

Echoes Of Division: Analyzing The Influence Of Partition On The Dilli Gharana's Art

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Abstract

The Partition of 1947 is an unforgettable event in the history of the Indian subcontinent. This event led to significant turmoil and changes. While there has been a lot that is written about the human and political aspects of the Partition, its impact on culture and art has not been discussed so often. This study focuses on the effect of the Partition on the Dilli Gharana which is a musical tradition rooted in Delhi. This exploration is particularly examining the influence on Khayal Gayaki (vocal art form). This exploration has been done and data is collected using interviews as the main research method. Interviews were conducted with artists from the Dilli Gharana residing in modern Delhi as well as those who chose to live in Pakistan post partition. The findings reveal significant cultural and artistic losses on both sides of the border. Instruments and art forms were separated, with some remaining in India while others moved to Pakistan.

Keywords: Dilli Gharana, Partition 1947, Cultural Impact, Artistic Loss, Subcontinent History, Cross-Border Cultural Exchange

Introduction

The rich history of any city is often reflected in its cultural diversity and complexity and Delhi is no exception (Naqvi et. al., 2011). Known for its cosmopolitan nature, Delhi boasts an interesting and complicated historical background (Mishra, 2001). Over the centuries, Delhi has frequently served as the capital of numerous empires that were often large and influential. Despite absorbing many external influences and populations, the city always managed to retain its unique identity, which has allowed its culture to flourish continuously (Parikh, 2016). Delhi's historical regional importance is largely attributed to its strategic geographical location. Situated between the two major rivers of the subcontinent, the Indus and the Ganges, Delhi has historically served as the main gateway to the fertile Gangetic plains (Pisharoty, 2015). This prime location made it an attractive target for empire builders seeking to control this lush and productive region. Locally, Delhi features a variety of landforms, including hills covered with vegetation and the major river Yamuna, which has created extremely fertile alluvial soil. These natural advantages facilitated the development of advanced civilizations in the region (Kapuria, 2022). It is believed that hominids, or pre-humans, were the first tool-makers to inhabit the Delhi area, followed by humans approximately a million years ago Crowley, T. (2020). Throughout its long history, Delhi has been a centre of power, witnessing the rise and fall of many empires and dynasties. This tumultuous history has resulted in a rich intermingling of cultures coming together to form the Delhi we know today (Nath, 1993). The city presents a fascinating blend of old and new traditions. Old Delhi showcases traditional values, architecture and ways of living, providing a stark contrast to the modern New Delhi, which features flourishing modernization, wide roads and modern infrastructure. This juxtaposition is one of the major tourist attractions in Delhi, highlighting the city's ability to harmoniously blend the old with the new. Today, Delhi is recognized as a vibrant metro city with citizens from diverse cultural backgrounds living together and interacting daily. The city becomes particularly colourful during the celebration of various festivals, regardless of the religion they represent. This cultural amalgamation is a testament to Delhi's enduring spirit and its ability to embrace and celebrate diversity.

The Impact of Partition in 1947

Long ago, in 1947, something very sad happened in Delhi. It was the 'partition'. During this time, there were fights, many people got hurt and lots of people had to leave their homes and move to new places because of the new borders. Some people thought India was their home, while others thought Pakistan was the right place for them. Sikhs also moved because they felt safe in India, where most people were Hindu.

When the British ruled, Muslims were a smaller group compared to Hindus. The British made things worse by favouring the Muslims sometimes, which made the Hindus angry. But not all Muslims agreed with this (Asif, 2017, n.d.). After the Partition, lots of people moved to Delhi from different places. They brought their own traditions and customs, which made Delhi more colourful (Denis et. al., 2017). But it was hard for everyone to get along and share things like food and homes. Even though it was tough, Delhi welcomed these new people and became even more diverse and rich in culture. Dissecting the partition and its impact, the main cause of the impact was the partition itself. When India got freedom from British rule in 1947, the country was divided into India and Pakistan. This led to people from different religious communities moving to Delhi and other places to find safety and new homes. During British rule, they followed a policy called "Divide and Rule." This means they created divisions among people to control them easily. They sometimes favored one community over the other, which made tensions between Hindus and Muslims worse (Banerjee, 2016). The huge movement of people from one place to another because of the Partition caused a big change in Delhi's population. Many Hindus and Sikhs came to Delhi from areas that became part of Pakistan, while many Muslims left Delhi to go to Pakistan. With so many people coming from different places, Delhi's culture changed a lot. People brought their own traditions, languages and customs, which mixed with the existing culture of Delhi, making it more diverse and rich. While it was good to have more diversity, it also brought challenges. People had to learn to live together, share resources like houses and food and understand each other's ways of life. This wasn't always easy, but Delhi managed to overcome these challenges and become a more united and vibrant city.

