

Bombay, Mumbai & Music

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Introduction

Of course, all of us know that Bombay and Mumbai are two names of the same city! Some suggest that the two names indicate a character-change of a rather paradoxical nature. The name Mumbai, was perhaps meant to resonate with two basic and seemingly contrary cultural drives, namely, nostalgia and Utopia. Motives such as revival of the early past, partial denial of the historical past, emphasis on the recent assertive past in search of 'original' identity etc. apparently resulted in the nostalgic drive. On the other hand, an equally intense inner need felt to voice a new identity, and that hoped for a new beginning demanded a return to the older name! It is generally marked, that a craving for new identity often begins with a hunt for new or 'not-so-much-in-use' names - may be because this is the easiest thing to do!

The identity change I am talking of (out of compulsion) relates to a narrower sphere - that of music. But music-changes have - as ethnomusicologists would love to put it - three kinds of socio-cultural capacities: symptomatic, diagnostic and prognostic. This is the reason why decision-makers and policy-makers would in-fact do well to use their ears more purposefully! However, this may be a theme for another occasion, different platform and a 'technical' exchange!

Towards the Visual and Visualization

I am saying that the character-change Mumbai city underwent during 60s and 70s, saw culmination of a tendency to whole-heartedly and near-completely prefer visualization and the visual over other sense-modalities. Whether it was information, knowledge or insight - the visual mode became the primary mode relied upon. Coleridge, in the preceding century has pithily complained about 'his' contemporary culture. He said, "We are suffering from the tyranny of the eye!" The observation surely turns out to be truer in our case. Today even music - the most auditory - temporal of the arts is forced to express itself in terms of the visual-spatial language.

Obviously, this is different from what happened when cinema had begun to occupy our imagination during the 1930s. The cinematic image was larger than life, it was projected on a distanced screen and it was also received in or along with a heterogeneous group. To an extent, the cinematic image registered a less radical shift in our perception and reception because it continued the earlier, prevailing and essentially composite experience of music in theatre. We know that music-drama in almost every part of India maintained a qualitative link with the Indian cinema.

As somebody has pointed out, in order to understand cultural changes, one has to go to their history, because no change of this kind can take place suddenly! The changes in sensibility that I am talking of, were obviously taking place over a period of time, and they became noticeable through events in many different, though related areas of life. I submit that a rough, chronological placement of certain events would make the argument clearer. This technique was once described by Aldous Huxley as casting a secular horoscope! In fact, I may claim that I am using two methods here: Secular Horoscope and Polybius's procedure of Alternate Chapters.

During the decades of 1960-80, the following musicians in the category of art music passed away: Pt. Omkarnath Thakur, Ustad Bade Gulam Ali Khan, Ustad Allauddin Khan, Ustad Hafiz Ali, Smt. Anjanibai Malpekar, Ustad Amir Khan, Begum Akhtar, Ustad Ahmed Jan Thirakwa, Smt. Kesarbai Kerkar and Smt. Siddheshwari Bai. The point is that none of these music-makers resorted to visual means to convey their musical intent or content!

Turning to a wider musical scene, note the following interesting facts:

Despite claims and counterclaims about who was the first in introducing the epoch-making mode of music-making and propagation, playback singing was firmly entrenched after 1947 and by 1950. In fact, by 1949, songs began to be recorded and released before the film was premiered. It cannot be forgotten, that by 1948, fine groove records, i.e., 45 and 33 r.p.m. had become available and by 1950, stereophonic recording and magnetic tapes came on the audio scene.

In 1951, the Cabaret-type use of bongo, oboe, clarinet, trumpet and saxophone by C. Ramchandra in *Albela (shola jo bhadke)* hit the ears. This was in continuation of his nonchalant strategy to adopt whatever light Western music that could easily attract, and convey pleasantness – simply and surely!

The year 1952 brought a confirmed beginning of Industry phase of Indian Cinema. Playback singing became a regular feature, non-insistence on 'singing actors'

inevitably followed, financier's increasing role affected many decisions of film-making, employment of large orchestras became a commercial imperative and arrangers entered as a music-making force. These are some of the features that distinguished Industry phase from the earlier stage known as Studio phase.

Coming to Broadcasting in 1957, All India Radio began its Vividh Bharati service. This service broadcast film-songs which were approved by a screening committee. As is known, the Ministry had to go back on its policy of banning film music from its stations as Goa and Ceylon proved the enormous attraction Indian listeners felt for this variety of popular music.

