

A Glimpse of Oral Tradition of Music in India
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Abstract

The evolution of poetry, painting and other visual arts has been presented on leaves, paper and stone, but music being auditory, no such evidence exists. As such it is not possible to listen today to the Music of ancient times.

India is a vast nation with many cultural cross-currents such as the Dravidian, the Aryan, the Muslims and now the western. People of different cultures came to India and mingled with people here in a manner which must have had powerful repercussions on Indian music.

Introduction

In spite of such a variety of cultural interactions, our music has remained essentially melodic. In melody, one note follows the other, making for a continued unity of effect, where as in harmony musical sounds are super imposed on one another. Our folk songs and classical music have retained the melodic quality even to this day.

When we talk about the oral tradition of music one thing that strikes directly to our mind is that music is the only art form which is a means of human communication wherein knowledge, art, ideas and cultural material is received preserved and transmitted orally from one generation to another.

In general terms anything that is transmitted through speech or song and which may include folk tales, ballads, chants, prose or verse are considered oral tradition. Contradictory to oral tradition in oral history one collects the evidence and documents through various scientific methods, mainly active interviewing.

The present Indian music is a growth from ancient times. Almost every tribe or people have lent their own share in this growth. What, therefore, we now call a ragam might have often started as a tribal or folk melody? Similarly, a complicated tala finds its roots sometimes in more primitive rhythms. Creation of music, a piece of melodic tune is the first thing of oral tradition which is then transmitted orally from one generation to another and while transmitting several changes do occur in the process, which is called improvisation, the most beautiful part of Indian music where the interpretation by the receiver is solely dependent on him. The melody remains the same but as it is transmitted it gains more expression on the part of musician. It is the advantage of oral tradition that the musician rarely plays the same song in the same manner twice adding unique embellishment to the melodic lines. It may also contain the fragrance of the place to where it is transmitted and also the flavour of its origin, the language, the dialect, performance arenas while employing flexible patterns and structures that aid composition, retention and reperformance.

Folk music is the best example of oral tradition where music is passed from person to person by imitation and which is the most reliable source, because from the time immemorial this oral mode is an integral part for the transmission of customs, traditions, folklores etc. from one generation to another.

This is the most reliable tradition where religious, political, social, cultural, philosophical values about life are preserved.

Oral tradition is full of variety which includes folklore, folktales, fairy tales, chants, proverbs, wise saying, mythologies and is a medium to pass knowledge across generations without writing. They help people make sense of the world and area used to teach children and adults about important aspects of their culture. Emphasis of oral tradition is to build and connect the people of different diversities through their sense of music.

Music is the best example of universal language. It is understood world over. Be it a folk tune of Rajasthani Mand or Bhatiyalidhun of Bengal all mingled together and becomes an integral part of our classical music. Music has a strength to make a bond between all of us and unite us together.

In ancient Indian musical treatises, the music is broadly divided into two categories, namely Margi Sangeet and Deshee sangeet. In 6th Century A.D. the renowned musicologist Matangarecognised that the folk and tribal music having no conscious grammar were outside the fold of the then classical music. Margi Sangeet has now come to be identified with classical music which has a conscious grammar of its own and an elaborate organic structure. It is highly cultivated art music. All forms of music which do not conform to the canons of Margi Sangeet were categorised under Deshi Sangeet even if they were cultivated. Therefore, Deshi Sangeet is not synonymous with folk music.

Indian music can be divided into following broad categories based on social and musical situation.

1. Tribal
2. Folk
3. Cultivated Folk
4. Traditional
5. Light Classical
6. Classical

The first three i.e. Tribal, folk and cultivated folk may be generally called as folk music while the rest i.e. traditional, light and classical as art music.

India is so rich and varied in the tradition of performing arts that even in these 3

types of folk music there is an amazing variety of forms differing from region to region and from state to state. We may divided Indian Folk music thematically into the following:

1. Ritual
2. Ceremonial cum festival
3. Seasonal
4. Functional
5. Recreational
6. Devotional
7. Ballads

In the past, music was believed to possess supernatural powers and therefore was closely associated with religious practices of the folk people. Various rites and rituals are still observed in rural India with great religious fervour. Mostly the rituals are accompanied by chanting and music. Ritual music may be either vocal or instrumental or both.

