

AN INTRODUCTION TO FOLK MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS OF BENGAL

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Music is closely woven into the fabric of Indian society with a tradition of over three thousand years. Just as a culture expresses itself best in what it deifies, in India, apart from birds and animals, the dieties are inseparably linked with their musical instruments. Lord Vishnu, the preserver of the universe holds a shankha—conch shell—in one of his four hands; Saraswati—the goddess of learning and the arts, plays the veena; Lord Krishna is invariably seen with his flute, and Lord Shiva with his damru—a small two-faced drum.

There are folk songs relating to festivals and marriages in our country. Even songs are used for laborious works and cultivating fields, for bratas (rituals of Bengal) and many life-ways in rural India. The songs of festivals weave round the country's joys and aspirations. The Agamani (songs of welcome) and Vijaya songs (songs of departure), Kirtanas (devotional songs) of the Bengalees are excellently interwoven with their autumnal festivities. The Dohas of the Gonds and Rawats, radiate the festive spirit of Diwali. Kerala, during Onam, vibrates with Vallamkali, i.e., boat-race songs. Other festivals too, like Pongal in Tamil Nadu, Ganesh Chaturthi in Maharashtra and Holi have inspired many folk songs like the Bihu songs of Assam.

Marriage songs also reflect the warmth and poignancy of human, social relationships and joys of marital life. Sajani songs of the Kol and Baiga portray tenderly a bride's departure from parents' house. Like Joranam of Assam, the Jalbara songs and rhythmic grinding songs of Bengal enliven the wedding ceremonies.

'Folksong comprises the poetry and music of groups whose literature is perpetuated not by writing and print, but through oral tradition'. Folk music is the source of all music. Every form of vocal and instrumental music

that we find in this world has developed out of folksong, dance and folk music.

In general folk music may be classified as follows according to its structure:

- (a) Rhythm
- (b) Harmony
- (c) Scale, Interval, Melody
- (d) Form

Folk music is based on 'Oral tradition'. Traditions of music technique may be summarised in this manner:

- (a) Purely oral
- (b) Predominantly oral
- (c) Mixed : oral and written
- (d) Predominantly written

In Indo-Pak Sub-continent 'written' materials are distinguishable from that of 'oral traditions'. Folksongs flourish in rural areas in this sub-continent. Folk song is functional as well as verbal art. It is also a composite art form, transmitted by the people from generation to generation. The instruments are also made by the artisans out of indigeneous materials, keeping conformity with traditions.

Musical instruments play an interesting role in folk music. Folk musical instruments have been grown in India out of Socio-ecological factors, which is the perennial source of inspiration to the people. These instruments help create tonal variations in music.

Folk musical instruments are variegated in nature and are considered to be essential parts of Folk music. Folk musical instruments may be classified under the following types:

- (a) Ghan Vadya (Idiophones) Idiophonic Instruments: clappers, Kansi, Juri, (cymbals) etc. The shaken type of clappers include Ghunghroo, Ramjhol, Kinkini, Dahara, Gaggara, Andelu, Jhumra etc.

[Jhumra is known in Bengal as Jhumjhumi, which is shaken for

a rhythmic sound. Cymbals are used in 'Kavigan' and Kirtan songs]

- (b) *Avanaddha Vadya*: Membransphonic instruments or Membransphones. *Damara*, *Dakki*, *Dhak*, *Dhol*, *Dhurmsa* etc.
- (c) *Sushir Vadya* : Aerophonic or Aerophones. Flute, bugles etc.
- (d) *Tat Vadya* : Chordophonic or chorodophones. *Ektara*, *Anand lahari*, *Dotara*, *Sarinda* etc. Descriptions of the few instruments are given below :

- (a) *Ek-tara or Gopi Jantra*: It is a single string instrument both rhythmic and tonal in character. It is widely used by the Bauls and folk minstrels of Bengal for vocal accompaniment.
- (b) *Anand Lahari*: It consists of a wooden 'cylindrical Resonator held between a two-piece, fork-shaped flexible bamboo frame with an iron string centrally passed through the underside of the parchment and tied to a tuning peg on the upper end. Tonal variations may be created by this instrument. In Bengal, the Bauls use it for accompaniment to their singing.
- (c) *Dotara*: *Dotara* is derived from 'Dota' means string. 'Ra' means sound. A tonal sound created by four strings of cotton fibres is usually called 'Dotara' by the people of North Bengal. A similar instrument is found in Eastern India which is called 'Saraj'. It is a 'finished elongated wooden body with a finger-board, an ecliptical peg box for 4 tuning pegs with bird motif on the upper top.

Round wooden belly covered with skin. Notched wooden bridge a nut. Four strings of gut tied to an iron bar on the parchment and to an integrated wooden extension on the underside. Strings are pressed against the finger-board (Sa, Re, Ga, Ma etc.) and being played by plectrum, used for accompaniment with folksongs all over North Bengal, Bangladesh and Assam.

Dotara is akin to *Dombra*—a folk musical instrument of Soviet Russia. *Dombra* is found in Georgia and is used by the folk minstrels. Similar type of musical instrument is found in Kabul, Persia, China.

- (d) *Sarinda*: It is made of three strings like *Dotara*.

- (e) *Khamak*: It is also a chordophonic instrument especially used by the Bauls of Bengal for tonal variations.
- (f) *Kendra*: Kendra is a type of chordophonic instrument used by the Santhals. It creates a monotonous tonal sound and is used for accompaniment with songs.

There are many simple folk musical instruments apart from the above mentioned instruments, which are frequently used by the folk minstrels of Bengal during their song demonstrations. An attempt for collection, classification and analysis in this direction, may yield good result at this transitional phase of social change in India.

REFERENCES

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