

Indian classical music and Swaminarayan Sampradaay

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Abstract

Indian philosophy essentiate- 'Nadadhinam jagat sarvam'- that, 'the entire universe finds its roots of dependence in 'Naad' (sound). And music has a pioneering role to play in human life and spirituality. Probably that is why music has been an inevitable part of human life from the moment of conception of life in the mother's womb till the end of man's life, through all the thick and thin in the form of the sixteen sanskars. Music is considered to be most effective instrument to attain "Moksha", the ultimate liberation-as per Hindu philosophy. Therefore all the sects patronized Music (classical music in particular) to propagate their teachings.

The past eight hundred years witnessed the growth and establishment of social and spiritual development through the Bhakti movement and the literary Bhakti works composed and compiled by various sects of different states in India. Swaminarayan Sampraday is one very important sect, led by Swami Sahajanand (1781-1830) was essentially spread in Gujarat and other parts of western India. He patronized various art forms and culture such as literature, painting, sculpture, music etc., and used it as a medium for the social awareness and reformation. Many saints were formally trained and excelled in the art of classical music. They created thousands of compositions based on classical Ragas and promoted it among their followers and in the society. Swami Premananda, Swami Brahmananda and in recent times Swami Vallabhdas were prominent name to promote Indian classical music. Their music was composed in both the main streams namely Margi (Dhrupad etc.) and Deshi Sangeet (folk songs etc.), with the poetry of very high standards. The tradition is continued to present times. My research paper takes a brief account of the journey of Indian classical music in the Swaminarayan Sampraday in the two centuries.

Key Words : Maargi Sangeet, Deshi Sangeet, Sampraday, Moksha, Pushtimarg

Research Paper

Indian philosophy accounts for 'Moksha' i.e. 'liberation of atman from the life cycle' - the ultimate goal of human existence, also termed as spiritual enlightenment. And worshipping sound is the most pertinent means to attain 'Moksha'. This leads to devotional approach to music-a salient feature of Indian music.

Indian philosophy essentiate- 'Nadadhinam jagat sarvam'- that, 'the entire universe finds its roots of dependence in 'Naad' (sound). And music has a pioneering role to play in human life and spirituality. Probably that is why music has been an inevitable part of human life from the moment of conception of life in the mother's womb till the end of man's life, through all the thick and thin in the form of the sixteen sanskars.

The past eight hundred years witnessed the growth and establishment of social and spiritual development through the Bhakti movement and the literary Bhakti works

composed and compiled by various Sampradaay of different states in India. Inspired by the 'Pushtimarg' of Shree Vallabhacharya, many saints who were esteemed music maestros came up with musical works based on traditional classical 'Ragas' through 'Asht Yaam Seva compositions'. Similar such musical innovations took place in eastern India in the works of Chaintanya MahaPrabhu, 'Ashtpadi' of Jayadeva, the 'Vaishnav-Vaarkari tradition' of Maharashtra, Gurubani of the Sikhs, Shyama Sangeet in Bengal, Kabir- Meera- Tulsi- Narsinh Mehta- Dayaram-Gyaneshwar and Vaishnav Ashtachaap Kavi, all through their pious and divine works were scintillating and stimulating entire India from the core darkness.

Indian Music is a perennial river, from which two streams sprang :

1. Maargi Sangeet
2. Deshi Sangeet.

1. **Margi Sangeet** – is a most pure and sophisticated music which treads on the path of spirituality. It is the “Marg” (the path) to realize God.
2. **Deshi Sangeet** – is predominantly entertaining for the common man.

Most *Sampradaya*-sects were instrumental in promoting Indian Arts and culture and of course Indian classical music with great zeal. They proved to be strongest medium to preserve both the above streams. Swaminarayan *Sampraday* (previously known as Uddhav *Sampraday*) is one such, which promoted Indian music on a very large scale. Sahajanand Swami^[1] (2 April 1781 – 1 June 1830) was disciple of Guru Ramanand Swami. Sahajanand Swami was handed over the leadership of this sect to propagate the teachings and philosophy of “*Vishishta Advaita*”. Swaminarayan *Sampraday* flourished in Western India.

Swaminarayan initiated 500 *Paramhansas* (ascetics or highest spiritual order) in a single night. The practiced strict restraint and spread the message of the *Sampraday* in the society.

