

TRADITION AND CHANGE IN INDO-PAKISTANI
CLASSICAL MUSIC¹

by

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There is a continuity in human life which transcends individual existence. Men die, but man lives and grows. Individual human endeavour is not an isolated phenomenon. In art or science, every effort men make is a brick in the edifice. Newton remarked that if he reached high into the realms of science, it was because he stood on the shoulders of giants, his predecessors.

In one sense, the importance of tradition in art is greater than it is in science, and in another sense it is less. It is less in that the arts do not necessarily progress with the passage of time, in that every artist is not able to make the achievements of previous artists his own merely by studying their work. He must cover all of that ground by himself. A scientist who reads and who understands the work done by his predecessors acquires the results of their effort. Every new scientific effort will almost necessarily be an advance because results can be objectively checked and errors can be detected and eliminated. Thus the scientist need not solve those problems again which were solved by older scientists. The composer or musician, however, must cover all the areas covered by his predecessors, and solve all the problems of harmony and melody and counter-point by himself, using the previous works only as guides. Past works do not give the help to an artist that they give to a scientist.

1. Adapted from a lecture delivered at the March 12, 1959, meeting of the Siam Society.

In another sense, the importance of the work of predecessors is far greater in art than in science. A scientist can reject a whole line of thought followed by older scientists for hundreds of years if he thinks he has found a better answer to the same problem. This has happened again and again in science. Copernicus rejected the cosmological system of Ptolemy; Einstein replaced Newton's theory of gravity by the space-time curvature propounded in his theory of relativity. But in art, no such complete break is possible. The literature of Europe is one continuous stream. So is the literature of Asia, or perhaps I should say the literatures of Asia. There have been changes in the flow of these streams, but no complete break. One may be able to reject traditional theories in science as soon as he develops a better theory, but in art if one rejects the past traditions, he has made his work almost hopelessly difficult. Art achieves its results by working upon the emotions, and emotions of every kind, including aesthetic emotions, can be aroused only by forms which already have acquired some emotional value through association. Certain shapes, colours sounds, came to acquire special emotional value in the eyes and ears of certain groups of people through centuries of use. These are the means which the artist employs to create special emotional and aesthetic experiences. His originality lies in combining them in new ways, and in discovering similar forms which also can arouse the emotions of his special audience. In poetry, certain words have very prosaic associations and others have deep emotional overtones. The latter are readily available tools for the poet to use. Other non-poetical words can be made fit for poetical use, but no artist can afford to reject all the old means of arousing the emotions of his audience and create completely new tools.

The importance of change also can be realized if we consider for a minute the nature of man. The emotional value of forms, shapes, sounds, and words, is lost or diminished by continued familiarity, and the inevitable vulgarization which occurs through excessive use by imitators. The bloom of the new

creation is lost in the millionth copy of it. Moreover, the onward progression of man's spirit demands new expression for each period and place. While no one will deny that great art is universal, and that what is good is good for all time, the spirit of one age finds fuller expression in certain modes than it does in others. Great artists renew old forms by a fresh use of the elements of art. Old words become lifeless, old colour schemes become dull, old melodies seem monotonous, unless the words and colour and notes are used in new ways and unless they are given new meaning and significance.

Indo-Pakistani music, as a living body of art, exemplifies both these principles throughout the course of its history. It has its roots in the Hindu music which existed in a rudimentary form of the liturgy and the devotional hymn. This form was later refined and systematised in the courts of the great Muslim kings of Delhi, before and during the Mughal rule, into the grand mode of Dhurpad singing. With increasing refinement and fastidiousness of taste under the later Mughals, the Khayal style of singing was developed. The gay life of the Oudh court made possible the evolution of the Thumri and Dadra styles of singing. During the modern age of mass entertainment and westernization film music and orchestral music were developed in order to satisfy new needs.

Not much can be definitely said about the music of ancient India. It probably consisted mostly of simple hymns and devotional songs which used only three and, later, five notes. These songs were known as Kubt, Doha, Chhand, Bhoru and Pad.

