

The impact of Hindustani classical music worldwide



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Abstract

The Indian subcontinent is a land that has seen various invasions. Thus, it was always subjected to social, cultural and political influences. These factors did contribute to disrupting the socio-cultural structure of India. However, music was an undercurrent that nurtured the soil of unity and integration amidst the chaotic foreign influences. Indian music was in full bloom during the post-British era and was performed extensively by many great artists. The advent of recording and broadcasting technology witnessed a boom, leading to a wide propagation of Indian music both nationally and internationally. From there on, Indian music with its myriad shades spread its grandeur across various parts of the world. Since Indian music has its roots in Indian philosophy, it has been a primary channel in the spreading of Indian heritage across the west and further. The objective of this research is to bring to light the various factors that have led to the widespread impact of classical music that has withstood various challenges and has gracefully responded to new stimuli over the years. In the years before the pandemic classical music had a different set of audiences whereas the post-pandemic period saw a widespread impact of Hindustani Classical Music on society. This movement of ideas over a considerably long period across geographical spaces has made it a living tradition. Thus, the remarkable influence of Hindustani classical music worldwide has been impactful, and it continues to thrive through practitioners and performers throughout the globe, creating a bright hope for the future of this art form. This research is a detailed analysis of how Hindustani classical music has impacted various facets of society over the years in spite of various new challenges it has come across. Secondary source are used in writing this paper to proof the hypothesis.

Key Words: Hindustani, Classical, Raag, impact, swaras

Research Paper

Introduction

Hindustani music is rich in diverse ways. It has its fundamental aim of propagating peace and cultivating a sense of social well-being. It also nurtures national and international integration. These factors bring us to the extrapolation that Hindustani Classical music is multifaceted and is universal in nature.

History bears testimony of music being a universal vehicle for expressing human emotions. Hence it is called as a universal language by many philosophers. The term 'Indian Music' can be broadly classified into four categories – Classical music, Semi-classical music, Folk Music and light music.

As per scholars, there is a symbiotic relationship between classical music and folk traditions. Whether the former borrowed from the latter or the latter is influenced by the former is a debatable point. When

we go back in history of the vedic era, we find two types of music mentioned in the texts- Margi Sangeet and Deshi Sangeet. Margi was the kind of music which was used to please deities and was governed by strict rules whereas Deshi sangeet as the name suggests developed organically with influences from the 'desh' or locality it was associated with. This music allowed more scope for artistic expression and was used for entertainment. It can be said that the seeds of what we call classical music today were laid by Deshi Sangeet. Classical music is further categorized as Hindustani Music (North Indian Classical music) and Carnatic music (South Indian Classical Music). Out of these, we would focus on Hindustani music and its role in making Indian music attain a universal appeal.

Hindustani art music began to evolve after pre-medieval Indian music passed through certain stages of transformation and development. Many Indian

and non-Indian cultures took an active part in this transformation.

The advent of Islam at the end of the 12th century brought Persian music and culture with it. Mughal India had a long, complex and eventful cultural history. Ultimately it became an inseparable part of the Indian cultural canvas. The invasion of Mughals led to the formation of khayal music whereas dhrupad music, which was temple music, was there even before the invasion.^[1]

Hindustani classical is also called Raga Music and is performed in two styles – Dhrupad music and Khayal music. Raga Music or Raagdari Music is a style of musical performance where the performer brings out the various nuances and intricacies of different Ragas through a means that involves systematic exploration. The end aim of a performance of a Raag is to bring out the underlying emotion of the tune and the composition in a way that creates an impact on the minds of the audiences. This factor alone when achieved contributes to making Hindustani classical music widely popular among the masses.

Contribution of Dhrupad in popularizing Hindustani classical Music

Dhrupad is a form of classical music which has had a long and profound history. The evidence of its prosperity dates to the 15th century despite the tantalizing traces from the earlier period. In the medieval Sangit Ratnakar, a compositional genre called the prabandha is specified in detail. The structural features laid down by Sharangdeva hold an uncanny resemblance and pose as a prototype to the structure of the contemporary dhrupad. Dhrupad music before the Mughals was only sung in the temples for worshipping the deities. Owing to the universal aesthetic appeal and adaptive quality of Indian dhrupad music, it was brought by the invaders from the temple to the royal courts. A detailed account of music during Akbar's reign is recorded in the "Ayeen -e- Akbari" written by Abul Fazal (1551-1602 AD), a courtier in Akbar's durbar. Akbar's successors continued to patronize music.^[2]

