



Changing Scenario of Guru Shishya Tradition in Indian Classical Music

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Abstract-

Hindustani music is essentially an oral heritage and its primary system of education is the guru-shishya parampara, (tradition) which evolved to meet its requirements. The guru-shishya parampara has been an integral part of Indian classical music for centuries. It is a deeply rooted tradition where knowledge, technique, and artistic expression are imparted from the guru (teacher) to the shishya (disciple) through years of rigorous training and personal guidance. Guru-Shishya or teacher-disciple relationship is one of the most divine and sovereign relationship, as it reflects the wider realm of knowledge, obedience, and belongingness. There is a deep relationship of knowledge, values of respect and motivation, and sense of Guru's aura and intimacy around. In Hindustani Classical Music, The Guru Shishya Parampara has been the biggest and only way to carry forward this glorious tradition through generations. The Gharana system's mandate to only pass on music through heredity created a highly conducive pedagogical environment for Hindustani music, though not necessarily sustainable in the long-term. Paluskar founded and established the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, the first music university in India, and trained many teachers to set up more such schools across the country. Paluskar was instrumental in raising the prestige and respectability of music in the eyes of the public by drastic alteration of the texts of compositions of Classical music from obscene eroticism to ethereal devotion. Paluskar and Bhatkhande taught music to anyone who was interested in a format that maintained the spirit of the guru-shishya parampara. India has had witnessed many idealistic teacher-student pairs in its long glorious history. Some of the prominent names that reflects this Parampara are, Dronacharya - Arjuna in Mahabharata time, Dhaumya - Aruni, Chanakya - Chandragupta Maurya, Swami Haridas and Muhammad Ghaus - Tansen, Samarth Ramdas - Shivaji Maharaj, Ramakrishna Paramhansa - Swami Vivekananda etc. this sacred tradition is also reflected in Modern Indian Hindustani classical music too.

Keywords: - guru-shishya parampara, Hindustani Classical Music, Spiritual knowledge, gharana.

Introduction-

The guru-shishya parampara has been an integral part of Indian classical music for centuries. It is a deeply rooted tradition where knowledge, technique, and artistic expression are imparted from the guru (teacher) to the shishya (disciple) through years of rigorous training and personal guidance. The Parampara Series recognizes the significance of this unique relationship and the need to uphold and preserve it in the face of modernization and changing musical trends. The tradition of carrying forward the age-old traditions from one generation to the next, from the teacher to the disciples, from gurus to the shishyas are known as **Guru-Shishya Parampara**. This tradition has been traced to the Vedic times when it was about the guru giving religious and spiritual lessons to his Shishyas. The shishya was supposed to reside with his guru, closely observing his day to day lifestyle and learning from them as well as learning methodical teachings from him. Guru-Shishya or teacher-disciple relationship is one of the most divine and sovereign relationship, as it reflects the wider realm of knowledge, obedience, and belongingness. There is a deep relationship of knowledge, values of

respect and motivation, and sense of Guru's aura and intimacy around. In Hindustani Classical Music, The Guru Shishya Parampara has been the biggest and only way to carry forward this glorious tradition through generations. We come to know about the anecdotes of how the lives of the guru and the shishya got intertwined. In our music, **Gurumukhi Vidya** is the only way to acquire this art. From the basic training like voice culture and notation, the student needs to be in strict guidance so that he or she does not deviate or pick up incorrect methods.

Earlier there used to be a special ceremony where the shishya formally announce to the society that he is entering the Parampara and the Guru publicly accepted the student by tying a ceremonious thread on the wrist of the student. The ceremony was called '**Ganda-Bandhan**' where 'ganda' meant the the ceremonious thread and 'bandhan' meant to tie.

The most important part of the learning process of our music is to listen to the guru and trying to grasp what he is singing by the audible segments of the body. The process of the listening directly to the guru and singing it after him helps the brain to memorize the patterns and try to create

more. In the modern times, residing with the gurus is often impossible. In such case, the students find a place nearby the guru's home and try to visit his or her guru as often as one could, so the primary aspects of the guru-shishya parampara are maintained.

