

Padavali Kirtan of Bengal

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Abstract

In the field of Indian music and literature, Padavali Kirtan is regarded as a remarkable artistic achievement which conveys the perfect blend of melody, poetry and dramatic aesthetic values. The lyrics of Vaishnava Savants are not only musical but also a fine piece of literature called Brajabuli. Joydev, the celebrated author of the “Gitagovinda (Astapadi)” is regarded as the father of Padavali Kirtan and these forms were evolved from the ‘Padas’ of “Gitagovinda”. The word “Kirtan” is used all over India to signify, “Songs in Praise”. The theme of these compositions cover the divine love, sentiment and romance (divine shringar) of Srikrishna and Radha known as ‘Rasa-Kirtan’ and the composition was called ‘Lila-Kirtan’. Countless songs were composed on Shri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, as his life story was very much related to the Radha Krishna theme. It is believed that the compositions of Padavali Kirtan are very much influenced by the Hindustani classical music. Padavali Kirtan has also its own tala system which is based on Sri-Khol (Mridangam) and it is the most attractive feature of Padavali Kirtan, which makes it different from all other types of music of India, in respect of sound production with great performance and presentation.

Key words: Kirtan, Padavali, Bengal, Charyapada, Prabandha, Gitagovindam.

Introduction:

In our country, several types of music were evolved from ancient time such as classical music, folk music and devotional music. As we know, classical and folk music are now placed in a deserving position, whereas devotional music also became very popular for its heart touching melodies and bhavs (rasa). In Indian culture Bengal is an ideal section to generate a quality of art forms in different variety throughout all the ages. The ‘Charyapada’ is a collection of Buddhists Sidhacharyas songs of the earliest forms of music of the region. The ‘Charyapadas’ were composed during the rules of the ‘Pala’s, which are based on some lyrical structures. The compositions of Charyapada’s are influenced by the classical music and there were some references of specific ragas. According to great scholars, ‘Charyapada’ is an ancient form of Padavali Kirtan of Bengal. As a musical appearance Kirtan was far older than today’s Padavali Kirtan. Though, we found assorted rhythmical genres which are called Bengali religious scriptures, like Manasamangal, Dharmamangal, and Krishnamangal etc. The history of Bengal says that, we can’t overlook these scriptures which were helping us to set up the ‘Padas’ as musical compositions. Padavali Kirtan is a rich devotional musical form of Bengal and it is the unique variety of Bengali music

Main Source of Padavali Kirtan:

Various musical compositions were in practice in Bengal from the time immemorable. But we can have historical evidences of compositional forms from the period of 10th - 11th century. There were mainly two types of musical forms like folk and classico-folk. One of the most important musical forms, 'Charyagiti' were sung based on classical ragas and talas and had a resemblance of 'Prabandha Giti'. According to some scholar, the Padavali Kirtan has been compared with the 'Rupak Prabandha' described by Sharangdev. As per Vidhusi Prof. Krishna Bisht, the Padavali Kirtan bears similarity with the most ancient 'Ela' and 'Suda' Prabandhas. It may be pointed out that Ela-Prabandhas were known in Bengal since the time of Matanga and one of the Ela, Gauda Ela belonged to Bengal¹. Therefore, generally the rules of 'Ela' must have been known to the musician of ancient Bengal. It is believed that, the great Bengali scholar Haraprasad Shastry contained the text of said songs elaborately in Sanskrit. In this regard, we can enter into the 12th century A.D. when the 'Gitagovinda Padaganas' or 'Astapadis' were composed by Thakur Joydev. This may be called the origin of 'Kirtan'. The songs of the 'Gitagovinda' are the 'Prabandha' types of gitis and it is a good combination of Prakrit and Sanskrit language². From the reference of 'Srichaitanya Charitamrit' we found that Mahaprabhu used to listen to the songs of Chandidas and Vidyapati, which indicates that some elementary form of Padavali Kirtan were in practice before the life and time of Sri Chaitanna Mahaprabhu. Besides this, another musical form 'Mangalagitis' were in practice and all the themes were taken from different 'Mangalkavyas'³. During this period, each and every 'Mangalkavyas' was of great value and were composed by various authors based on simple poetry to glorify a particular God or Goddess. These types of musical forms are known as 'Mangal gaan'. According to some scholar, it was the pioneer of Padavali Kirtan and Padavali style was very much influenced by these 'Mangal gaan'. After that, we can see Vaishnava Savants like Vadu Chandidas, Kavi Vidyapati and others as composers of 'Gitagovinda Padaganas' with the help of classical ragas and talas. Vidyapati composed his songs in Maithili and the poets of Bengal tried to follow the style of Vidyapati by introducing a new literary language of 'Braj-bulli'. But it is not ignorable that Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is the father of 'Nama kirtan' and 'leelakirtan'. But then, there was no definite musical style known as Padavali Kirtan in Bengal.

