



Singing Style and Vocal Characteristics of Bishnupur Gharana

Naima Parven

Research Scholar, Indira Kala Sangeet Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagarh

Abstract

In Indian music, especially in the Dhrupads, Bishnupur has a distinct and unique genre that has been mentioned in Indian history for nearly two hundred years as the 'Bishnupur Gharana'. It is said that Bahadur Khan and Peerbaksh of the Senia Gharana were appointed to Bishnupur in the 18th century at the invitation of Raghunath II, King of Bishnupur, and from that time the practice of classical music began in Bengal and the genre became popular and popular. Many talented artists were initiated and developed in this genre and became one of the prominent stars in the music scene of Bengal. In this article I will mention in this article the analysis of how different the singing style or chaal of the Bishnupur genre is different from other genres and the contribution of this genre to Indian classical music and the tradition it carries as the only Dhrupada genre of Bengal. Bishnupur is the only one gharana of Bengal and Pride of Bengal. This gharana is popular for dhrupad. In Indian Classical Music, it has been great contribution for Drupad Music. Although now the practice and promotion of this gharana has become very limited. In this article, I wish to highlight the tradition and contribution and their music characteristics of Bishnupur gharana in classical Music. Although the Bishnupur style is simple, there is very little use of gamak and layakari in classical style. The Khyal songs of this genre can be heard playing by Dhrupadi style. Instrumental music like vocal music also has proper use of ornamentation in this genre.

Keywords : Hindustani Music, Dhrupad, Bishnupur Gharana, Vocal Style, Layakari, Ornamentation

Research Paper

Introduction

In the history of classical music, "Bishnupur Gharana" is a name that is known as a music genre. It is about two hundred years old and is mentioned in the history of Indian classical music as a distinct and separate genre from other genres.

Background

It is said that Bahadur Khan and Peer Bax of the Seni Gharana were appointed to the court of Bishnupur in the 18th century at the invitation of Raghunath II, King of Bishnupur, and from that time, the practice of classical music in Bengal began to spread and become popular. Many talented artists were educated and developed in this gharana and became prominent stars of the Bengali music scene. Gadadhar Chakravarty, Ramsankar Bhattacharya, Nitai Najir and Vrindavan Najir were the first disciples of Ustad Bahadur Khan. All of them mastered Dhrupada of the Seni School of Delhi. After Bahadur Khan, his favourite students, Gadadhar Chakravarty and Ramasankar Bhattacharya became teachers, and Bishnupur was regarded then as the second Delhi in Bengal.

Bishnupur was the capital of the Mallaraja. This is where the Bishnupur genre started and spread. The tradition of this genre can be traced back to the time of King Raghunath Singha II, although there are different opinions on this. However, even if there is an argument about who the first promoter of this genre was, the name Ram Shankar Bhattacharya is the first to be mentioned as the first bearer and bearer of this method. Notable names among Rama Shankar's disciples are Ram Keshava Bhattacharya, Keshab Lal Chakraborty, Kshetramohan Gowsamy, Deenbandhu Goswami, and Anantalal Bandopyadhaya. All these artists carried this genre's music tradition beyond the borders of Bishnupur as a container and carrier (Acharjaya 154; Karunamayee 181).

We need to discuss gharana before delving into the Bishnupur gharana Style. Gharana can be said in one word about the song's singer and its characteristics. Even though the same bandish is learned from the same guru, there are differences between different disciples during the service. It is based on the different thoughts of different artists and their adaptations.

Research Problem

Bishnupur Gharana is the tradition of Bengal, but as artists of this genre are introvert, there are no manuscripts and data collection is very difficult. Different researchers have different opinions about the origin of Bishnupur Gharana. However, I have recorded all the information according to popular opinion. Here are some research questions arrived:

1. What are the main musical aesthetics of Bishnupur Gharana?
2. What should be emphasised in the analysis of Bishnupuri singing techniques?
3. What factors have had a special influence on the development of Bishnupuri Singing style?
4. Do Bishnupuri Gharana artists primarily focus on certain techniques in voice practice?
5. Do the artists of this gharana primarily adopt specific techniques in voice practice?
6. What kind of voice characteristics do Bishnupuri singers adopt?

Objective of the study

This research aims to describe and analyse the singing style of the Bishnupur Gharana, focusing on its music tradition, philosophy, and cultural aspects. I explore the distinctive vocal characteristics and stylistic elements of Bishnupuri Dhrupad, examining how this unique style has evolved over time.

