

Hinduism and Hindustani Music

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ABSTRACT:

नाहं वसामि वैकुण्ठे योगिनां हृदये न च ।
मद्भक्ता यत्र गायन्ति तत्र तिष्ठामि नारद ॥¹

Narad Samhita

These are the famous lines wherein lord Krishna professes that neither do I reside in Vaikuntha (his heavenly abode) nor in the hearts of the Yogis, but I dwell where my devotees sing my name. Thus, in Indian Culture, Music has been associated with devotion as a vehicle to reach the Almighty. This association can be seen not only in Hindu religion but also in other religions like Jain, Christian and Muslim religions etc. However, to limit the scope the paper, the relationship between devotion and Hindu religion will be studied in this paper. Also, this association can be found in many genres of Indian Music such as folk Music, Semi classical music, Carnatic Music etc. Though, Sufism too, has played role in the evolution of Hindustani Classical Music, it does not fall in the purview of this paper. Thus, in this paper, we would focus on the relation between Hinduism and Hindustani Classical Vocal Music.

Keywords:

Hinduism, Religion, Devotion, Bhakti, Hindustani Music, Bhajan.

INTRODUCTION

The association of religion and Music is a universal phenomenon. From the early of times music and prayer were sung as complementary in Jewish worship. A veritable orchestra in the temple was inseparable from the Levitical choir and antiphonal psalmody in both temple and nascent synagogue. Rabbinic pronouncements link liturgy to musical performances.² In Arabia Muslims call to prayer through music five times a day. In the Christian church, music is a constitutive part of the liturgy and includes Gregorian plainchant, polyphonic singing, modern church music, popular hymns and the use of the organ in Public Worship³. Psalms were initially sung in Syrian Monasteries and churches. Psalms were the religious poems that were meant to be sung. The 'Canticle' were developed in Catholic Churches where passages of the Bible were sung in worship at specified times. Thus, Music has accompanied humans in their search of divinity across the religions. Hinduism can not be exception.

Before, we commence our deliberations on relationship between Hinduism and Hindustani Music it is necessary to see what is 'Hinduism' in brief. Hinduism is an important religion of India. It is an ancient religion with complex history and is enriched various off shoots and sects. It is also considered as a

way of life. Its origins can be traced from the Indus valley civilization of 2500 BCE. "Hindu" was initially a Persian toponym used for people living beyond the Indus River. It was later used by the British to refer to people of Hindustan (northwest India). Hinduism does not have a single historical founder nor a single treatise of Doctrines, nor a single deity. It is an amalgamation of cultures and traditions. Its earliest sacred texts are called Vedas. The texts, traditions and rituals are designed to assist the follower to attain Moksha i.e. salvation. Other beliefs like birth cycles, Brahman (the divine absolute soul), Karma (law of cause and effect) have become ethos of Hinduism. It is religion, that binds people together and has a major impact on life, society, literature, culture and Music cannot be exception.

Hinduism and Music

If we look at the Histography of Indian Music, we can find that practices and beliefs in Hinduism have fundamentally moulded Indian music. The association of Music and Hinduism is found both in Ontological discourses as well as in liturgical practices. Right from Upanishads and the Vedas, the earliest sacred texts to this date, this association is quite evident. One must bear in mind that Hinduism itself subscribes to multiple schools of thoughts rather

than a single religious doctrine. This too has influenced Indian Music. The ancient Sanskrit texts, both of Theology and Music, deliberate about the close links between Hindu religious thought and Indian music. All through the sacred ancient texts Vedas, Upanishads, Yogic philosophy, Tantric rituals, Bhakti movements, we find to references of Nada-upasana (reverence to sound). Be it song texts (lyrics) or practice of the art music forms like Dhrupad and Khayal set to Ragas and Talas to lighter forms of Bhajans and Kirtans, we often come across the term Naad-upasana even today. Thus, spiritual experience goes hand in hand with Musical practices.

