

CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN ARTISTS TO SPREAD AND POPULARIZE RABINDRASANGIT

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ABSTRACT

Pre-renaissance Bengali music was localized, dull and erotic in nature. Different music forms were developed at that period in different parts of Bengal and decayed away in course of time. There was neither any formal school/institution to impart music, nor any scientific method to preserve music. Renaissance infused new blood in every sphere of human activity in Bengal and music was not any exception. Enlightened people established music schools, published journals of music. Experts in music published in those journals many new systems of notations to preserve music. Some schools provided courses not only on classic vocal music but also taught different instruments all at free of costs. In the mean time Vidyasagar, Raja Rammohan, David Hare along with other stopped many bad practices against women and opened girls-only schools. But still girls were debarred from the domain of music, arts and culture. Rabindranath Tagore took initiative in this regard and allowed girls in the field of music, dance, and painting. It is needless to say that Tagore faced many criticisms initially but many girls from different parts of India came to learn music, became famous and spread the songs written by him, called rabindrasangit.

Keywords: Renaissance, Music, Rabindranath, Female Artists.

Introduction: The socio-political, cultural and economic degradation of Bengal started from the middle of 18th century and continued till the beginning of 19th century. During this period no remarkable cultural activities were observed or recorded. The Renaissance, which pushed aside the perdurable poor and bad education, anarchy and unenlightenment, appeared in Bengal in the beginning of 19th century. Raja Rammohan Roy (1772-1833), Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar (1820-1891), Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay (1838-1894) and other thinkers of Bengal were the driving forces behind the weeding out the poor deliberation systems of Bengalis and obviously, these great thinkers were the pioneers of new a era : the renaissance.

Renaissance and Bengali music: Seeds of renaissance were sowed in the socio-economic conditions created by the British themselves and the new education system they introduced. Since the new systems, in education and in other fields, were introduced first in Bengal (because it was the then capital of British India Empire) hence the renaissance enlightened Bengal first. But according to some views, the renaissance, which was inspired by the western culture, was only limited to the higher strata of the society and failed to enlighten the common people of Bengal.

But none disagree on the fact that, many new ideas and activities were seen in the field of music in 19th century. After the songs of Ramprasad ¹(1718 or 1723 to 1775), the lyrics became diluted and erotic. In order to get quick mass-entertainment music and its lyrics become obscene and indelicate. All, people from rural Bengal to rich Babu² Class in Calcutta, were fond of AKHDAI³, HALF-AKHADAI⁴, KABI GAAN⁵, TARJA⁶, KHEUR⁷, PANCHALI⁸, but it is needless to say that none of songs did have any originality. Most of the lyricists were uneducated or illiterate, and so, while they tried to imitate others without understanding the meanings, they often write meaningless lyrics, obscene and sometimes repeated same lines in the songs. The rhythmic sounds of Bronze gong, Khol⁹, and clapping mesmerized the crowd as if they were hypnotized.

¹ Ramprasad was poet and saint, devotee of goddess Kali. His poems are still popular in Bengal and sang as Ramprasadi.

² Babus are the extravagant in so called elite class of Bengalis in British era.

³ It is type of local songs, became popular in 18th century during the Sen Dynasty. It has reference in Ain-i-Akbar of Abul Fazal.

⁴ It originated from Akhadai. Nidhu Babu, the famous musician introduced it in Calcutta in 1804. It remained popular over next two decades in Bengal and then gradually decayed away.

⁵ It is an important branch of Bengali folk songs, remained popular from 1760 to 1830 where two main performers engage in verbal duels making spontaneous rhymes and it still can be seen in remote villages of Bengal.

⁶ It is a 16th century local song of Bengal where two performers make paradoxical rhymes.

⁷ It is a type of Tarja but subject is utterly erotic. From remote district Nadia of Bengal it spread to Calcutta.

⁸ It is originated at the end of 18th century or beginning of 19th century and still practiced in Hindu Bengali families. Here a story is narrated in terms of rhymes on religious subjects.

⁹ Khol is a two sided terracotta percussion instrument used for accompaniment with kirtan.