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In all the knowledge traditions of our nation, the teaching-learning process is verbal. In the most revered way, it is called 'Guru Mukhi Vidya', where the knowledge is received directly from the mouth of the Guru, not merely from textbooks. This ancient tradition is extremely widespread in one of the innumerable cultural traditions of Bharat – The Classical Music Tradition – Shastriya Sangeet Parampara. It is as profound today as it was thousands of years ago, constantly infusing faith in the mind and heart of all seekers of music, inspiring them to choose classical music as their way of life. India has had witnessed many idealistic teacher-student pairs in its long glorious history. Some of the prominent names that reflect this Parampara are, Dronacharya - Arjuna in Mahabharata time, Dhaumya - Aruni, Chanakya - Chandragupta Maurya, Swami Haridas and Muhammad Ghaus - Tansen, Samarth Ramdas - Shivaji Maharaj, Ramakrishna Paramhansa - Swami Vivekananda etc. this sacred tradition is also reflected in Modern Indian Hindustani classical music too. The recent example is the Guru-Shishya relationship between Shrinivas Khale and Shankar Mahadevan, An acclaimed composer in his own right; Shrinivas Khale tutored his star pupil, singer-composer Shankar Mahadevan from a young age to achieve the greatest heights that Shankar Mahadevan experiences today. The brightest feature of Indian culture is its tradition of holy and ever deepening tie of soul kinship between Guru and Shishya. As time passes this tradition of teacher-disciple relationship gave birth to Upanishads. The word Upanishad is spelt as 'Upa nishad'; which means to sit near and to listen - to absorb. In this Parampara or tradition it is required for a shishya to be more attentive disciple who has to listen to the teachings and experiences of his spiritual master, assimilated them and then briefly and succinctly recorded them systematically in the form of unique scriptures called Upanishads. The lines "Spiritual knowledge cannot be attained without the help of the Guru. Life without Guru is like a body without life breath" better describes how blessed and exalted is a person who has attained the immediacy of Guru, his blessings and subtle protection.

In India, guru has all the power to select his own shishya from the ancient times, since serving the humanity was the core issue with the teacher or guru the responsibility of selecting the right disciples followed by removing their darkness of

ignorance and leading them to accomplish salvation. One can effortlessly understand how vital it is to reestablish this revered tradition of Guru- Shishya under the present circumstances when Jivan Vidya has almost disappeared and vanished. Hindustani music is essentially an oral heritage and its primary system of education is the guru-shishya parampara, (tradition) which evolved to meet its requirements. 'The earliest evidence of Indian musical activity is traced to the ceremonial chanting of the Rig and Sama Vedas.'¹ Vedic chanting is considered musical in nature because it is composed to specific tones and in a fixed meter. The Sama Veda, in particular, uses seven tones to create a melodic sounding form. It is identified as the origin point of music. Thus, 'song is rooted in the traditions of sacred chant.'² The role of the Guru is multiple: he has a steadfast commitment to passing on the corpus of knowledge, he is a guardian and mentor figure for the student and also a role model in life outside of the area of study. The role of the shishya, unlike the modern concept of 'student', is not limited to strictly imbibing knowledge. It is expected that during the period of tutelage, the shishya completely surrenders to the Guru's wishes and demands with unquestioning loyalty and trust. In the Vedic and post-Vedic period, temples and Hindu kings supported music, dance, and theater. 'The Muslim reign mostly was concentrated in the northern region. This led to interactions between the Persian music and the northern music. Indian Music crept into Persia, then to Greece, and onwards to Arabia, from where it was again brought to India, Blending itself once more into the Parent stock and forming the modern Hindustani music.'³ With the advent of Islamic rule, there was a very fruitful period of cultural exchange first through the Sufis, followed by the Turks and then the Moguls, resulting in the creation of two different branches of classical music in India.

Raja Saurendra Mohan in his book 'Universal History of Music' wrote-'The Mohammedans did not encourage the theory of the art, but they patronized practical musicians and were themselves instrumental in composing and introducing several styles of songs or devising new forms of instrumental music.'⁴ South India remained largely uninfluenced by the invasions, and thus retains a similar aesthetic to the music of the temples. 'North India imbibed influences from Persia, from musical modes to new instruments, rhythmic systems, and languages. Thus began the birth of the distinctive style now known as Hindustani Raagsangeet.'⁵ The Gharana system's mandate to only pass on music through heredity created a highly conducive pedagogical environment for Hindustani music, though not necessarily sustainable in the long-term. As detailed in Deepak Raja's book, Hindustani Music: A Tradition in

