



## MUSIC & SOCIETY: A SOCIO-CULTURAL STUDY WITH REFERENCE TO BENGAL

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### RESEARCH ARTICLE



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### Abstract

Music plays a vital role over the human life as well as the society. Starting from the Vedic period to the modern age the society has passed through intricacies in the evolution of music. It nurtures Folk music from time immemorial as the nature of the same easily relates with social life of the common people. The society, on the other hand, has also accustomed to the practice of Marga and Deshi Sangeet; amalgamation of the both resulting into several Forms of Prabandha Sangeet, have further given birth to a number of derivative Classical musical Forms. Rag-Raginis, the core of Classical music and various Folk music being the prevailing Cultural Tradition have definitely enriched the treasure of Indian music. This paper tries to capture the relation between society and music of different time periods which has helped the inhabitants of Bengal for the constitution of the cultural mindset till date.

**Keywords:** Classical music, Cultural Tradition, Evolution of music, Folk music; Prabandha, Sangeet; Rag-Raginis, Society

### Introduction

The relation between Music and Bengal of the past may be connected very easily as some sort of information in this support are already registered. Some regions of the ancient Bengal such as *Pundravardhan*, *Barendra* or *Barendri*, *Gaud*, *Vajra Bhoomi*, *Soomha Boomi*, *Rarh Bhoomi*, *Bongal*, *Chandradweep*, *Harikel* and *Samatat* are traced and out of those places *Pundravardhan*, *Barendra* and *Rarh Bhoomi* were meant for the centres of Culture and Music in old Bengal. *Pundravardhan* was famous for the practice of Classical music (Mitra, 12-13).

The *Mauriyas* captured *Pundravardhan* and North Bengal. Some concrete cultural accounts of the *Sunga* dynasty were found in Bengal but till that time Bengal was probably a part under *Pataliputra*. Even with the *Kushans* there might have some link as some currencies of the dynasty were discovered in Bengal. The *Guptas* captured almost over the Bengal except *Samatat* approximately during the last phase of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century A.D. During the reign of this dynasty the city culture began to be flourished. At the beginning both the culture of the Aryans and the *Dravids* continued simultaneously. Afterwards the Aryan culture dominated all over Bengal and replaced the same of the latter one. Shashanka, the King of Gaud ruled over Bengal in 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. and was capable enough to establish stability. After his death Bengal faced wretched situation and chaos for hundred years until the Pal dynasty was established in Bengal. This dynasty ruled over for four hundred years. During this reign Bengal had deep relation with other countries. *Ragas* like *Maalav*, *Gurjar*, *Kamboj*, *Gandhar*, *kornat* etc. used in the music of Bengal might have been originated due to the cultural admixture between Bengal and other nations (Mitra, 14-17).

The *Chalukyas* set up their reign in Bengal during 11<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. Along with them many families from South India came here. The successors from some of these families were linked with the Sen Dynasty of Bengal and the Barman Royal families of East Bengal. The Kings of the Sen Dynasty were fond of Sanskrit language and Classical music. The Kings used to invite renowned musicians. Shashi Prabha and Bidyut Prabha were also famous as Court-musicians. Of course, Jaydev, the poet and his wife named Padmavati need to be mentioned in this connection. Profound practice of music was encouraged during the reign of Lakshman Sen.

*Mangal Gaan* being the prevalent music of ancient Bengal which was performed in a slow tempo. *Kaishiki* or *Botto* was used as a *Raga* for that music. Vocal music, instrumental music and dance both were in practice. *Veena* as a stringed instrument, flute as a wind instrument. *Mridanga*, *Mrit Bhandas*, *Dhak* as drummed instruments and *Kansar*, *Kartaal* as metal instruments and above all dance were used in the religious programmes (Mitra, 16-19).

