

# Music and Bombay

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Bombay - Mumbai -Mumbapuri, whatever the chosen name, it is the image of a mother-city which comes floating in! Does such a city display a distinctive attitude towards music, the most insubstantial of arts? What kind of music does it favour? Is it hostile to some musics? Why? Over the centuries (fortunately, not many!) has the city changed its musical preferences and what could be the reasons? Being a city at the hub of all kinds of communications, is Bombay likely to bring into play forces affecting/modifying Indian music, which at present, is the mainstream music in Bombay? Mother city, is in itself a socio-cultural concept and no enumeration of historical/chronological facts would help in divining the dynamics which Bombay generated in its march to the present status. The interplay of music and culture could not have been so intricate and fascinating in case of any other city because.... But perhaps some arguments need to be put forward before an attempt is made to complete that observation and make it a statement!

It is my experience that in cultural studies, the present tense causes the least academic tensions! What is the music-scene like, in contemporary Bombay?

Bombay today allows five categories of music to prosper in varying proportions. Primitive, folk, devotional, art and popular musics thrive in Bombay. Mother-cities are known to respond to the maximum number and kinds of musical stimuli because these responses operate as outlets for a corresponding pentad of psycho-cultural traits (of an expansive, if not a complete, human psyche). The five categories are not producer-oriented. They come into being because certain structural features appear in musical endeavors in order to fulfill certain socio-cultural needs. Hence primitive music is not to be understood as music produced by tribals etc. It is a music produced by, and for, primitive layers or levels of human mind. Primitiveness in music is related to definable music-features on the one hand, and to socio-cultural characteristics on the other. For example, extreme rhythm orientation, predisposition to create a body of sounds rather than contours /graphs melody, acceptance of numbing sound sensations as the essential components of experience, readiness to an abundant use of non-sense, linguistic distortions, tendency to induce discontinuous, repeated and

energy-spending movements etc. can be listed as musical features of primitive music. On the other hand, fear of countless and unknown people, places, languages and cultures; an eagerness to end isolation by belonging to groups; a wish to drown individual weaknesses in collective strengths etc. can be listed as socio-cultural features echoing musical features described earlier (and vice-versa). Each category of music would, on analysis, display its own, exclusive musical features as also those it may share with others. The point is that it is in the character of Bombay to bestow a legitimacy on all categories. People converging on Bombay are too diverse to 'institute' close-knit socio-cultural groups without difficulty, or even to succeed in locating others who may be equally keen and desirous of coming together. The undifferentiated socio-cultural mass of the mother-city needs matching music to flush out unnameable fears and tensions. Primitive music goes a long way in bringing about this partially cathartic miracle. It is not coincidental that from chair-breaking early rock-n-roll to ear-deafening modern dandia-disco, all kinds of foreign/native inputs of primitive musics have been welcome in Bombay.

By definition primitive music is a force designed to blur, to erase class/ caste/ creed/ language distinctions. On the other hand, folk-musics are firm believers in evoking specific natural/geographical memories and invoking commensurate definite linguistic/literary loyalties. Mother-cities encourage formation of sub-groups frantically trying to hold fast to their respective regional and cultural geniuses. To this end folk-music is the most accessible vehicle. On this background the beehive of associations, sabha-s and leagues which emphasize regional/linguistic fidelities are to be understood and appreciated. It is obvious that Bombayites' folk music or their love for it display a tinge of nostalgia, an exaggerated notion of the value of 'ourness' in music as also a naive respect for the pure, authentic and natural in music. However, this does not make the 'folkish' expressions less real or culturally less useful. The folk category gives a mother-city-dweller a much-sought-for chance to belong that exhibits identifiable, known and selectively shared characteristics. The metropolitan inner castle walls - i.e. those institutions which allow tolerable segmentation and movement of recognizable cellular structures, therefore serve a purpose. In their absence the heterogeneous populace might perish into anonymity in an anarchic free-for-all or alternatively succumb to pressures to imitate in order to become the other, the more powerful. Primitive and folk categories may appear to function in contradictory directions. Only a mother-city can afford to enjoy these and the ensuing tussles as exercises to strengthen its own cultural fabric.

