

SOME UNEXPLORED AREAS OF RESEARCH IN INDIAN MUSIC

Dr. Suresh Vrat Rai

Advanced study or research in music is a direct offshoot of the institutionalised system of teaching and learning music. The system has been accepted widely despite its limitations and attacks by the conservative school supporting the traditional pattern. The socio-economic circumstances particularly of the artist and the students of music have paved the way for the popularity of the institutionalised system introduced by Pandit Vishnu Digamber Paluskar, Maula Baksh and others, on account of its intrinsic advantages. Yet its critics continue to be aggressive. Their approach and arguments need not necessarily be brushed aside summarily, on the contrary critical examination of their view point might reveal positive suggestions for advanced study and research.

The critics feel sore about the majority of amateur musicians teaching in the Music colleges because an average amateur according to them lacks the professional skill, performance and therefore, suffers from a sense of inferiority. Even the critics admit that these amateur musicians earn bigger sums than the traditional professional, they are also capable of exploiting other avenues. The modern music institutions divorced from Guru or Ustad have produced "Text Book" music, making the students dependent upon certified music teachers or tutors or badly managed, under-staffed and semi-starved music colleges for their training in music. One is not surprised to find such extreme stands taken by the critics.

"We can close down all our music schools without doing any positive harm to the heritage of classical music. Apart from doing general propaganda for music, these schools serve no creative purpose. They neither inherit nor transmit the genius of our music. Their mushroom growth is symptomatic of our organic decay. The music examinations of these colleges turn out graduates and no musicians, giving a stamp of recognition to all successful candidates who go out into life with very poor equipment. They may find jobs and this is one of the main functions of a music institution".
(*Indian Music To-day*-S.K. Chaube Page 109, 112)

The criticism though apparently biased and guided by blind support to the traditional pattern need not necessarily be dismissed as reactionary. Let us accept the challenge with sincere introspection. The criticism of teaching in various classes, is equally applicable to research and advanced study. Critics of the institutional system appear to have formed the impression that the research work done so far is more academic and theoretical in nature. The vast area of practical performance remains untouched. We can strive to focus our attention on research work having a direct bearing on performance and its technique in some way or the other.

A heterogeneous crowd of students with or without talent and aptitude on account of indiscriminate admission of students is a genuine complaint against the institutions of music. Except few institutions e.g. Banaras Hindu University (see Ordinance No. XX Prospectus of Studies Faculty of Music and Fine Arts) aptitude tests are unknown to the institutions. Such a crowd of students impairs fruitful training of music.¹ Even general aptitude tests can be helpful at the initial stage of admission but advanced study or specialisation in particular style or branch requires more comprehensive aptitude tests to determine leaning of the student to particular style and his capacity. The aptitude test in itself can be an important field for intensive research, practically untouched so far.

The Notation system is another irritation to the advocates of the traditional oral system of imparting lessons in music. Notation has been dismissed as inadequate and misleading imitation of the Western music pattern.

"The genius of our music cannot be reduced to any form of notation. Not even the most scientific system of notation can convey the spirit of *ragas* and their composition. Such a highly individualistic art as classical music in which personality of the musicians counts a great deal and which abounds in numerous niceties and embellishments cannot be transcribed in notation".²

The critics are partially correct. The intricate compositions and styles are elusive and too subtle for notation. Moreover, notation is unfortunately taken as substitute for *guru* or teacher. It is true, the infinite *Nada Brahman* having infinite modes of manifestation cannot be restricted within finite limits of prediction, enumeration or narration through the symbolic dialect of notation, but the traditional protagonists take extreme sides, rather extreme view of the technique of recording notes.

"This new musician inherits nothing from the past because trained as he is against the background of text book notation, his style is also of the printed variety".³

Yet even the sharp critics admit that notation does give us at least a faint idea or vague impression which has to be improved upon considerably.⁴ We have so far been dealing with the two notation systems in vogue without major changes. It is for the research scholars to exploit immense potentiality of notation, evolve a rationalised and uniform notation system to the nearest point of accuracy and permanency. The recording technique can be enriched further.

Turning to the traditional style one hardly finds scope for seeking an answer to 'how' and 'why' either from the *gharana ustad* or some one else. The natural seed for research and advanced study was nipped in the bud in the name of regard for the *ustad*, submission to him. One can find how undaunted faith to the extent of being blind made the pupil self enclosed and without initiative. He made the defects in the style of his *ustad* as part of his own style and hardly made any effort to improve or further enrich the traditional style. He could not think of research. Faithful reproduction of the style formed rigid frame work. We, therefore, find virtually a status quo during the last few decades except a combination of two *ragas*, may be *Purvang* or *Uttarang*, or pieces of the two *ragas* blended into a new one, giving it the name of new *raga* and that too as exceptions based on a trial and error method.