Vedic Period, worship, Liturgy and Music

Vedas are the ancient texts of Hindu religion. The recital and chant of mantras have been a core element of Vedic ritual over the centuries. Amongst the four Vedas, viz Yajurveda, Rigveda, Atharvaveda, and Samaveda, Samaveda is text of melodies and Chants to worship and appease the deities. There are two major parts of Samaveda. The first part contains collection of melody (gaana); while the second part is verse "books" (aarcika). The *Gana* collection is further into *Gramageya* and *Aranyageya*, while the *Archika* portion is divided into *Purvarchika* and *Uttararchika* portions. The *Purvarchika* portion of the text has 585 single stanza verses and is organized in order of deities, while *Uttararchika* text is ordered by rituals. The *Gramageya* melodies are those for public recitations, while *Aranyageya* melodies are for personal meditative use such as in the solitude of a forest.⁴ Thus, we can easily derive that Samaveda is an ambiguous example of association of Music and devotional practices of Hinduism both ritualistic or otherwise.

Metaphysical Perspective of Hinduism and Music

Hinduism theorizes that all the diversity we see and experience is an illusion. At the meta-physical level is absolute unity; everyone is nothing but Brahman. In Hinduism, Musical sound is considered as The Absolute Divine or as "Shabda-Brahman" or "Naad-Brahman". The concept of Brahman is first articulated in the Upanishads. It has two dimensions. It is also conceived in two ways: Sagun (With attributes) and Nirgun (without attributes). The concept of Nada-Brahman is deliberated in Agamas, Tantras and in Yoga commentaries.

ब्रह्मप्रणवसंधान नादो जोतिर्मयः शिवः इ ।
स्वयम विभार्वेदात्मा मेधापायैऽशुमनिव ॥
सिद्धासने स्थितो योगी मुद्रां संधाय ।
वैष्णविं शृणुयाद्दक्षिणे कर्णे नादमन्तर्गतं ॥
सदा अभ्यसमनो नादोऽयं बाःयामावृणुते ।
ध्वनिम् पश्चाद्विपश्चिखिलं जित्वा तुर्यपदं वज्रेत ॥

- Naadbinduupanishad – 30/31/32

Oh Dear! When we think about Atman and Brahman, we get enlightened

The music of Naad Brahman is indeed very pleasing. Yogis should sit in Siddhansan and Vaishanvi Mudra to be able to listen to Anahat Naad. This enables us to distract from the external noise and look into the sound within and be one with Naad-Brahman. Thus, the sound and Music has been associated with Music.

The concept of Naad Brahman is not only deliberated in theological treatises but also in Musical treatises as well. The treatises on Music like Brihaddeshi and Sangeet Ratnakar praise Naad-Brahman as a prelude to the glory of Music. For e.g.

न नादेन बिना गीतं न नादेन बिना स्वराः । न नादेन बिना नृत्यं तस्मान्नादात्मकं
जगत् ॥

नादरूपः स्मृतो ब्रह्मः नादरूपो जनार्दनः । नादरूपा पराशक्तिर्नादरूपो महेश्वरः ॥⁵

Brihaddeshi- Matang Muni Chapter – 3, canto 16 & 17.

Which means, Music, Musical notes, dance and entire world cannot exist without Naad. The worship of Naad is worship of Brahma, Janardan (Vishnu), Shakti and Mahesh because they are one and the same.

Further, in another important treatise on Music, Sangeet Ratnakar, Sharangdev praises Naad in similar manner.

चैतन्यं सर्वभूतानां विवृतं जगदत्मना ।

नादो ब्रह्म तदानन्दमतिन्द्रियमुपास्महे ॥

नादोपासनया देवा ब्रह्मविष्णुमहेश्वराः ।

भवन्त्युपासिता नूनं यस्मदेते तदत्मकाः ॥⁶

Sangeet Ratnakar (Chapter Three canto 1 and 2)

Which means, I worship Naad-brahman which resides in all animate beings as its conscious. The worship of Naad Brahman is worship of Brahma, Vishnu and Mahesh because they are one and the same.

Thus, the concept of Naad-Brahman is deliberated in the earliest treatises of Hindu Theology, Ontology and Metaphysics and musical treatises as well. Similarly, the concept of Anahat Naad, the Unstruck Sound too is deliberated in both Music as well as Ontology.

The Ananhat Naad too used by Yogis (sages) to unite with Brahman. The scared sound 'Aum' or 'OM', is considered as 'Omnipotent' and the cause of all the 'Creation'. Both the Yogis and Musician use this sound in their practice even today.

In India Yoga was considered as basic science, which further incorporated the pursuit of Dharma (Duty), Darshana (Philosophy), Shashtra (Science) and Kala (Art). In fact, religion, philosophy, spirituality, mysticism and art have been a simultaneous process until the advent of Modern Contemporary Art came to the scene. Here, like Philosophy and Science, Art too is a quest for truth. Thus, fundamental Philosophical thought process, has a great impact on the artist quest in India.