This brings us to devotional music, the unique Indian tradition encompassing the entire expanse of the subcontinent. It is paradoxically religion-based and yet religion transcending! Distinctive features of this category are at once conducive to a social bonding and favorable for individualist forays which enable those in possession of certain qualities to gain a place 'above' the society. Cutting across all manner of divisions and resolving differences at an abstract but 'felt' plane become translatable dreams in and because of the category. Further, myths in India have always proved their capacity to arouse in their receivers parallel experiential structures. For example, a Karnatak version of a mythical motif may successfully arouse in a Manipuri mind a parallel mythical motif/structure, thus resulting in a unifying experience. Music is an able partner of the rich Indian mythological heritage and thus the rich blend of devotional category of music becomes a reality. Bombay has of course added dimensions to prevailing forms in the category. Firstly, it has introduced new musical instruments. Secondly, it has accentuated the solo element to add to the musico-aesthetic content, often bringing in strategies of *raga* elaboration *a la* art music. Thirdly, it has created conditions suitable for borrowing or assimilating some genres/genre-features, otherwise foreign to the category. Finally, Bombay has accelerated the process due to which music-religion combination in Western India has tended to flow in two streams of devotional music: one nearer to art music and the other closer to folk music.

In art and popular music Bombay expectably proves more creative. Bombay-patronage has been wide-based and both Hindustani and Carnatic art-musics of India have derived considerable support. What is usually overlooked is the base Bombay provides to Western classical music. Traditional patronage, which was chiefly court or temple-oriented of course continued. But music-circles, associations, drama troupes, recording companies, broadcasting institutions and film-producers diversified terms and conditions on which patronage was offered. Consequently, new kinds/ genres of music came into vogue. The musical menus offered in the early 'public' music-concerts provide an insight into the musical aspirations of the organizers as well as preferences/ tolerances of the audiences. Many music-related activities, otherwise taken for granted or ignored, became accepted beneficiaries of patronage in Bombay. Teaching of music, researching into music, writing on music, band-music, manufacture and sale of musical instruments, public lecture-cum demonstrations on music and such other avenues came to be frequented. The ruling adage perhaps was "Music is too important to be left to musicians alone!" Many classes and castes owe their close involvement with music to conditions prevailing in Bombay. Bombay-ethos in fact allowed an isolated appreciation, an aesthetic appraisal (as distinct from socio-cultural evaluation) of art-music and in a manner of speaking, art-music could therefore safely sever its ties with

life. It is not often realized that it is mostly after the arrival and firm entrenchment of the British in India that arts, artists, concerts, programmes, listeners, audiences and such other music-related institutions became separate entities nurtured, presented and appreciated. It is no coincidence that art-galleries, art-exhibitions or proscenium-arch theater - (all neatly dividing creators, creation and receivers) - are Bombay-products.

Popular music, as a technical category of music, consists of music conceived, manufactured for and propagated through mass media. Jingles, musical horns, (door bells!), film-songs, procession/tunes/slogans as also the 'bhajan-s' (!) in the suburban trains form an ever-expanding spectrum in the category. Borrowing from all other categories, from sources indigenous as well as foreign, giving the topmost place to 'success' as a criterion for judging music, restlessly striving for novelty (as distinct from modernity) - the category has been largely a product of market-pressures and forces created by Bombay. Languages, musical idioms, systems of organizing musical material, dissemination agencies and channels are all under the sway of popular music, - a haven for everything ad hoc, topical and for all superficially felt cultural stimuli.

My attempt has been to emphasize two points: Firstly, that Bombay, as a mother-city allows scope to all categories of music even at the risk of losing on musical quality because it is in the character of such cities to encourage and balance opposing forces to maintain a dynamic cultural equilibrium essential for holding to their special status. Secondly, the city breeds ideas of all kinds, irrespective of their desirability and ultimate cultural worth. Like the sun, Bombay smiles with equal warmth on maggots and saints! And yet it is not a cultural hell because the same inclination to harbor all ideas also generates in it an organic craving for building institutions which would make value-judgments and take decisions on what is to be preserved, documented, passed on and recommended for the posterity. The City turns on itself, reverses - to make harsh judgments on its own follies, culturally 'wrong' acts of commission and omission. The very lack of homogeneity allows it the power of going beyond itself! In music, this becomes evident as Bombay tries again and again to reexamine performance-practices etc. Music and musicians then come forward to borrow models from social sciences and humanities to shape their own behavior. They try to organize themselves on the lines of political movements to seek socio-cultural ameliorative actions. This is why performing and scholastic traditions in music register the maximum divergencies in Bombay as both are trying to seek institutional footholds to build their respective traditions. Culturally examined, mother-cities, townships, villages and inhabitations are active in declining proportions as far as generation of new institutional frameworks is considered. The same foursome is equally eager to hold to existing institutions in the

reverse order! Bombay creates traditions which other cultural centers try to preserve, protect and propagate.

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