It is interesting to note, that by 1957 there were 29 main stations of the All India Radio, and by 1975 there were 71!

In 1960, 64 and 73, the percentage of different kinds of music broadcast from AIR was as follows:

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|------|----------------|-----------|----------|
| 1960 | Art Music: 24% | Light:18% | Film: 3% |
| 1964 | Art Music: 19% | Light:18% | Film: 4% |
| 1973 | Art Music: 16% | Light:18% | Film: 6% |

In 1959, experimental television was launched in Delhi.

While considering film songs, it is necessary to consider at least three factors: 1) kind of music composed 2) kind of vocalization encouraged and 3) kind of visualization that accompanied it.

In 1960, *Mughal-e-Azam* made a mark on all fronts, while *Kanoon* scored without a song! Once again Pt. Ravi Shankar composed music for a sensitive movie – *Anuradha*. Many liked it, but it did not arouse general excitement! On the other hand, *Barasat Ki Raat* and *Chaudavi Ka Chand* are still musically remembered by all and sundry! *Barsat Ki Raat* could be mentioned for popularizing Qawali in films. *Kohinoor* also struck abundant escapist gold.

1961: A Bengali film *Ingit* did not have a single spoken word! *Kabuliwala* registered an artistic, minority triumph. As if to remind us of the Indian larger reality, *Junglee* and Shammi Kapoor vaulted to trend-setting status.

1969: *Aradhana* and Kishore Kumar cleared the ground for a specific kind of music-making brushing aside many other modes!

Bhuvan Shome directed by Mrinal Sen with music by Vijay Raghav Rao marked the beginning of new Hindi Cinema. Many names such as Art-Film, Realistic Cinema, New Cinema and such other terms were slowly replaced by the term Parallel Cinema - a term reportedly coined by Arvind Kumar, editor of the Madhuri magazine devoted to films.

By this year, around 200 Film societies were functioning in the country. How many discussed film music? This should be a factor in deliberating on the cinematic sensibility in India.

In 1972 Television came to Mumbai. Now note what was happening in other cultures which were also enjoying the visual boom, but still chose to be more generous to the auditory mode.

The year 1973 witnessed the staging of the longest opera in history. The work had 7 acts, it took 13 hours and 25 minutes of performing time. It was staged in Brooklyn Academy of Music on the 14th and 15th of December and the name of the work was *Life and Times of Joseph Stalin*.

The year also meant end of two illustrious careers. Annunzio Pavlo Mantovani was described as a maestro of homogenized sound. He was the first American musician whose album sold one million copies. He used to say, "Twenty five percent like classical, 25% like modern. I am for the middle 50%."

John Culsnow, manager of the Decca during 1950s and 60s, was a pioneer in recording as an art form. He recorded complete version of Wagner's *Ring*. He was a pioneer, who used echo chambers and slowing and speeding of tapes etc. to produce music with a special character.

It is clear, that march of the audio was registering important and culturally significant gains in many places - leading to qualitative richness of experience.

Coming back to the Indian scene, *Bobby* 'happened' in 1973 with Rishi Kapoor and Dimple! The song *Chabi kho jaye* flew all over. It was, in a way, confirmation of the idiom for romantic-musicals that Raj Kapoor had perfected over the years - right from his *Awara* days. The physicality of Sangam that Raj Kapoor stressed, was softened with accent on 'really' young "lovers".

Indicative of the dominant form of the coming years, Salim-Javed scripted *Zanjeer* that replaces music with violence. The film also pointed to the 'angry-young-man' image of Amitabh on its march! In many films in the coming decade, rape scenes also became frequent and more detailed. It cannot be a coincidence that song-writer Gulzar also came up with his *Achanak* – a song-less film!

In the year 1977 a well-received film *Swami* entertained but also distorted Bade Ghulam Ali Khan's famous 'thumri' in the film. Once again, this pointed to a now-accepted strategy of musical dilution! Not that this has happened for the first time! The category of Popular music and within the category, Hindi film music believed in intra-categorical transfer of music in form as well as content.

It is interesting that the year 1981 saw *Umrao Jan* (music by Khayyam) with its reassuring musical music and also *Kalyug* with its firm non-reliance on music for cinematic success!