The very foundation of this sect is the holy Vedas and *Vaishnavism*. The objective of this *Sampraday* is to fuse characters, spirituality, ethics, religious values in the society, family and individuals by mass motivation and individual attention through elevating projects for all across the humanity irrespective of caste, creed, culture and country. Sahajanand Swami (alias Bhagwan Shreeji Maharaj or Swaminarayan) was extremely worried by the deterioration of music and literature due to invasion and presence of the foreign extremists. He patronized various art forms and culture. Sahajanand Swami knew the importance of fine and performing arts for the social awareness and reformation. Therefore many great saint poets, musicians, painters, sculptors were produced by the *Sampraday*.^[2] He inspired his saints to compose music in both Margi & Deshi Sangeet traditions.

Keeping in mind the then social and political circumstances, many religious ‘festivals’, ‘Sammaiya’, were organized in order to unite all sections of the society. He inspired and motivated his disciples, his followers and saints to come up with musical literary works for the cultural and spiritual upliftment of the society and its people. The *Fatana*, Ribald songs started getting replaced with beautiful songs of Rukmini Vivah & Radha Vivah, were

composed to folk tunes. These ‘*Sammaiyas*’ can also be called as ‘*Gyan-Yagya*’ (gatherings and activities for knowledge and wisdom) because by means of organizing these events Shreeji Maharaj spread the Knowledge and principles of our culture, tradition, customs and practices, spirituality. Simultaneously, he formulated many ‘Bhajan, keertan & Raas groups’, making these ‘*Sammaiyas*’ more interesting.

Music is not a means of sensual gratification but a tool to reach and connect with God. Therefore Shreeji Maharaj believed that singing and playing instruments should be used only for worshipping the ‘*Saakaar-Sagun Parmeshwar*’ (God with form) without which, one cannot attain peace of mind- this is a message given in ‘*Vachanamrut-Gadhada-Chapter 22*’. Only the amalgamation of superlative Literature and Music has the capacity to help mankind attain the Divine. And attaining ‘*Moksha*’ is the ultimate goal of our Vedic tradition. Following these Vedic principles, Bhagwan Swaminarayan took utmost care in spreading music amongst his devotees. Saints of Sahajanand Swami were great classical vocalists & Instrumentalist. These also included the Ashtakavis^[3] namely, Swami Premamand, Swami Brahmanand, Swami Muktanand, Swami Devanand, Swami Dayanand, Swami Nishkulanand, Swami Manjakeshanand, Swami Bhumanmand. Lord Swaminarayan made arrangements for his saints to get trained under great musical Gurus or Maestros. Swami Premanand received training in Indian classical music from a Guru on the banks of River Kshipra in Ujjain. A scripture “*Harivachanamrut sagar*” mentions in details about various *Paramhansa* Saints and their expertise in classical singing and playing various instruments.

Saints of *Sampraday* composed Many “DHRUPADs” of *Margi Sangeet*. Dhrupad, the genre of Indian classical music is subtle yet vast & intensely spiritual. The intricate musical work of *Meend*, *Gamak*, use of *Shruti* in the Raga presentation makes Dhrupad most divine. In terms of Indian classical music in the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*, Swami Premanand’s contribution is considered to be the highest.

Swami Premanand (1784–1855) was disciple of Swami Sahajananda and a leading a saint of the *Sampraday*. He was one of the main *Paramhansas* - the ascetics.^[4] He was born in Bharuch in a Brahmin family as Hathiram,

but was abandoned in childhood. He was looked after and raised by a Muslim family. He was encouraged to take training in Indian classical Music, which he did in Vadodara. He was musical and poetic talent of very high order. He wrote “*Cheshta pad*” (sung in morning time at the temples) and Premanand Kavya with the nick-name of ‘Prem-Sakhi’. On request of Gopalanand Swami, Swami Premanand compiled *the Cheshta Pad*, which distinctly depicts Swaminarayan’s daily routine and habits. He compiled the *Vandu Pad*, before the death of Swaminarayan, for the purpose of meditation. The “*Vandu Pad*” describes the beauty and appearance of Swaminarayan. It is said, that he composed thousands of *Padas* - poetries. Many of them are based on ancient Dhruvad style of classical Music.