But the changes in the society also initiated the process of the changes in the art, culture and literature associated with it. The Renaissance that already had started in Bengal acted as a catalyst in rediscovering the lost glory of Bengali music from the third decade of 19th century onwards. The struggle for resurrection of art, culture and music of Bengal took place somewhere by individuals, whereas, some other-where, by groups of individuals. The principal movements that took place in the field of music during this period could be summarized as below:

- Collection of musical notation systems from different states in India as well as from foreign countries; a rigorous study of these notation systems and development of an easy understandable native notation system necessary to preserve music.

"Dandamatrik" notation system was invented by Kshetramohan Goswami (1813-1893) in 1868. In 1871 he published the notation (Swaralipi) of Geet-Govinda¹⁰ but that was not popular. After that in 1880 Dwijendranath Tagore (1840-1925) discovered the "Kasimatrik" notation systems. Jyotirindranath Tagore invented "Akarmatrik" notation systems in 1885 and this system has become popular and accepted by all in Bengal.

- Publications of musical journal helped to grow interest in music in common man and helped in popularization and spreading of music.

The first journal of music published in Bengali was SANGIT CHITTOSANTOSH (Chakraborty, January 2000, p. 25). The directors of the journal publication House were Umacharan Sen and Jogendra Chandra Bose. The publication House was closed down within a short period. Then Raja Sourindramohan Tagore, from the Tagore family of Pathuriaghata took the initiative to publish in 1872, a magazine on music in Bengali called SANGIT SAMAALOHANI (Chakraborty, January 2000, p. 26), but this magazine also not had a long life. The next attempt to publish magazine on music was from the Tagore family of Jorashanko. A six page supplement on music was started publishing with famous TATTWABODHINI PATRIKA¹¹, a magazine in Bengali. In this supplement Jyotirindranath Tagore (1849-1925), elder brother of Rabindranath Tagore published his works on notation systems in music entitled "A system of symbols to note down songs" and also published notations of five Brahma-Sangit. After this Jyotirindranath Tagore published in 1897 the magazine BINABADINI (1897) and SANGIT PROSHIKA (1901). All these magazines on music took leading roles in publishing forgotten and latent songs, a regular printing of notations of different songs, justification in favour of different notation systems, printing of different articles on music and criticisms of music.

- Collection of different resource books on music, translation of books and articles in Bengali from other languages, publishing the biography of various instrumentalists, lyricists, musicologists, and composers.

Preservation of history and knowledge of ancient traditions are the symbols of renaissance. In the field of music Radhamohan Sen first took pioneering attempt. After him important steps in this field was taken by Khetramohan Goswami (1823-93) and Sourindramohan Tagore (1840-1914). The book on Indian music SANGIT SAR written in Bengali by Khetramohan Goswami is specifically noteworthy. Sourindramohan Tagore spent a tireless life to write a few important books on music. Of these books most important are: The Six Principal Ragas of Hindus (1870), The Eight Principal Ragas of Hindus (1880), Universal History of Music (1896). After famous Sourindramohan, the noteworthy person in the field of Bengali music is Krishnadhan Bandyopadhyay (1846-1904), the father of modern Indian musicology. He published many books on music in his own expenditure of which BANGAOKYATAN (1876) and in two volumes GITASUTRASAR (1885), both in Bengali, are remarkable.

- Use of harmony, orchestra, opera etc. different foreign elements in Bengali songs.

New thinking in stage performances appeared in Bengal in the second half of 19th century. Adoption of the methods of foreign drama and adopting Operas in native JATRA-GAAN¹² are two important activities of this time. Writing dramas in the shadows of Opera was an important endeavour of Jyotirindranath Tagore of the Tagore family. He was the first person to adopt orchestra successfully in Bengali dramas. In the year 1867 Jyotirindranath wrote a Bengali drama NABANATAK in which he tried to mix foreign music with that of Indian (Chakravarty, January 2000, p. 20).

- Enhancing the scope of learning pure music by establishing music-schools and other institutions in individual or collective capacity.

In the sixties of 19th century Raja Sourindramohan Tagore established a Music Academy with the help of some renowned persons in music viz. Khetramohan Goswami (1813-1893), Lachhmiprosad Misra (?) and Kaliprasanna Bandyopadhyay(?).