In the 18th and 19th centuries, raga music began to be practised permanently in Bengal. Bishnupur, the original Bengal style, gained more popularity at that time. However, this genre originated in 1370 AD, and the city of Bishnupur belongs to the Bakura district of West Bengal. At that time, there was a lot of practice of Vaishnava Padavali as songs of the generation after Gita Govinda in Bengal. Along with this, there were chants of Dhap Kirtan, Lord Krishna's Padavali, Dhruvadanga's Kirtan etc. And the Bishnupuri Dhrupads had similarities to this Pravanda style. (Biswas 91, 92)

Methodology

Bishnupur Gharana's singing techniques and singers have developed around the traditions of the Bishnupur region. The main difference of any genre is found in the singing style. The method of tuning is different in each genre; the main objective of this article is to analyse the singing style of the Bishnupur genre and discuss how different the singers are from other traditional genres. In this short study, I am trying to highlight the techniques

used by artists of the Bishnupur genre to practice their voice and what ornaments to use in singing.

Discussion

While the origin of the Bishnupur Gharana is often attributed to Agra or Mathura in the west, it is the Gwalior Gharana that serves as the focal point for the music of the Bishnupur Gharana, much like the Seni Gharana. Another aspect is that many Dhrupads of Seni Gharana are prevalent in Bishnupur Gharana. However, what distinguishes the singers of this gharana from other gharana is the rare, simple, ornate melody. In Vrindavan, Mathura, Rajasthan, and Gujarat, the classical bhajans in various temples are Haveli music. Dhrupad songs of the Bishnupur Gharana share similarities with haveli songs, both unblemished, melodious, and expressive of God-seeking. Its richness lies in its melody (Mukhapadhaya 84,85).

Bishnupur's classical music has been propagated through about two centuries of Vaishnava religious practice. This Bishnupur is one of the main centres of Sanskrit and Gaudiya Vaishnava scriptures. About one and a half hundred temples were established here under the patronage of the Malla kings. The art of terracotta sculpture evolved by incorporating temple architecture. The indirect influence of Mallarajad's devotion to the Vaishnava religion and direct support for music contributed to forming a distinct Marg music style within Bishnupur Gharana. It represents the classical temple music of the Bishnupur Gharana. These temple-bound Dhrupads served as the soulful melodies of the common people, embodying a straightforward, uncomplicated, and expressive narrative. The song has a lot of purity, simplicity and depth of emotion. So, it can be said that temple-based dhrupads have "arts" that are integrated but not laborious and wonderful techniques. In Bishnupur of Radhbong, this essay style has been practised since ancient times. Later, Bishnupur music artists collected compositions of different genres but did not abandon this ancient traditional style of composition while performing. (Biswas 94,95)

It is said that Bishnupuri Dhrupad is simple and straight. Characterised by minimal ornamentation techniques. Many musicologists said that this Gharana singing style resembles Dagar Bani. The Bishnupuri Dhrupads embrace simple yet solemn rhythms, akin to the devotional music in Hindu temples. Haveli Sangeet of the Vaishnava community may have had influences similar to those of Vishnupada songs. The singing is straightforward and unadorned with primary emphasis



on the purity of the raga. The ritual identity is mirrored through diverse manifestations of ragas. The use of shuddha dhaivata in Vasantha raga, Kamal nishad in Bhairav raga, integration Suddha Dhaivat in purvi raga, insertion of shudh swar in Vibhasa, exclusion of tibra madhyam in Ramkeli etc. are clear indications of it. In this gharana “char tuk” of dhrupad are sung. Here the tom nom is accompanied by the meditation of raga through alap, then sung to the accompaniment of pakhwaja.

The characteristic of this gharana is the worship of God without displaying the adornments of the master, emphasising a pure sense of devotion and nothing else. Actually, it can be said that the original and main purpose of dhrapada is to worship God, which has been successfully achieved in the dhrapada of Bishnupur Gharana. Even now, in the dhrupads of the Bishnupur Gharana, love and devotion to God are preserved intact (Chandra 511, 512; Mitra 87).

Although the Bishnupur Gharana is Dhrupad-centric, there is very little use of Gamaka or Layakari in Dhrupad in this gharana. Tones are applied in simple and easy motions. Singers of this genre are Simple gayaki; Various ornaments are used but less dominant (Acharya 155,157).