The modern institutional system is now more than fifty years old. Yet the teaching continues according to the outdated syllabi and fixed routine. The method of teaching music on scientific lines is yet to attract musicologists and research scholars. Dr. Surendra Shanker Awasthi has tried to focus attention on this problem in his work. Prof. S.S. Bodus, while participating in the Seminar at Lucknow in February '77 advocated a rational and scientific approach for teaching music to primary and junior class students. Training in teaching methods at various levels corresponding to the respective syllabi is the paramount need of our age. This project will require work by several research scholars on various aspects, branches and styles for varying grades or classes. Such comprehensive work dealing with (a) the specialised technique of practice, (b) teaching model lesson, (c) supervision, (d) maximum use of the general principles of teaching applicable to music lesson plan, (e) method of assessment and evaluation, (f) use of modern teaching aids and equipment as well as other aspects, will undoubtedly open a new era for bringing qualitative changes in the output.

New Approach

Research in initial stages moved on the lines of other Humanities departments. Recent research works on music are accordingly characterised by critical study, analysis, a comparative study of the *Sanskrit* texts right from the *Samveda Samhita*, the *Puranas* to the *Natya Shastra*, the *Vrihad-deshi*, the *Sangeet Ratnakar* and series of works on ancient musicology.

We also find interesting epigraphic interpretation. While, recent research unfolds glorious past of Indian music, its highly developed and rich tradition, unless such works reflect a bearing on the present styles and instruments, the utility appears only academic like similar works in the department of ancient history and culture or Indology. Music is essentially a performing art. The area of research having relevance in some way therefore, appears equally desirable. Apart from research on the ancient texts, various styles in vogue can also be picked up for meaningful work e.g. the origin and development of *dhrupad*, *khayal*, *tappa* and *thumari* styles. The concept of *raga* content versus grammar, *tana* and *alap* in Indian music as applicable to *dhrupad*, *khayal* etc., aesthetics, application of its principles to music, the ethnomusicological aspect of styles, impact of folk music on classical *ragas* and their origin, musicality in folk-lore and folk tunes, the semiclassical styles, voice culture, comparative study of *gamak* in the two systems e.g. the Karnatak and the Hindustani, comparative study of *ragas* in the two systems-like *bhupali* and *mohanam*, *bhimpalasi* and *averi*, *durga* and *shuddha saveri*, which will ultimately pave the way for mutual dialogue between the two systems. It is needless to point out adoption of *ragas* like *hansdhvani*, *charukeshi* and other *ragas* of the Karnatak system. Not mere coverage of the new area, but change in the fundamental approach, practical impact and evidence might make research work really useful. Actual performance, should form the basis of research work.

Experiments in choral singing and orchestration of Indian music, the concept of *rasa* and poetic compositions can also be promising areas for research. In this connection demonstration of the twenty *shrutis* on the *shruti Veena* by the late Prof. Lalmani in support of his exposition deserves mention. Dr. Shatrughna Shukla has produced a comprehensive work on the evolution of *thumri* and multicolours of the style.

Some of the popular myths and legends in regard to the *ragas* like *deepak*, *malhar*, *kafi*, *hindol*, specific colours of the seven notes, a scientific basis, if any, of the *Ragmala* paintings are yet to be examined in the light of "Sound theory" advanced by physicists like Herman Helmholtz, Tyndall, Sedley Taylor.

Manufacture and repair of instruments, indispensable for any style has failed to attract the Board of Studies and research scholars alike. Some of the traditional manufactures are doing the job without an intimate knowledge of sound, its intricacies, structure, shape and material of instrument, which affect the performance considerably. The students and musicians knowledge about instruments is theoretical, and limited to the historical background. The test of a good instrument is barely known to most of the musicians. The approach of the manufacturer is commercial emphasising ornamentation rather than tonal quality of the instruments from the point of performance. We accordingly hardly notice any significant improvement

or addition to these instruments. The ancient musicians devoted themselves not merely to performance but to the manufacture of the instrument as well. We know the popular story of how Narvahandutta rejected the *Veena* immediately after the first stroke saying that same cobwebs in the *tumbi* distorted the sound and his criticism proved to be correct.⁵ Research on this neglected aspect will certainly enrich the instruments apart from their standardisation and necessary modification according to requirement. Research on instruments from an historical point of view will have to rely on references in musical texts, general contemporary literature, careful examination of paintings, sculpture and other fine arts, epigraphic references, folk lore and mythology⁶ for arriving at a conclusion. The realm of research in this regard is practically virgin, but imperative.

