

ON THE MUSICAL CULTURE OF THE NORTH INDIA

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Abstract. In the article the system of musical culture of Northern India is presented for the first time. The most fundamental layer is shastriya-sangeet, i.e. «Scientific music», the equivalent of the European definition of classics. The tops of shastriya-sangeet are the vocal genres dhrupad and khayal, which serve as the sound «symbols» of Indian civilization. The category of up-shastriya, or «semiclassical», occupies a special position. This layer of music is the most extensive and multilevel and fills up today most of the sound «field» of Indian culture. Also considered is the leading genre of up-shastriya – vocal thumri in the context of related genres of dadra, tappa and traditional regional music of Hindustani (kajri, chaiti). In general, up-shastriya is a kind of phenomenal mediastinum, a soldered synthesis of massive layers of culture, formed over many centuries – classical (shastriya-sangeet) and traditional (lok-sangeet). The essence of this process of interaction and mutual knowledge of the two categories lies in the concept of «up-shastriya»: it is music that is saturated with the aroma of «high» classics, moving farther from their traditional roots. Currently, up-shastriya forms the main part of the sound space in the two music systems of North and South India, becoming the style and structural basis of a large number of samples of «light» type music, the most important component of complex artistic phenomena, such as theatrical and dance performances, cinematography, variety music. All regional genres raised to the level of «semiclassical» came to the concert stage and are popular not only in the Indian states, but also beyond. The category of «light classical» music (gazal, bhajan) is strongly associated with up-shastriya, but differs from it by another semantic load of raga. Currently, in India there is a constant exchange between the genres of different musical layers.

Keywords: shastriya-sangeet, up-shastriya, dhrupad, khayal, thumri

Today in the history of world civilizations, the process of building new cultural relationships and priorities can be seen, since each of the national cultures enters the dialogue with other regions of the world. The «musical map» of the world appears to be a set of diverse sound and musical images of different civilizations, building together one sound picture of the Universe as a whole. The research subject of this article is the diverse and unique Indian music with its specific interplay of rich and various traditions, patterns and trends in a compound musical and cultural picture of civilizations. The bright colourful music of Hindustan (North India) is infinitely diverse and amazing both in itself and as a sounding context for different sides of life, history, culture, art of the South Asia at whole.

From the history of musical Indology. Indian civilization as a large-scale artistic phenomenon, that was formed over many millennia, has been and remains attracting to its bizarre world. It gives Western people a different understanding of life and simultaneously helps to examine themselves better in the mirror of another culture, and also serves as an inexhaustible source of inspiration for creative people from different countries.

There are still many «white spots» in the musical Indology. Knowledge of certain fields of classical, regional and popular music is insufficient and requires further in-depths analysis based on the system approach to questions of musical art. Since the entire specific organization of the musical culture in India is functioning as inseparable wholeness, there is a problem of identifying all of its social and cultural layers.

G.K. Mikchailov¹ defined in the 1970s for the first time in musicology the concept of «social and cultural layers in music», suggested their classification and the most significant characteristics of each of them. According to Mikchailov, the socio-cultural layers of music (and music culture) are «a set of its types, kinds and styles, the musical text's specifics of which is due to their belonging to a particular locus (the sociocultural environment) and functions. Each of these layers is also characterized by the type of being a musician, the nature of learning music, musical instruments, etc» [2, 12].

Gandharva and sangeet. Let us turn now to the specifics of the musical culture of India, which developed many centuries ago into a coordinated system where each of its layers and their respective categories of music got their historical understanding, theoretical grounds, their own name and their artistic and aesthetic specificity. Already in the ancient scriptures as «Nāṭya Shāstra» (II BCE – and III CE), «Gīṭānaka» (III BCE), «Bṛhaddesh i» (V-VII CE) the types of music are described as a long existing reality. They are distinguished by strictly developed standards – ethical, aesthetical and musical. Another fact should be considered: this culture has long ago created its own classification of music types, consistently introducing several concepts that define either different sides of «high» music or its different understanding.

