

Classicality of Odissi Music

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Abstract:

All these singing acts of Odissi music are sung on the basis of some specific 'gamak'. A particular vibration that is created by a tune (swara) is called 'gamak'. It has been written in Sanskrit as such: "Swarasya kampai gamakah". From this vibration of the tune only a style of the music is differentiated from other style of music and soon after listening we can come to know that which music belongs to what style. Similarly, in Odissi singing style also there are some particular vibrations of tunes called 'gamak', for which our Odissi style of singing bears a quite different identity among its other counterparts. It is noteworthy that the vibration act in music is solely general. But the language and conceptual difference, at the backdrop of regional and cultural distinction retain the importance of a particular style, irrespective of place.

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The Odissi styled 'gamak' might be used in their forms of music but, rises spontaneously in Odissi, hence it is said to be an asset for Odissi. May be by making efforts all sorts of 'gamak' can be sung or performed musically. But the 'gamak' which can be sung normally, effortlessly or spontaneously, truly represents the natural quality of the concerned style of music.

In the singing and musical performance of Odissi the use of four important 'gamak' is found. Those are: - 'andolita', 'ahat', 'dhaalu' ('arohi dhaalu', 'abrohi dhaalu'), 'ambreydita'.

The movement in 'Odissi sangeet' (Odissi music) is said to be 'andolita' (fluctuating). This movement is mainly a classical 'gamak' named as 'andolita'. The specialty of this 'gamak' is that it is neither stable always nor very fast.

This fluctuation act plays an important role in awarding a special identity to Odissi music. 'andolita' 'gamak' is transformed with the help of a 'gamak' called 'ahat'. And its unique nature is that to sing a tune (swara), the next or following tune has to be twisted mildly and then to be resumed. Hence this process is called 'ahuta- kampana kriya' or 'gamak'. With the help of 'ahat gamak' the act named as 'arohan- abarohan' of Odissi form is done in such a manner that a listener can instantly have a clear picture about the distinct quality of this form of music. 'dallo' is one of the 'gamak's or tuning acts of traditional

form of singing which is mostly used during the performance of ‘raaga-sangeet’. This is executed in both the acts called ‘aarooha’ and ‘abaroha’. Likewise a traditional vibration act called ‘ambredita’ is used immensely during the performance of Odissi, which is a special ‘gamak’ act of Odissi. These four acts of ‘gamak’ are written as follows :-

‘andolita’- sa re ga

‘aahat’- sa re ga ma.....

‘arohi dhaloo’- mapa pani nisa.....

‘abarohi dhaloo’- sani nidha dhapa.....

‘ambreydita’- nisa nare sani, ga ma ga pa ma pa, re ga re ma ga re, pa dhapa sa ni dha pa etc.

As far as possible, this ‘ambreydita’ ‘gamak’ act is executed once and moves always in the mode of abarohi. The ‘laya’ of this ‘gamak’ is comparatively fast.

Though various other acts which are either performed or arise spontaneously during the musical performances, but ‘anibaddha’, ‘nibaddha alaap’, ‘swara- binyas’ and ‘taan’ etc. Are mainly executed by combining these four acts or with a harmonious blend of these ‘gamak’s mentioned above.

Due to this performance related uniqueness, odissi in its true sense is regarded as one of the Indian classical forms of music.

As there is a classicality in the singing of Odissi classical music, likewise there is also a specialty in its musical instruments, musical performance in the ‘taala chhanda’ of this Odissi. The musical instrument tabla as ‘Tabla’ (a musical instrument) is significantly used as an associate instrument in Hindustani music, and ‘Mridang’ is treated likewise in Carnataki music so also the musical instrument called ‘Mardal’ is significantly used as the main instrument in Odissi classical music. The preparation, the performance style etc. of ‘Mardal’ instrument has full resemblance with ‘Tabla’ and ‘Mridang’ and at the same time it has maintained its own distinct identity. Hence Odissi can undoubtedly be considered as one of the Indian classical forms of music. This is solely a matter of pride for Odisha, Odissi music and culture.

