

Gandharvas and Musical Change

- Attempt at Cultural Perspectives -

Ashok Da Ranade

(Published in World of Gandharvas, Edi. Balwant Joshi, A.B.G.M.V. Mandal, Miraj, 1993 Jan 09)

The last century has seen Socio-economic and cultural changes as never before. Do these changes affect art music? If they do, what are the clues to detect them? During this period we had four Gandharvas! Of course grouping these musicians, because of a common suffix is not justifiable musicologically. Gandharva is an honorific suggesting excellence. The fact of selecting particular musicians for the honour may reflect indirectly on the Maharashtrian way of thinking as it brings out a cultural preference. Cultural preferences form the core of questions considered by cultural musicology or ethnomusicology. To tackle many musical problems one needs the total perspective of cultures which produces music-s concerned. Music tends to reflect culture and it is possible to suggest that if one country has a certain kind of culture it will have a certain type of music. It is also possible to say that to have a particular kind of music is to have a culture of a certain type. This mutual relationship should help us to explore the effects if any on music of changes taking place around us.

We are considering four musicians who represent 'art music' and are trying to see if their music was affected by changes. But whenever one talks on Music one should refer to five categories of music namely 1. Primitive Music, 2. Folk Music, 3. Devotional Music, 4. Art Music, 5. Popular Music.

Art music forms only a part and that too, a very small part of the total music of this country. Another important aspect is that none of these categories are producer-oriented. One does not say that music 'x' is primitive because it is produced by people who are described by anthropologists as primitive. Urbanites can as well produce primitive music. Primitive music is a particular type of Music leading to a particular kind of musical experience which is an integral part of every human mind. The urbanised people may need primitive music and they may tend to produce it. When we consider art music we are considering only one part of our musical personality. You cannot expect art music to reflect everything that happens in life. Every category of music has a separate, independent, legitimate, justifiable function and reflecting mundane matters may not be one of them! One cannot for example, expect art music to represent world war. Folk music may! Folk music often reflects immediate changes like

war, or any other calamity affecting society. Popular music would do that still better! But khyal, for instance, is not expected to do that.

Art music tries to move away from day to day life. That is the function and justification it has. Popular music tries to keep pace with the timers. That forms its legitimate and special function.

Does that mean that art music and musicians have no connection with our day to day life? Was the Gandharva quartet unaffected by cultural changes taking place around them? If the whole culture feels very deeply about certain matters then the immediate concern is first made 'abstract'. This is why a loss felt by an individual becomes a viraha or viyoga in art music and it is experienced by others who have suffered losses of different kinds. In this way singing with a feeling of loss evokes a feeling of loss in others as they are able to relate the evocative music to their own experience. Attempt at abstracting feelings is the function of art music.

Art Music works to move away from concrete instances of sadness, pleasure, happiness, delight and take it to abstract level and that is how and why is more lasting. The Gandharvas could be studied as instances of abstracting life for music.

Let us take for example the tempo in which Ustad Rahimat Khan Saheb used to sing and the tempo in which other musicians sang. The earlier tradition of Gwalior singing is properly presented by Ustad Rahimat Khan Saheb's use of madhya laya. This madhya laya answers certain musical needs. Ustad Rahimat Khan Saheb ravelled in this laya because he could not stick to one idea but wanted to fly from one idea to another. He was a man of great imagination, obviously quick of voice and also endowed with a temperament suited to the tempo in which he was singing. But Amir Khan, for example, of indore gharana who chose a slow tempo. His musical ideas were different from those of Ustad Rahimat Khan Saheb. This slow tempo reflects something other than music too. Does it mean the fast pace of life has affected the tempo in Amir Khan's singing? He operates inversely i.e. faster the life, slower the tempo. Musical ideas in Amir Khan's music will not be elaborated in madhya laya the way Ustad Rahimat Khan Saheb did. One observes there has been a general slowing down of tempo even among the Gwalior musicians. If one listens to records of musicians and compare them with Ustad Rahimat Khan Saheb's one observes this change. Musical ideas, when they became important, compel the artist to organise his temporal space. This change is casually related to feelings. When experiences become too fleeting they are not registered. One likes continuity of experience and one tends to hold to the experiences. (Recorded music now helps you in holding them.)