Padavali Kirtan at the time of Thakur Narottam Das:

In the time of 16th century Thakur Narottam Das introduced the classical type of 'Padavali Kirtan' on the basis of the 'dhruva prabandha gana'. After the death of Sri Chaitanyadev, a great Vaishnava Savant Thakur Narottam Das felt that he has to do

¹ Bisht, Dr. Krishna. (1986). The Sacred Symphony: A study of Buddhistic and Vaishnav music of Bengal in relation to Hindustani Classical Music. Ghaziabad: Bhagirath Sewa Sansthan. P-99.

² Prajnanananda, Swami. (1981). A Historical Study of Indian Music. Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers Private Limited. New Delhi. P-195.

³ Roy, Sukumar. (1973). Music of Eastern India. Firma K.L.M. Private Limited. Calcutta. P-41.

something to develop the Padavali Kirtan of Bengal. He restructured the kirtan style by following the rules of classical music⁴. Actually, Narottam Das has taken musical training from Swami Haridas, who was very popular for his great disciple Miah Tansen, a legendary musical personality of classical music. After receiving all musical training, Narottam came back to his village and gave full attention to organize the Vaishnava community. To establish the style of Padavali Kirtan, he arranged the 'Khetory Utsav' in Brindavan, where the thousands of Vaishnavaites were present. In his own way he made a team of four members. They were Gouranga Das, Devi das, Sri Das and Gokulananda. The basic musical tone of Narottam's singing style emerged from the ancient musical form Dhrupad, which is known for its deepness and devotional mood. He made the structure of Padavali Kirtan with talas and rhythms. It is believed that Narottam also created some new talas for Padavali Kirtan. We can say it was a good combination of North Indian tala system and South Indian tala system. This movement was given a new color by Thakur Narottam das. He has mentioned compulsory singing of "Gourachandrika" as an opening part of Padavali presentation. The word "Gourachandrika" means the songs in honor of Shri Chaitanya, who is also well-known as 'Goura' or 'Gourchandra'. Narottam also manifested the idea of presentation of the Radha-Krishna story and the life-story of Shri Chaitanya separately with musical composition. Jayadev or Badu Chandidas, the famous author of Bengal was very much inspired by this work of Narottam Das. His technique was to gather and collect the songs on a variety of shades of an especial sentiment and arrange them into a pala which has a "Gourachandrika" to express it dramatically. This proposal was also accepted by the Vaishnava Scholars. Shri Chaitanya produced an immense popular enthusiasm about Padavali Kirtan, while Narottam gave it a suitable musical direction⁵.

Recitation Techniques of Padavali Kirtan:

Kirtanias are follows five recital techniques of Padavali Kirtan, which are identified as 'Anga'. The techniques are named as Katha, Doha, Tuka, Chhuta and Ankhara. Each one has its own different meaning. 'Katha' indicate the main text of a Padavali song. The word 'Katha' also identify the conversations, especially in the form of question and answer among Radha, Krishna and Barayi. When the Kirtanias explains the meaning of a line or a stanza in pure prose, it calls 'Katha'. The stanzas of various forms in Padavali lyrics called 'Doha', which helps a singer to recite in their performance. There has an ornamental part of a Padavali song name as 'Tuka' which is traditionally handed over from the Guru to the Shishya through generations as it is not written down or codified like the 'Padas'. 'Chhuta' is a part of a Kirtan 'Stanza'. Instead of the whole Stanza when a part is presented, it becomes 'Chhuta'. The last piece 'Ankhara' is the most significant limb, which enhance the sweet melodies of the Padavali Kirtan and also helps to highlight the bhava's of Padavali Kirtan⁶.

⁴ Prajnanananda, Swami. (1973). Historical Development of Indian Music. Firma K.L.M. Private Limited. Calcutta. P-393.

⁵ <http://www.sdnbd.org/sdi/news/general-news/June/22-06-2002/Feature.htm>

The performers use it in the middle of their song and perhaps it impressed small phrases of Padavali Kirtan. Actually, Kirtanias wants to describe this portion without break the emotional continuity of the original 'Pada' to highlight a particular emotion of the Padavali Kirtan⁷.

Important Ragas uses in Padavali Kirtan:

It is an undeniable fact that, the Padavali system has developed within the contours of the mainstream Hindustani classical music keeping in view the technicalities of the raga structure as the source of melody. Actually Prabandhas are the classical genres of ancient Indian Music. Vaishnava literature mentioned that the Padavali singing had started in the early 16th century, along with Nama-sankirtana. However, there is a common notion that the classical type of Padavali Kirtana was an innovation of Narottam Das. From the reference of "Gitagovinda", we came to know that, Joydev mentioned about some ragas to set his compositions, which influenced the Padavali Kirtan also to set the musical compositions in some ragas and talas. Though Padavali Kirtan is very much influenced by the classical music, but it does not strictly follow the classical Raga Sangeet music. The Vaishnava Padavalis are essentially lyrical. Therefore, each Pada has been marked with a specific raga. The name of the ragas commonly found in various anthologies are Dhanasi, Pahida, Sindhura, Kanada, Kamoda, Shri, Gurjari, Adana, Vibhasa and others⁸. Apart from the use of common ragas, other ancient ragas are also common like Kedarbihagda, Deshabaradi, Vibhas- Lalit, Karun-Vibhas etc.

