

Hindustani Classical Music-Music Criticism

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Abstract

Hindustani classical music emerged in the northern parts of the country and has slowly spread across the continent; over the years, the music has gone through significant transformations and has developed into the different sub-divisions of classical Hindustani music as well as southern Carnatic music. The present study has focused on the history and rich tradition of Hindustani classical music. The different influences that have impacted the musical style have been presented within the study; the religious similarities between the Vedic classics and the Sufi music of the 12th Century, all of which have collectively given rise to this musical form. The importance of musicians in ancient India and how their journey has been impacted during the colonial period and modern times has been shown in the study.

Keywords: Hindustani classical music, Indian, Sufi, religion, culture, tradition

Introduction

Hindustani music is one of the oldest forms of Indian music that has existed for centuries and has continued to shape Northern Indian Culture. While some historians argue that the music is over 3000 years old (Sangeet Sadhana, 2023), the presence of it in Indian music can be seen more vividly from the 12th Century CE. In ancient times, Hindustani music had essentially been linked to cultural and religious practices; this form of music essentially originated in the Northern parts of the country and gradually moved to the central and southern parts of the country. The purity of the Indian culture is held with classical Hindustani music, a form of performative art; one of the most striking features of the piece is the use of “Raag” or musical notes. Every note in Indian classical music is luminous and shines bright by itself; the music is spiritual in nature. Over the generations, Hindustani classical music has given rise to many other musical forms, such as Ghazal, Dadra, Chaiti, Tumri, Kajri, and Bhajan.

The music is usually practised with the help of instruments that regionally has belonged to the Indian sub-continent; Sitar, Sarod, Bansuri, and Sator are some of the tools used by the musical professionals who specialise in this form of music. Indian music represents standards and principles; the changing socio-economic conditions over the years had a profound impact on the musical style. Different kinds of rulers have ruled India over the years, and each of them has contributed to the development of this musical form. Music in the Indian culture has often been held in high regard, with music being part of all kinds of religious ceremonies, weddings and rituals. Different musical schools have emerged in India over the years, and people who hailed from these places were known as “khandani musicians” (Vedabala, 2017). The musical compositions served a particular purpose in the culture and were thus preserved in this manner. The present study aims at observing all of the intricacies of Hindustani Classical music and provides a detailed criticism of the subject.

Discussion

The emergence of Hindustani classical music cannot be credited to a single person, as it has gained influence from many different religions and cultures. Although the concept of classical music emerged from the Vedic chants, the cultural synthesis which took place during the Delhi Sultanate cannot be overemphasised. Hindustani classical music is not exclusive to India as historically, Pakistan, Nepal, Bangladesh and even Afghanistan have been part of the same traditional practices. The intermingling of the Persian culture with the Indian culture has helped in shaping this musical form. The notes of the Hindustani music have been specially designed in a way which puts the most focus on the vocal performance of the performer, the instruments which are used merely enhance the experience. From the Middle Ages up until the colonial period, musicians belonging to the different traditional “gharanas” were patronised by the feudal aristocracy to perform in different religious and cultural gatherings (Alaghband-Zadeh, 2017). With time the elite fell into decline, and music began to be patronised by the middleclass audience for both public and intimate gatherings.

Hindustani music diversified during the 12th century, with Persian and Sufi music contributions; the age observed a revolutionary period where Sufi emerged to challenge the orthodox Islamic practices of Sunnism. Communal singing practices in the northern parts of India exploded, and the Persian–Hindustani musical form was given birth. Music was formalised in India to preserve the teachings of the Vedas. The most crucial lyrical text from ancient times is Bharata’s “Natyashastra”, composed during the third century CE. Narada’s “Sangita Makaranda” also made significant contributions as it paved the way for Sharngadeva’s “SangitaRatnakara” (Bhattacharjee&Alam, 2012). In the later years, Kabir and Nanak used this musical form to spread their teachings, and Hindustani classical music began to be popular in many other different cultures and communities. Hindustani music flourished under the Delhi Sultanate and the Mughal era, as court musicians such as Amir Khuso and Tansen made significant contributions to the field of music. A fair share of Sufi music has also been sacred and spiritual in Nature as a result, the intermixing of the different cultures went smoothly, and people were more accepting of the musical form which emerged from this union.

