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An Analytical Study of Voice in Sharngadeva's Sangita Ratnakara

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Abstract

Singing is primarily performed using the voice. A singer's voice is what defines his quality. He will be among the best vocalists when his voice is of the highest caliber and possesses attributes like dynamism, intellect, and endurance. For any singer, voice culture is crucial. Pt. Ajay Chakraborty stated, "Voice culture can improve one's voice and change it up to 30%." Science proved a long time ago that objects vibrate to make sound. The history of music claims that vocalists have conducted several in-depth research trials with success, just like scientists have. From the times of Bharata Muni until the present day, several voice experiments have been conducted. A renowned musicologist, Sharngadeva (1210-1247AD), examined 'voice' in great depth during the first half of the thirteenth century. Sharngdeva was deeply interested in voice and vocal culture, as evident in his Sangeetratnakara. This is demonstrated in Gamaka and Sthayas' narrative. It is fascinating to observe how the concepts of voice that he outlined are employed in classical music of today's times. Many different singing styles have developed in music as a result of vocal variations. It is accurate to say that there are as many Gharanas as there are vocal styles. Numerous intriguing details are revealed in this regard. In Sharngadeva's Sangeetratnakara, 'Shabda' (voice/sound) is examined from the perspective of singing Dhrupad, Khyal, Thumri, Ghazal, folk melodies, movie songs, etc. It is quite challenging for one person to learn every singing style. A singer's vocal abilities are crucial for singing all genres of music. A vocalist who masters this knowledge and selects the appropriate vocal style sings with ease and finds success. In light of this, it is intriguing to know what style of voice Sangeet Ratnakara represents in modern usage. Sharngadeva has often demonstrated that in Raga presentations, sound quality is of paramount importance. According to him, the word is said to be of four types: Kahula, Narata, Bombaka, and Mishraka. The effects of four types of vocal chords on Hindustani singing are studied in this work.

Keywords: Voice, Stamina, Shabda, Sangitaratnakara, Gamaka, Sthaya, Raga presentation, Kaarika, Kaahula.

Research Paper

Introduction

Music is worshipped as an art, a scripture, a means of entertainment, and a means of salvation, as per one's taste. Music is a different shastra when compared to others because it has two components, unlike other shastras. It has Shastra Paksha (theory) and Prakhya Paksha (practical), which are complementary to one another. These are also called lakshyas (practical aspects) and lakshanas (theory). Although lakshyas seem to be prominent, laskshanas are equally important in music. Shastra helps to put the practical music in a proper framework. This is why both complements have been extensively researched and experimented upon from ancient times to the present day, which illustrates the importance of music.

Sanskrit and music are intricately intertwined because most of the original scriptures related to music are in Sanskrit. The practical and theoretical aspects of music provide ample opportunities for research. Bharata's Natyashastra, Narada's Naradiya Shiksha and Sangeet Makaranda, Matanga's Brihaddeshi, and Sharngadeva's Sangeet Ratnakara are some of the major books that extensively cover music-related topics. The majority of aspects mentioned in these books are directly connected to musical practice. Therefore, there is a vast scope for research on most of the topics in these books.

Sangeet Ratnakara, authored by Sharngadeva during the early 13th century, serves as the foundational text for music. Sharngadeva (1210-1247AD) was a Brahmin living in Kashmir. His work proves his status as a Sanskrit scholar as well. The text has 7,951 verses

divided into seven chapters, namely: Svaragatadhyaya, Ragavivekadhyaya, Prakirnakadhyaya, Prabandhadhyaya, Taladhyaya, Vadyadhyaya, and Nartanadhyaya.

Out of these seven chapters, Prakirna Kadhyaya has given considerable importance to the practical aspects of music. This chapter explains terms like sound, voice, singers, types of singers, qualities of singers, sthayas, sharira, shabda, etc. Shabda (voice) is the most important thing for a singer.

This study reveals that Sharngadeva has taken great care to elaborate on this subject. A lot of emphasis is given to the smooth movement of the voice through the three octaves (Tristhaayi). Sharngadeva categorized artists based on diverse voices into distinct groups and contributed to the variety of music. Through this research paper, an attempt made to understand the conceptualization of 'voice' theory proposed by Shrangadeva in the thirteenth century.