Gradually some of these compositions began to be synthesized, and the combination of Dhoru and Pud gave rise to the elaborate and complex Dhurpad. It is a vigorous and simple type of singing for men only, in which heroic tales of gods and demigods are recited. What its early and primitive form was, one can only guess at, but the Dhurpad as we know it, in the form which it took in the time of Akbar, when great musicians like Tan San

and Bilas Khan developed it, has four parts—Asthai, Antara, Sanchai, and Abhog. It is sung in a rhythm called Chau-tal and Sol-Fakhta, and in some other obsolete rhythms. Hori and Sadra also are forms of Jhurpad sung in Dhammar and Jhaptal, respectively.

The story of Pakistani music really begins with the coming of the Muslims. Early in the thirteenth century, Muslim rule was established in India, and with the Muslim conquerors came the practitioners of the arts and sciences, including music. The contact of the music of the newcomers with that of the older population, suggested new lines of development. It led to the introduction of the Twelve Maqaam or Notes of Arabic music into Indian music, which gave it a proper scale.

During the second half of the thirteenth and the early fourteenth centuries lived that great and versatile genius, Amir Khusru. Poet, statesman, saint, and composer, he enriched Indo-Muslim music with the wondrous flowers of his fertile invention. A lover of the land and its ways, he was also a master of the arts and sciences of the Muslims. He was well-fitted by temperament and training to initiate lasting changes and innovations in music.

Among the new styles of singing attributed to Amir Khusru are such compositions as Qaul, Qalbana, Naqah, Nigar, Gul, Hawa, Baseet, Schla, Mandha, Tarana, and Tirwat. These are a living part of our music today. Particularly noteworthy are the new raags which he created by the synthesis of local and foreign music. Among these are eighteen forms of the Bahar raag and twelve of the Bilawal. He enriched our music not only by giving us new compositions. He invented new musical instruments. He replaced the old percussion instrument called the Mirdang, and introduced the Tabla which has now become an inseparable part of our music. A poet of the people who was also a man of the highest refinement and culture, he invented the Dholak, which is an accompaniment of the folk music, and the Jal Tarang, which is used for the recital of classical music.

The work of Amir Khusru and other great inventors and composers was made possible by the deep appreciation and generous patronage of the Muslim rulers of India. Even a ruthless conqueror like Alauddin Khilgi, when he captured the kingdom of Deogiri, demanded as tribute from the local Raja his greatest court musician, Gopal Naik, who was later brought to the court of Delhi and received with great honour. The great ruler of the kingdom of Jaunpur in Northern India, Sultan Husain Sharqi, greatly encouraged the development of music and, through his compositions, he contributed greatly to the development of the Dhurpad style of singing. The court painters of the Mughals made portraits of some of the great musicians of the time. A few of these paintings are extant today. The great respect and honour in which the art of music was held by the Muslim rulers is evident in many records.

Tansen was a renowned composer and musician of the court of Akbar, and there were other remarkable men such as Bilas Khan, Darang Khan and Lal Khan. These were not idle imitators but men who enriched and evolved and raised our music to greater heights. It would be impossible to give an adequate idea of their innovations and inventions in a brief space here, but something must be said about the momentous role played by Tansen. He was a singer in the Dhurpad style, but his contribution consists in his thorough research into all the Raags and Raagnis of Indian music from which he selected some of the best and then developed and perfected them to a definitive form. Numerous raags and raagnis which are sung today are sung in the form which was given to them by Tansen. We have Mian ki Todi, Mian ka Malahar, and Mian ka Sarang, which are raags composed by Mian Tansen. This composer also explored entirely new possibilities and invented such novel raags as Durbari, which is one of the most majestic and impressive of them all.

