

# Maharashtra: Music

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Maharashtra is *madhyarashtra*, a region which enjoys a central location, and has been the confluence of cultural stimuli from both the southern and the northern parts of India. Influences have streamed into Maharashtra from all directions and have been assimilated in the religious and social structures, finding expression in literature, the visual arts and the performing arts. Among these, the tradition of music - tribal and folk, classical and popular - manifests a rich and varied heritage.

## Tribal Music

The term 'tribal music' designates the music of the people who habitually live in the heavily wooded mountainous areas - the Bhils, Mahadev Kolis, Gonds, Warlis, Kokanas, Katkari Thakurs, Gaveets, Kolams, Korkus, Andhs, Malhars and Pardhis.

An important feature of primitive music is that it is closely integrated with movement which has choreographic potentialities. Not surprisingly, most of the musical occasions are described as dances, as for example, the tarapi-nach and the ghor-nach of the Warlis and the ganesh-nach and holi-nach of the Agaris. Again, the musical expressions of these people are marked by a pervasive collectivity, which, in turn, demands a perfect synchronisation of steps, movements as well as vocalisation. The collectivity is therefore causally related to the hypnotic repetitiousness in musical expression. It is essential for such music to employ instruments with an impressive acoustic output. Sharp tones and sonority reign supreme. For this purpose, small flutes, drums and wind-instruments of power are used and idiophonic struck and scraped sounds are selected. The primitive instruments are mostly made of easily accessible material such as bamboo, animal hides, gourds, clay pots, leaves and the like which do not involve extensive financial outlay. Instruments fashioned out of these materials are forked and jingling bamboo sticks, tarpe (a primitive wind-instrument which uses coupled gourds as resonators), dera (a primitive scraped membrane instrument), thaal (a primitive drone with a metal plate and scraping rod), ghungroo (a primitive folk

rhythm instrument) are characteristic and are played with great dexterity. The importance of musical instruments in primitive cultures is indicated by myths and tribal names. For example, the Agaris also known as dhol-Agaris, claim that they were drummer-musicians for Ravana, the demon-king of the Ramayana epic. Primitive musical compositions are permeated with religiosity and an intense rituality. Important events such as child-birth, initiation, marriage or death in individual life-cycles are occasions associated with music. Singing and dancing often signal the coming of the rains or the gathering of the first harvests.

### **Folk Music**

Certain non-musical factors of a culture serve as indicators of the richness of its folk expression. In Maharashtra, apart from the major divinities, there is an abundance of cult and local deities. The extension of the pantheon naturally results in the multiplication of rituals, involving song and dance. Not all of these are connected with the caste system. Among the musical occasions are the thousands of fairs held every year in various parts of the state. Furthermore, there are more than seventy important sacred places in Maharashtra. These have their usual complement of temples and entertainers who play a significant role in the consolidation of folk traditions. It must also be noted that a large segment of folk music consists of women's songs.

Folk music generally means an abundance of songs which are generally widely understood. For various reasons folk-songs assume a character of a 'package' presentation which emphasizes the choric, choreographic or the histrionic impulse in fluctuating proportions. As a consequence folk songs defy all attempts at neat classification. The sixty-odd song-types prevailing in Maharashtra therefore need to be examined in a new light. The musical significance of these song-types is properly understood if they are simultaneously placed on three continua according to the accents they display. These three continua are: sound-effect to song; movement to dance; and routine bearing to dramatisation.

### **Nandivala**

In this form, sound-effects are used as music. The nandivala in Maharashtra is a specialised entertainer-performer who presents his animal-training shows in villages allotted to him. Combining tricks with some soothsaying, the nandivala employs gubgubee (a two-faced scraped membranoplate), ghadhyaal-tipru (the mallet used to strike the gubgubee) and tiny bells as instruments. Rhythmic playing, equally

controlled verbalisation as well as loud thumping and scraping constitute the exploitation of the musical principle. After the show, the nandivala asks for alms.

### **Bahuroopi**

This form consists of a drama-oriented song. The term bahuroopi, taken literally, means "one with many disguises." In actuality, however, a bahuroopi is a professional performer-entertainer who parades in different disguises and, in return for his performance, asks for alms. Bahuroopis, the avowed devotees of the cult-deities Bahiroba, Khandoba, Jakhai and Janai, are widely known for songs representing a humourous invitation to a marriage. Impersonations of women, pregnant females and young mothers find a place in their repertoire. The versification is full of rhymes and assonances, and the recitation has an attractive and quick tempo. No musical instruments are employed.