*Charya Geeti* as discovered by Haraprasad Shashtri, a historian may be an ideal example during the period from 950 A.D. to 1200 A.D. as defined by Dr. Suniti Kumar Chottopadhyay, a linguist (Roy, 30-31). The literary meaning of *Charya* is Behaviour or Department. The nature of this music was religious. The songs were performed as a means of recreation and as a part of ceremony. *Charya* was a type of *Prabandha Sangeet*. According to Scripture of music *Charya* may be considered as a *Prabandha* having *Tri Dhatu*, devoid of *Melapak* and added with the *Anga* named *Taravali* having two characters namely *Pada* and *Taal*. So, this type of music was as same as common songs because all the *Dhatu*s and *Anga*s were not present and may not be compared as high class music. Evidences say this music continued till the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. (Mitra, 36-38). The *Prabandhas* in *Geet Govinda* composed by Jaydev were found with *Raga* and *Taal*. The *Ragas* were *Maalav*, *Gurjari*, *Basant*, *Ramkiri*, *Kornat*, *Deshag*, *Desh*, *Baradi*, *Goandkiri*, *Bhairavi*, *Vibhas* etc. He also used *Roopak*, *Ektaal*, *Jat Taal*, *Nihsaar* and *Ashta Taal*. The references of the *Ragas* are also found in the *Charya Geeti*, *Sri Krishna Kirtan* and the *Mangal Kavyas*. The *Ragas* used in the *Charya Geetis* were *Gauda*, *Aru*, *Gurjari*, *Patmanjari*, *Baradi*, *Shabari*, *Mallari*, *Malashi*, *Malashi-Gabuda*, *Kanhu Gunjari*, *Bongal* etc. (Mitra, 36-38).

In this paper secondary data such as printing resources have been used to make a connection between Society and Music of different ages which influenced the Bengalees in many ways.

Ancient Bengal, however, encountered with many races coming from outside; some of them settled here and acculturated as well. Different groups of people with their different parallel concepts and views have woven the social structure. Despite many differences, some sort of subtle resemblances are also observed due to prolonged co-existence. As a result, many a customs, culture either might have lost their originality or superimposed into a greater human race (Roy, 1). The historians have acknowledged the blood mixing between the *Dravids* and the *Aryans*; and their cultural assimilation thereof. The formations of *Shaabari*, *Goand* or *Goandkiri* etc. define such ancient *Ragas* in Indian Classical music, shows the effect of cultural assimilation between them (Mitra 6, 31). Many folk and tribal tunes (structures of musical notes) have been taken into account as *Raga* elements. The *Ragas Tripuravati* and *TripiSarang* may be referred to this connection, which were formed with certain modification of the tunes, practised among the *Kokborok* speaking Tribes of Eastern hilly Tripura (DebBarman, 39-41). The ancient Indian *Ragas* such as *Kanada*, *Bongali*, *Jhinjhoti*, *Maalavi*, *Gujari*, *Gaud* etc. being the popular provincial tunes and some of which are obsolete today, were developed out of the folk tunes (Roy 97-98).

Classical music refers to organized and high-class musical exposition through proper articulation of sounds with particular embellishments of musical notes and rhythm. *Raga* is the compound of the powerful ingredients of Classical music which expresses specific moods. The practice of Vedic music became obsolete in the Classical period that begins at about 600—500 B.C. (Prajnanananda, 44). An extensive research on the development of Indian music as well as *Ragas* and their classifications was initiated from this time. The *Gandharvas* are considered to have established *Gaandharva* or *Marga Sangeet* (music). In fact, the *Gandharvas* took the leading role to accomplish successful progression of Indian Classical music.

Indian music may broadly be divided into two parts; namely Folk music and Classical music. Folk music is region based; bounded with simple rhythm, simple tune, colloquial language or dialects. Classical music remains almost unchanged irrespective of regions. Another Form of music has been traced since from the age of the *Vedas* where regional or indigenous music was somehow modified and performed. This kind of music identified as *Deshi* music was regional in nature and also different from Folk music. *Deshi* music was further modified; named as *Abhijata Deshi Sangeet* and was restricted to the elite class. Till the 15<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. three kinds of music was in vogue in India which may be defined as Temple-oriented music, *Abhijata Deshi Sangeet* or Court-music and Folk music. This reference is found in *Sangeet-Uponishad-Sar* written by *Acharya Vachanacharya Sudhkalash* (Ghosh, 94). The *Abhijata Deshi Sangeet* was further modified and through evolution of Indian music *Prabandha Sangeet* began to be developed country wide with a number of Classicized Forms during the beginning of the Christian era.

