



The Role of Classical Music Conferences in Preserving and Promoting Indian Music Heritage

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Abstract- This research paper explores the monumental role of classical music conferences in safeguarding the cultural & musical identity of India. Tracing the trajectory from the Vedic 'Saman' to the landmark All India Music Conferences initiated by Pt. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, the study analyzes how these gatherings functioned as a bridge between ancient spiritual traditions and modern academic frameworks. It examines the shift from royal patronage to public platforms and the subsequent awakening of cultural consciousness. The paper concludes that these conferences are not merely performance venues but are essential pillars for the preservation, reformation, and dissemination of Indian musical heritage.

Keywords- Indian Classical Music, Music Conferences, Music Festivals, Pt. Bhatkhande, Cultural Preservation, Vedic Music.

I. Introduction

Indian music and art are the very soul of Indian culture. Since the Vedic period, music has been associated with religion, and spirituality and music have been complementary to each other. As humans progressed by connecting with spirituality, they began traditions of various worldly and social festivals, using music as a medium to express their emotions. Classical music is a rich heritage of India, and classical music festivals have made an unprecedented contribution to Indian culture. India was the first in the entire world to initiate the rich tradition of classical music festivals. These festivals have preserved Indian music from the Vedic period to the present day; this grand musical tradition of music festivals has traveled a long journey from the ancient Vedic era to reaching modern times.

II. The Role of Music Festivals in Promotion and Dissemination of Classical Music

From the Vedic Era to the Modern Age

Currently, through technology, we are able to see and hear music festivals and learned artists from any corner of the world while sitting at home; this has provided many means to promote, disseminate, and preserve music. However, all these facilities were not available in the Vedic, ancient, medieval periods, or in the times preceding modern human life. In such circumstances, these music festivals played the most important and influential role in preserving India's vast and rich classical music tradition, as well as the artists and music lovers associated with them. With time, there were certainly differences in the purposes and names in each period, but Indian music was promoted, disseminated, and preserved through these festivals, keeping the musical-cultural heritage intact.



Historical Progression: Ancient to Medieval

In the Vedic era, the form of the music festival used to be a musical fair known as 'Saman'. In the Puranic era, Saman came to be known as 'Samajja'. During the composition period of the 'Ramayana' and 'Mahabharata', both the king and the subjects were great patrons of music, and a divine aura of music flowed throughout society, with public music festivals being organized. In the Mahabharata period, the form of music festivals changed somewhat from Vedic music, and efforts began to be made by royal courts to organize music festivals.

During the Buddhist period, collective musical rituals, Giragga, Samajj, and other folk festivals were prevalent. In the Mauryan period, the foundation of the courtly form of festivals was laid by Chandragupta Maurya, and during the reign of Emperor Ashoka, courtly music festivals remained prevalent. Due to the love of music among the rulers of the Shunga period, music festivals held a special place. In the Kanishka period, festivals of singing and instrumental music were organized on many auspicious occasions, where artists from Kashmir, Afghanistan, China, and Magadha would gather. The emergence of mutual love and goodwill among artists is a contribution of the Kanishka period. These music festivals strengthened uniformity and artistry, and through these festivals, feelings of humanity and universal brotherhood began to awaken.

From the perspective of the development of music, this period can be called a progressive era. In the Gupta period, during the reign of Chandragupta I, there is no mention of musicians or music festivals in his court. Chandragupta I's son, Samudragupta, was a high-level musician, and music festivals were also organized in his court. When Samudragupta returned after conquering a kingdom, music festivals were held not only in the royal court but throughout the entire state; the general public also participated in these royal music festivals.

During the reign of Samudragupta's son, Chandragupta II, the courtly form of music festivals and the social form in the way of musical festivities are visible, which not only developed the art of music but also provided scholars of music the opportunity to demonstrate and evaluate their art. This gave a firm foundation and development to Indian music and culture and also provided a means to transfer the cultural heritage of music from one generation to another.

Cultural Flux: From Royal Courts to Colonial Influence

In the medieval period, from the Rajput period to the last Mughal ruler Muhammad Shah Rangila, the echoes of court musicians and court music festivals continued to be heard. Subsequently, a time came when society was passing through an uncertain phase from a cultural perspective. The mixed culture established in the Middle Ages had to face the ill effects of Western civilization, and after independence, the inevitable changes that occurred in society and its perspective meant that old established values could not survive, from which literature, art, and music were not untouched.



III. The Institutional Era: Pt. Bhatkhande's All India Music Conferences (1916-26)

The Emergence of the 'Sangeet Sadhaks'

When music had ended its golden age and was in hope of a new life, there were some music worshippers who were absorbed in their practice (Sadhana). Only music had a place in their hearts. These were the practitioner artists who were the true servants of music, and their incarnation happened for this very purpose; the salvation of music was to be achieved through the fragrant sound of these devotees.

Pt. Bhatkhande's Pan-Indian Vision and the Baroda Conference

This was Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, who started this difficult task with great devotion and hardship by traveling across India. Because of him, the echo of musical discourse reached South India as well. The feeling of listening to melodious songs and musical discussion was awakened even in far-reaching states. Keeping all these things in mind, the idea of organizing an All India Music Conference was formed, and Pandit Bhatkhande had been eager to organize such a conference for a long time to bring these ideas into action.