Margi / Deshi Sangeet :

The terms "Desi" and "Sangita" are deliberated in treatises like the Natyashastra Brihatdesi, Manasollasa and, finally, in the Sangita Ratnakara. The span from Natya Sastra to the Ratnakara is about 1000-1200 years. The Sanskrit word Maarg means Path. Thus, Margi Sangeet is Music takes us on the path of reaching the Almighty. It is believed that Shiva himself taught Marga Music, on his Veena to the sages sitting around him. According to Bharat Muni, Marga Sangeet was traditionally sung to worship to gods, in the preliminaries (purvanga) of the plays. Bharatha also mentioned that Marga Sangeet or Gandharva was dear to gods and Gandharvas.⁷

Desi Music had a charming appeal to human beings (hrudaya-ranjaka). It appealed common folks, cowherds, women, children and nobility alike. It reflects the range of emotions and tunes springing from different regions. Deshi Music varied from region to region and hence had no fixed pattern. Thus, Deshi-Margi concepts convey that in India, Music was considered to be the "Path" to reach the almighty.

Medieval Period, Bhakti Movement and Hindustani Music :

Music accompanied Indian quest of Salvation from vedic era to Medieval Era of Bhakti movement. "Bhakti" was a religious movement that simply means devotional surrender to a personally conceived supreme God for attaining salvation. The origin of this doctrine can be traced to various scriptures such as the Gita. But Bhakti as a religious concept means devotional surrender to a personally conceived supreme God for attaining salvation. The origin of this doctrine can be traced to various scriptures such as the Gita. But Bhakti movement emerged for the first time in South India between the 7th and the 10th century. The Shaiva Nayanar saints and Vaishnav Alvar saints of South India propagated the concept of bhakti among

different sections of the society irrespective of caste and sex.⁸ These saints composed devotional songs in Tamil language and created popular base for the movement. They ignored rituals and traversed the region several times singing, dancing and advocating bhakti. Bhakti movement of south began reached its peak in 10th century after which it began to decline.

When the popularity of the bhakti movement in South India was declining, Ramanuja (11th century) defended Bhakti on Philosophical level and gave philosophical justification for bhakti. This movement was revitalized by a series of scholars or acharyas. The last two prominent vaishnava acharyas were Ramananda (late 14th and early 15th century) and Vallabha (late 15th and early 16th century). From 13th to 15th centuries the Bhakti movement flourished in North and East India and Maharashtra. Emphasis on bhakti and religious equality characterized these movements. However, Bhakti movement was never a single movement except in the broad doctrinal sense of a movement which laid emphasis on bhakti and religious equality.

The Bhakti movement had a great impact on architectures, literature, and artistic expression. In the Medieval Period the Bhakti movement was propagated with Bhakti Sangit ("devotional music") which was set to Raga and Tala and had lyrics that expressed love and devotion toward a chosen deity. As mentioned before Bhakti Songs were composed in vernacular dialects such as Hindi and Braj in North, and Tamil, Telugu, and Kannada in the South. Varied types of songs in Bhakti Movement were called as Kirtan and Bhajan. Bhajan and Kirtan have been acknowledged as vehicle to reach the Almighty in many ancient Sanskrit scriptures of Hinduism like Bhagvat Gita and Bhahvat Purana. Bhagwat Gita refers to Bhajan and Kirtan as worshiping or loving with devotion, including music. The Bhagavata-Purana on the other hand prescribes Music as a Statutory practice with liturgical offerings.

Pushti-Margi Sangeet, Samaj Gayan, Dhrupad and Dhamar

The Kirtan compositions in Pushtimarg tradition are "Dhrupad Style of Composition". Bhakta Jaydevji (1100 AD) is regarded as the first bhakta poet to start this parampara. By the sixteenth century, Dhrupad was influential musical form in the temple music styles of several Vaishnava traditions of Krishna worship in Braj. These primarily include the sects Vallabha Sampradaya or Pushti Marg tradition, founded by saint Vallabha, and the Radhavallabha Sampradaya founded by Hita Harivansh Mahaprabhu.⁹ The Dhrupad songs of Pushti Marg are called Haveli Sangeet. The song texts are in Brij, the dialect of Hindi and themes are on

life, glory and daily chores of Lord Krishna, describing the childhood pastimes of Krishna, including the festivals of Holi in the spring season and the Rasa Dance in autumn. Originally established in Braj, where a group of eight saints poet-singers known as Ashtachhap Kavi performed their musical worship. Haveli Sangeet is still performed in the temples of Rajasthan and Gujarat.