Some of the examples of these rituals are:

1. Lai Haroaba of Manipur.
2. Nagapa of Himachal Pradesh (Music has tantric overtones)
3. Ritual based on superstitions in Kerala observed as Bhuta rituals for exorcising evil spirits and ghosts.

Ceremonial cum festival music has two branches one is religious (closely associated with rituals) and social ceremony. Example of ceremonial festival is **Karma** festival of Bihar, Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and West Bengal where branch of particular tree is planted in the middle of the courtyard and new cloth is tied around the branch with oil fed lamps and group of men and women dance and sing around the branch.

In Karnataka there is a **Karaga** festival with earthen pot beautifully decorated placed on the head.

Then there is **Holi** festival with songs gay and buoyant. Social ceremonies, like marriage, thread ceremony, mundan etc. All these occasions inspire rural folk to singing.

Social ceremonies have at times served as a potent factor for intermingling of different cultures. North India has a strong tradition of singing '**Sohar**' songs. When a son is born. This has influenced the Muslim culture and a form of **Sohar** song gained popularity in the Muslim families living in some regions of Uttar Pradesh. Sohar songs are the unmistakably a best example of the fusion of the two cultures.

In every region there are various forms of seasonal songs. Rains have inspired more forms of folk music than any other season, Rain bring the hope of a good horvestand also after gruelling heat of summer in a tropical country rains fill the mind with a sense of great relief. '**Kajri**' of north India is famous for its tuneful singing.

The Bhakha form of folk music is popular in Jammu region. It is a rare form in the sense that the Indian music, be it classical or folk is melodie in character. Bhakha is one of the exceptions since it also has a harmonic element. When harvesting is over village folk of this region start singing Bhakha.

There are innumerable forms of folk music which are just an aesthetic expression of the rural people- lyrical and tuneful these forms may be classed as recreational.

'**Moria**' songs of Rajasthan is extremely lyrical. The gorgeous Peacock is symbolically addressed in this song charged with emotions.

'**Lavni**' of Maharashtra is equally lyrical which is extremely popular in the region and Lavni singing finds a dominant place in the **Tamasha** form of folk theatre.

Devotional Songs like Kirtan of Bengal, Assam, Orissa and Manipur, Alvar. Songs of Hari Katha of South India which are highly cultivated and would come under traditional category.

Boul of Bengal, **Janama** of Orissa, **Devigeet** of Uttar Pradesh are also the devotional forms of music under cultivated folk.

Ballads are the folk songs which tells stories. Some entertaining ballads are Heer Ranjha of Punjab, Prabhuji-ka-padh of Rajasthan, Ahla of U.P. Banjara of Bihar, Kanigan of Bengal are few major forms of balladry in India.

The Panduvani of Madhya Pradesh is a fascinating form of balladry. In this form the whole of the Mahabharat is sung as a ballad and one or two episodes, are taken for one night's performance.

To sum up we come to this conclusion that India has a vast body of folk and tribal music. It is a pity that this rich and varied tradition is fast disintegrating and dying out under the impact of industrialisation. Many advanced countries particularly in the west have now come to realise that oral traditions are extremely precious and therefore should be carefully preserved folk music no longer regarded as inferior art music as these art forms are the best carriers of our rich cultural heritage since ages. Thus, oral tradition is considered as the life line of the society and can be summed up in four most important characteristics.

1. It is clearly distinguished from cultivated art music.
2. It is transmitted from generation to generation through oral tradition.
3. It comes out of a community rather than spreading in it.
4. It is the expression of the whole community rather than the expression of an individual.

संदर्भ ग्रन्थ

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2. लोक गीतों के संदर्भ और आयाम— शान्ति जैन ।
3. राजस्थान का लोक संगीत—देवी लाल साभर
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