A consistent history of Indian music has been traced from the age of the *Vedas*. The origin of the *Vaidic (Marga)* and the *Laukik (Deshi)* or regional *Swaras* (musical notes); the development of the same occurred during this period. The information about the *Grame-Geya-Gaan*, *Aranye-Geya-Gaan*, *Uha* and *Ujhya Gaan* express different natures of the respective prevalent music. Before the beginning of the Christian era, Indian music was divided into *Marga* and *Deshi* (Prajnanananda, 44). *Marga* or *Gaandharva Sangeet* was bounded with certain rules of *Raga* (melody), *Taal* (beats), *Chhanda* (rhythm), *Dhatu* (tune), *Matu* (lyric), and *Geeti* (articulation) which remained unchanged irrespective of regions. *Deshi Sangeet*, on the contrary, expressed its regional trait and was devoid of excessiveness of the musical elements used in *Gaandharva Sangeet*. *Deshi Sangeet*, having modified with some musical elements of the *Gaandharva Sangeet*, appeared as *Abhijaat Deshi Sangeet* and was named as *Prakirna* in Sanskrit or *Pakinnak* in native language. The *Prakirna* songs were further modified and the new form was called *Biprakirna*. Both *Prakirna* and *Biprakirna*, the two forms of *Abhijaat Deshi Sangeet*, were in vogue till the Christian era. *Marga Sangeet* became obsolete just after the Christian era. *Biprakirna* songs were modified again and in course of time *Prabandha Sangeet* evolved. With the advancement and demand of time, many a Classical musical styles were developed with different forms and shapes out of the *Prabandhas* irrespective of Northern and Southern India (Goswami Preface: 10). The *Prabandha Sangeet* comprised usually four *Dhatu*s and six *Anga*s. *Dhatu*s may be compared with the four stanzas of *Dhrupad*, still prevalent in the modern age. These four stanzas are *Sthayee* or *Asthayee*, *Aantara*, *Sanchari* and *Abhog*. In *Prabandhas* the names were *Udgraha*, *Melapak*, *Dhruba* and *Abhog*. *Udgraha* means introduction or starting phase

of *Prabandha*. *Melapak* acts as a connector between *Udgraha* and *Dhruba*. The essential portion of the *Prabandha* was *Dhruba* which couldn't be eliminated in any way. *Abhog* was meant for the portion which might complete the music. In *Prabandha* either *Melapak* or both the *Abhog* and *Melapak* might be excluded; the *Prabandha* was then defined either the combination of two *Dhatus* or the same of three *Dhatus*. All the *Prabandhas* didn't have six *Angas*. The *Prabandhas* were defined as *Medini*, *Anandini*, *Deepani*, *Bhavani* and *Taravali* due to having 6,5,4,3 and 2 *Angas* respectively. The six *Angas* were namely *Swar*, *Virud*, *Pada*, *Tenak*, *Pat* and *Taal*.

*Swar* refers to musical notes such as *Sa*, *Re*...etc. *Virud* is synonymous with praising. *Tenak* expresses holy words and it was used at the beginning of music. *Pat* was meant for the syllables, accompanied with the drummed instrument and even with utterance. *Pada* expresses meaningful words used in the music. *Taal* of course was the *Deshi Taal*, supposed to be accompanied with the drummed instrument. *Prabandha Sangeet* was actually meant for Classical composition. It was divided into three kinds; namely *Geet Prabandha*, *Vadya Prabandha* and *Nartan Prabandha*. *Prabandha* was set to *Deshi Raga* and *Deshi Taal*. Mostly this type of music was performed in the temples. But one thing should be kept in mind that *Geet Prabandha* was religious in nature and performed without *Alaap*, *Vistaar*, *Taan*, *Laykari* etc. *Vishnupada*, *Charyapada* etc. were the ideal examples of *Geet Prabandha*. This type of music was defined as *Haveli Sangeet* in northern India during medieval period (Ghosh, 22-25). The era of the *Prabandhas* (compositions) was going to be an end from 14<sup>th</sup>/15<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. onwards and new Classicized *Deshi* Forms of music after modifications began to be developed till the period of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. (Ghosh, 26). Some of the noted musical Forms are as follows:

**North Indian Forms:** *Khyal*, *Dhrupad* or *Dhurpad*, *Dhamar*, *Dharu*, *Sadra*, *Vishnu Pada*, *Rag-mala*, *Tappa*, *Thumri*, *Tarana*, *Tribat*, *Chaturang*, *Pancharang*, *Haptarang*, *Kaul*, *Gulnaksh* etc.

**South Indian Forms:** *Kirtanam*, *Padam*, *Geetam*, *Kriti*, *Varnam*, *Rag-malika*, *Jabali*, *Tillana*, *Jati Swaram* etc.

*Dhrupad* and *Khyal* are considered to be the Classical Forms through which *Raga* may properly be expressed. *Tappa* and *Thumri* being the Semi-Classical Genres which were later on adopted by the Court-musicians as well as the *Gharana* representatives. These Forms or the Styles of Singing got Royal patronage to a large extent and thus are rightly recognized as *Darbari Sangeet* (Court Music).