In the time of the later Mughals, in the 18th century, there arose two great composers and musicians called Adarang and Sadarang who graced the court of Mohamed Shah. They are

responsible for popularising the style of singing which is known as the Khayal. The invention of this style is attributed to Sultan Husain Sharqi of Jounpur. This invention did not receive the stamp of popular approval until it was presented by such masterly exponents as Adarang and Sadarang. From their time onwards it became so popular that it completely replaced the Dhurpad style of singing. Hundreds and thousands of musicians have used this form and contributed to its development. Among them are Suraj Khan and Chand Khan, Tanras Khan and Fayyas Khan of the recent past. The Khayal is a more elegant and refined form of singing than the Dhurpad. It is richly ornamented with beautiful tans, that is, interesting variation on the basic pattern of the notes of that raag. The last of the great Mughals, Bahadur Shah Zafar, has himself left a composition in the Khyal style under the name of "Shang Raag." The peculiarity of his composition is that he gives two antaras to a single asthai. The Khayal that is sung today is different from the Khayal that was sung by Adarang and Sadarang because continuing modifications and refinements have been made in this form of singing. At first the Khayal had the same basic form as the Dhurpad and was composed of the same four parts, Asthai, Antara, Sanchai and Abhog. Later on, the last two were dropped, and now only the Asthai and Antara remain. Similarly, at first the Khayal was sung in very many many tans and rythms, but now only about ten or twelve rythms are used. The use of different tans in Khayal also has changed from age to age.

With the decline and fall of the Mughal Empire, the centres of culture moved away from Delhi to Lucknow, Hyderabad and other places. Lucknow in particular became a great centre of art and literature. The kings of Oudh were patrons and practitioners of music. Wajid Ali Shah composed under the name of Akhtar Dra. In the Court of Oudh there prevailed a mode of gaiety and carefree enjoyment which demanded a different type of music to express its spirit. In this atmosphere of elegance and frivolity the Thumri form took its birth. It was an offshoot of

the Khayal, but the style of singing is quite different. It is meant to be sung by women because it gives expression to ideas of love and romance and is accompanied by gestures and postures which border on the lascivious. But after women singers won great popularity for the Thumri, men began to copy them. They tried to substitute the physical gestures by clever turns and twists of the voice. The rhythms in Thumri are lively and gay, as Punjabi and cha char. The verses sung in Thumri are also full of sensuous charms.

Dadra is another form which was patronized at the Court of Oudh. It is rather like Thumri, but the words are in the Poorbi dialect and the song has a rustic background. Both Thumri and Dadra are semi-classical compositions.

Another innovation of the days of the Oudh kingdom was Tappa. Tappa is a song sung by the camel-drivers of the Punjab. A gifted singer and musician named Master Shorey who came to Lucknow thought of presenting the songs of his land by way of variety at the court. Although there could hardly anywhere be found a more critical and fastidious audience than that of the court of Lucknow, Tappa was very well received and at once won immense popularity. It is a song vibrant with life and energy, in which every bar of music is a "taan" that is a variation on the basic notes. Because it required not only great skill but great exertion to sing, it gradually fell into disuse.

Whereas in Tappa our music drew upon the songs of the desert folk, it was enriched in Qawwali by the religious sentiment and ecstasy created in the singing of mystical poetry. Qawwali is a semi-classical form. It must be sung by good singers, but it remains a folk-song. It contains no subtle touches or nuances, and is marked by repetitions of words and rhythm. This gives it an almost hypnotic effect that evokes religious ecstasy. A Qawwali party will continue throughout the night in an emotion-charged atmosphere where both the poetry and the music can achieve full effect. The leader starts the singing, and, again and again, at the

proper place, his party joins in a chorus with him. It is a fine and boisterous form of singing, which may be looked down upon by high-brows, but which gives the common people the kind of musical experience that they want and appreciate. Qawwali singing is an important line of evolution in our music.

Our historical survey here has covered the period from primitive times to the early nineteenth century and the days of the kingdom of Oudh. There is no doubt that research into the refinement of music in Lucknow reached an unprecedented height, but the study was directed in those days not toward a scientific end, but toward drawing the greatest enjoyment and pleasure from the art. When British rule came and all the old kingdoms and thrones were cleared away by the new rulers, music fell upon evil days. Some nawabs and rajas continued to employ outstanding masters, but there was no longer the generous patronage and popular demand that existed in Delhi and Lucknow during their palmy days. Popular patronage was not able alone to support the practice of the higher form of the art.