The assertions by Odias of Odissi’s classical status have been fueled by the tension between Odia regional nationalism and pan-Indian nationalism—by the belief that there is an Odia national culture that is distinctive and highly evolved, but which has not gotten fair recognition from the rest of the country of which Odisha is firmly and proudly a part. But will Odissi music ever attain widely-recognized classical status? At this point, sixty years post- Independence and fifty years after Odissi dance was recognized as classical, convincing non- Odias of the need for another classical music may prove an insurmountable obstacle. India has an astounding number of distinct cultures vying for attention; unless Odissi music can be made the repository—the articulated “expressive space”—for more than an elite Odia identity, through which it may be able to carve out a third space on the map for itself, its prospects as a player on the pan-Indian cultural stage will remain dim. A more interesting question might be: Would the conferment of classical status on Odissi be an overall benefit to the music and the musicians? Certainly, some degree of prestige, perhaps even some economic benefits, might accrue with classical recognition. But there is also a danger here. As Purnima Shah (2002) has argued regarding dance, classicization—while perhaps raising the prestige of the more recent dance additions— can necessitate stylistic compromises and lead to a “museumized” treatment of the traditions: the road to classicization, in other words, can also lead to homogenization and a discouragement of innovation. Though more work yet needs to be done, there is strong evidence that Odissi music and its performance practice have indeed been altered to align more closely to the established styles of Hindustani and Karnatak. Whether these alterations are seen

as healthy innovation or as homogenization is perhaps a matter of perspective. Despite the dangers, and regardless of whether the Odissi music movement is successful in its aim of some kind of *official* recognition, the movement already seems to be having positive effects. By means of festivals in major cities throughout India— where music performances are often paired with performances of the more recognizable and popular Odissi dance—and attractively produced local festivals, Odissi music now appears to have greater visibility within India than ever before, and the ears of sympathetic non-Odia audiences. One optimistic prediction of the outcome of this trend might be that it will demonstrate that regional Indian music can be, if not classical, then at least more than regional. But whether or not the music is able to find a new stature or larger audience, I feel it is at the very least proper to recognize— along with its practitioners— that Odissi music is a unique and powerful form of expression. Whether or not one

labels the style “classical,” for now it continues to be performed and developed. Who can know what lies ahead? Surely the dedicated musicians of Odisha will continue their work rehydrating the riverbed of the Saraswati, so that a third stream may finally take its place in the musical geography of modern India.

There are certain texts on Odissi music which are authentic and authoritative and provided excellent indices to the development of the music. These are written in Sanskrit or *Odia* containing the characteristics of *Udramagadhi*, *Ardhamagadhi*, *Udra Bhasa* and *Utkalika Bibhasa*.

The tradition of Odissi classical music goes back to ancient times. This is evident from several research work published over ages on the classical form of Odissi songs. Between 15th – to 18th century, numerous literature have been published on music and dance. Among them, ‘*Sangeeta Sara*’, ‘*Sangeeta Koumudi*’, ‘*Geeta Prakasha*’, ‘*Sangeeta Muktabali*’, ‘*Sangeeta Kalpalatika*’, ‘*Sangeeta Narayana*’, ‘*Sangeeta Saranee*’, ‘*Geeta Prakasha Boli*’, ‘*Sangeetabnaba Chandrika*’, ‘*Natya Manorama*’, ‘*Abhinaya Darpana Prakasha*’, ‘*Abhinaya Chandrika*’ are the music- related compositions (*Granthabali*) by various *Odia* authors. Besides, the literary compositions on ‘*Alankar*’, ‘*Sanskruta Nataka*’, and ‘*Lakshyan Kabya*’ has the elaborate discussions on dance and music. These literary compositions describes the *Nada*, *Sruti*, *Swara*, *Raga*, *Tala* and an overall adept presentation of classical music developed over hundreds of year. Specifically, the *Raga* based Sanskruta, *Braja* and *Odia Prabandha* songs are mentioned as significant (*Mahatwapurna*) part in the history of *Odia* music.

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