambit* (slow), *madhya* (medium), or *drut* (fast) compositions, popularly known as *Bada Khayal* and *Chhota Khayal*.

Thus, from the ancient *Sāma-gāna* and *Prabandha* traditions to the modern *Bandish* of *Dhrupad*, *Dhamar*, *Khayal*, *Tappa*, and *Thumri*, the journey of the structured musical composition reflects the continuous evolution of India’s melodic imagination.

In this long process of transformation, the *Bandish*—the soul of raga expression—has not only preserved the essence of ancient tradition but also adapted flexibly to new creative and linguistic horizons.

## Findings:

The study indicates that the evolution of *Bandish* commenced with *Sāma-gāna*, progressing via *Prabandha*, *Dhrupad*, and ultimately culminating in *Khayal*. Early Vedic chants gave rise to the basic framework of meter-bound melodic portions and refrains, which has been developed over time by diverse traditions. The *Prabandha* gave it a theoretical framework, and *Dhrupad* was the form that brought the two together. During the Mughal era, *Khayal* made *Bandish* more expressive while maintaining its structure the same.

## Conclusion:

The analysis shows that the *Bandish* is not just a piece of music; it is also a historical continuum that shows how India's musical grammar has changed throughout time. The religious chanting of *Sāma-gāna* and the poetic expressiveness of *Khayal* illustrate that Indian music has had a good mix of structure and originality for a long time. The *Bandish* has been around for a long time, which illustrates that Indian art forms may change over time while still preserving their deep philosophical and artistic value.

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