

Music in Indian Universities

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There are adequate grounds to maintain that music education in Indian universities has now a tradition. The number of universities that have music in their syllabi and the number of years they have taught music lend conclusive support to the above statement. Hence it is time to examine this tradition in depth. What sort of tradition is it? Is its movement purposeful and well-directed? Does it have a clear-cut educational philosophy supporting it? Are its results evaluated and are modifications brought about in the curricula, teaching methods, staff structure and such other matters as a consequence?

Before we try to answer these and similar questions it is instructive to note the background against which music was introduced in the universities. Its introduction was a direct consequence of the work of two great reformers in the field of music in the first quarter of the century—Pandit Vishnu Digambar (1872-1931) and Pandit V. N. Bhatkhande (1860-1936). The former was mainly instrumental in institutionalizing music and giving musicians a place of pride and social status in the daily life of the community. The latter rationalized musicology and made music intelligible to the educated. Pt Vishnu Digambar removed the social stigma attached to the musicians and facilitated the essential occupational transition from medieval to modern conditions, removing music from court patronage to popular patronage. Pt Bhatkhande erased the scholastic stigma attached to the Indian musical system (which for most Westerners and educated Indians was virtually non-existent) by doing away with the element of mysticism introduced in it indiscriminately and unjustifiably by the practicing uneducated musicians. Both Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar were products of the renaissance movement in 19th century Maharashtra. The introduction of music in the universities meant for them and their followers a culmination of the processes initiated as status-endowing. Music was now given a place in the educational structure. It was brought nearer to the educated and vice versa. And, lastly, a permanent channel of employment was created for professional musicians, thus bringing them in line with the respected category of middle-class intelligentsia which included professors, legal practitioners, doctors and journalists. Many problems of music education (including university education) are direct consequences of the Bhatkhande-Vishnu Digambar phase of institutionalization and elevation of music and the profession of music.

It is interesting to note that the protagonists of music education were throughout on the defensive as far as their policy vis-à-vis the university authorities was concerned. Their inclination was to fall in with the other subjects rather than draw attention to and insist on the separate identity of music as an educational subject. Obviously, an outgrowth of the past in which music and musicians were liked but not respected, the entry of music in universities unofficially conferred on it a status of a 'subject under obligation'. It was a subject on trial and music protagonists were prompted to prove themselves by fitting music in all possible aspects in the general pattern. Curriculum, teaching method, work-load distribution, theory-practice dichotomy, degrees and diplomas conferred – all such matters were treated by them as excuses for hasty attempts at total identification.

This had many adverse consequences. It was almost forgotten that music is a performing art and hence in its case the training bias should have been similar to that of branches like medicine or engineering. Emphasis on professional competence should have been the guiding principle. In disregard of this fact, music courses were designed to fit in the pattern of humanities and science courses. They were at best capable of turning out graduates knowing the theory of music and not graduates practicing the art of music. Our B.A.s, B.Com.s and B.Sc.s were never expected to sing or play the instruments proficiently. This was natural because all the time the talk was about the art of music while mostly they were taught the grammar of music. In the humanities and the sciences we were interested in imparting general education but in the case of music we wanted to give professional training, and yet we still pursued the pattern of general education. Unfortunately, things have not changed much and therefore a degree in music has become a dis-qualification if the degree is referred to as a criterion of musical proficiency.

A still unrectified error lies in the lack of diversification of courses. Broadly speaking, the mapping of the musical courses at the university level should fall into five categories: (i) music appreciation courses, (ii) hobby courses, (iii) music proficiency courses, (iv) music theory courses, and (v) music training courses. Each category is obviously expected to fulfill a different set of musical needs. The proportion of practical training varies from category to category in consonance with the needs related to it. The curriculum content for each of the categories should vary considerably. Music appreciation should not include music theory and hobby courses should not be saddled with the theory and history of music or such other subjects. Our music theory is still confined to the grammar of music, i.e. musicology when, in fact, it should include disciplines like musical acoustics, organology, music psychology and other

systematized branches of music-related knowledge. It is high time that we took cognizance of the fact that for any anthropological venture and survey scheme, as well as for all museums and cultural orientation programmes and in application of music, a wider conception of the theory of music is necessary. In the absence of such a conception music cannot play its proper role in cultural and educational studies. Our university curricula show a woeful lack of historical perspective by failing to reflect the changing structure of musical needs. All curricula are period-based and they age with time. To reflect these changes the curriculum has to be flexible and here the old pattern of a three-hour paper for hundred marks, one paper for each subject, and all such concomitant features have to be dropped. These are evaluation techniques that go with the lecture system prevalent in the humanities and the sciences. Music training cannot be burdened with them as it has to proceed on the basis of a modified guru-shishya tradition. The guru-shishya tradition of imparting training is relevant in at least three categories—hobby course, music proficiency course and teacher training—of the five mentioned earlier and hence deserves some attention.