After this, initiative to establish Music teaching institutions was taken by Jyotirindranath Tagore. Though the school "Adi Brahma-samaj Sangit Vidyalaya" was established in 1857 to help in promotion of Brahma-sangit in

¹⁰ It is a 12th century famous work composed by Indian poet Jayadeva

¹¹ Tattwaboghini (truth-searching) Patrika (news paper) a news paper in Bengali was first published by Devendranath Tagore in 1843 from Kolkata and continued until 1883.

¹² Jatra Gaan, Jatra Pala or simply Jatra is a form of folk theater popular in Bengal.

original Brahma society, but it also used to give lessons in classical vocal music and instruments at free of costs (Paul, December 1993 , p. 227). But this school run for a very short period only. Jyotirindranath Tagore later established second institution for teaching music named 'Bharat Sangit Samaj', which was similar to 'Gayan Samaj' of Puna. The aim of this institution was to spread knowledge of music, teaching and learning of music in Bengal. Unlike previous one this institution did live long.

At the just beginning of 20th century, the youngest son of Tagore family, Rabindranath Tagore, established at a remote corner of the district of Birbhum 'Santiniketan Brahmacharya-ashram'. Though it was developed in ideas of 'Tapovan' of ancient India to inculcate education, music was its essential part. In order to impart complete education, Rabindranath provided all necessary facilities of learning music, paintings and acting. Though the institution was originally established in 1901 for education of boys only, but from 1908 arrangements for the education of girls was also started, that was an unthinkable activity in those days (Paul, January 1993 , p. 65).

In 19th century, Vidyasagar and Raj a Rammohan Ray jointly took some revolutionary initiative to stop self-immolation of Hindu widows or Satidaha tradition (1829), declaration of widow marriage as accepted by scripture (1857), enactment of law to abolish child-marriage (1891); but no effective initiative was taken to spread women's education. Missionaries in Calcutta took pioneering initiative in this regard but due to superstitions and mental barriers of the natives, their efforts failed to produce any effective permanent progress. Vidyasagar, Devid Hare, Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay, Radhakant Dev took special interest and initiatives to spread women's education. In 1849 with the financial help of Dakshinaranjan Mukhopadhyay (1814-1878), Jhon Elliott Drinkwater Bethune (1801-1851) established 'Hindu Girls School', which is now famous as Bethune College.

Rabindranath and women rabindrasangit artists: The tireless efforts of different reformists after all made a breakthrough to allow women in the domain of education but they were still debarred to enter the domain of art and culture. We have already discussed that in the 19th century many new initiatives were taken in the field of music but women of elite class of Bengal were not allowed to practice music which was seemed to be a most disgraceful activity for them. But Rabindranath gave equal opportunity for girls to learn, music, acting, and later dance in the institution established by him and for which he had to face severe criticism, resistances and antagonisms.

Initially daughters of the teachers of the institute were provided facilities for education and slowly girls from outside also started to come and got enrolled as students. Gurudev associated music with the everyday activities of the Ashram in a meaningful way. The performance of Baitalik (singing of songs in group while walking around the Ashram) is a unique tradition of the institute. Initially Dinendranath Tagore, Ajit Chakraborty and Tejesh Chandra Sen used to give music lessons to young girls and boys. In 1913 Bhimrao Shastri came from Maharashtra to give lessons on classical music. Sangmeshwar Shastri taught Dakshini Bina and Nakuleshwar Goswami was teacher of Sitar, Esraj and Hindustani music (Ghosh, August 1987, p. 40). Rabindranath introduced 'Basanta Utsav', 'Sharad Usav', 'Barsha-mongal' and many other programs along with the normal courses of education in the Ashram. Almost each and every function had music and dance associated with it. Initially, men used to perform the roles of women in dramas organised in Santiniketan. Performance in dramas by ladies on stages was not acceptable in the society. Rabindranath wrote a girls-only drama 'Lokkhir Porikkha', with no male character in it to extend to the girls the scope of acting in drama in Santiniketan. Only Gurudev and a few older professors enjoyed the drama from behind a mat-curtain. Afterwards girls and boys used to perform songs and dramas together and many people used to come to enjoy their live performances. The daughter of one of the initial residents of the Ashram Srishchandra Mazumder, RAMA MAZUMDAR (1903-1935) was one of the first batches of girls' students of Ashram Vidyalyaya. She was a good singer. She performed songs not only in the prayers of Ashram but also in each and every program organised there. She performed songs in many programs even outside of Santiniketan. She passed matriculation examination in 1919 and started teaching at Sangit-Bhavana (Paul, January 1993 , p. 167).