### **Dhangari Ovyā**

This form consists of a movement-oriented song. This genre is associated with dhangars (goatherds) though, etymologically, the word dan, is derived from the Kannada term meaning cattle. The songs weave a musical web around Biruba, an incarnation of Lord Shiva. The myth associated with it mentions that, once upon a time, numerous flocks of sheep emerged from an ant-hill and began to destroy the standing crops. Lord Shiva was approached for redress and he created the dhangars.

The dhangars gather together in colourful clothes, and the participants dance around the players of a huge dhol and perform vigorous movements known as gajanrittya (a collective dance performed by shepards in the open air). The ovyā songs are usually in the ahirani dialect and narrate Biruba's story, sing his praises and often touch upon secular themes. Broad forceful rhythms, emphatic stanza-endings, powerful voice projections and other features characterise this form of open-air singing. The presence of the prosodic mould of ovi (form used in extempore composing of folk music) is causally connected with the required flexibility in construction.

### **Vasudev-Geet**

This genre seems to be particularly poised to make a transition from a dance-oriented group expression to a melody-oriented solo performance. Vasudev, the performer, is an incarnation of Lord Krishna, as is apparent from the distinctive head-gear of peacock feathers worn and the instrument employed, the murali (a type of flute). With ghungroo (bells) on his ankles and a pair of manjiri in one hand the

performer sings and executes nimble, delicate dance-steps with frequent whirling movements. Vasudevs belong to a class of itinerant devotees who perform for alms in the courtyards of homes in the early mornings.

### **Vaghya-murali Geet**

The songs of this form constitute a sub-variety of gondhal. However, the feminine element qualitatively differs from the parent genre in its clear aesthetic orientation.

Vaghya and murali refer respectively to the male and female devotees of Khandoba (to whom they are dedicated).

The minimal number of performers in such a presentation comprises a vaghya and a murali. The murali is the chief dancer and the surtya vaghya is the individual who provides accompaniment known as jagran. The performance is distinguished by the murali's graceful and nimble dancing, her attractive and neat costume and the pervasive but sophisticated sensuousness of her movements. As far as the instruments are concerned, the jagran consists of limited resources: the tuntune, the khanjiri, the ghungroo and the ghol, the last being a small bell tied to the loose end of the murali's sari and played by her. In its musical use of the nonsense syllables 'haba-haba', or in the repeated atonal phrasing and in the use of definite and traceable raga-frames, the song-type affirms musical ambitions that range far beyond the song-types described as 'folk'.

As indicated earlier, any attempt at the listing of folk music would necessitate a deeper analysis of the categories of game-songs, work-songs, ritual songs, lullabies and other songs related chiefly to women's activities.

At least sixty-odd types can be identified-in reality they signify a fraction of the wealth of folk music in Maharashtra.

### **Devotional Music**

Devotional music has been an important and uninterrupted tradition for more than four hundred years. Its wide hold cuts across social strata and the unique feat of assimilating both folk as well as art-music features attracts special attention. As a cult or a movement, bhakti devotion held sway in India from the fourth century and music became a part of the bhakti practices. All over India the bhakti movement gave

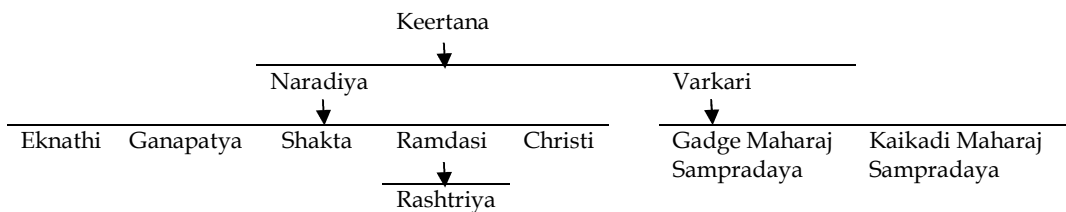
rise to a special category of saints who were devotees, poets, singers as well as gurus. This led to the wide circulation of music and created a category of variegated music. This form has several salient features.

First and foremost it explored the three major modes of vocalisation: chanting, recitation and singing. It also employed the solo as well as the choral manner of presentation. Secondly, it judiciously selected its instrumental resources. Traditionally, the vina ektari has always provided the melodic aspect, while the rhythm was supplied by the mridang, the khanjiri, the manjiri, the taal and the chiplya. The instruments chosen in this form are simple, relatively easy to play (with the exception of the mridang) and involve little maintenance. For rhythm, cycles of four and eight beats are employed in a majority of cases. These cycles do not require special skill or virtuosity.