The Guru-Shishya Tradition

The guru-shishya tradition means, along with a favourable teacher-student ratio and the possibility of individual attention, a sense of total responsibility on the part of the guru for the disciples put in his charge. Music education at the university level means institutionalized education, which due to the improper identification of music with other subjects has unfortunately become an impersonal and one-way process. Unlike this impersonal and one-way process, the guru-shishya tradition includes elements of interpersonal communication and supervised practice. It means training followed by regularly reinforced evaluation of the received musical material. In it the disciple's failings and achievements can be clearly traced back to the guru. He gets the credit undivided and this is highly unlike what happens in ordinary class-room teaching where the teaching process is impersonal, one-way and mechanical.

The conventional guru-shishya tradition however has one defect. It depends to an undesirable extent on the temperamental vagaries of the guru and hence consumes more time than it should to bring the disciple to a minimum standard of achieved skills. Being institutionalized, the revival of the guru-shishya tradition in the university environment would ameliorate the situation to a considerable extent. The guru is bound by the time limit as well as the curriculum content. Institutionalization and interpersonal communication would ensure a fruitful and total educational process.

From the structure we must move to the method of teaching. The guru-shishya tradition essentially follows the demonstration-imitation-correction method of teaching, and at least in the earlier stages it does not have any effective substitute. But why not couple it with conscious and judicious use of modern electronic aids like the tape-recorder, record-player or radio? An intelligent use of the record library should be a great help in reducing the burden of the repetitious part of teaching that is borne by the gurus at present. A still more imaginative use of tape-recorder would be to record the student himself and to play it back to him as in language teaching. At present we use the recording apparatus solely for storage purposes and that is only half exploiting this important resource. When played back with graded goal-setting, recordings will enable the student to attain accelerated progress in correspondence with his receptive capacities. Playback of recordings should be converted into regular listening sessions where carefully planned listening will ensure the student's exposure to varied musical influences helpful in giving him a wider perspective on musical styles, forms and traditions.

In fact, the case for using modern aids in music education cannot be overstated. But Indian universities do not seem to have realized this. Tape-recorders and other aids are no longer a secret. That these aids are used in language teaching and similar branches is also known. But still music teaching in the universities continues to be impervious to what is being achieved in other fields of education. It is obviously necessary to keep pace with the general educational thinking if music education is to be fruitful. In this context it is surprising to note that very few universities seem to be interested in envisaging music education in the total context of art education and general education. Due to the mistaken identification of music education with general education already referred to, music education always seems to be re-organized but never reformed. Some ragas are changed or omitted, some topics are introduced for essay-writing and some new books are prescribed! But beyond that no steps are taken to review the principles and methods of music education in the light of relevant branches of research in general education. The plague of compartmentalized thinking rages unabated as far as music education is concerned. While more and more educated people are entering the field of music education, there are no attempts to modernize music education in respect of basic patterns, adoption of modern teaching methods and evaluation procedures.

The rationalization of music education should also take into consideration the fact that the need-based pattern of music education discussed above is also to be linked up at some stage with the employment potential. One cannot maintain that there is no

employment potential to music. There is a slow increase in the number of fields where persons qualified in music are required. Apart from continued employment opportunities in the AIR, TV, Films Division, universities, schools, music schools, museums and organizations like the Anthropological Survey of India, the use of music in medicine, industry and such other fields is also on the increase. Music educationists should take a survey of these and similar fields and map out their requirements. This will enable them to assess correctly the nature and number of needs that a student of music may have to fulfill. Music teaching could then be modified and interdisciplinary approach developed. The consequent alteration in the roles of music and musicians will benefit both musician and society. True, the very idea of making art education job-oriented has always caused some people to raise their eye-brows. But it need not be so. What is advocated here is the propagation of music education with varied biases without diluting its skill-acquisition content.

In addition to this awareness of performance-orientation, it is necessary to note that there is henceforth less likelihood of having any demand for musicians who are entirely without education. A minimum level of general education will be assumed in the years to come and a successful pattern of music education will have to be designed, in which an early completion of general education followed by specialized education, which in turn is followed by professional high-level training, will be contemplated. Here the linking up of university with school education in music comes into the picture.

At this point the problem goes out of the sphere of university education and becomes a problem of overall educational policy. At some stage or another this is inevitable. There is little or no co-ordination between the school curriculum and college-level courses as far as music is concerned. What is lacking is a firm desire to examine the question in its entirety. As argued earlier, the protagonists battled to the position where music was successfully established in the curriculum at various stages of education. Unfortunately, there was no significant change in the later line of action. Music education followed the same pattern even when the education in other subjects was modified or overhauled. Various reasons can be put forward for this lapse, but none would be strong enough to be justifiable. Whatever may be the reason it is high time that steps were taken to rectify the error. With increased cultural awareness it is logical that universities will have to play a greater role in art education. Music educationists must have a well-prepared programme for such an occasion.