MALATI SEN (?) came to Santiniketan in 1920/21. She was expert not only in singing but also in playing Esraj and Veena.

In the year 1923 AMITA SEN (nick name Khuku) (1914 -1940) came to Santiniketan from Dhaka. She was not only a brilliant student but also had very a good voice for which she was able to wine special affection of Rabindranath Tagore. Amita Sen recorded thirteen rabindrasangeets during the lifetime of Rabindranath. She got appointment in Sangit-Bhavana in the year 1939 (Sen, June 2014, p. 30).

In the year 1928 SAVITRI GOVIND KRISHNAN (?) came to Shantiniketan from Madrass. She also successfully overcame the language-barrier and learned rabindrasangit and classical music. In the year 1925 at Alfred Theater in Calcutta the drama 'Arupratan' was staged. Rama Mazumdar, Amita Sen (Khuku), Savitri Govind Krishnan, Malati Sen, Fullarani Singha, Mamata Sen, Latika Roy and many others from Santiniketan performed songs in this drama (Paul, May 2003, p. 147) . In 1929 the drama 'Tapati' was staged at Jorashanko and

Rama Mazumdar, Amita Sen (Khuku), Savitri Govind Krishnan sang songs. In New Empire theatre of Calcutta the drama 'Nabin' was performed and Savitri Devi sang solo rabindrasangit.

- RAJESWARI BASUDEV (14 July 1894-20th December 1981) came from Panjab to Santiniketan in the year 1938. She got a first class first degree in Sanskrit honours from Lahore Government College and got a gold medal from the University of Panjab. She abandoned her general education and came to Santiniketan to learn music only. Later she taught music in Chicago University. She took, for some time, the charge of lecturer in Indian music at the famous School of Oriental and African Studies in London. In 1961, during the birth centenary of Rabindranath Tagore, she performed songs by the invitation of National Tagore Centenary Committee in London, Paris (Sinha, 2019, p. 138).

KANIKA BANDOPADHYAY (1924-2000) and NILIMA SEN (1928-1996) learned music from Sangit-Bhavana and took teaching assignment there. During the lifetime of Gurudev, Kanika Bandopadhyay went Bombay, with the trope of Visva-Bharati to perform as singer and also as actress in the drama 'Tasher Des'. Later, in mature age she travelled to Pittsburgh, Boston, Chicago, Canada, San Francisco and many other countries being invited by them.

Nilima Sen got 'Tagore Hymn Prize' from Brahma Samaj of London. During her stay in USA she performed rabindrasangit from different centres of 'Voice of America' viz. at Chicago, Michigan, Madison and many other places.

ARUNDHATI MUKHOPADHYAY (1924-1990) came to Visva-Bharati in the year 1940 to learn Music. In later life she took acting in cinematography as her profession and got reputation not only as an actress but also as a singer. Many such ladies after getting training from Santiniketan got reputation in social and cultural domain by overcoming many barriers in society and family.

Conclusion: - All the experiments and new endeavour in music resulted by renaissance was based in Calcutta. Rabindranath shifted the epicentre of renaissance in music to a remote place in Birbhum, far from Calcutta. He not only established a Brahmacharya Vidyalia in Santiniketan, but successfully promoted and supported girls in singings, acting and paintings as an essential part of all-round education. The right to sing, act, paint and dance that Rabindranath provided to girls in Santiniketan was a pioneering step and opened a new direction in renaissance in music. Due to the revolutionary steps taken by Rabindranath many women even outside of Santiniketan entered the field of music and enriched our treasure.

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