During the dawn of the 20th century, Hindustani classical music had already integrated into different sub-classical music forms and Carnatic classical music. Under the imperial British rule, Indian classical music did not have much space to grow as survival for people became more important than the luxury of music. Near the end of the colonial period, Indian classical music reemerged and became the voice of people and played a significant part in India’s struggle for freedom. The expulsion of Wajid Ali Shah to Calcutta in 1857 brought an era of Renaissance; the Lucknowi nawabi music rose into prominence in Bengal, and Rabindranath Tagore made several compositions which fed into classical Hindustani music. Simultaneously the significance of Bhatiali and Baul songs in the rural parts of Bengal also caught the attention of people. Variations arose in the form of Tappa, Thumri, Khayal, Dhamar and Dhrupad (India Netzone, 2023). Indian Classical Music (2023) states that the government's contribution in bringing All India Radio helped the musicians of India again enter the public domain and repair the damage of the colonial period through their music.

Computational musicology deals with the study of the characteristics shared across the different subdivisions of Hindustani classical music; the raga is the musical concept in Hindustani music. Matanga Muni, in his work “Brihaddeshi”, has stated that raga gives life through the usage of swara and varna and

is expressed through dhvani or voice. The “swarnas” are essentially constituent notes, and while their progression is measured through arohana/avronhana, the various movements which are recorded are known as the gamakas. In the raga, there are seven basic swarnas (Unnikrishnan, 2018); these are Shadjam which is the typical “Sa” sound, Rishabham is expressed through “Ri”, Gandharam is “Ga”, Madhyamam is denoted by the sound “Ma”, Panchaman is “Pa”, Dhaivatham “Da” and ultimately, Nishadam “Ni”, all of these sounds collectively represent the Mandra Sthayi. Sa is the tonic or AdharaShadjam, vaguely based on “ascent” or higher octave. Sa plays the most significant role because, as it is the AdharaShadjam, all other sounds are based on this particular note. The three octaves of Hindustani classical music are Mandra Sthayi, Madhya Sthayi and Taara Sthayi.

The music of India cannot be comprised within a single research paper; however, to understand the modern perspective of Indian music and the significant role which gharanas play, the emergence of Khayal needs to be studied. Baanis emerged in the Mughal court and denoted the stylistic features of Indian music. Tansen famously made the Gobarhaar Baani famous in Akbar's court, and Jahangir and Shahjahan carried these regimes forward (HALGAONKAR, 2022). The intricate ways of how a musical composition can be carried forward were trademarked by the different gharanas of India. The Agra Gharana is one of the oldest, established in the 13th century by Gopal Nayak; over time, other parts of India also started adopting this method and gave birth to the different schools of Indian music. Finally, the audience of classical music also needs to be elaborated on, as they play an active part in the different musical concerts and performances (Nair, 2021). The audience makes particular sounds and gestures to denote satisfaction with the music, further adding to the wonders of the classical form of Hindustani music.

The melody of songs is an integral part of the Hindustani classical music, the ragas or the musical notes are arranged in a cohesive pattern to generate musical expression. As stated within the study, the Hindustani classical music is essentially focused on glorifying the vocal performance of the performer, therefore the instruments which were designed for this form of music has been made to enhance the experience. Hindustani music essentially begins with a series of improvisations, followed the melody composed in a traditional fashion.

Conclusion

As concluding remarks for the present research, it can be seen how diverse Hindustani classical music has become. The study has observed the transformation of music from ancient times and how it has continued to adapt itself according to the different cultural and religious impacts that it has witnessed. It has been stated within the study that the rise of Sufism in India during the Delhi Sultanate contributed a great deal to the advancement of the musical tradition. The Mughals have also equally impacted the musical form. A brief description of the musical terms and forms has been presented within the study to demonstrate the significance of the “Sa” sound and how it directs the entire musical form, the importance of different musical schools or gharanas has vividly also been discussed in the study.

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