

Challenges of Indian Muslim society in Indian Classical Music practice



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Abstract

It is hardly necessary to reiterate the immense contribution that Muslims have made to Indian music, especially Hindustani or north Indian music. Muslim Sufi centers and music have always been closely related. Muslim music families are the source of most of the Dhrupad, Khayal and Instrumental music Gharanas. But classical music practice is still somewhat behind Muslim society. In Muslim society, there is no conducive environment for learning and performing classical music. As a result the percentage of Muslim students studying music at universities is quite low. Around the world, a large number of Muslim musicians play Indian classical music. There is a very few Muslim woman artist to be listed; mostly they are all male. There are no Muslim classical music artists from the general public also; all hail from well-known music families. This paper explores the difficulties Muslim society has in the area of Indian classical music.

Key words : Classical Music, Islam, Muslim, Barriers, Nationalism, Colonialism.

Research Paper

Introduction

The Ganges River's course can be compared to the development of India's classical music legacy. Eternal, selfless, joyful, accepting hundreds of streams without distinction and merging into the huge, boundless ocean for all eternity. Music is a religion unto itself for a large number of Ustads and Pandits in India. It is merely a channel for speaking with God.

Two distinct musical traditions from the Indian subcontinent—Hindustani music in the north and Carnatic music in the south—have been labeled as "classical." Both traditions place a high value on abstract improvisation, but they are also strongly associated with Hindu philosophy and devotion, whether through the use of religious song lyrics or the stress placed on the sacredness of the Guru-disciple relationship. However, it is irrelevant. A wonderful shehnai rendition of

Raghupati Raghav Raja Ram by Ustad Bismillah Khan, a Mero Allah Meherban in Raag Bhairav by Pandit Jasraj, or a Ya Mere Maula in Raag Jogiya by Pandit Jasraj could perhaps best describe communal peace.

The list of the greatest Muslim musicians of the 20th century is long and includes Faiyaz Khan, Abdul Karim Khan, Alladiya Khan, Allauddin Khan, Hafiz Ali Khan, Vilayat Khan, Bismillah Khan, Ali Akbar Khan and Amjad Ali Khan. However, they are all from well-known musical families. There isn't a single person from typical Muslim families. In the field, gender discrimination has been pervasive, just like in most other professions. The curtain etiquette of Muslim society prevents any musical family from allowing their daughters to perform. Conversely, however, There are thousands of students studying in music institutes such as Gurukul and Universities, but very few Muslim students are there. Academics believe that the primary cause is Muslim civilization generally forbids music

practice because of so called religious obligations. Some of them believe that another barrier for Muslims in the area is the Hindu nationalism that was spawned by British colonization. Though many Muslims in the area practice a wide variety of musical styles. However, there are very few examples from general Muslim community in the classical music industry.

If we talk about the following, it will be simple to understand:

1. Muslims and music throughout history
2. Present situation
3. The challenges of practicing music in Muslim society
4. Islam and music;
5. Family secrecy of Ustads
6. Prejudice in the Indian Classical Music Sector
7. Impact of colonialism
8. Modernization and Hindu nationalism of Hindustani Music

Muslims and music throughout history

Islamic music and art historically reached its peak during the Islamic Golden Age and they persisted throughout the Ottoman, Safavid, and Mughal Empires until the 19th century. In particular, Ottoman music evolved into a broad genre of art music. Islamic music is also recognized for having influenced European and Western music. For instance, French musicologist Baron Rodolphe d'Erlanger attributes this influence to Abu Nasr Muhammad al-Farabi's 'Kitabu l'musiqi al-kabir' (The Great Book of Music) in his evaluation of the Abbasid Caliphate in Islamic history.