The traditional Indian music theory suggests two terms for the art of sound: *gandharva* is a relatively old word, which was created during the forming of the ancient Indian epos, and *sangeet* is a relatively new one. The Indian scientist Mukund Lath in his well-known book «A Study of Dattilam: Research work on Dattilam» points out the existence of the concept «Gandharva-Sangeet»– «"heavenly, sublime" music not connected to the Vedic tradition» [7, 115]. Then Lath notices that in the first centuries AD the concept of «Gandharva-Veda» appeared testifying a special sacred respect to canonized music.

Gandharvas are celestial genies, mythical singers and musicians who sing and play for gods and please their hearing. These are male musicians. One of their tasks is to announce the sacred truth (like muses) which makes them mediators between gods and humans. Both muses and *Gandharvas* are responsible for human musical skills: muses give talents for music and poetry, *Gandharvas* instruct people in singing and playing instruments. In this regard in Greece and India alike music is considered a sacred art. At least in India this remains so until now.

By the XIII century in the Sharṅgadeva's treaty «Sāṅgita Ratnākara» another basic concept appears – «Marga-sangeet» («*marga*» from the Sanskrit «looking for a way»): it is a type of ancient music «given» from the side in the contrary to «*desi*» music, common and regional («*desi*»– from the Sanskrit «land, region») i.e. mundane local traditions.

The later term used until today is «sangeet», from the words «san» (together, with) and «geet» (song). Consequently, the term is translated as «song and everything that follows along with it» and implies a synthesis of the arts intertwined through their sound nature: the unity of music in all its manifestations, dancing (gesture, movement) and acting, i.e. of three inseparably associated kinds of artistic practice.

Classics, semi-classics and «light classics». The structure of Indian musical culture consist of the following layers of the musical artistic work: *Shāstriya-sangeet* or the music of «high tradition», *up-shāstriya* («semi-classics»), *lok-sangeet* (traditional music), «light classics», pop, «light» music etc. Being in a constant dialogue, these categories define the complex multicomponent nature of the Indian musical culture.

The most fundamental layer is the *Shāstriya-sangeet*, i.e. «academic music», the equivalent of the European definition of the classics. «Classics» means music of the «high tradition» with a highly developed complex of philosophical-aesthetic and music-theoretical

¹ G.K. Mikchailov (1938-1995) was a composer, a teacher, the creator of a unique methodological system for studying world musical cultures, the creator of scientific and degree programs of the same name in the Moscow State Conservatory.

principles that took shape over the centuries of historical development of the Indian culture. The highlights of the *Shastriya-sangeet* are vocal genres *dhrupad* and *khayal*, the sound «symbols» of the Indian civilization.

Dhrupad is a base and standard of the intonation and structure model from which all other genres were derived. It is the most ancient classical genre; its prime was in the XV century during the reign of Emperor Akbar. Born from the depths of the religious music *dhrupad* got its existing form in XV-XVI centuries when *raja* Mansinha Tomar from Gwalior (1486–1516) introduced a genre called *darbari* (court) *dhrupad*. Half of the following century *dhrupad* flourished as the main genre of the Mughal court musical tradition. In *dhrupad* the powerful spiritual processes of the Mughal era were expressed, its heroic spirit, the whole experience of the South Asian civilization in the Indo-Muslim medieval period².