Transition, ‘many factors in this set-up initially seem logical for facilitating efficient learning. Raja cites genetics, familial environment, and extensive exposure as some of the key elements that positioned family members as the best candidates for continuing the gharana music tradition.’⁶ Advances in technology, specifically the print media and the gramophone, broke down many barriers of the oral tradition. Two very important figures in modern Hindustani music, Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, changed the landscape of music education and documentation. Bhatkhande was a renowned musicologist who undertook the task of documenting all the gharana compositions and raga grammar, until then guarded as sacred. He is responsible for creating a notation system that is still in use today, and for organizing the ocean of information into a taxonomy that made it more logical and teachable. ‘He adopted Melakarta system but he chose only ten Thatas and tried to classify all the Ragas of Hindustani music.’⁷ The publication and dissemination of his many volumes of notations and music theory represents the first break from the strict confines of the oral tradition. ‘On the changes that happened in the Northern Indian music Pt. Bhatkhande ji said, ‘There is no denying that the North Indian music of that time needed important changes and these were conveniently provided by the advent of foreign music.’⁸ Paluskar founded and established the Gandharva Mahavidyalaya, the first music university in India, and trained many teachers to set up more such schools across the country.

‘Paluskar was instrumental in raising the prestige and respectability of music in the eyes of the public by drastic alteration of the texts of compositions of Classical music from obscene eroticism to ethereal devotion.’⁹ Paluskar and Bhatkhande taught music to anyone who was interested in a format that maintained the spirit of the guru-shishya parampara (learning by listening and imitation). However, he also modified it to reach more people. For the first time, women were openly accepted as students of music, and considered as potential performers as well. ‘The strict seena-ba-seena, face-to-face, mode between a guru and one disciple started to change with music schools offering group classes. These major changes in the learning environment had many positive as well as negative results.’¹⁰ The quantity and quality of riaz are markers of an individual’s potential. It is implied that if riaz is very rigorous, the individual has tremendous promise and is on the right path. Thus, before even beginning to perform, a student and artist is evaluated by the intensity of riaz. Almost all evaluation in this model is done by the Guru. The Guru decides when the student is ready performing, whether riaz needs improvement,

and more. As it is a performing art, those trained with that intention will be judged on the ability to perform at an acceptable standard. ‘It is not only preparation for performance, but preparation for unattainable perfection. It is a learning experience for which there is never any end, only successive stages...one has to practice in order to learn how to practice, and practicing sixteen hours a day exemplifies a sense of scholarship and a level of learning which it inevitably generates...The concept of riaz symbolizes a certain accomplishment of one’s inner development’¹¹ Music is always learnt with an association of a guru. The guru imparted knowledge of music to his student according to his potentiality. After years of devoted practice the guru used to give the specialties of music to students and by virtue of his excellence the student fostered the art of music. Thus, through generations and by Guru Tradition Gharanas of high order used to emerge.

Conclusion-

In Guru–Shishya Parampara discipline plays a vital role. This parampara continued from Vedic period is still alive. The art of music is pragmatic art. Shastra describes the scientific system of music and following this system of knowledge can be acquired with discipline. Guru Shishya tradition maintained this discipline. An art imbibes a new technique according to time and place and relinquishes the system and thus grows further. To maintain this flow of discipline Guru tradition proves to be successful. With the advent of new technology, Music teaching has undergone a lot of change. New musical instruments have been invented. Recordings of renowned artists are easily available to the students of Music. Information technology too has contributed to the teaching of music. The present form of “Guru Shishya Parampara” does not strictly adhere to the principles of this tradition. It rather uses some basic concepts of this tradition along with modern teaching methods and techniques. By using a MP3 player, iPod or digital recorder a student can now acquire more details in lesser time. Youtube and other such internet mediums have opened up vast archives of Indian classical music records of the past 100 years or so through which students can simultaneously learn and enrich their knowledge base. So, the scenario has changed quite a bit and we can expect to see more changes in the coming years. “Guru Shishya Parampara” is still essential for Indian classical music. It has not lost its credibility due to the emergence of new technology or institutionalized training system. What is needed today is the confluence of “Guru Shishya Parampara” with modern training methods and techniques. New technology and equipment can further increase the effectiveness of this tradition. With spontaneity and improvisation, it is destined to

play even a bigger role in shaping the future of Indian classical music.

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