The Dhrupad has a very deep relationship with Indian philosophy. The themes used in dhrupad compositions are devotional and mostly maintain an advaitic or non-dualistic approach. Thus, the study of dhrupad offers a ground for inquisitiveness into the study of Indian spiritualism or Sanatana dharma. The study

of Indian Philosophy similarly opens doorways as to how music and sounds, formed an integral part of spiritual development. The notes or swaras in a raga determine the mood it brings out and its impact on human psyche. It is well established that the west has always had a keen eye to know and study Indian philosophy, Indian music and its allied sciences. Nada Yoga is a spiritual discipline that has its roots in Indian scriptures. It deals with the science of the paramount union with the primordial sound which is universal in nature. The end aim of Nada yoga is becoming one with the ultimate reality i.e., Brahman which is referred to as Nada Brahman in Nada Yoga. The very foundation of dhrupad music rests on the principles of Nada Yoga. Dhrupad thus serves a spectrum of interdisciplinary studies like philosophy, psychology, physiology and history. Thus Dhrupad, an ancient branch of Raagdaari Hindustani music holds fort for the universality of Hindustani Music.

Contribution of Khayal in popularizing Indian classical Music

The reign of Mohammad Shah Rangile during the 18th century saw the uprise of two art geniuses namely Sadarang (Niyamat Khan) and Adarang (Firoz Khan). They played a pivotal role in the propagation of Khayal Music. Khayal had been moulded from the basics of Dhrupad and interspersed with the attractive rapid movements of qawwali. Thus, it shaped into into a more entertaining and less rigid genre of Hindustani Classical Music. The Raagas that were prevalent in Dhrupad were taken up and many newer raagas were devised. Sadarang and Adarang used their central theme as the play of Radha Krishna which was borrowed from Indian philosophy. Indian mythology, which is a part of Indian philosophy, just like Indian music has content that is relatable to mundane human life and emotions which is universal. Dhrupad and Khayal music were practiced and performed extensively then on.

Responsiveness to new stimuli:

Indian music has always responded positively to new stimuli. Organized broadcasting came into existence with the inauguration of the first station of the broadcasting company in Bombay by lord Irwin on 23rd July 1927. Hindustani music was broadcast even before the establishment of AIR through radio stations by private businessmen.^[3] However, musicians did not welcome this change, just like what the introduction of gramophone era saw. As time passed the number

of musicians that agreed to broadcast their music through AIR saw an increase. In the decades following Independence, broadcasts of Hindustani Music attracted more listeners across several regions as the number of stations rose. By August 1947, the AIR network had nine stations.^[4]

The intrinsic adaptivity of Hindustani music made it open to a wider audience especially in the post British era. The emergence of radio and broadcasting created an upswing in Indian music reaching out to wider audience both nationally and internationally. The first Radio Sangeet Sammelan was held in 1954 and continues to be an annual feature even today.^[5] The rise of multimedia technology resulting in the establishment of a national body named 'The Films Division'. Many film-musical compositions began to surface in various broadcasts. The music in these films was played, directed and sometimes even enacted by musicians who were adept in Hindustani classical art music.

The ministries like Ministry of information and broadcasting, ministry of education, ministry of human resource development, ministry of culture at the national level, and others at the state level, have initiated fragmented policies related to culture in general and to Hindustani music, in the past seven decades. Government and autonomous institutions, including the Prasar Bharti and its constituent media units, that is, All India Radio (Akashvani), and Doordarshan (DD), as well as the Sangeet Natak Akademi (SNA), the Indian Council for cultural relations (ICCR), National Culture Fund (NCF) and the Cultural Zonal Centers (CZC) particularly relevant here.^[6]

Contribution of ICCR:

The ICCR – Indian Council for cultural relations was established in 1950 which till the present day has been playing a pivotal role in international propagation of Hindustani music paving many paths for international integration. These factors consequently lead to friendly cultural exchanges that provided a fertile soil for peaceful relations between India and other nations.^[7] Over over the decades Hindustani music concert tours have primarily being organized in the USA, Canada the UK, Germany, Netherlands, Italy and France. On some occasions the ICCR provided travel grants to musicians traveling to these countries and funded tours that took place as part of festivals of India. Concert tours to East European and South Asia countries have also been undertaken under the aegis of the ICCR.^[8]

Contributions of some world-renowned artists in popularizing Hindustani Music overseas:

In 1966, Pt. Ravi Shankar the celebrated sitar legend collaborated with Yehudi Menuhin at the Bath Festival in England and recorded an album which titles 'west meets east'. No Western musician had ever played a classical raga on stage with Indian musicians before and it marked the beginning of a collaboration that would ultimately bring Indian music to a western audience.^[9] Pt. Ravi Shankar and Ustad Allarakha became the earliest artists of Hindustani music to have performed at a global level.

