ISSN No. 2349-4654
Naad-Nartan Journal of Dance & Music Volume : 4, Issue : 1, January 2017

Dhrupad education in India and abroad

Aditi Sharma
Research scholar, Department of Music, University of Delhi

Dhrupad is the oldest form of north Indian classical music. Its origins lying in the chanting style of the sacred Sanskrit text, called *Samaveda* with central element of practice of the *Nada yoga*. These exercises height awareness of the singer's own inner vibrations, enabling sound to flow freely from umbilical region to their cerebral zone in a vast palette of tones.

Dhrupad education has played a pivotal role from the ancient system of music education; the sanctity of *dhrupada* somehow got eclipsed when–spiritual aspect of music gradually overshadowed. We know that change is inevitable but keeping the tradition intact is also a social, cultural and moral responsibility of the artists. For a few decades, this style has gained stupendous momentum and we have been finding a quite promising state of *dhrupad* on the global maps. This style has not only attracted international audiences but also involved foreign musicians to practice this rock-solid form professionally in the international spheres.

Dhrupad being the pinnacle of the Indian classical music tradition has the great potential in strengthening the base of Indian classical music. It is an indispensible form that has to be encouraged at the very initial level in the ambits of classical music learning catering to all the bed rock principals pertaining to correct inside and a development of highly evolved classical mind. A brief account of the importance of *dhrupad* as an age old practice is worth mentioning here:

In the celebrated history of Indian classical music the great doyens of the established *'gharaanas'* themselves were great *dhrupad* exponents. Musically, in *Dhrupad*, raga takes a different design and colour which harnesses the flawless articulation where the composition bears the imperative feature of the raga along with immaculate nuances of the note; also some of the *dhrupad* composition serves the purpose of *lakshangeet* of the desired raga to be rendered featuring the demarcation of the *vaadi*, *samvaadi*, *swar* etc. The implementation of *Gamakas*, known to be special feature of dhrupad *gaayaki* has greater impact on *khayal gayaki* as well. *Gamakas* are the embellishing tools used for the ornamentation of the musical notes in beautifying the raga.

Music is both the expression and the architect of India's deeper consciousness. From ancient times to **Bhatkhande's** age it changed and developed with changes in the social, cultural and political situations while carrying within its womb the heritage of rich past. "As one of the important aims of **Bhatkhande** was to link the past and the present in an evolutionary process and to bridge the various gaps that had grown between the different periods of history and thereby to preserve and digest for the present, what was still relevant in the past, a significant strand in the methodology has been the historical."[1] In such a case or situation his attempts were the most serious and formidable ones to understand our glorious heritage.

To understand the magnitude of his endeavours it is necessary for us to know the state of music existed in his time and the sense of direction where *dhrupad* was prone to the assault of time and stands still till date against all the ordeals. The importance of a composition is valued from the very times of descendants of **Tansen** who practiced vocal as well as instrumental music and to learn as a rule the traditional *Dhrupad* and *Dhamar* in order to understand the correct form of the ragas. They did not read the theory of music all the theory they knew was the *Dhrupad* and *Dhamar*. It was an accepted fact that the traditional compositions were very important to reveal the correct form of the raga. In this regard to *Khayal*, the compositions of **Sadarang** and **Adarang** were composed on the models of the *Dhrupad* / *Dhamar* in the matters of purity that is the authenticity of the raga form.

"*Dhrupad* / *Dhamar* has been variously being described as 'dead', 'extinct', 'a museum piece' and'experiencing a revival'. Genres of music go out of circulation and are

replaced by other genres or by their own transformations, through an open-ended historical process of socio-cultural change. *Dhrupad* / *Dhamar* were widely believed to have fallen prey of this process."[2]

Such a situation would suggest that the aesthetic assumptions of the genre ceased to satisfy the needs that community wished to satisfy through exposure to art music. These aesthetic assumptions are worthy a subject of consideration because they could also hold the clue to the resilience of the genre in the contemporary environment of art music. "The issue of resilience is relevant because, in recent decades there emerged a movement, which argued that *Dhrupad* / *Dhamar*, being the manifestation of a long musical tradition, cannot be allowed to perish. This movement sought to cajole the nation's cultural conscience into crystallising a concerted social effort to arrest the decline of the genre, and if possible, reverse the trend."[3]

With respect to *Dhrupad–Dhamar*, more than any other genre, we need to consider audience profile in national and even international levels. This genre appears to show signs of greater cross-cultural versatility that the modern genres. We find a' musical dialogue' flourishing between the Indian classical music and the western music which is our matter of concern in this article.