Furthermore, the impact of the partition and subsequent migration on art in Delhi was significant and multifaceted. With the influx of people from various regions and cultural backgrounds, the city's art scene experienced a rich infusion of diverse influences. Artists found themselves exposed to new artistic styles, techniques and themes brought by migrants, which in turn enriched their own creative practices (Ansari, 2017). This cultural fusion spurred innovation and experimentation within the art community. Artists began to explore the blending of different cultural elements, resulting in a vibrant mix of artistic expressions that reflected the multicultural essence of Delhi. Paintings, sculptures and performances began to reflect the diverse experiences and narratives of the city's inhabitants. Moreover, the disturbances caused by the Partition prompted artists to delve into themes of identity, belonging and displacement. Through their art, they grappled with the complexities of individual and collective identities in the wake of such monumental social change. This exploration not only provided catharsis for artists but also resonated with audiences who found solace and understanding in these visual representations of their experiences. Art also served as a catalyst for community engagement and dialogue. Collaborative art projects and cultural events brought people from different backgrounds together, fostering empathy, understanding and solidarity (Wexler & Sabbaghi (Eds.), 2019). These initiatives helped bridge divides and promote harmony among the diverse communities of Delhi. Furthermore, artists played a crucial role in documenting the historical events and cultural shifts brought about by the Partition and migration (Goswami, 2013). Their artworks served as visual records of a tumultuous period in Delhi's history, preserving memories, stories and perspectives for future generations to contemplate and learn from. Thus it can be said with authority that the impact of the Partition and migration on art in Delhi was profound, shaping the city's artistic landscape and contributing to its rich cultural heritage. Through artistic expression, the people of Delhi found a means to navigate and make sense of the complexities of their shared history and diverse identities.

The Evolution of Delhi

Delhi is a very special city because it has changed a lot over the years, but it still keeps its old charm. There are two parts of Delhi namely Old Delhi and New Delhi. Old Delhi is like a treasure chest full of history with its narrow streets, busy markets and ancient buildings (Crowley, 2020). New Delhi, on the other hand, is all about modern life with its big roads, new buildings and organized layout. People in Delhi love to celebrate different festivals like Diwali, Eid, Christmas and Guru Nanak Jayanti. These festivals bring everyone together and make the city very joyful (Crowley, 2020).

Delhi like what it is today has been shaped heavily by the various incidents and events. One such unpleasant incident was the Partition. The modern Delhi cannot be understood without delving into the history of partition. It was when many people had to leave their homes and move because of this. Delhi was the place that was at the helm of everything and the cross-border movements from India to Pakistan and the other way was all very closely seen by Delhi (Goswami, 2013). Being testimony to the outrageous event, Delhi managed to grow and become stronger. Delhi is amongst those regions within the entire world that has seen many historical landmarks including the rise and fall of many big kingdoms. This is what makes Delhi a great teacher in the form of a city that shows how people can overcome hard times and change for the better (Mishra, 2001). Today, it's a place where old traditions mix with new ideas and this cultural intermixing has turned it into a wonderful and vibrant city to live in. And even though Delhi has faced challenges in the past, it continues to shine brightly, showing the world its strength and ability to bounce back (Mishra, 2001).

Impact of Partition on Art with Special reference to Dilli Gharana

The artistic community was not exempt from the disruptions of the partition. The classical artists of Delhi, particularly those associated with the Dilli Gharana faced significant challenges during this period (Ansari, 2017). The rich lineage of the Dilli Gharana predominantly had representation of Muslim artists and the partition compelled many of these artists to leave Delhi. They at that time believed that Pakistan would be a better place for them to live. The migration of these artists led to a significant cultural shift. It was like culture of the two geographical regions crossing the pathways, witnessing exchange and expansion at the same time.