Being not only a musical phenomenon but also a specific way of intense spiritual activity of a prayerful and meditative kind *dhrupad* embodies a unique balance between the rational adjustment of all sound construction elements and tense concentration of psychoemotional energy. This explains in particular the highest artistic quality of his samples. The performance traditionally starts at a slow pace in the «low octave» with a long *alap* (entry) which is the heart of the entire composition. The *cheez* (composition) itself follows having four parts: *sthayi* (the beginning, a kind of refrain), *antara* (second section), *sanchari* (third) and *aabhog* (final). The two latest are especially complex. The melody deployment is slow and majestic; *raga* is presented in its «pure» and perfect form. Since the idea of «beauty» in *dhrupad* was essentially absorbed by the idea of «accuracy», the full perception of the sound information in it was available only to a few initiates of the laws of this art, particularly educated people. Being this way a form of communication only for a thin elite stratum, too few in numbers to set the essence of the culture, *dhrupad* could not exist without a companion genre the sound model of that would be somehow more flexible and free, responsive to the ever-changing life conditions spiritual needs of society. These trends led to the emergence of a new genre called *khayal* (from the Persian «imagination», «fantasy», «obsession») that evolved from the «court *dhrupad* and replaced its elder brother around the XVII century» [5, 48]. Nowadays *khayal* is a leading classical genre of Hindustani music along with *dhrupad* which stands out by its the elegance and romantic nature, sophisticated melodic ornamentation and virtuoso passages. *Khayal* is a product of Indo-Muslim cultural synthesis. A typical *khayal* is a large composition of two parts: *barakhayal* («big») and *chhota-khayal* («small»). Many of the *khayal* stars consider singing *khayal* to be not just a music making but a sort of spiritual effort, incredible activation and emancipation of intuition, which alone is able to reveal some uncognizable truth. The expected result is a dazzling insight, the rapid flight of the spirit. The text is taken into the smallest pieces: syllables, sounds, noises, sighs; from second to second the sound wave gently and precisely touches to the thinnest strings of intuition, the subconscious, awakening of which links all the complex meanings into one perfect world.

The next significant category is *up-shastriya* considered as music of a «reduced tradition»: «*up*» is a prefix meaning «half», «under». The literal meaning of the term is «semi-academic». The culture-bearers determine this layer of music in English as a «semi-classical music», which can be interpreted as «graded below; located under the main». It should be noted that in the Indian musicology that is not the only term used with the prefix «*up*»: there are some *ragas*³ which are classified as *up-raga* (*semiraga*), for instance, «Sindhu Bhairavi» is considered

² Traditionally in «*dhrupad*» the medieval text in *Braj* with a lot of Sanskrit inclusion are used which are prayers and praises offered to the Hindu gods but imbued with the Sufi worldview, although as a verbal base for singing *dhrupad* the Buddhist *mantras* may be used.

³ *Raga* – the Sanskrit word «*raag*» is masculine, but in the Russian tradition it is used as feminine. The etymology of the word «*raag*» is connected with the root «*ranj*» – from the verb «to paint», «to give shade». The emotional message of a *raga* «gives shade» and affects our mind, makes us feel. «*Ranjayati iti raag*» in Sanskrit means «*raga* pleases, amuses, excites, elevate and exalt». Each *raga* is a kind of musical «language» with its own alphabet, phrasing, punctuation, syntax, which means its own set of characteristic rules. Here belong: a tonal set (at least 5

by the Indian musicians as a short version of the most popular *raga* «Bhairavi» coming from the traditional music of Sindh (Pakistan). This fact confirms the assumption that *up-shastriya* has departed as a specific layer already in ancient times and adopted its official status as a «light» classical music, occupying its own cultural niche.

Up-shastriya and classics are genetically related categories and the «semi-classics» uses the entire range of classical musical grammar, but is intended for a broader auditorium. The basic representative of *up-shastriya* («semi-classics») is a vocal genre *thumri*, which is a «base fabric» of the multi-coloured «tapestry» of the Indian musical culture, and concentrates in itself all the main regularities of this category of music. According to the Indians, it is a charming song about love, poetically sublime and vibrantly exciting, revealing the diverse and subtlest nuances of mood and emotions. The genre *thumri* is a result of the interaction of aesthetic principles, which were developed, in Indian classical vocal music (*dhrupad*, *khayal*) on the one hand, and features of traditional singing in various parts of the Uttar Pradesh territory on the other. This leads to the ambivalent position of the genre between the «high» classics and traditional works, as a kind of «compromise» between them.

The etymology of the term «*thumri*» implies several meanings («a little song associated with the dance», «children dance with the coquettish gait», «graceful dancing steps», etc.), most of which indicates the relationship of the genre with the dance element.