In the western world *dhrupad* has gain some more space and attention for it. And the nourishment it need, by way of more practitioners and concerts, seems to be coming from within and outside of India. Indian classical music thrives on audience involvement. The more knowledgeable the audience, the better the artist performs. "It is a symbiotic relationship –and the level of enjoyment and transportation reached –is most often reached jointly as a result of artist-audience interaction."[4]

Bringing our focus to the consideration of the audience in the West, with regard to *dhrupad*, *dhrupad* in west is described as 'ancient', 'profound' and 'spiritual' –the oldest existing form of Indian classical music. Dr. **Ashok Da Ranade** says, "Western audiences probably find *dhrupad* tonally more cohesive that their own classical music. It may lack tonal colour; it is monochromatic in a way. But, it is one single colour presented very solidly."[5] Calling *dhrupad* an ancient art form one creating an inquisitiveness to decipher out a sense of curiosity which makes this style a unique form in the western world gaining momentum.

Dr. **Ashok Da Ranade** further adds," the western mind values a musical genre that is broadly—even if wrongly – described as ancient music. It creates a kind of nostalgia. Nostalgia need not necessarily be evoked by a cultural affinity with of the feeling; it can also be a more universal sense of loss, in purely historical terms."[6]

The western audience for *Dhrupad* recitals majorly comprise of the spiritual groups. Meditation, yoga, and Sufism have large following in the western country. These groups regularly hold retreats, art lectures, and meetings of their members and often request music as part of the event. **Gundecha brothers** mention (in an interview conducted by **Deepak Raja** in September 1998 at the first time ever government established dhrupad institute' Dhrupad Kendra' in Bhopal)"[7] The important aspect of audience accepting the style is the *aalaps* are more widely appreciated. The taste for the elaborate *aalap* might have been created by the instrumentalists of our times, who have retained the three-tiered dhrupad style *aalap* in their music and popularised it. Because the *dhrupad aalap* has become familiar through instrumental music, and probably *Khayal* is losing its contemplative, soulful movements, audiences could be appreciating this facet of *dhrupad* even more.

Relative to the size of *khayal*-oriented audiences, the dhrupad oriented audiences are larger in the West than in India. The mystique of an ancient art form, of course, has a greater appeal for Western audiences. But, they too value the *Dhrupad aalap* more than the compositions. This shows that *dhrupad* is more accessible art form because of the separation of the melodic from the rhythmic keeping dhrupad more easily to digest for the western audience than *khayal*. This separation in a way frees them from the simultaneous need to keep track of melodic' and rhythmic' manipulations. **UdayBhawalkar** says:

"Perhaps most important, audiences seem to like the gradual build –up of the structure in dhrupad, contrast to khayal form. Moreover, of course, the peace and tranquil quality of the vilambita alap in dhrupad, without an explicit rhythm, seems to be satisfying a very important need amongst contemporary audiences. This is a favourable situation that is keeping *dhrupad* as a style being re-integrated into the mainstream of developing audiences

not only nationally but also internationally. Further he adds, "My impression is that *dhrupad* is more popular in Europe than *khayal*. The audiences show a special appreciation for *dhrupad aalap*. They can share its meditative and peaceful quality. However, this is also a very important reason for the growing popularity of *dhrupad* in India.

"The *aalap* portion in the *khayal* is equally capable to create audience appreciation but perhaps the *khayaliyas* are neglecting some of the beautiful things that *khayal* took from *dhrupad*. Therefore, audiences are now tuning to *dhrupad*. The wheel may have come full circle. In the past the *khayal* developed when *dhrupad* started becoming soulless. And now the dryness of the *khayal* is probably helping *dhrupad* to return."[8]

In India we tend to have strong *gharana* loyalties. In contrast to the foreign market especially Europe, requires a greater variety to satisfy its special needs. In search of this variety, students, impresarios, researchers and recording companies seek out good musicians from several traditions and patronize them. Surprisingly, the European followers of dhrupad have a broader exposure to the stylistic variety of dhrupad than most Indian audience.