Methodology

This is a research paper combining historical and analytical methods. The primary source considered for the research is the original copy of Sangeet Ratnakara (available in the Adyar Library, Chennai). Apart from the primary source, the researcher has read and analysed several commentaries and articles on Sangeeta Ratnakara. The researcher has also carefully listened to more than fifty contemporary vocalists and has tried to establish a connection between Sharngadeva's theories of 'Shabda' and the voice quality of contemporary singers. There are many types of voices and also singers who can sing in three or two octaves (lower and upper octaves). The paper examines how vocalists understand the quality of their voice and use it in their singing.

Results

The results found from this research study are listed below.

1. It is known that music and Ayurveda have a strong relationship.
2. Vata, Pitta, and Kapha become different types of sounds.
3. Khahula, Narata, Bombaka, and Misraka were the medieval sound types.
4. Singers who sing proficiently in the lower and middle octaves are called Khayal singers.
   The unique sound born from the Kafi note becomes mature when sung in the lower and middle octaves, making it easier to sing. Singing in the high octave (Tar Saptak) is challenging. Therefore, if they sing ragas like Darbari Kanhada, Miyan Malhar, and Marva, which have extensive coverage in the lower and middle octaves, they become successful singers. It is known that those who adhere to these rules and sing are excellent singers. Currently, those who have followed these rules in their singing are considered outstanding singers. Utilizing strength beyond necessity and attempting to sing in the high octave has caused them to lose the beauty of their voice.
5. Singers who possess the term "Narata" sing across all three octaves. They are extremely influential and proficient singers. Currently, when listening to the singing of many artists, those who have the "Narata" resonance stand out prominently. These singers, who have mastered the Narata sound, have gained immense fame, showcasing brilliance in the field of music. They are known for delivering extraordinary performances. Singers of this kind can sing any composition with great ease. In terms of impact, they are seen at the forefront among leading vocalists.
6. Singers who possess the term "Bombaka" sing with great force, but it is noted that their singing lacks melodic nuances. Even in the present day, such singers are observed. However, instead of taking up singing, they are more inclined towards playing musical instruments or becoming instrumentalists.
7. The formation of various Gharanas was due to different vocal sounds, as revealed by the study.
8. Due to the diversity of sounds, various genres have evolved in music. Thus, this study has proven useful in understanding music from different dimensions.
9. The tonal culture determines the entire future of a singer's artistic life. Therefore, every singer should prioritize this aspect, as emphasized repeatedly by Sharngadeva.
10. It was observed that voices are about 60% in khahula, 5% in narata, 15% in bombaka and 20% in misraka.

Analysis

Sharngadeva has proved time and again that sound is the most important thing in raga presentation. Sharngadeva explained that the words are after describing the body, body type, guna doshas. Sound is voice. It is mainly divided into four types. Namely.

Chaturbhedo Bhavechhabda: Khahulo Naratabhida:|
Bombako Mishrakashcheti Tallakshanamatochyate ||

There are four kinds of distinguished voice and they are Khahulo, Naratabhida, Bombako and Mishraka which is defined as follows:

While describing the quality of a singer, he has experimented with the word sound as Hridyashabda in the same sense as voice. Since Hridyashabda refers to the singer's voice itself, it is clear that it is the voice. Even when describing the character of the Narata, he said that the sound is the sound.

1. Khahula

Kaphaja: khahula: snigdhamadhura: saukumaryayuk |
Aadilla esha eva syath proudshenmandramadhyayo: ||

The characteristics of Khahula singers are creamy, sweet, and soft. When it matures, it becomes an Adilla.

This verse is associated with Ayurvedic science and music. This verse proves that Sharngadeva was well versed in Ayurvedic science. Vata, pitta, and kapha are elements. It is related to the structure of the body and the elements and is responsible for the formation of various vocal sounds. Being born of phlegm is sweet to hear. In the Mandra, Madhyasaptakas, the one who has the power to move sound, is called Kahula. Dim, medium; if he matures in the sevens, he is called unplayed. But Sharngadeva's opinion was that the sound should travel in three sthaayis in raga presentation, which has been relaxed by him and said this way. If only three saptakas are used, it shows the quality of the raga presentation, but Sharngadeva has expressed the intention of dividing the rest of the singers who perform the raga presentation in this way. It was observed that voices are about 60% in Khahula.