Specific Talas of Padavali Kirtan:

Music is one of the most remarkable Art form which can easily interact with human emotions. Only music can help to refresh human mind and to get happiness. But without the tala system music doesn't get its proper structure. So, there is also another great diversity in Kirtan, which is rendered in three tempos: druta or speeds, madhyalaya and vilambit or slow. As we know, Narottam Das also devised some new talas of Padavali Kirtan. The rhythmic part of the Padavali Kirtan is fascinating. The Kirtanias of Bengal have developed a scientific system of tala, many aspects of which are quite independent of the modern Hindustani tala paddhati. Normally in a single composition, the number of talas is more than one. Though Kirtan claims to have more than one hundred patterns, most of them are very complex in composition. Among them, "Daskosi" is one of the instances of the most significant Tala of Padavali kirtan which used in its different classifications. "Bara Daskosi" is a tala of 28 beats (matras). Some of the names are common but arrangements of bars (time measure) are in some cases different. The popular names are: Teot, Ektali, Daspyari, Rupak,

⁶ Roy, Sukumar. (1973). Music of Eastern India. Firma K.L.M. Private Limited. .P-36.

⁷ <http://www.sdnbd.org/sdi/news/general-news/June/22-06-2002/Feature.htm>

⁸ Bisht, Dr. Krishna. (1986). The Sacred Symphony: A study of Buddhistic and Vaishnav music of Bengal in relation to Hindustani Classical Music. Ghaziabad: Bhagirath Sewa Sansthan. P-74.

Teora, Jhamptal, Jhanti, Dharata, Madandola, Chutha, Nandan, Indrabhash, Jhurjhuti etc⁹. It should also be mentioned that the performance on khol, with all its boldness and the changing phases of each tala, stands as a predominating aspect of music in Padavali kirtan.

Dominant Gharanas of Padavali Kirtan:

There has strong indication that we have to follow the Gharanadar Gayaki in Indian classical music as it is. Padavali Kirtan has also its some dominant Gharanas like Indian Classical Music like Garanhati, Manhar Shahi, Reneti, Mandarini and Jharkhandi¹⁰. At first, Thakur Narottam Das introduced the first Kirtan style of singing, based on classical ancient form 'Dhrupad' name as 'Garanhati Gharana'. It was regarded as a basic Kirtan Gharana with slow tempo and it was compared with the Dhrupad Gharanas of Indian classical music. But day after day it became quite difficult for learners and performers. Then we found the next Kirtan style was developed by a Vaishnava Savant named Jnanadas. His Kirtan style of singing identified as 'Manhar Shahi Gharana' of Padavali Kirtan. This style of Padavali song was little easier than the Garanhati style. To make the composition more attractive he added some speed to the rhythm. This singing style of Padavali Kirtan was counted as being equivalent to the Khayal gharana of Hindustani music. The third Kirtan Gharana was Reneti Gharana of Padavali Kirtan devised by Vipradas Ghosh. The 'Reneti Kirtan Gharana' is compared with the Thumri Gharana of Indian classical music. The fourth Kirtana style is known as the 'Mandarini Gharana', propounded by Venidas. Popular acceptability was the motto of this gharana. Only the easy rhythmic patterns were sustained. The fifth and the last style of Padavali Kirtan which was developed by Kavindra Gokul, was known as 'Jharkhandi Gharana'¹¹. It was devised in the Jharkhand region. The 'Jharkhandi gharana' was denied all the classical or the semi-classical modes of the earlier gharanas and blend with the colors of folk music.

Conclusion:

It is clear that Padavali Kirtan is one of the classical and devotional songs of Bengal. Today, not only in India even whole country is very much attached with this art form for its great dramatic music which has the essential raga frame and the verity of rhythms. It is full-fledged classical genres having its own set of laws, techniques, rules and regulations and most importantly it follows a certain discipline. At present, Bengali Padavali Kirtan is being highly neglected and this pristine form is not much encouraged and needs very special attention. It is painful to observe these days that several musicians ascribed Padavali Kirtan as "laghu sangeet" light music. For this ignorance, Padavali Kirtan couldn't grow up easily in our cultural society. We have to understand that the both tradition Padavali Kirtan and Indian

⁹ Prajnanananda, Swami. (1973). Historical Development of Indian Music. Firma K.L.M. Private Limited. Calcutta. P-408.

¹⁰ Roy, Sukumar. (1973). Music of Eastern India. Firma K.L.M. Private Limited. Calcutta. P-41, 42

¹¹ <http://www.sdnbd.org/sdi/news/general-news/June/22-06-2002/Feature.htm>

classical music have their significant styles and features which is almost same. Without the knowledge of Indian classical music, nobody can sing Padavali Kirtan properly because it is performed by following some specific ragas and talas which are possible only by learning it in Guru-Shishya tradition.

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