At this time, however, some Parsi gentlemen conceived the idea of establishing a Western form of theatre in Bombay, and they were able to get poetical plays written for the stage. Another movement of this kind had also begun in Lucknow, where King Wajid Ali Shah himself had written poetical plays, and where Amanat wrote his famous *Indersabha*, which was considered by many to be the first play of Urdu. Research has invalidated this claim, but there is no doubt that *Indersabha* set the pattern in the early days of Urdu drama. These plays are more like operas because they employ a great deal of music and dancing and because the libretto is in verse. The day of the cinema had not yet begun and this new business venture by the Parsi gentleman was a great success. Theatrical companies came into being in different parts of India and many went on tours about the country. The plays provided a great opportunity for musicians, and a particular type of music developed for them. The main accompaniment

in this music was the harmonium because more subtle instruments like the Sitar or the Sarangi had not the volume to reach the ears of the large audiences gathered attracted by these plays. A great deal of use was made of dance tunes, choruses, and orchestration of musical instruments, all for the purpose of making the show more audible to the gathering. Our fine classical music is a kind of chamber music because it was created for small audiences, but the demands of the public theatre gave rise to wide innovation, and our musicians rose to the occasion and developed some extremely interesting new forms and styles of singing and playing.

New research into the scientific basis of our music was accompanied by great organisational activity. Schools and colleges of music were established. At the beginning of the twentieth century radio and films made their appearance, and both provided new avenues for the development of music. Because of the very wide appeal of the films it was natural for them to use folk music. The radio, on the other hand, was a medium that was able to cater to every taste, the popular, the refined, and the fastidious.

Film music has been deplored and criticised as a vulgarization of our musical tradition. This may well be true, but it does provide an opportunity for our musicians to break new ground and to satisfy new demands. There is no doubt that among the hundreds of songs written and composed for the films the major portion are mere sentimental and romantic effusions that do not contain much art. But it cannot be denied that they have occasionally been able to achieve a greater degree of emotional expressiveness than can be found in our more traditional and formal music. This ability to express feelings and moods is a matter of the highest importance in any art, especially in music. If our film music has helped to point the way here it has made a definite contribution.

Radio music has also been the subject of controversy. Some people criticise the broadcasting of film songs and others the broadcasting of classical music. Radio, however, has tried to satisfy both tastes. It is not always easy to persuade the best singers to sing on the microphone. Our musicians are used to singing directly to their audiences and this personal contact between the artist and his audience is of great importance to them. However, they have gradually adjusted themselves to the conditions of radio singing, and now one can hear even our best masters on the radio. By bringing the songs of our best singers to the common man the radio has rendered great service to music. If we look for definite addition or enrichment of our music through the medium of the radio we observe a greater use of folk songs which are considerably refined and modified. That the unknown or little-known songs which once echoed only in the forests of East Bengal have reached the city dwellers of Lahore and Karachi is a great achievement. When these songs are greatly refined and made to conform to a set scale of notes and a correct rhythm, they undergo a development which may well lead to the enrichment of our classical music. The radio musicians have also been practicing such innovations as setting Urdu songs to Bengali tunes and Bengali songs to Sindhi tunes, so that musical ideas and traditions are made to mingle, to circulate, and thereby enrich the musical repertoire of the different regions of the country.

Some purist critics may object to the great emphasis that is being given to folk music on the radio, but it must be remembered that folk music is the soil and source of all national music. It is from folk music that the flowers of raags and ragnis blossom. This soil must be enriched if the garden of our classical music is to flourish. Changes in raags and ragnis cannot be made on the basis of artificial theories. The soil of our music must be watered by circulating the musical riches of our folk songs. Their effect on our classical music would then follow a natural process. Change and evolution of arts cannot be forged. The natural must be spontaneous.

There is every reason to hope that the inherent vitality of Indo-Pakistani music will enable it to assimilate new influences and continue to evolve and progress as it has done in the past. The continuity of the stream must not be broken and the fresh waters of the past should continue to flow into the gardens of the present. If this is done tradition and change will combine to bring Indo-Pakistani music to its finest flower.