Verbal texts in *thumri* are usually samples of «high» poetry in the Western dialect of Hindi *bhasha braj*, and, unlike *dhrupad* or *khayal*, this text is clearly articulated and generally expressed «literally», with the identification of those meanings, which are set in a poetic source. As a rule, *thumri* tells the romantic and sad story about the love of God Krishna and Radha, in whose allegorical images the *bhakti* idea of eternal sorrow of a human soul is embodied, the longing to reunite with the endlessly elusive truth.

Nomenclature of the *thumri* genre varieties has surprisingly many levels. There are samples fostered at the court, close to *khayal* and general characteristic for the «high» classics elevated type of expression, though with a more liberated, sensual and sentimental character. Nearby there is a wide layer of this genre common among citizens who are prone to home-music-making, a kind of salon type of leisure. A huge number of *thumri* circulates between classical and traditional music, literally «on the fly» picking up the characteristic features of a local singing and as freely «going to the people». Flexible, pliable to the variety of changes genre is readily used in numerous synthetic types of art: dance scenes, theatrical performances, and cinema. In the modern India, *thumri* exists as an independent instrumental genre and has as well an active influence on other «semi-classical» genres.

Beside *thumri* the *up-shastriya* family has another two genres – *dadra* and *tappa* as well as traditional regional music: *chaiti*, *kajri*, *savani*, *jhula*, *hori* and *baramasi*. As the most researchers notice, the difference between them and *thumri* is only in themes and the time of performance. *Chaiti* are summer seasonal songs sung only in the *chaitra* month (March-April); *savani* belongs to the month *shravan* (July-August, rain season); *jhula* describes swaying in the boat or swing in the rain season; *hori* is only performed during the spring Holi celebration; *baramasi* is sung all over the year. The boundary between the *up-shastriya* and the named genres of traditional music is as difficult to draw, says Professor Prabha Atre, «as between classics and semi-classic» [3, 39].

Dadra is a light rhythmical song of erotic content in a dialect *Braj Bhasha*, often with some verses in Urdu, in a relatively lively pace, accompanied by *dadra tala* (6 beats). It is

tones), a specific melodic base, a tone classification, a melodic core of the *raga*, an order of tones in a melodic line (*aroha and avaroha*), specific caesuras and tone pronunciation. In General, *raga* is a complex concept: 1) a special psychemotional condition expressed by the means of different constituents (musical structure, particular «shading» of a mode, performing manner); 2) a scale with endogenous I hierarchy of tones and a strict system of their relationship; 3) a model frame for a musical composition.

regarded that *dadra* genre is closely connected and «reminiscent of *thumri*, but much “lighter” as music. The difference between them lies in the pace: *dadra* is performed faster than *thumri*» [8, 69].

Tappa is believed to origin from the songs of camel drivers in Punjab and Rajasthan. It is firstly mentioned in «Ragadarpana» (1665). The improvement and shaping of *tappa* as a «semi-classical» vocal form in the late XVIII is attributed to Punjabi musician to Shori Mian (1742-1792). The performing of *tappa* abundantly uses virtuoso zigzag passages (*Zamzama*), freer employs *ragas* of small scale and has a romantic content in *Barj*, which is fully consistent with the performance practice of *up-shastriya*.

To the whole of India the concept of «plurality» is applicable, in this «state» are nationalities, religions, philosophies, dialect, social structure, cultural phenomena, music genres and forms of artistic expression. Moreover, even the gods, according to the Hindu mythology, are also multifaced as they have the ability to reincarnate (transform). The same for *up-shastriya*: it has evolved in a variety of genre forms, so in every state of the North and South India and in neighbouring countries, there are regional varieties of *thumri* and a whole range of «stylistic subtypes, which have their own names and follow all the laws of semi-classics» [1, 9].

Therefore the «semi-classical» music today fills the most part of the sound «field» of Indian culture. Let us examine its main stylistic criteria. *Up-shastriya* is characterized by more unstrained expression, compared to classical genres, accessible poetic content, using of simple tone scales and ethically simple *ragas*, employing of *talas* with less complex structure (often of the folk origin), absence of strict limits in terms of rhythmical and melodic al composition of the musical text, free borrowing of traditional music elements, modifications of the structure - sections of the form, «erosion» of the style features within genres. It should be noted that the *up-shastriya* is the most multi-layered part of the musical culture in the modern India and considered its major form. This includes «multi-colour» film music, music for theatrical performances (*Natya-Sangeet*), for radio and TV shows, etc.