Haveli Sangeet connects us to the age old tradition of Indian Music. Many Ragas these composed in are still in use. For eg. Bhairav, Ramkali, Bilaval, Bibhas etc. Many varieties Kanada, Sarang etc. in Haveli Sangeet are not in vogue in Hindustani Music; these can be revived with the help of the compositions of Haveli Sangeet. The talas employed in these compositions are many times same as that of Dhrupad viz. Chuatal, Teevra etc. In Dhrupad, Pakhawaj is used for percussion accompaniment, however, in Haveli Sangeet Cymbals are used.

Interestingly, RadhaVallabh sect performs another style of devotional singing which is known as Samaj Gayan, which is based on Dhamar¹⁰. The poetry of this sect revolves mainly around intimate love-play of Radha and Krishna. The compositions of Samaj Gayan are akin to Dhamar than Dhrupad; many compositions are set Dhamar Taal and Ragas of Hindusthani Classical Music. Unlike Dhrupad-Dhamar, Samaj Gayan is a community or group singing. The group follows the main singer; technical elements of Dhrupad like rhythmic play or elaboration of Raga is not part of Samaj Gayan.

Dhrupad-Dhamar

What is being performed today as Hindustani Music is developed from devotional Hindu music performed in northern India- Mathura, Vrindavan, Braj, Gwalior, Rajasthan, Maharashtra, Gujarat, and Uttar Pradesh. Dhrupad and Dhamar are the oldest forms of Hindustani classical music which are still in practice. Dhrupad performance is majorly divided into main phases 1. Elaboration of Raga before the composition and 2. Elaboration of Raga with composition. In the first phase the acronyms of hymn in **Hinduism** "Om Shri Anant Hari Narayan, Taran Taaran Twam".i.e. , Nom, Tom, Dere, Na etc. are used. The lyrics of the of Dhrupad compositions are widely about praise of the Hindu Gods and Goddesses their bravery, their description, benevolence, grace, Hindu Philosophy (Moksha, rebirth, karma etc. The compositions were in the later stage were also about Kings as rulers and glory of Music. Thus, in both the phases of elaboration the theme of devotion prevails.

Modern Period, Khyal, Hinduism and Spirituality :

It's been almost a century now that the "Khyal" idiom reigns Hindustani Classical Music. So much so that whenever we talk or think about the musical forms of Hindustani classical vocal Music, the first form that comes to our mind is Khyal. The form of Khyal emerged out of continuous and gradual evolution that took place due to Muslim and Sufi influence on Indian Music. Thematic content of song text of Khyal are varied. They range from praise of gods/ goddesses, the pastime of Krishna, Krishna love songs, Indian Festivals, moral thoughts, thoughts on Music and its glory, nature, seasons, sufi devotion, praise of patrons etc. Thus, although Khyal has varied thematic content, we can see that like its presiders, Khyal too has thematic content of Hindu Gods and Goddesses and religious teachings. The musicians too perform the form of Khyal with perspective of Naad-upasana. This feeling and philosophy of surrender to almighty is deeply rooted in Indian Culture and go hand in hand with Musical practice. Vidushi Kishori Amonkar, once revealed, "I cannot defy the loving beckoning of the swaras. I must surrender and listen to the mood of a particular swara in that specific moment."¹¹

CONCLUSION:

Thus, practices and beliefs in Hinduism have fundamentally moulded Indian music. The association of Music and Hinduism is found both in Ontological discourses as well as in liturgical practices. Right from Upanishads and the Vedas, the earliest sacred texts to this date, this association is quite evident. The ancient Sanskrit texts both of Theology and Music deliberate about the close links between Hindu religious thought and Indian music. All through the sacred ancient texts Vedas, Upanishads, Yogic philosophy, Tantric rituals, Bhakti movements, we find to references of Nada-upasana (reverence to sound). Hindustani classical forms classical forms like Dhrupad and Khyal set to Ragas and Talas have thematic content that of Gods, Goddesses, religious thought etc. The musicians even today perform these forms with perspective of Naad-upasana which is deeply rooted in Indian culture.

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