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These days Fareeda Khanum rarely gets an opportunity to perform. About 35 years ago, when *ghazal gaiki* in Pakistan was at its most popular, Fareeda Khanum was one of the most sought after *ghazal* singers in the county. But gradually with the changing taste of popular music her appearances on the public media became rare as did her live performance in concerts.

Listening to Fareeda Khanum in a concert last week in Lahore was a treat for many reasons: she is a virtuoso in the old tradition and clearly embodies the development of the *ghazal gaiki* over the greater part of the century; there is a clear strand of the *ang* of Mukhtar Begum in her earlier phase; and as the *ghazal gaiki* took a creative turn with Mehdi Hasan, the emphasis of her music moved to middle and the lower register.

But it is a pleasant surprise that Fareeda Khanum has started to sing the classical *bandishes* in *raags* as part of her repertoire. One does not remember her singing in public, pure classical compositions in various *raags*, which must have been part of her training during the formative stage of her life. At that time, of course, *ghazal* was looked down upon as a minor form of singing as the *kheyal* still reigned supreme, with some concessions grudgingly granted to the light classical forms like the *thumri*.

Now Fareeda Khanum sings those compositions in the *mudh lai* that was probably the standard practice of singing the *kheyal*.

It is difficult to say who initiated the *kheyal gaiki* in the extremely slow tempo, the *vilampat lai*. Some say it was Abdul Karim Khan, who dropped the tempo so much as to give the singer

Raags to riches of the past



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Photo

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second and third generation of Patiala gharana *gaiks* sang were actually the composition of Mian Meharbaan. At times he used a nom the plume, but mostly attributed these to his Ustad Taan Kaptaan Fateh Ali Khan.

It was also very clear that the ghazal *gaiki* in Pakistan has evolved from the *thumri*. As Fareeda Khanum initially sang the *kheyal* compositions in the *mudh lai* and then switched to the occasional *thumri*, her journey to the ghazal was totally demarcated. As they did in the olden times, it was sung mostly in the upper register (and essentially Fareeda Khanum does sing in the upper register with full throated ease) one could palpably feel the overwrought emphasis on the tonal embellishments and *laikari* being gradually replaced by the significance of the lyrics. But still with Fareeda Khanum, the words remain incidental, the elaboration of the *raag* takes precedent, and probably it was left to the creative ability of composers like Niaz Hussain Shami, who were able to weave words in the larger pattern of her tonal combinations.

Mukhtar Begum was the shagird of Ustad Ashiq Ali Khan, the son of Ustad Fateh Ali Khan; at times during the singing of the classical *bandishes* Fareeda Khanum rendered the very complicated

manufacture of discs made ghazal very popular and guaranteed its continuation as a form indispensable to the very popular form of cinema.

By the 1930s, Mukhtar Begum and Akhteri Bai Faizabadi became household names and the prestige and renown that comes with fame institutionalised the singing of ghazals in films. Most films had ghazal numbers, and blossomed in the hands of better practitioners of the higher musical forms.

In Pakistan, the three great exponents of the ghazal *gaiki* — Fareeda Khanum, Iqbal Bano and Mehdi Hasan — have contributed in styles similar and dissimilar to the evolution of ghazal *gaiki* in the last 50 years or so. Before them, however, one can trace a whole development which led to the fructification of this *gaiki* in Pakistan. Besides Mukhtar Begum and Akhteri Bai, other exponents of the ghazal *gaiki* — Ustad Barkat Ali Khan, Rafiq Ghaznavi, Ali Buksh Zahoor and Akhter Hussain Nagina — had already enriched it sufficiently. Actually, it was Ustad Barkat Ali Khan who brought the *thumri* ang of singing into the ghazal *gaiki*, and hence started a new trend that was to characterise this form for the next many years to come.

The imperatives of identity helped in promoting the ghazal in the new state of

Fareeda Khanum too must have had her initial training in singing in the *mudh lai* and if her singing now is a reflection of her singing of the formative period then one can say that she had a