It is also important to note that for Indian classics *up-shastriya* is a source of life force, refreshing and nourishing. On the one hand, the tradition of «semi-classics» is a living mother lode of intonation thesaurus for both traditional and classical genres; on the other, it is a very convenient field for testing the classical norms of musical development. Particularly refined, «purified» sound ideas ripened in the depths of this layer of music are easily replicated by classical musicians and smoothly introduced into the sound world of «high» music, adding to the sound vocabulary of *dhrupad* and *khayal*. Bright, memorable motives and rhythms are sporadically captured by the multifaced *up-shastriya* from the classics and with the same easiness then get spread into traditional genres. This vibrant life of traditions, imbued with the constant exchange of ideas between the culture layers, let us speak about the dynamics within the integrated musical system of the Indian civilization.

The category of «light classical» music (*Gazal*, *Bhajan*) is vitally connected with the *up-shastriya*, but differs from it through another meaning of *raga*. If «semiclassical» text and *raga* complement each other being at the same functional level, in the «light classics» text prevails over the *raga*. A religious song *Bhajan*⁴ includes *pada* (a short poetic text), *biruda* («greeting to the deity»), *teck* (a refrain formed by the first two lines of text and repeated after each stanza) and *mudra* (lit. «stamp», «face»: the last line of the song that includes the name of the author, who is described as an admirer or «servant» to the deity). *Bhajan* is to be performed on the concert stage and is not a part of a religious ceremony.

*Ghazal*⁵ is a lyrical song in Urdu in a strophic form where each couplet is grouped into sections: the first, *matla*, defines the poetic meter known as *the radif qaafiyaa*; other sections form part of the whole *ghazal*. The last section that mentions a poet's name «is called *makta*» [4, 54]. From a poetic point of view, the *ghazal* lyrics has a high artistic value.

⁴From the Sanskrit root «bhaj» - «take part», «to serve», «to love» [6, 184].

⁵From Persian «conversation between lovers».

A motley genre category *lok-sangeet* (traditional) is composed of local styles and many types and styles of vocal and dance music.

What is interesting in the last century of the history of the Indian musical culture? The constant interchange between the genres takes place in India nowadays. Those performers, who presents concerts one type of music in their concerts, consciously integrate features of other genres to enliven and diversify their performance. It suffices to say that on the concert stage, you can hear a classical *khayal* reminiscent of the «semi-classical» style, and the peculiar embellishments used in the *up-shastriya* are now freely applied in *khayal*. Even *sargam*⁶ and *taans*⁷ typical for the *shastriya-sangeet*, are now not uncommon in the genres of the *up-shastriya*. The «light classical» music such as *ghazal* becomes more and more similar to the *up-shastriya* and classical music, including a wide *alap* (opening section), long *taans* and *sargam*. This interchange of styles among the various musical layers in the modern India is a continuous process.

Instead of a conclusion. In summary, we emphasize that the Indian system of culture, on the one hand, is a strictly hierarchic structure, and on the other hand, contains the predisposition to internal fragmentation, whereby a plurality of organic, self-sufficient and polished elements in each of the socio-cultural layers are formed. All of the above is another testimony of the highest level of self-awareness, self-regulation and self-descriptions of the Indian musical tradition which on the basis of its underlying genetic qualities not only keeps its developed set of regularities in the musical culture, but also reveals the readiness for the internal transformation, responding to the needs of the new era, or, according to Indian musicologists, is in the process of «perpetual motion».

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⁶*Sargam* – from «*sargam karna*» is «to do the singing by *swaras*», «speaking, speech»: singing with saying *swaras* (tones); comes from the names of four opening *swaras* in Indian solfa: *Sa Re Ga Ma*.

⁷*Taans* from Sanskrit *taanana* (root «*taan*»–«expanse, extension»): virtuoso phrases of different length demonstrating the vocal skills of the performer.