The voices of artists of this genre are expressive and open sounding. It can be stated that the customs and vocal practices of artists of the genre are designed to preserve their distinctive singing characteristics. But let's add another thing here: unlike other gharana, the voice of Bishnupur gharana's singer is not very bold or Gambhir. Khayal songs in this genre can be heard using Dhrupada style. The “Khayal” song incorporates an emphatic tone. Utilize taan sargam and features the application of sapat taan (Acharya 107).

The Bani of Bishnupuri Dhrupad is pure and has its own sweetness. The singers of this gharana have no resemblance to the Betiya genre. Meend, Gamak, and Murchhana are observed in the song; from that point of view, the difference between the Bishnupur and Seni genres is not only in pronunciation or appearance; There is also a notable difference in the spirit of the song. So, it appears that singers of Bishnupur Gharana have a speciality that seems to be different from that of conventional singers of different Gharana. On the other hand, the origin of the Bishnupur Gharana is associated with the original Gharana of Gwalior or Mathura Vrindavan. As a result, although there are similarities between the singers of the gharana prevalent in North India, the style of the Bishnupur genre demands distinctiveness (Das).

Bishnupuri artists underwent training in various gharanas, fostering the independence of Bishnupur music with Several Gharana merging into this unique tradition. But still, Bishnupuri artists were always conscious of their gayaki and vocal implementation. Therefore, the traditional style of the genre is called the Bishnupuri song, and the singing style is called the Bishnupuri singing style. According to Bishnupuri artists, the music of Bishnupuri could take a definite form from the time of Ramashankar Bhattacharya. Artists of the Bishnupur genre or musical geniuses have received talim in other genres but expressed it in their own, even after disturbing other genres. Like the great musician Yadubhatta, regardless of the external training he may have received, the artist maintained a unique style in both expression and output. Perhaps this is the custom of great artists.

Similarly, Satyakingar Bandopyadhaya is known as a prominent musician of Bishnupur gharana. One can experience the Bishnupur gharana through his renowned Adana recording. Still, Alladiya Khan of Jaipur Gharana sings three sevenths in the style of Khandameru and jumping notes in the style of Durdanta. I also added great mixers in the two to three-minute range. So, it can be said that any genre is enriched over time and gradually moves forward. Another great artist of this genre is Radhika Prasad. Although he was initiated into all three genres, he used to sing in the Bishnupuri style while singing in Asra, though he followed the Betiya genre more. But the special juice in his songs is more than the master. Anantalal's second son Gopeshwar Bandopyadha was first trained in Bishnupur gharana and then in Betiya gharana, but he became well-known throughout India as a Bishnupuri singer. Gyanendra Prasad Goswami trained in Agra and many other genres besides the Bishnupur genre, but the singing style of the Bishnupur genre is evident in the singer. (Pragyananda; Chowdhury 27,28,32,33)

Another characteristic of Bishnupur artists is that they extended beyond teaching, learning, and performing rituals, encompassing various activities, including music. They composed songs, bandish and produced various music books. This genre has a huge repertoire of traditions. Although the Sangeet Sadhaks of Bishnupur region was not self-promoting. Pre-twentieth century musicians left no written records or autobiographies. The musical history of Bishnupur is mainly based on legends. That is why researchers have different opinions, doubts and disagreements (Acharya 155-157).

No textbook on the gharana Bandish or Cheez of Bishnupur genre has yet been written. On the other hand, even if a particular Bandish is identified as own Bandish of Bishnupur Gharana, there is an absolute need for the education or training of the Bandish to make that Bandish form. Otherwise, it is not possible to sing genre-specific singers or characteristic bandish or comparable songs (Basu 326).

The name of Jorasako Thakurbari is very important in the Guru Shisya tradition of Bishnupur Gharana. Rabindranath Tagore, Bengal's greatest composer of all time, was a disciple of this gharana. It was through the Drupada that Rabindranath realised the greatness of Indian music. He composed numerous devotional songs in the Hindi Dhrupad style, representing the distinctive essence of this genre. It can be said that "Upsana Sangeet" of Tagore Bari, Bramha Sangeet originated from Bishnupur genre because the outline of Bramha Sangeet is from the hands of Yadubhatta, Gopeshwar Bandopyadhaya, Radhika Prasad Goswami, Surendranath Bandopyadhaya and other acharyas of Bishnupur gharana (Basu 315,316).