Here is an example of his creation in Dhruvad Gayaki in ‘Raag Sohini & Taal Chautal’ –

“*Ae Gave Piya Pyari Dhruvad Sapta Suran Teen Gram;*

Eekvis murchhana let banaai...E gaave.

Aarohi Avarohi, Astai sanchai,

Dhuran muran baran baran paran bajaai...E gaave.

Gadgadthom gadgadthom, dhumkat tak dhukat tak,

Taghilang taghilang mirdang baajt sohaai...E gaave.

‘Premanand’ kahe pyaari, let taan tananananan,
prashansti Shyam let kanth bhuj lagaai...E gaave.[⁵]

This composition is a benchmark of his excellence in music and literature. The literature of the composition has certain terminologies which are mentioned in ancient literature of Indian music. It suggests that Swami Premanand, apart from being practicing musician, was aware of the music theory also. He surprised everyone by composing and singing ‘*Parabrahmaraaya Parabrahmaraaya Akhil Bhuvanpati Naath*’, [⁶] based on the ‘Raag Kalyan’ in the most difficult ‘Fifteen Taals’ of Indian Classical Music before Shreeji Maharaj in the village ‘Gadhadaa’. Once, Swami Premananda did a musical miracle by singing an early morning Raga Bhairav in the afternoon and created feeling of dawn in presence of some renowned musicians of Gwalior. Swami Brahmananda mesmerized a group of musicians by tactfully playing a very old huge Ganesha Mridang, which nobody had dared to play for more than

700 hundred years, because of its abnormally huge size. Swami Brahmananda (was a *Shighrakavi*-extempore creative)[⁷] created musical gems which were composed in some of known and lesser known ragas of Indian classical Music. Ragas were meticulously chosen by these Saints to suit the wide range of themes considering their mood, emotions and thus musical splendors were created.

Many of the works of these Saints works became popular due to their simplicity and aesthetic beauty. The objectives of the great musical works of such great stalwarts of music which are though variegated, yet possess one untainted goal of taking the ‘self’ and the society towards ‘Divinity’. In this way these works completely fulfill the traits of a ‘*Vaggeyakar*’, or “composer” as mentioned in the ‘Sangeet Ratnakar’ of the great musicologist of 13th century- Pandit Sharang Dev.

The musical compositions of these *Ashtakavis* include varieties of:

1. Genres such as

- Margi Sangeet: Dhruvad, Dhamar, RaagMala, TaalMala, Chaturang, Trivat, Thumri
- Deshi Sangeet: Dhol, Prabhati, Garbi, Duha-Chhand, Rekhta, Ghazals, Kawwali, Hori & other Festival songs etc.

2. Ragas : Kalyan, Sohini, Paraj, Kafi, Malhar, Sorath, Asavari, Maru, Sarang, Malhar, Dhanashree, Hameer, Bihag, Bihagda, Kedar, Mand, Sameri, Khambhati, Khamaj, Maligaura, Hussaini Kafi

3. Talas & Chhandas: Chautal, Dhamar, Trital, Dadra, Jhaptal, Rupak, Punjabi, Deepchandi, Avali, Sulfakta, Rudra, Ashta taali, Brahma, Chachar, and many Prakrit Chhandas.

It is really painful that many of the above Ragas & Talas are either rarely heard or are lost with the time.

4. Languages : Sanskrit, Hindi, Bruj, Rajasthani, Talapdi-Sorathi, Urdu, Kachchhi, Marwadi etc.

(The variety of language helped the philosophy and message of the Sampraday spread over many regions, in the language of a common man.)

According to Indian Sanatan Vedic Philosophy, there are four kinds of ‘Bhakti Sangeet’-

- Yaatumaargi Sangeet-the Mantra chanting of Swaminarayan Sampraday falls in this category.

2. Yagyamaargi Sangeet- Vedic Psalms in the Samraday.
 3. Poojanmaargi Sangeet- STROTRA, *invocations*, *aarti* as sung in the Sampraday
 4. Bhaktimaargi Sangeet- *Keertan-Bhajans* etc.
- “Narad Bhakti Sutra” describes eleven categories of attachment with God.
1. Gunamahaatmya Aasakti
 2. Roop Aasakti
 3. Pooja Aasakti
 4. Smaran Aasakti
 5. Daasya Aasakti
 6. Sakhya Aasakti
 7. Kaantaa Aasakti
 8. Vaatsalya Aasakti
 9. Aatma nivedan Aasakti
 10. Tanmaytaa Aasakti
 11. Paray Vivaah Aasakti

Interestingly all these categories are incorporated in the classical or non classical based ‘Padas’ of Swami Narayan Sampraday, which is an evidence of the excellence of these Literary and Musical Creations.