Apart from the temporal aspect patronage has changed and that too affects music. An artist is keen to know who are his listeners and how to did they choose to listen to him. Kings or rich people formed one kind of patronage. This was not sufficient-though it provided shelter and partially helped monetarily musicians want their music to reach larger audiences. If you delve into history you will see all types of methods were pursued. How can you justify Abdul Karim Khan taking to perform a dog-trick, however music-related it may be, in a concert in a public place, to have Suresh Babu at the age of seven to do notations? How do you justify Pandit Vishnu Digamber having pyramids and drills in the first half of the programme to be followed by the art music? How would you account Ustad Alladiya Khan and Ustad Rahimat Khan Saheb singing from the same platform in a cinema house in Kolhapur in 1920! These were stunts. This is not what music is meant for. They all knew this but since patronage was shifting they had to locate their own patrons. The effort was to find new audiences and this was not easy!

Then followed the era of social clubs and music circles - where you form audiences of likeminded people who come together to listen to an artist of their choice. Pandit Vishnu Digamber also tried to get audiences by sale of tickets in 1898 or 99. The first concert of this type was held in Rajkot. This was a different type of audience. The audiences were aware they have paid for their entertainment and naturally failure in that concert meant right of resentment of the audience. This is a commodity exchange and not an act of patronage. This type of 'patronage' affected performances. The audience oriented the music, artists started moulding the form of music, the ragas which they presented and the time frames of presentation. This was music for the 'indiscriminate' audiences.

Music circles provided more discriminate audiences. They were useful since they allowed freedom to the artist to prove his talent.

Another kind of patronage became available through the mass media broadcasting that came about in the 1930s, or films. For example Wadia Brothers used to present films of musicians of about eight minutes duration before the actual film. Kumar, Tirakhwa Saheb have appeared in these films.

All India Radio posed the problem of time limitation. Artists could not reconcile to the ides of 1/2 hour to 1 hour for their music-making. The same artists could however cut a record of 3-1/2 minutes with no apparent resentment! Obviously the extended musical statements (baithaks) were full of repetition and musicians could, when they wanted, edit music suiting the performance whether on AIR or on

gramophone records! In a way mass media forced them to compose their music. They divided the given time in right proportions to render khayal, chota khayal and tarana etc. They also learnt about the use of increased tempo and restricted use of saragam in given time. All this meant they 'composed'. One knows that to say "our music is free, our music is all improvised" is an overstatement! If I compose mentally before the performance it is hardly an improvisation! At the same time it is a tribute to our singers. Those who were not disciplined could adjust and give the most satisfying music on 78 RPM records. That music is good, it is edited no doubt, but full of substance.

These changes effected our music indirectly. It made you aware of the time-frame and the use of faster/slower tempi in music.

Since then repeated and massive exposure to music has changed the type and quality of Patronage. Though our audiences cannot be considered knowledgeable they are no more ignorant! One cannot fool this audience. These audiences now are able to know the artist's repertoire, and the depth of his knowledge. The old days of taking shelter by saying 'Hamare gharane me aisa hi gaya jata hai', are now no more! This awareness in the listener has introduced an element of competition in various types of gharanas and their presentation. Old artists used to talk so much of oral tradition. They claimed they never wrote down music. After Bhatkhande's books were published (1910) every gharanas started printing books of their music compositions. Every artist had his own note books, everything was noted down because that is the way it has been done all along.

Yet another factor affected by the changes around is the Guru-shishya tradition we swear by! Guru and shishya relationship has changed. The age of Guru has nearly passed, now is the age of teachers. The word teacher is not used with any feeling of derogation, however, mean that teachers are different than Gurus. Gurus were supposed to take care of shishya's total musical personality. Teachers are not supposed to do it. Teachers are supposed to impart certain skills and there it ends, whether this is good or bad, desirable or not is different but this has taken place. I remember I asked Pt. Mallikarjun Mansur how he differentiates between a shishya and his own son while teaching music. He said 'disciples sing what I tell them to sing and the son sings with me'. This was the old method. I am reminded of my Guru who never taught me alap by alap. He used to sing and whenever I could, I used to start singing with him. If I went wrong he used to interrupt me, he used to be quiet when I was on right track and allow me to complete the avartana. It took five years for me to sing with him. The other method keeps you stuck to the alap gradualism and one remains where he is even, after 15 years! This first method allows development of a fuller musical personality of the

disciple. This has now been replaced. The four Gandharvas were products of the Guru-shishya parampara.