According to Bishnupur's singing style, the form of music is created and expressed through a unique lyrical style without extravagance, which is simple, simple and ornament rare, characterised by clarity and individuality. On the other hand, ritual identity is reflected in various raga forms. In this Bishnupur, diverse aesthetic thought, experience and melodic practice have paved the way for the development of high-quality music and have brought the Indigenous culture and tradition to the musical court of all India (Pragyananda)

In the Bishnupur style, emphasis on "Bani" holds paramount importance, particularly in the context of dhrupada. In the past, the "pada" was given only importance. But later, after the influence of North Indian music in Bengal, the use of alap in classical singing started, but the alap was not sung as long as in other Gharana. In the early Bishnupur gharana, chartuk dhrupadas were sung entirely, which is not heard in present-day artists' performances. Although the chartuk is learned according to the rules of the genre, it is sung in two stanzas during the performance. And this can also be said to be the influence of North Indian styles. Certainly, understanding the meaning of the word in dhrupad singing within Bishnupuri gharana is crucial for conveying the intended emotions and depth of the composition. It adds a profound layer to the musical expression to. That is, the importance of words here is very high. While singing, be very careful to sing so

that the pronunciation is clear and meaningful. The exhalation process will be such that the word's meaning remains intact. Of course, Kabiguru Rabindranath Tagore used to compose Bishnupuri style (chal) songs and strictly followed their singing styles.

Another special feature of dhrupada is that the laya is never 'over-delayed' (Ati-Vilambit). The motion of Laya depends on the interpretation of the term "Bandish". How fast the laya will be depends entirely on the "Bani" I have already said that the meaning of bandish is very important in Bishnupuri Dhrupad singing style. Here, the singing tempo will never increase so much that the emotion and meaning are lost. Another notable aspect is that the rhythm of the chautal in Bishnupuri Dhamar is always in the madhyalaya. Even if you listen to Rabindranath's Chautal songs, you can clearly understand it (Das; Acharya 154,155).

In Bishnupur's style of vocal practice, certain things were taken care of; such as when practising palta, they used alternate tones according to the chaplain of the raga. When the chalan of raga was completely settled in the mind, the alternations were raised, and the tone of the conversation was set. The two speech letters are "Ra and Na" in their singing. The letters are arranged in rhyme like a poem. And must follow the singing rule. They never prioritise the laya while learning bandish; this genre's real singing technique is to sing along with the laya and tala by understanding the meaning of the words.

Conclusion

Bishnupur Gharana is the only original Gharana of Bengal. Bishnupur's unique culture, traditions, local thoughts, and tastes are clearly revealed in the singing of the Bishnupur genre. In more detail, the indirect impact of Vaishnava culture in Bishnupur is manifested through Bishnupuri Drupada, commonly known as temple-based Drupada. The Bishnupuri style directly reflects the artistic preference of the local community of this region. Drupada, a blend of Vaishnava devotion and kirtan, conveys its essence best through auditory experience. Therefore, the purity of their words and worship of God is preserved intact. The Bishnupuri singing style reflects a noticeable impact from the widespread practice of devotional music, characterised by straightforwardness, seriousness, simplicity, moderation, and a lack of charm. However, the practice of Dhrupads and Bishnupuri singers is very limited at present. It can be observed that the disciples of the Bishnupuri gharana do not exclusively continue the practice of the Bishnupuri



singing style. But it is not desirable that such a traditional genre should disappear like this (Biswas 94,95).

There is much speculation about the origin of the style of the Bishnupur genre. According to Dr. Bimal Roy, this genre originated from Haveli music. Haveli music or kirtan was the theme of Krishna's Leela and is still sung in Mathura, Vrindavan on chautal, ara chautal, dhamar and jhaptal in various ragas. Sangeet Manjuri mentions the position of Ustad Bahadur Kha in the royal court of Raghunath II. Still, Dilip Mukhopadhyay, in his own book "Bishnupur Gharana", proves with a lot of historical data and documents that Raghunath Singh II and Tansen's son Jeevan Khan are contemporaneous. Besides, from the singer's point of view, there are many similarities between the Seni and Bishnupuri techniques. The simple and bare singing of Bishnupuri Dhrupad is completely influenced by Haveli music (Mukhapadhaya 83,84).

Bishnupur gharana is the context of classical music in Bengal. In this Bishnupur, many aesthetic thoughts, experiences and sound pursuits have paved the way for high music's development and brought the native culture and tradition to the court of all India.

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