Historic Synthesis of Hindustani Music Traditions

His intention was fulfilled, which would not be wrong to call a significant event in the field of classical music. That event was the first All India Music Conference called in 1916 with the encouragement of the then Maharaja of Baroda. Through Panditji and the Maharaja, paths for high-level music service opened, and in March 1916, the first session of the 'All India Music Conference' was grandly completed in Baroda. Dignified artists and theoreticians of both Hindustani and Carnatic styles participated in the conference. Not only this, besides the singing and playing programs in the conference, disciples along with the artists also gave their performances, and in-depth discussions on musical subjects were held, from which everyone benefited. This music conference was the result of the deliberation, discussion, and cooperation of two great personalities. For the first time in India, the dream of North-South experimentation was realized under the auspices of this council.

In this way, the first tradition of organizing All India Classical Music Festivals in North India was started by the famous scholar of the music world and music redeemer, Pt. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande, by organizing five large All India Music Conferences from 1916-26. He wanted to create a country-wide central institution so that the preservation, promotion, and operation of all musical trends and activities of the country could continue uninterrupted. In all future conferences, his power and inspiration remained centralized.

IV. Awakening of Cultural Consciousness

Democratization and Public Engagement

From research-based study, it emerges that to take music to the masses and to encourage the promotion of music, the awakening of public consciousness is very necessary; this fact was deeply understood by Shri Bhatkhande and Shri Vishnu Digambar Paluskar.



Panditji wanted Indian classical music not to remain limited to one class but to reach people across the entire society. It was his strong desire that the educated class should also come forward in the field of music; the enlightened class should know, understand, and learn ancient classical music and come forward themselves to advance it, because the value of ancient art, ancient culture, and ancient cultural heritage was no less than any priceless object. From his personal experiences, he had understood this glorious importance of music and had not just loved music but had practiced devotion to music.

The Transition from Personal Devotion to Social Movement

Through the travels of Shri Bhatkhande and Shri Vishnu Digambar, public consciousness was awakened again. Seeing everyone getting joy, the organization of gatherings and festivals became mandatory. Curiosity and respect for artists grew in the hearts of the public, and then many successful gatherings took place. The seeds of goodwill were sown through the exchange of artistic essence. The area of disparity gradually narrowed. Music conferences began to happen everywhere. In time, many gatherings were integrated, and their grand form was declared by the name of 'Conference'.

V. Main Objective: Sangeetoddhar - 'Music Reformation'

Due to the tireless efforts of Pandit Bhatkhande, great artists of that time used to participate in the councils and give speeches in discussions on music. In the past, the country's renowned artists had close relationships with each other. Due to meeting repeatedly in music conferences, radio, and other events, there used to be respectful and substantial discussions on various aspects of music. Music festivals were the only medium to gather artists and art lovers together in one place.

In those days, the nature of the councils was mostly like a music festival. Many singers would gather, and the festival of discussion and singing-playing would begin. The name of this union of musicians for 'Sangeetoddhar' (Music Reformation) was the Music Conference. It would be most appropriate to call the ancient music conferences and music councils a cultural movement in the field of music, whose goal was to protect ancient music, free it from the unrestrained rule of professional musicians, take it to the educated class, and maintain the purity of the sacred soul of music.

The primary objectives were:

- Collective opportunity for substantial theoretical discussions related to music.
- Resolving inconsistencies and differences through unanimous decisions.
- Providing a high-level platform for artists to present their vocal/ instrumental art.
- Enabling the public to hear performances by India's premier artists.

Music is an art that expects an occasion, a gathering, or a conference for its expression. The modern tradition of music conferences further encouraged this after Independence. The purpose of these seminars was education, exchange of ideas, and progress, alongside the opportunity to meet and hear matchless musicians live. While the planning and execution of such events represent a great struggle, their impact on cultural preservation is immeasurable.



VI. Conclusion

In every era, the changes and developments according to the times have provided a new direction and energy to music festivals. This continuous change still keeps these events alive and relevant today. In fact, these festivals have been strong pillars for the preservation, promotion, and dissemination of our art and culture. From the study of the nature of music festivals in different periods, it is clear that the collective expression of music has been the fundamental basis of their origin. It is not just a performance, but a living platform for dialogue between the artist and the listener. This participation takes music out of limited boundaries and brings it to the wider society. Consequently, the music tradition of a particular region reaches other regions and artists, becoming a medium for cultural exchange.

The Author, Squadron Leader Rakhi Agarwal (Retd), is a scholar of Indian Classical Music and is conducting her research on the subject "Uttar Bhartiya Raagdaari Sangeet mein Vyaapt Visangatiyan evam Virodhabhas - Ek Adhyayan" i.e. 'Contradictions and Discrepancies Prevalent in North Indian Raagdari Music - An Study' under the direction of Prof. Meena Singh, Head of the Music Department, Post Graduate College, Ghazipur, from VBS Purvanchal University, Jaunpur.

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