Institutionalism in Music :

As the patronage shifted from the Kings and the rich to a common man, there arose a necessity of making music available to everybody. This is how Institutions came to life. Since it is being made available to many musicians needed to be served in digestible doses! In the earlier days Guru would teach his shishya by looking at his adhikara i.e. the ability to receive. Institutional model totally neglects this fact because ability is proved if money is paid! This is how institutionalised training became impersonal. No performing art can prosper in this way!

If you compare it with teaching in other subjects like social sciences or literature, you will see the difference. One who does M.A. in Marathi is not expected to write a novel. But M.A. in Music is expected to sing in a mehfil!

I think diversification of musical courses was never tried properly. Music was put on par with other subjects and the curricula were prepared accordingly. The degrees and diplomas and certificates did elevate the social standing of the musician but this affected and reflected on music. This is yet another way how social conditions can affect music.

Institutionalised training needs books which need to go with performing traditions. This was the clue which was lost and people thought books alone were adequate. Institutionalised music education fulfilled certain needs more social than musical.

Perhaps a comment is necessary on the nature of music-making occasions.

Performing situations are of three types - one when one practices Music, second, when he teaches and third when he performs in public. When artists perform in public for the public, it is called baithak or mehfil. It has taken various shapes like concerts, parishads etc. The nature of mehfil has changed because of the shift in patronage. They now get the satisfaction of performing in front of greater number of knowledgeable and interested people. As already indicated, the art circles provided audience of connoisseurs and interested people. Many public concerts today provide indiscriminate audiences. The artist therefore to decide on the 'menu' and hence the dependence on successful music. Music which has succeeded on earlier occasions, or

music which has been recorded and proved Successful - will be repeated! This is expected to ensure them against failure! A real problem for 'creative music'! Experimentation is avoided by the artist because of this fear. The solution lies in having occasions for all kinds of audiences. The organisers have a significant part to play here.

Advent of the new devices of recording and playing music have created certain situations for artists which organisers should realise and understand. It is the duty of organisers to invent opportunities conducive to creative music. Financing of cultural events needs to be done differently. The words patronage and sponsorship require redefinition. They do not mean same thing. Sponsorship is concerned with immediate returns in the form of advertisement or publicity. The word patronage does not carry this sense. It is a sort of deferred payment for a cause and this act of giving is not attached to any wish of immediate gains, Perhaps with a hope of getting poonya after death! Patronage is an act of exchange of influences. What the patron gets out of this exchange is intangible but he rates it very high. The musician also rates the act very high since there is no obligation to a person on any side. Hence the words like ashrayadata should be avoided. For exchange of money between persons we have many terms. For example dakshina, dan, najar, mehanatana. Why all these terms, if the act is merely a transfer of money? The total attitude of the giver and the receiver needs to be understood, redefined.

I can offer stray comments on the quartet as case-studies.

The Gandharvas: Ustad Rahimat Khan Saheb (Bhoo Gandharva):

The best quality observed in his music was the unformed quality it had. He was not out to impress you because he was not aware of your presence. He was singing because he felt like singing at that time and he stopped singing when he felt he should. He never bothered whether his music is a finished product. He never bothered when he committed mistakes, or grammatical mistakes. He never bothered whether his singing was beautiful. It was natural music. Whatever may be the reason, his habits or his being under the influence of afeem, his outlook towards music was, "it comes and it is expressed, and people would have to take it or leave it". Technically speaking those 7 records which we have of him shows how a musician, well versed and permeated with music, reacts instinctively to what he himself does. I do remember in one or two places in his records he repeats himself because he wants to have a particular tihayee which has not come correctly. He goes on repeating it. Now nobody would venture to do that today because you are aware that might be exposing yourself! People try to gloss over

things, they do not try to correct themselves in public! Second quality which attracts is the fluidity, the music does not stop, the music continues and there is a flow in his imagination and in his execution also. He had a wonderful voice.