In the Swami Narayan Sampraday the name of Swami Vallabh Das in terms of classical music stands foremost. He was a scholar and performer par excellence. He was influenced by *Dhrupad Gayaki*- the excellent example of Maargi Sangeet. He had received training in music from legendary musician ‘*Aftab-e-Mausiki*’-Ustad Faiyaz Khan Saheb of Agra Gharana, who was known for keeping intact ‘Dhrupad’ in the era of relatively lesser classical forms like ‘*Khayal*’, ‘*Thumri*’, ‘*Tappa*’ etc.[⁸] Ustad Faiyyaz Khan- the greatest music maestro of the century was the ‘State- Singer’ at the court of Baroda. Swami Vallabh Das, followed the traditions of Swami Premanand. Swami Vallabh Das was trained in Music by KrishnaJeevan Swami, the disciple of Chakubhai Nagar. Chakubhai Nagar was directly trained by Swami Premanand. Once, in Karachi, Pandit Vishnu Digambar Pulaskar was deeply mesmerized by his rendition of Dhrupad composition of Swaminarayan Sampraday. The famous music maestros- Pt. Jasraj, Pt. Ramrao Nayak and Swami Chaitanya Swaroop took music training from Swami Vallabh Das. He also established ‘Shree Vallabh Sangeet Vidyalaya’ at Mumbai where the great gurus of music- Pt. S. C. R Bhat and Pt. K.G. Ginde gave lessons on music to many talented devotees of God. Swami Vallabh Das passed on the traditional as well as self composed songs of the Sampraday to the devotees through his ‘*Guru-Bandhu*’, PadmaBhooshan, Pt. Shri Krishna Ratanjankar and Pt. Ginde-Bhat.

On the behest of Swami Vallabhdas, Pt. Ratanjankar ji & his disciple Pt. K. G. Ginde, composed the *padas* of the Swaminarayan *Sampraday* & did the notations for the first time. Swami Vallabh Sangeet Vidyalaya under able leadership of Swami Chaitanya Swaroop, till today, has been completely devoted to the cause of Indian classical music, imparting training on-*Khayal*, *Thumari*, *Dhrupad-Dhamar*, & the *Padas* of the *Sampraday*, creating new horizons, taking Indian classical music to an unscalable heights.

One can infer from the presentation and data referred that, Swaminarayan *Sampradaya* contributed the following:

1. The Paramhansas and the Saints of the *Sampraday* during the 19th century, were embodied with all kind of traits that had been qualified as skilful *Vaggeyakaar*” musicians/composer by the world renowned Musicologist Pt. Sharang Dev as referred in “Sangeet Ratnakar” of 13th century.
2. One more noticeable thing regarding Gujarat region, Classical Music found place through the Swaminarayan Sampraday.
3. This Classical music tradition was initiated by the Swaminarayan Saints and *Haribhaktas*. The mode had been the education, practice and performance in the temple domain, public domain of the *Sampraday* followers. This can be perceived as a unique and exemplary situation amongst all other sects of the 19th century.
4. The content of the compositions is circumnavigating along the Bhakti themes & the Songs are unique & open ended which could be counted to 30,000 in number.

In the Swaminarayan *Sampraday*, from Bhagwan Swami Narayan to Pujya Pramukh Swami Maharaj have continuously and consistently not only preserved the heritage and legacy of Indian Classical music but also spread it in the nooks and corners of India and the rest of the world. Even in the absence of financial and economic support or even in the midst of various adversities this arduous journey has persistently prevailed even today. At many places in India the Swaminarayan *Sampraday* has come up with classes imparting training in music. In the modern times, the saints like Bhadrash Swami, Ramswaroop Swami, Yogicharan Swami and the many

musical devotees or the Swaminarayan temples of education, values, arts and culture throughout the world, that are indulged in the propagation of the Indian music of Sanatan Vedic heritage is incredible.

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