Devotional music expresses itself through various vocal forms such as the bhajan, the kirtan, the sankirtan or the gayan. These forms have a long history and can be traced to the twelfth century. Certain other forms associated with a performing tradition are known as dhavale, abhang, gaulan, pad, bharud, stotra, arati, karunastak, shloka, ovi, phatka, katav and virani. Even though sections of devotional music compositions may have lapsed over the centuries, a significant number of them still remain in circulation because sects like Varkari, Samarth and Datta prescribe obligatory and daily rituals for their followers. Chanting and reciting form an important aspect of their devotional practices.

The continuous tradition of devotional music has been perpetuated and enriched by the evolution of new religious movements.

The kirtan in Maharashtra has branched into several interesting sub-traditions. It has also provided the basic format for similar expression in the south. Furthermore, it has contributed to Marathi stage music which became popular in Maharashtra from 1843 onwards. Even though it is not possible to discuss all the kirtan continuities in depth, a diagram of its types should provide an idea of its variety.



## Classical or Art Music

Without going into intricate problems of definitions and terminology it is possible to describe classical or 'art music' as music with a codified grammar within a scholastic tradition. Music answering such a description existed in Maharashtra from as long ago as A.D. 200.

The *Gatha Saptashati* - a second century compilation - gives an inkling of the general life-style of those times. A perusal of these couplets reveals spectacular performances by groups of professional dancers. The musical instruments employed were the dundubhi, nagara, mridang and vina as well as the flute. Thus, the robust and the sophisticated as well as the rhythmic and the melodic aspects of music were evident. The compilation also mentions a husband who provided musical accompaniment to his wife's recital. In other words, both the elite and the non-elite musical expressions were already established during this period.

Pictorial and other evidence from the centuries that followed reveal that music was employed on various occasions such as processions, coronation ceremonies, religious festivities and the announcement of gifts. Early in the thirteenth century, ragas such as kalyan, ramkali and forms such as choupadi appear to be well-established, judging from the fact that Sant Namdeo's compositions included in *Granth Saheb* - the Sikh sacred text - were set to tune in ragas. Obviously, Maharashtra had opted for a musical system that was later to become the Hindustani system of art music. That by the sixteenth century the northern system was clearly the prevailing mode, is apparent from the devotional compositions of Dasopant (1551-1615), which were set to ragas such as hussaini and kafi. Moreover, he described other ragas such as maru and gaud as dakshinshala, indicating thereby that they were prevalent in the southern regions. Interestingly, like Maharashtra, the adjoining kingdom of Bijapur appears to have been favourably inclined towards northern music.

For example, Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1580-1626) in his book, *Kitab-e-Nauras*, employs terminology including names of ragas which clearly suggest Persian influence. Furthermore, the compositions are written in Braj, as are most compositions of Hindustani music. In all likelihood, Ibrahim Adil Shah is the originator of the raga-ragini miniatures associated with the Hindustani tradition of music. The possibility that artists from the defeated Hindu dynasty of Vijayanagar must have turned for patronage to the Adil Shah court, therefore the absence of a Carnatic style in it, assumes special significance.

During the reign of Shivaji, established trends continued. After his death in 1680, for almost fifty years, art and music suffered from indifferent patronage until the Peshwas - the Prime Ministers of the descendants of Shivaji and the other Maratha chieftains found sufficient means and inclination to offer support to music. For example, Raghobha (1734-1783), who was the Peshwa for a short period, records the expenses incurred while arranging a concert of a musician of Tansen lineage. Raghobha's son, Bajirao II, retained the services of Chintamani Mishra - a Dhrupad singer. Thus, by 1819, when the British Union Jack was hoisted over the Shaniwarwada, Maharashtra had developed a firm and a wide-ranging tradition in art music which included such forms as the dhrupad-dhamar, khayal, tappa and instruments such as the sarangi, sitar and pakhawaj. In addition, during this period, the form of baithakichi lavani - akin to thumri of Hindustani music - arose and received definition.

During the British rule, music flourished in Maharashtra and received impetus from various forces. At this time the educated Marathi elite began to associate itself with the arts and to offer sustained patronage to performing artists. Balkrishnabuwa Ichalkarajikar was among those to receive such encouragement. During his career, he edited a music magazine in Bombay, aided by Ramkrishna Bhandarkar and other luminaries, and contributed substantially to the creation of a platform for the khayal style of Hindustani music in Maharashtra. With organised promotional efforts, the audience and appreciation of music expanded significantly. The institutionalisation of the art was another important factor in its growth. Vishnu Digambar Paluskar opened a music school in Lahore in 1901 and Ustad Abdul Karim initiated a similar institute in Bombay a few years later. Western music had been promoted by the Parsi community since the late nineteenth century.