Ustad Ali Akbar Khan's Ali Akbar College of Music, set up in the USA in 1960's encouraged even the non-Indians to learn Hindustani music. At the request of Lord Menuhin, Ali Akbar Khan first visited the United States in 1955 and performed an unprecedented concert at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. He also made the first Western LP recording of Indian classical music, and the first television performance of Indian music, sowing the seed for the popularity of Indian music in the 1960's.^[10]

Tabla Maestro, Ustad Zakir Hussain, son and disciple of Ustad Allarakha, is arguably the most famous Tabla player of our country in the post-independence era. Over the years, he has been a pioneer for taking the tabla, an Indian classical percussion instrument to the global stage. He became a famous international celebrity after taking the sounds of Tabla to many international festivals and shows. This eventually flooded him with opportunities to work in many international movies. It led to the creation of brilliant works of fusion, which was new to both Indian and overseas audience. He showed to the world that Tabla, which was considered a mere percussion before his era, could be used as a main instrument at concerts. His achievements as a Tabla player inspired many young aspiring percussionists and opened the doors for many Indo-Western collaborations. Tabla, which was earlier just a Hindustani classical percussion instrument, began to be welcomed and practiced universally.^[11]

The celebrated Sitarist - Ustad Vilayat Khan, also popularized Hindustani classical music in its most pristine form among the international audiences. He did not believe in the idea of western collaborations, yet his music made a heavy impact in other countries. His role of profusely contributing to give Hindustani Music a universal value cannot be forgotten for eons to come.

Another highlight is the contribution of the label Music Today. Mohan Veena exponent Vishwa Mohan Bhatt received a Grammy award for 'A Meeting by The River', his collaboration with American guitarist Ry Cooder.^[12] Many International music labels like Navras records and Nimbus records from the U.K., Chanda Dhara from Germany and Moments established by Ustad Zakir Hussain in the U.S.A recorded Hindustani classical music.

Music in the Millennium age

The beginning years of 2000 saw a steady decline in the use of audio cassettes and an increase in the production of CDs for recording Indian classical music. Subsequently the record labels started producing more CDs and converting the existing cassettes into new CD packages.

Live concerts became more and more popular. International music festivals like Durbar festival (U.K.), SAARC music festival, Basant Bahar (U.S.A), MERU concerts by Maharishi European Research University (Switzerland), The Asian Music Circuit (U.K), the All-Bengal music conference (Dhaka).

These organizations have been hosted concerts of stalwarts like Ustad Vilayat Khan, Pt. Ravi Shankar, Pt. Shiv Kumar Sharma, Ustad Zakir Hussain, Pt. Rajan Sajan Mishra, Vidushi Shubha Mudgal and Ustad Shahid Parvez to name a few. Some contemporary star performers like Pt. Ulhas Kashalkar, Pt. Ajoy Chakraborty, Vid Ashwini Bhide Deshpande, Smt. Kaushiki Chakraborty, Nandini Shankar, Anoushka Shankar, Ustad Bahauddin Daggar, and a few others have also contributed to popularizing this art form in the west.

These international festivals began to reach wider audiences with the pacy increase of internet websites like YouTube that allowed streaming of concert video recordings. However, the number of online live streaming concerts and video content of classical music on these platforms saw a considerably steep acclivity after the hit of the Coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

Internet and the pandemic age

Hindustani classical music began to reach a vast audience with the rise in usage of social media platforms like Facebook and Instagram. Before the pandemic, video streaming, both live and recorded was majorly on YouTube. The upgradation of Facebook and Instagram media handles and its user-friendly

interface made it possible to capture a wider range of audience. Live in-person concerts took a back seat and all the artists ranging right from the top national artists to the upcoming artist started being active on these platforms to achieve a better reach. Writing of blogs by eminent scholars have increased as the social media platform provides the authors with readers around the globe. We can say that internet and the development of social media especially in the current scenario has generated a healthy curiosity and liking of Hindustani music among the younger generation. This music has reached far and wide and much more with virtual concerts happening more than ever. Many small and big music festivals and music institutes have mushroomed leading to many Indian and Non-Indian enthusiastic students to take up this glorious art form.

Conclusion

We have seen how Hindustani music in its full glory has evolved with time. That music which was available only to a limited to a sect of practitioners and audience, now is accessible to the common man. Thus, Hindustani music has been successfully propagated and has gained a great universal appeal. Hindustani music speaks volumes about the heritage of our country. This music being harbinger of peace and a symbol of a homogeneous cultural extravaganza has become popular internationally among the Indian diaspora and non-Indian audience too. As an art form, its role in propagating peace and cultivating a sense of social well-being cannot be ignored. All these aspects of this expansive art form point towards its character that is rich with a multitude of cultural, philosophical, moral and ethical values that are kept at a high pedestal from a universal standpoint.

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