I consider it a sort of principle in music that tonal shadows are more important than tones. He was interested in these tonal shadows. Manifestation of this principle would be possible with lot of meend because a meend does not stop, it leaves a lot of shadows behind. Another principle is that of gurusana i.e. one tries to resonate the sound and you are in it all the time. The same quality I have felt in Bal Gandharva, in Pandit Mallikarjun Mansur and in Ustad Abdul Kareem Khan Saheb.

Bal Gandharva showed the same quality of naturalness. The way he starts and the way he stops, the way he continues is very natural. He is not bothered about creating a form. He was singing a different kind of music which has its own conventions. Those who came after him became prisoners of his conventions!

Bal Gandharva's greatness was in his freedom. He never copied anybody. He started deviating from others. This is a creative principle involved. What Bhaskarbhau Bakhale taught him was not the same as he taught Master Krishnarao. Bageshree raga was taught to Master Krishnarao but Bageshree as a mood was taught to Bal Gandharva. This was the difference. So whether Bageshree or Soor Malhar or Mand or Desi they all appear so differently when sung by Bal Gandharva. He starts with a raga but does not stick to it because he is not interested in singing raga music at all. That is why I have called him 'shreshtha natagayaka'. He is not a gawayee. His aptitude, training and his musical intentions were of a natagayaka. His music was impregnated with dramatics and that is why it was entirely different music.

Kumar Gandharva:

I have written extensively on Kumar. Most of his major experiments I have reviewed. His programmes were not just programmes, they were formulations of musical ideas and ideas must be tested, they must be talked about. He was one of the musicians who was exciting because his music was not only for ears but through his music he spoke of a tradition and his was a voice of tradition. It appealed to people at various levels and he created controversies because no tradition can satisfy everybody. That is not to be expected of a tradition. Tradition tries to be comprehensive and this is not very appealing! Tradition makes it difficult to be original because better minds than you must have come across the same problems 200 years back and they must have

addressed themselves to them and they must have found solutions! To know about that solution and then to reject it and then again to come out with new one will require a tremendous person. That is exactly why person like Kumar becomes very important. He could digest a lot of what tradition had to give and move away from it. A person who knows the tradition can only move away from it. Deviation means that you have to have a reference point and this reference point means to know the tradition. He had a wonderful Guru like Devdhar Saheb who knew the tradition and went assimilating nuances of traditions, and went on telling him why's and if's, not in a bookish or scholastic way but in the performing mode. Kumar was a thinker and he had read a lot of music. He had formulated his opinions and all the while went on asking like a performer and trying to find solutions to them.

Kumar was very meticulous about the text of his songs and that made him a better composer. In his literary compositions you see a deliberate attempt of giving a new content to the compositions.

A good musician in Western countries with the concept of programme music will try to respond to everything around him - a beautiful sunset, and he composes to his experience. This sort of experimentation is lacking in Indian music. We have our Radha-Krishna theme, or seasons of the year etc. which are often repeated. Kumar Gandharva was aware of this and he was trying different things all the time. That is why in spite of his contradictory statements, in spite of his weak position on many issues (about voice, or Muslim influence on Indian music, his views about validity of Western appreciations of Indian music), he showed awareness of certain problems.

Sawai Gandharva :

I have only heard his records. Two things have struck me. In the earlier stages he seems to be singing exactly like Bal Gandharva's. His natyasangeet was like Bal Gandharva's and from some of his 78 RPM of art music I felt he was moving away from Kirana. He had a lot of intellectual content in his music and that is why he was a different musician. This was corroborated by my Guru Gajananrao Joshi. He always used to tell me that some musicians like Sawai Gandharva are important because they are adding their own. Sawai Gandharva used his imagination in not repeating the usual formulations of Kirana gharana.