The Dilli Gharana is famous for its special way of singing called Khayal, which started a long time ago, around the 13th and 14th centuries with a musician named Amir Khusrau (Gharanon Ki Gayaki, 2019). He began it during the time when Sultan Alauddin Khalji was ruling. But in 1947, when India and Pakistan were divided, many singers from the Dilli Gharana had to move to Pakistan. Apart from the Khayal Gayan, Dilli Gharana has been known for its contributions in Sarangi Vadan. Both these arts form experienced a loss of talent and tradition as many artists relocated at the time of partition. This migration disrupted the continuity of the Gharana's artistic heritage and led to a period of cultural loss and adaptation.

Talking about the ones who exchanged paths, one stalwart of Khayal Gayaki in Pakistan was Ustad Nizam Ahmed Khan Sahab who was the son of Ustad Ramzan Khan (Ansari, 2017). Along with this, he was also the grandson of famous Sarangi Nawaz Mamman Khan and Sugda Khan and nephew of Ustad Chand Khan. He undertook initial training from his father Ustad Ramzan Khan and after that went under the supervision of his uncle Ustad Chand Khan (Banerjee, 2016). He believed that the "Taankari" in singing should be as per the capabilities of the artist. He was known for many years as a singer of the highest order of Radio (Pakistan).¹ Ustad Ramzan Khan Saheb was famous for his powerful voice, especially for his skill in "Taan preparation." He got the title 'Shaaer Gawaiya' because of his strong singing. He was excellent at singing Raags with fewer notes and used complicated tones/taans a lot (Bisht & Ranga, 1992). He also supported 'Sursagar,' an instrument made by his teacher Ustad Mamman Khan, which sounded like many instruments playing together (Gharanon Ki Gayaki, 2019). Ustad Ramzan Khan Saheb often used songs made by Hazrat Amir Khusrau in his music. He also created many beautiful songs called bandishes, which were later sung by other singers in his family (Gharanon Ki Gayaki, 2019). In 1978, a record called Aahand-ae-Khusravi Gharano ki Gayki (Ustad Ramzan Khan) was released by EMI Pakistan and the National Council of Arts Pakistan. It had Ustad Ramzan Khan's singing on it (Banerjee, 2016).

Another such artist was Ustad Bundu Khan, sarangi player of the Delhi Gharana, was born in Delhi in 1880, but due to political restrictions, he settled in Karachi, Pakistan.² He never sang but composed Khayal Bandishes/ compositions. Khan (2022) in a telephonic interview shared the hand written Khayal Bandishes of his father and legend, Ustad Bundu Khan. These compositions are yet unpublished.

In a conversation with a legendary Sarangi Player Ustad Mazhar Umrao Bundu Khan, regarding Khayal compositions of Dilli Gharana (Pakistan), it came to be known that in Pakistan, the vocalists of the Dilli Gharana included Ghazal singer Iqbal Bano, Qawwal Maqbool Sabri, Ustad Ramzan Khan, Ghazal singer Tina Saani (Shahgird Ustad Nizamuddin Khan), Ghazal singer Labna Nadeem (Disciple of Ustad Jahan Khan), Suraiya Multanigar. (Shahgird of Ustad Umrao Bundu Khan), Nigat Seema, Aryan Praveen (Disciple of Ustad Umrao Bundu Khan) etc. Tina Sani's first song 'Akha Hum Hum Waseha' was composed by Ustad Zahoor Ahmed Khan (India) in 1978. All these artists have also sung in films (Banerjee, 2016).