The *Bengalees* till the 17<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. was confined to the *Prabandha Sangeet* and couldn't excel in the Court-music. Moreover in the segregation of old Indian Classical music they took time to assess as well as learn *Hindustani* music or Court-music; and that was not before 18<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. It is to be kept in mind that the *Bengalees* first adopted *Dhrupad* and *Tappa*; *Khyal* and *Thumri* were taken a bit later as a means of learning (Goswami, 67-68). During this time the *Bengalees* gradually began to be acquainted with *Hindustani* music.

Ramshankar Bhattacharya (1761-1853 A.D. approximately), Vishnu Chandra Chakraborty (1804-1900 A.D.), Kalipada Chattopadhyay or Kali Mirza (1750-1820 A.D. approximately) and Ramnidhi Gupta or Nidhu Babu (1741-1839 A.D.) ---- all left their valuable marks in the minds of the *Bengalees* during their times. They learnt *Hindustani* Classical music but performed and taught mostly in Bengali language in order to instill the essence of *Hindustani* Classical music into the minds of the *Bengalees*. The contribution of both the *Jorasanko* and the *Pathuriyaghata Tagore* families for the exercise and spread of *Hindustani* Classical Music is innumerable. Residence of *Satu Babu* (Ashutosh Deb 1805-1856 A.D.), the same of the *Lahas'* at *Thanthaniya*, the *Sinhas'* at *Jorasanko*, the *Shobhabazar Rajbadi*, the *Kashipur* (Baranagar) *Rajbadi*, and the Royal Court of *Nawab Wazid Ali Shah* at *Metiyaburz* were significant places of *Kolkata* where the maestros of *Hindustani* classical music performed and got patronized. The *Bengalees* of mid nineteenth century A.D. availed adequate scope of learning *Hindustani* classical music from different *Gharana* maestros which culturally enriched Bengal with varied virtuosity.

### Critical Analysis

India encouraged *Acharya-Shishya Parampara* in old India which was a very old tradition between the *Guru* and the *disciple*. The old education system was nurtured by them. The king was the financial supporter. This system was in vogue throughout India. The *Parampara* encouraged researches, experimentations, manuscripts writing about various disciplines and other academic matters through generation of wise and dedicated disciples. The concepts of various matters on Music alike other subjects, in most of the cases, had maximum similarities with minimal controversies irrespective of regions of this country. The erudite people of Musicology (the subject dealing with the logical knowledge of both theory and practice) of different parts of this country met themselves for regular intervals in the meetings through discussions and after unanimous decisions inferences were taken and the same were registered in the manuscripts as written documents. The entire processes occurred officially in front of the *Kings* (Ghosh, 94).

The *Acharya-Shishya Parampara* discontinued during medieval period. The Court-music came into prominence with the abolition of the old system. The so called *Gayak-Vadak-Nartak Parampara* (the musician class, involved into vocal music, instrumental music and dance) got privileged to the Royal Courts and a new trend of music with its branches began to be developed in course of time in northern India and gave birth to *Hindustani* Music. This musician class was the imitator of the music, prevalent in the old *Parampara* made by the *Acharyas*. The *Acharyas* shifted to the southern India and engaged themselves for the development of the music therein. *Hindustani* Music flourished gradually with various Classical and Semi-

classical Forms; respective styles of music were accordingly established. *Dhrupad, Dhamar, Khyal, Tarana* etc. are the Classical Forms while *Tappa* and *Thumri* being the Semi-classical Forms, as considered prevalent cultural resources of our country.

In the old *Acharya-Shishya Parampara*, theory and practice in music were equally important and complementary to each other. Professionalism was gradually prioritized rather than old traditional values in the *Acharya-Shishya Parampara* during the medieval period in northern India. Theoretical as well as analytical thoughts began to lose its glory day by day and the place of practice rapidly started rising up with the advent of the Court-music culture. Starting from the last phase of nineteenth century a great consciousness had been observed by the initiation of a few educationists cum scholars from different fields. Actually, they tried for the overall social and cultural development through some changes. Institutional training in music began to be assumed during the first phase of twentieth century. The Protagonists of this Renaissance dreamt the development of Music and Culture through the co-relationship between Theory and Practice. Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar are remembered with great regard in the field of *Hindustani* classical music. These two personalities had utmost contribution for the propagation of the basics of *Hindustani* classical music among the common people. They took initiative for the foundation of Music Institutions along with arranging seminars as well as Classical music concerts with the renowned Music Maestros in order to disseminate music education among the mass people.

### Conclusion

Music, may it be Folk or Classical, should be presented in a proper way being aware of the Form and application. This age demands much awareness from us because if music being presented without its purpose the proper style and form might have lost in the long run and the trend and tradition will be deviated from consistent course of music and culture.

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