Vishnu Digambar, who had been exposed to staff notation, evolved an Indian notation system by 1900. Bhatkhande contributed to several major branches of theoretical study: history, criticism and grammar. His signal contribution involved the written 'translation' and codification of the oral tradition. After extensive research, he formulated the grammar of Hindustani music and, in 1909, the first volume of *Sangeet Paddhati* was published.

In addition were interesting and instructive manuals on sitar, mridang and harmonium (the latter variety, proliferated as stage-music, became more and more popular). Ms. Clement-Deval and G. B. Achrekar, Krishnarao Mule and others too contributed to the grammatico-historical discussions of music. In 1912, the establishment of the Western India Philharmonic Society served the purpose of

introducing Indian music to the western world. Some Indian musician also learnt western music from European masters.

The most vital and energetic musical form that developed in Maharashtra during the mid-nineteenth century was Marathi Stage Music. A unique blend of art and non-art music it drew its power from its accommodative and assimilative capacities. It prospered into a major musical stream due to the varied contributions of actor-singers such as Bhaurao Kolhatkar, Balgandharva, Keshavrao Bhonsale, Master Dinanath and others. The form enjoyed uninterrupted growth till the advent of the talkie in 1931.

Band-music achieved recognition in many of the princely states. Similarly, orchestra music also became popular. Pandit Vishnu Digambar, Ustad Abdul Karim Khan and others, used the orchestral items in the jalsas they organised. Also, by 1930, the major gharanas (term used to specify musicians and musical styles) of Hindustani khayal-singing enjoyed stability.

### **New Musical Instruments**

To the traditional instruments such as the pakhawaj and the tabla were added the violin and the pedal-harmonium. Later, the Indians introduced the bellow-harmonium. Harmoniums of both types were extremely popular in Maharashtra. Western instruments such as the banjo and the piano were employed frequently in orchestra and film music. Several other factors affected all categories of music, though in varying degrees. Among these were the easy availability of gramophones in India from 1928 onwards and the recordings of songs from stage and cinema. At the same time, radio-broadcasting was introduced in India and that played its own part in ushering new styles and trends in music. But an even more important function was performed by the press. Newspapers in English and Marathi, in the nineteenth century, influenced the opinion of the educated and cultured elite - the new patrons of the arts - through their reports and criticisms.

### **Popular Music**

The existence of popular music can be traced back to the seventeenth century. There is reason to believe that powada, an important song type in this genre, received impetus during Raja Shivaji's times. Marked by a forceful, rhythmic, outdoor manifestation, the powada consisted of singing praises of heroes and descriptions of valourous deeds. This also included praises of the activities of leaders of society. With



changing times there was a considerable expansion in their thematic content and the compositions included subjects such as famine and the holi-festivals of the Peshwas, to the depiction of the Goa Liberation Movement (1955) or the Samyukta Maharashtra Movement (1956-62). The stentorian voice of the singer-composer was accompanied by musical instruments such as the tuntune (a rhythm-cum-drone instrument with one string) and halgi (a membrano-phonic struck and scraped instrument).

Around 1860 a new form of folk-drama known as the vag (consisting of narrative, lavani-singing, dance and effective but unsophisticated acting) came into vogue. Uma and Babu Savlajkar are credited with the first successful performances of the genre.

Maharashtra shot into a glamorous age with the advent of the talkie cinema as first Pune, and later Bombay, became the seat of the Indian film industry. From the 71 compositions of the film, *Indrasabha* (1931), to the 'no song' film, *Naujawan* (1931), Indian cinema displayed various facets of its relationship with music. However, by and large, myth and music have been the staple food of Indian cinematic experimentation. The play-back singing brought about a qualitative change in music through the entry of the talented singer Lata Mangeshkar and other play-back singers.

From 1931 onwards, Maharashtra witnessed the emergence of another form of popular music - that of bhavgeet. To sing a poem in tune and not merely to recite it is the essence of the bhavgeet gayan. Shri G. N. Joshi, J. L. Ranade, Gajanan Watve, Sudhir Phadke are some of the artists who performed creditably during various phases of the development of this form.

It is also important to note the emergence and gradual decay of the mela-songs in Maharashtra. They owed their origin to the Ganesh Ustav and Shivaji-Jayanti celebrations made popular by Lokmanya Tilak in the 1890s as one of the ways of bringing people together and involving them in the freedom struggle against the British. The songs formed a part of variety-entertainment programmes that included collective dance, singing and drill - which contributed to the festivities.

The musical scene in Maharashtra today is a rich fusion of forces - all of which mutually influenced each other. Never before have the non-musical areas of culture come so close to music and yet been so separated from it! The paradoxical processes of cultural fragmentation and artistic integration are simultaneously in progress, necessitating an alert response to challenge ahead.