Since 1984, *dhrupad* has contributed to the scene of the United States. **Santha Benegal**, resident of Washington, student of **Ustad**. **ZM Dagar** writes," The reasons American can more readily appreciate *Dhrupad* are as follows; it has a starkly beautiful simplicity. Language is no barrier except during composition, which takes comparatively little time. The unhurried pace lets the listener understand the music better. The abstract quality of *Dhrupad* is more akin to the abstractions found in the western classical music-particularly too early and baroque music. It also gives them a sense of peace."[9]

Renowned Dhrupad cellist, Smt. **Nancy Lesh** form US gives an account of that what dhrupad means to those Americans who appreciate this genre.

"It can be seen from the accompanying dhrupad discography that the American *dhrupad* enthusiast can choose from over 65 recordings to 27 dhrupad artists. There are also Indian organisations located in this country which send dhrupad CDs by mail to American customers. This shows that although there are only a few commercial recordings available yet they enjoy reasonable popularity in this country.

Dhrupad CDs can also be ordered through the Ali Akbar School of Music (California), World Music School (New York) and Vista India (New Jersey). Adding more to the information she further adds the frequency of the recital slowly gained a momentum since 1984 but still convincingly it appears to be still on the rise. Renowned exponents from India frequently performed in the US. **Ustad Z Mohinuddin Dagar** and **Z Fariduddin Dagar** performed at Government of India's festival Festival of India. They performed about in 20 American cities. Each one was attended by a mostly American audience of 300-500 people."[10]

It is interesting that the proportion of *BEEN* players to dhrupad vocalist represented a much higher proportion even in comparison to the performances of the *beenkars* in India itself. This shows a strong interest on the part of American organisers in the *been*, an instrument which is very rarely heard in India. The few American dhrupad musicians is worth mentioning here, **Nancy Lesh** (cellist) **Shanta Benegal-Annie Penta** (vocal *jugalbandi*). **Jeff Lewis** (*sur-bahar*), **Jody Stecher** (*sursingar*). All are the students of **Z M Dagar**, the only dhrupad master who has been employed in university teaching positions in the USA. In addition there are few concertizing *Pakhawaj* players living in the USA **Phil Hollenbeck**, **Peter Fagiola**, **Greg Johnson**,**Ed Pias**. They are frequently requested to accompany visiting and local *dhrupad* musicians, dance performances and for east-west fusion music.

The main producer of *dhrupad* recordings in the western hemisphere is MAKAR records in Paris, France. They sell a huge number of CDs to America each year, mainly to California, Washington, Texas and New York.

The collaboration with composers of contemporary music presents another flourishing dimension and is giving rise to the rich field of opportunities for *dhrupad*. **Amelia Cuni** (renowned *dhrupad* exponent from Italy) writes the meeting of *dhrupad* with the western music is gradually but steadily developing into a productive and stimulating field for research for innovative music productions. Engaging her with the various cross cultural project after having seriously devoted her 20 years of her life to *dhrupad* she believes in viewing to open the self-containing form to let in fresh air. She writes "Distancing it from the traditional setting, being receptive to

contemporary issues and establishing a dialogue with suitable artistic partners may well contribute to the continuation and enrichment of this music."[11]

Hence, this rich form is on a high level of optimism that is still radiant and shining globally and keeping the Indian music tradition intact with its glorious past, present and future.

Footnotes

1. Nayar, Shobana, Bhatkhande's contribution to music - A Historical Perspective, p. xii, 1989, Sangam Books
2. Deepak Raja & suvarnalata Rao, Perspectives on Dhrupad - a collection of essays edited prologue, Indian Musicological Society, Mumbai & Baroda, 1999
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid. Dhrupad–a view from New York by Lyle Washovsky, p. 91
5. Ibid. Perspectives on Dhrupad by Ashok Da Ranade, p.26
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid. The Bhopal initiative, p. 70-71
8. Ibid, p. 75
9. Ibid. Dhrupad in the United States by Nancy Lesh, p.103
10. Ibid, p.101
11. Ibid. Confessions of a European Dhrupadiya by Amelia Cuni, p.109