2. Narata

Tristhanaghanagambhiraleena: pittodbhavo dhvani: |

Full (ghana), deep (gambhira), and clear (leena) are the characteristics of the Narata voice arising from the bile (pitta).

The sound born of pitta should travel solemnly through the three saptakas and be properly absorbed in the shruti. Such a sound is called Narata. This is the voice that achieves the greatest success in the raga presentation. It often surprises the listeners and makes them experience great a raga presentation. It was observed that voices are about 5% in Narata.

3. Bombaka

Bombakastu Syadantarni:saratayuta: |
Purushochchaistara: stoolo vataja: Sharnganodita: ||

Hollow, harsh, high sounding and rich (sthoola) are the characteristics of the Bombaka voice arising from the wind (vata). Such a voice could try voice culturing through training to see if the voice can be softened; else, learning instruments or being in chorus could be other ways to explore. Otherwise, become an organizer for musical festivities. It was observed that voices are about 15% in Bombaka.

4. Mishraka

Etatsammishranadukto Mishraka: Sannipathika: |

An admixture of three Khahula, Narata, and Bombaka is said to be Misraka, which is also known as sannipathika. Such a voice may remain normal or may not excel in some cases. The same opinion is also expressed in the book of Sangita Samayasara. It was observed that voices are about 20% in Mishraka.

Nanu rookshaguno Bomb: Khahula: snighdataayuta: |
Katham tayormishranam syadvirudhdhagunayogino: ||

Dryness of voice is one of the characteristics of bomba. While a creamy voice has the same characteristics as Khahula, the question is: how can there be such a combination that has opposite qualities? However, the larger question is: how admixtures give a better voice?

Atrochyate parityagaath parushasya virodhina: |
Avirudhdhasya madhurya stoulyadermishranam matam ||

The opposite characteristics can be combined by the elimination of the opposite quality, such as harshness, and through the combination of the qualities, such as sweetness, and grossness, and so on.

Etena ghanani:ssaraguna naratabombayo: |
Virudhdhagunatakshepasamadhane nivedite ||

The same explanation holds good with regards to the similarity or in-between through the hollowness of Bomba and the solidity of Narata.

Mishrasya bhedachtwaro yukto narata khahulou |
Naratabombakou Bombakhahulou mishratastraya: ||

There are four combinations of misra's: (a) Narata and Khahula; (b) Narata and Bombaka; (c) Bombaka and Khahula; and (d) all three put together.

Ni:ssaratarookshatabhyam heenastritayamishranath |
Uttamottam ityukta: suranamiva Shankara: ||

The finest among the fine voices, like Lord Siva, is based

on a combination of four variations. The characteristics of the finest voices are free from hollowness and harshness.

Narata Khahulonmishra Uttama: Khahula: puna: |
Bombayukto madhyama: syadbombo Naratasamyuta: ||
Shabdanamdhama: prokta: shrimatnsodhalasoonuna |
Ni:ssaratarookshatabhyam yukta: sarvadhamo mata: ||
Bhavanti bahavo bheda: nanatadgunamishranath |

Sarngadeva grades voices from best to lowest, such as Narata and Khahula, whose combination is the best, while Khahula and Bombaka are average, and Bomba and Narata are low; but the voice that combines hollowness with harshness is considered to be the lowest. These characteristics help to distinguish voices through the opportunity to learn, practice, and lend voices to different forms of music, such as classical, semi-classical, ghazal and etc. Several forms have glorified voices and music. Sarngadeva had documented them in the 13th century, and these continued to be observed among voices.

Conclusion

The research is a continuous effort, and no single piece of research can be confined to begin final. Be it a piece of literature, an instrument, etc., it is subject to constant reinterpretation. Acknowledging this fact, Sharngadeva's work Sangitaratnakara, who foresight, is mentioned in a series of topics that continued to be relevant to the field of music and sound culture even after eight centuries. This Sanskrit treatise presents a series of musically useful and indispensable subjects for music. With that in mind, if every experimental subject presented in this treatise is subjected to research, there is no doubt that the current movement of music will be enriched.

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