Historically, in India almost every Muslim king supported and encouraged music. The morning raga Jaunpuri is assigned to Sultan Husain Shah Sharqi, the ruler of Jaunpur. Tansen, one of the nine gems in the Mughal emperor Akbar's court, composed immortal ragas such as Darbari, Miyan Ki Todi, and Miyan Ki Malhar. While the origins of khayal may be attributed to Amir Khusrau and the melodies performed at Sufi centers, the genre truly took off at the court of Mughal emperor Muhammad Shah 'Rangile', with court musician Naimat Khan 'Sadarang' playing a major role in its ascent. Sadarang wrote many khayals, which marked the beginning of the Dhrupad's demise. Khayal emerged as the standard vocal form for sophisticated Hindustani music. Most of the Instrumental gharanas also established by the Muslim musicians.

Present situation in India

In contemporary moment in Muslim society there is no example in classical music practice except musical families. Numerous well-known Muslim musicians, like Ustad Zakir Hossain, Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, Ustad Ashish Khan, Ustad Rashid Khan, Ustad Shahid Parvez Khan, and many more, are now active in the Indian classical music scene. They are all from well-known musical families. There is nobody in the broader Muslim community.

While many of the students studying classical music under these well-known Muslim music gurus are Hindus or follow other religions, there is a small sample of Muslim pupils. In the other hand there are very few Muslim students in the universities who are studying Under Graduation, Post Graduation or in Ph.D program, most of them are foreigners nobody from India.

In Banaras Hindu University of Uttar Pradesh there are just three Muslim students at the Faculty of performing Arts and they all are from Bangladesh. In Ravindra Bharati University of West Bengal also have 3 or 4 Muslim Sstudents in Music Department and most of them are from Bangladesh. The scenario of other universities is almost same.

Challenges of practicing music in Muslim society

The dominance of Islamist Fundamentalism and Hindu nationalism are the two biggest challenges facing the Muslim population in Indian classical music, according to experts. The rigid familial heritage of the Ustads is another barrier.

Religious Barrier

In the present the religious communities across India are being overrun by forces that are fundamentalist and obscurantist. Old fault lines are being widened, and new ones are being made. Moral policing is a common tactic used by Hindu and Muslim religious leaders and organizations in their ongoing attempts to control the social and cultural life of young people, particularly girls.

A recent 'appeal' to boycott a musical concert scheduled for March 25 of 2017 in Hojai, Assam was issued by 46 Muslim clerics, madrasa professors, and community leaders in the state of Assam. They contend that sharia (Islamic rules) prohibits magic, music, theater, and similar practices. The appeal warns that 'our future



generations will attract the wrath of Allah if anti-sharia acts like musical nights are held on grounds surrounded by masjids, idgahs, madrassas, and graveyards,' and it begs the local Muslim community to not only boycott the event but also to encourage others to do the same. An appearance at this event was scheduled for 16-year-old Muslim girl Nahid Afrin, who gained notoriety after winning a talent competition. Since she participated, it was considered that the 'fatwa' was directed at her (Kuldeep Kumar)

22-year-old Muslim Suhana Syed from Karnataka faced intense backlash on social media after she sang a Hindu devotional song (bhajan) honoring Lord Balaji on a Kannada TV channel in March 2017. Some who disliked her said that performing a bhajan was anti-Islamic. Muslim radicals have begun issuing fatwas across the nation in an attempt to thwart music (The Times of India)

Music and Islam

Islam and music have always been complicated and contentious topics. Some Muslims hold that the Quran and Sunnah forbid music (instruments and singing); others, on the other hand, think that some types of music are acceptable. In spite of this disagreement, music has always been popular and flourished in the Islamic world, frequently in palaces and private homes to elude censorship.

According to Veronica Doubleday and Eckhard Neubauer's book, 'Islamic religious music',

'Strictly speaking, the words 'Islamic religious music' presents a contradiction in terms. The practice of orthodox Sunni and Shia Islam does not involve any activity recognized within Muslim cultures as 'music'. The melodious recitation of the Holy Quran and the call to prayer are central to Islam, but generic terms for music have never been applied to them. Instead, specialist designations have been used. However, a wide variety of religious and spiritual genres that use musical instruments exist usually performed at various public and private assemblies outside the orthodox sphere.' (Neubauer, Eckhard; Doubleday, Veronica - 2001).