Perhaps it is not realized, but the advent of the video in 1982 has proved to be an event of far-reaching consequences. The video has affected cinematic vision of directors as well as viewers! Action, violence, and romance - everything came at close quarters and visual images and not the total message became more overpowering!

Return of the Composite

With the video, we seem to have reached another turning point in our cultural evolution, affecting every area of life. In nutshell, it signals a return to the composite sensibility. Preference is clearly for that which consists of multiple and simultaneous sensory satisfaction. But let us remember, that the multisensory aspect is only one aspect of the composite.

The concept of compositeness, in reality, operates on two levels, on the level of senses, and secondly, on the level of functioning channels of communication. Thus, approval of acts and expression conceived to engage the maximum number of senses constitute one conquest of the conquest. The second aspect points to the ancient foursome of Bharata enunciated in his *Natyashastra*. The reference is obviously to the four kinds of abhinaya: the Kayik, Vachik, Aharya and Sattvik. The composite abhinaya is thereby expected to be pressed into service - whatever might be the main, intended or selected channel of expression by the initiator of activity. Let us realize, that it is incorrect and untenable to translate the term abhinaya as acting – because the former is a much wide concept than the latter. Abhinaya is Communication – taking, reaching,

conveying something from one to the other. On this background, it is easy to appreciate, that from music-videos to mobiles – we are witnessing the hold of the composite engaged communication.

Delegated Music-making

Finally, the increasing tendency to observe or delegate music-making is alarming. In any performing segment of behavior, participation is the only way of reaping benefits accruing from performance. Irrespective of the category of music involved, it is the direct involvement in music-making which helps. You cannot play a record of an arti, or lullaby or even a love-song for that matter, if music is to be of help to the core of your personality. Music is great because music is not just music. It is a Sanskara.

Music as Sanskara

These turns in musical behavior of our society are thought-provoking, because music is a 'sankaraka' (संस्कारक) force in Indian environment. All communicative channels are able to convey information, knowledge or insight, depending on the depth of the effort involved. But in addition, music can act as a 'sankaraka sanstha' (संस्कारक संस्था) i.e. as a social institution capable of carrying out the task of influencing without the influenced party becoming aware of it. 'Sanskara' (संस्कार) is a process which is not necessarily religious. It is a ritualistic act that enables us to reach those levels of human and animal mind - otherwise inaccessible to us. Sanskara generate behavioral and thinking-feeling moulds that affect possible future actions, the potential of which cannot be easily predicted. In this context, it is instructive to remember that human beings cannot shut their ears – hence the unimaginable power of sound! Even in case of persons unable to receive other sensory stimuli, sound is able to directly reach the receiving centers in the brain. In addition, we also are subjected to unheard sound which however exists as stimuli.

It is on this background, that we can, and should plan for the future. The Mumbai soundscape must be planned thoughtfully, comprehensively and urgently.

A Look into the Future

Mumbai is where things are thought about and acted upon – that being the prerogative of any city as a culture-shaping force. To make possible the qualitative enhancement of music as an expression, to ensure the role of a musician as a responsible 'sanskaraka' (संस्कारक), it is possible and of course desirable to take some steps.

1. In brief, the action needs to be taken in three fundamental spheres of education, propagation and distribution of music.
2. Creating curricular interest in music at various levels is admittedly debatable – at least the way it is usually sought to be done! However, if education is understood as a methodical exposure to beneficial and life-shaping influences, then even curricular ameliorative action is possible, at different levels and in various ways.
3. Environments respectively describable as family, school and public are all to be explored to achieve this goal of wider education.
4. The main aims of musical activities carried out in these locations are: sensitization of children to sound, creation of awareness of musical categories among boys and girls in the 'growing-up' group and, finally informal and or formal instruction to aspirants to actual, active musicianship.
5. We need to create spaces for informal music-making. These spaces were created and exploited in earlier lifestyle mainly through religious practices and secular components in festivals etc.
6. It needs to be specifically mentioned, that Indian music is not to be equated with what is generally known as Indian classical music. Primitive, folk, religious, art, popular and confluence form the categorial sextet of Indian music for every serious and substantial cultural undertaking related to music.
7. Mumbai has a key role to play in the venture because this city has room for all music categories. It is poised to attract all kinds of new ideas and it possesses the rare capacity to assess every cultural move in multiple filters provided by varied expertise and enterprising minds, interested in ideas with a capital 'I'!