Another disciple of Ustad Umrao Bundu Khan was Muneeb Shaikh Umra Sahiba who was a famous Naat singer from Karachi. He was bestowed with the title "Pride of gramophones". Umrao Bundu Khan Sahab of Delhi Gharana (Pakistan) used to play Sarangi. He was also a good teacher and exceptional Khyal Singer (Banerjee, 2016). He was the first son of Ustad Bundu Khan. He undertook initial musical training from his father Bundu Khan and then from his maternal uncle Ustad Chand Khan in Delhi. At the age of 15, he started singing in All India Radio stations in India and Pakistan. During the Indo-Pakistan partition in 1947, he moved to Pakistan with his father, Bundu Khan. There he was appointed as a musician in Karachi, Akashvani. Ustad Bundu Khan passed away in the year 1979 leaving his two sons Ustad Mazhar Umrao Bundu Khan and Athar Khan who are now prominent Khayal singers in Pakistan.³ As per the evidences it has been stated by many stalwarts of Dilli Gharana (India), that the shift of Ustad Bundu Khan Sahab due to the partition led to the end of an amazing era of traditional sarangi playing in Delhi, as he along with all his disciples and his teachings shifted to Pakistan (Imran Khan).

Despite all the blending that happened due to the cross-border movement of art and artists, certain things remained common which included some compositions of Hazrat Amir Khusrau. However contradictory to the belief, popular khayal singer of Dilli gharana (Pakistan) Ustad Ghulam Haider states in his Urdu book 'Nagmat-e-Khusro' in 1975 that "in no book of Urdu, Persian and Hindi language, has the mentions of raga-raganis of Amir Khusrau in the way with which it should have been". Most of the scholars have agreed over Hazrat Amir Khusro's contribution in composing ragas like Gaara, Jaaleef, Sarparda etc. The popular belief restricts the understanding regarding Hazrat Amir Khusrau of Dilli Gharana to that point only (Bisht & Ranga, 1992). Haider (1975) has given a complete description of the ragas invented by Khusrau along with the rare compositions of these ragas as examples.

The biographical details of the two prominent artists of the times of partition is a proof that the artists were divided yet connected. It also led to the expansion of the art form initially and later cultural influences of India and Pakistan further

¹ Bisht, K., & Ranga, V. K. (1992). Doyen of Delhi Gharana: Ustad Chand Khan. Ustad Chand Khan Centenary Committee.p(3;194).

² Banerjee, M. (2016, April 21). Delhi Gharana: My musical family. Scribblings.
<https://mallikabanerjee.wordpress.com/2012/09/20/delhi-gharana-my-musical-family/>

³ Gharanon Ki Gayaki: Ramzan Khan and Umrao bundu Khan. (2019, February 2). Harmonium.
<https://harmoniummusicblog.wordpress.com/2019/02/02/gharanon-ki-gayaki-ramzan-khan-and-umrao-bundu-khan/>

directed the course of the trajectory of these art forms making one form more popular in one and another one popular in the different region. However, the stamp of Dilli style still shines bright.

Conclusion

The impact of Partition extended far beyond the immediate human toll and territorial divisions; it profoundly affected the cultural and artistic heritage of the subcontinent. The Dilli Gharana, known for its distinctive style in Khayal singing and innovations such as the Sarangi and Sursagar, suffered significant losses. Artists who fled Delhi to Pakistan took with them invaluable experiences, visions and instruments, leaving behind a crippled Gharana struggling to reclaim its identity. Partition's horrors reverberated through millions of lives, both directly and indirectly. The trauma is still felt today, manifesting in various forms of devastating human experiences. While the obvious and visible impacts of Partition have been well-documented, the more subtle yet significant cultural losses often go unnoticed. The rich traditions of the Dilli Gharana, including the unique singing styles of popular ragas and bandishes, were disrupted. Many traditional Qawwals and exponents of this legacy moved to Pakistan, leading to a cultural void in India. This loss extended to the indigenous singing styles of compositions that continued in both India and Pakistan, but with a fragmented heritage. Although the world frequently discusses the loss of human lives during Partition, the quieter narratives of cultural and artistic erosion deserve equal attention. These cultural losses, viewed through a more nuanced lens, are as devastating as the loss of human lives. Understanding the full impact of Partition requires acknowledging these cultural and artistic losses. The separation not only divided lands and families but also disrupted a shared cultural and artistic lineage that had flourished for centuries. The Dilli Gharana's struggle to maintain its traditions in the wake of Partition serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring scars left on the cultural fabric of the subcontinent. Recognizing and preserving these artistic heritages is crucial to fully appreciate the complex legacy of Partition.

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