Scholars disagree on the issue of whether music is allowed or prohibited in Islam. Music is not mentioned in the Quran expressly. However, some academics have taken the forbidden term 'idle talk' to mean talking about music (Irish Times. 21 July 2006).

Family secrecy of Ustads

In north India by the nineteenth century, "the field of music was dominated by Muslim musicians. That is not to say that there were no musicians who were not Muslim, but that there were conspicuously more Muslim musicians than non-Muslim" (Bakhle 81). Oral transmission was the typical method used to transfer musical training from father to son. To ensure that "hereditary musicianship was concentrated within families of Muslim performing artists" (Katz 280).

The distinctive musical and artistic style of each family was known as a Gharana, and the exceptionally talented musicians within a Gharana were referred to as Ustads. For many Ustads, one another were a rival; they "had erratic, self-protective, and sometimes capricious pedagogical habits. They also tended to be secretive about their art, tradition, and history" (Bakhle 6). Soon, the Ustads and the self-styled modernizers of Hindustani music would clash over their propensity for secrecy and self-preservation. It also explains why the majority of Muslims have never had the opportunity to hear or study Indian classical music

Prejudice in the Indian Classical Music Sector

Several prominent Muslim female performers who gained widespread recognition are Gauhar Jaan, Akhtari Bai Faizabadi, Hamida Banu, Anyapurna Devi and Parween Sultana.

Though the nation's first recording artist was Gauhar Jaan. In the early 1900s, she was the first performer in India to have her singing recorded on a gramophone. There have been instances where a woman has not been able to obtain or hold onto the spotlight despite the backing or assistance of a Guru—even if that Guru is a family member. Aside from a lack of diversity, discrimination in this area also involves lower pay and, to varying degrees, harassment of women. Their career graphs have been sculpted by male domination, and discrimination has been observed at all levels, from quite subtle to extremely overt. Very few women were able to advance in their careers, and even those who did often had to give up their work due to pressure from their families—particularly from their husbands and in-laws—despite having the special abilities necessary for success. (Barsha Chattaraj)

How the general public will perform classical music in this unpleasant environment, when the women of musical families are dealing with these issues, is the question.

On the other side, Muslim middle-class females attempt to discourage girls from listening to music because of religious taboos, while Hindu middle-class girls are taught music since female musicians are permitted to play in Hindu temples.

Impact of colonialism

A few researchers are questioning that, considering the background of Hindustani music, which was 'secularized' in Muslim courts and further refined by Muslim performers, why do so many Muslim musicians of today seek to openly associate their music with Hinduism?

In order to answer this topic, it is necessary to examine the pre-colonial history of classical music in north India, when Hindustani music was controlled by Muslim hereditary musicians and their Gharana system. The first people to question this system were intellectuals who wanted to change Hindustani music to fit the modernism ideals of British colonial culture. Muslim musicians also faced danger from the concurrent rise of Hindu nationalism in India, since classical music began to be connected with Hindu devotional rituals.

Late nineteenth-century British colonial authors, who were both enthralled and confused by Indian music, posed one of the first serious challenges to the Gharana system. According to these writers, "music needed three things: nation, notation, and religion," and these criteria were quickly internalized by Indian intellectuals (Bakhle 10). The emerging nationalism movement responded to these colonial insights by wishing to "declare triumphantly that Indian music was just as religious, and as easily textualized, or notated, as the more sophisticated music of the West" (Bakhle 94-95).