The problem of acoustics apparently comes within the purview of physics. Physics has so far been strange and also irrelevant to musicians of the past, but once we are exploiting the latest mechanical devices like use of microphone, recording apparatus, broadcast in the realm of music, research in this area can hardly afford to ignore acoustics any more. It is true that the sound engineers are doing their job but those well versed in music having an intimate knowledge of the subtle shades of oscillations, interpretation of articulations microtones, embellishment, accurate sense of pitch, relative proportion of various instruments in an orchestra, or accompaniment, can do real justice to the job. Similarly an excellent auditorium and its sound arrangement requires deep knowledge of the acoustics of music rather than superficial architecture. Research in acoustics of music from this point of view can serve as a technical guide to the engineers. Research on vibrations of sound units causing evolution of musical tone, tunes, their colours by the psychologists Prof. Wordsworth, Mermann, Helmholtz, M.A. Bijerregward, Chalandus, Wallis, Morloye can serve as signposts for Indian musicologists.

Applied Music

The very concept of applied music appears strange to the institutions of music. We have to go beyond sole performances with the moving times, and exploitation of music in various directions. Background music for drama and films, sound effect, choral singing, orchestral compositions, folk tunes, commercial tunes for advertisement with deep understanding of human psychology, music of folk theatre, music direction, will not merely widen the scope of research and music but also provide more alternative job opportunities for the musicians. Some stalwarts like Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Uday Shanker, Ustad Bismillah Khan, Ustad Ali Akbar, Pt. Ravi Shanker have already taken a lead in this sphere. The area of applied music for research appears promising both from an academic and practical point of view.

Our materialistic oriented approach confined to the empirical level

has obscured a vision of the transcendental level. Modern research scholars have perhaps left the real field of research to the saint musicians particularly of the mediaeval period. The highest research should guide transition from the visual and audible phenomenal objective music to the absolute subjective music, the celestial music conceivable through the concentrated spiritual mind. Research from this point of view should underline harmonising the chords of phenomenal music with those of the transcendental music by adequate training and education, which can by itself be an independent subject of research. Research limited to the empirical level so far, might equip the musician with perfect knowledge of microtones, tones, sidetones, *alankara*, *tana*, *murchanya*, understanding of moods and sentiments but the real aim is not mere appreciation of phenomenal music and its structure. It is on the contrary, communion with the inner vibrations of sound which requires metaphysical balance of life. Music is psychomaterial object, research on the technique of cultivating music for appreciation of the ideational and real forms by intuitive artists can be a guide to the supreme goal. The communion with *Nada Brahma* requires a dynamic approach to the basic concept and definitions for example the *ragas* from a transcendental point of view are not a mere combination of *swaras*, *murchana*, *alap*, *tana* and other essentials. Positively the *ragas* are the divine and dynamic life principle and, therefore, the psycho-material approach should transcend to the religio-philosophical state. Some of the musicologists suggested *dhyan mantras*⁷ i.e. contemplative compositions for realising the real and divine form, *ragas* are accordingly to be viewed as a medium to the realisation of the essence that shines beyond music. The divine bliss, grasping the inner meaning instead of confining vision to the external appearance. Research beginning with basic definitions, technique and principles should gradually transcend to the summum Bonnum of all fine arts and life as such, mystic experience of the *Nada Brahma*, awareness of the Absolute, a state where there is neither music nor musician nor audience but the highest experience alone, the state of pure monism.

It is true, there are practical difficulties and limitations particularly within the limited scope of the institutions, but research has to be taken in a wider sense. The responsibility of higher research rests on the future musicians and musicologists produced by the institutions. There are still musicians though very few in number, who can show the way to the highest goal through music. The musicians can start research work according to their level. It is true that the higher research work will be fundamentally different from the academic research work, never the less, a beginning can be made to explore the virgin areas of research with a note of optimism✓

NOTES AND REFERENCE

1. "The result is that musical institutions in this country have no vital common interests, the only common interest being the granting of certificate to dozens (now thousands) of candidates every year. Instead of becoming means, they become an end in themselves. (Ibid page 112).
2. Ibid 108.
3. Indian Music to-day-S.K. Chaube-page 110.
4. Ibid page 107.
5. See Vrihat Katha Shlok Sangraha, Chapter XVI and XVII.
6. Article "Mukhvina" By Dr. B. C. Deva in the Sur Singar Journal, Vol. 2 October 1964 No. 2,
7. See Sangeet Darpanam (Tanjore Edition 1952) Also see nadmaya and devtamaya description of ragas by Pt. Somnath (1609 W. D.)