Modernization of Hindustani Music

Leading the push to bring Hindustani music up to date was musicologist V.N. Bhatkhande, who worked under the presumption that the "families in whom music had resided and flourished for generations were the main problem confronting music" (Bakhle 131). He and his associates felt that Hindustani music was being suppressed by the Gharanas because of their oral transmission system and secretive nature. The answer from Bhatkhande was to "impose on these practices a nationalized and textual solution" (Bakhle 131), by which he made an effort to enumerate and notate hundreds of Hindustani compositions.

Indian classical music is mostly based on melodic oscillations, which are difficult to notate, hence notation of it never really took off. Nevertheless, Bhatkhande's work had a big influence on Indian musical academia. In Bhatkhande's reign, "Muslims were conspicuous by their absence as organizers, lecturers, and authors" (Bakhle 81) and even now "Muslims have played a negligible role in modern Indian music scholarship, hampered as they have been by their traditional reliance on oral transmission" (Manuel 126).

Muslim musicians, according to Bhatkhande and his associates, were despised for their alleged illiteracy and backwardness rather than being specifically barred from modernizing because of their religion. One of the declared objectives of the music college that Bhatkhande established in 1926 makes this evident: "to collect and preserve the great master pieces of the art now in the possession of illiterates" (Katz 289). In fact, rather than being called 'Muslims,' Ustads were continuously labeled as 'illiterates.'

Music of Hindu religion

Although the Ustads' religious beliefs may not have had much of an impact on modernization initiatives, they served as the inspiration for the Hindu nationalist movement, spearheaded by musician V.D. Paluskar, to 'reclaim' Hindustani music from Muslim performers.

Paluskar established Gandharva Mahavidyalayas, or musical academies, all over India in an effort to spark a renaissance in which Hindus would 'reclaim' their music. Hindustani music was taught in these schools using an explicitly Hindu curriculum, which included Hindu prayers at the start of each lesson and school closures on days dedicated to Hindu festivals. And "students were repeatedly told that they were involved in a process of tapasya (penance) in service to the goddess of music" (Bakhle 151). The fact that Paluskar's first academy had no Muslim students while being established in the predominantly Muslim city of Lahore is telling;

Impact of 1947 Partition

The subcontinent was divided in 1947, and Pakistani nation-building initiatives rejected Hindustani music in favor of more Islamic options like Qawwali. This led to the explicit association of Hindustani music with Hinduism in India. Colonialism and Islamic and Hindu nationalism have impacted Hindustani music over the past century, which has significant implications for how Muslim artists in the genre show themselves now (Nikhil).



For Hindustani music and its traditional performers, this was a pivotal time. It's possible that the Ustads migration to Pakistan helped them flee an increasingly hostile environment in India. 'Although Hindustani music was becoming "democratized", meaning it was being taught to mostly middle-class Hindus through the schools established by Bhaktande and Paluskar, hereditary Muslim musicians still dominated the art form' (Katz 280).

Prior to 1947, Hindustani music in the region that would become Pakistan had prospered mostly because of the support of Hindu commercial communities. Following Partition, these populations predominantly chose to relocate to India, making "this trend of the migration of musicians in one direction to Pakistan and their connoisseurs in the opposite direction to India one of 1947's most ironic developments (Saeed, "Fled" 240).

Hindustani music was sidelined in the process of forging a Pakistani cultural identity because of its ties to Hinduism, while the Pakistani government gave support to more widely accepted Islamic alternatives.

Conclusion

Analyzing the research of researchers, analyzing the number of Muslim students in music institutions and seeing the barriers faced by Muslim artists in newspapers, it is clear that fundamental Islamist psychology is the main barrier of Muslim society in Indian classical music in India. Hindu nationalism is also playing a negative role for Muslims in Indian classical music. Because of this, Muslim middle class society has not developed a culture wherein Indian classical music is learned, listened to, or patronized.

History is never that simple, therefore there's no use analyzing these developments in terms of good versus bad. Instead, this historical information ought to influence how we view Indian classical music in the present as well as how minorities are regarded in other South Asian artistic and musical traditions.

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