

Gurus, Shishyas and Educators: Adaptive Strategies in Post-Colonial North Indian Music Institutions

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Introduction

British colonialism in India incorporated a complex administrative system of native states and direct British rule. The British India map included more than 500 native states, each governed by a local ruler. These were the chief patrons of Indian music, whose wealthy lifestyles allowed for the maintenance of court musicians in a system of patronage dating from at least as early as the first Moghul rulers of the sixteenth century. While British administration supported royal aristocratic patrons, Western ideology and attitudes provided a new and modern approach to musical patronage and training which was in conflict with the traditional system.

With the dissolution of the royal princely states shortly after independence in 1947, the government of India suddenly found itself the prime sponsor of Indian musicians. Two agencies that the new independent government inherited from its colonial predecessor became the new patrons of Hindustani music. These were All India Radio and government-funded institutions of music education. In particular, institutions of music education today remain a legacy of the conflict between traditional systems of instruction and Western systems of education. The adaptive strategies employed by Indian musicians in this

institutional environment demonstrate an important aspect of inter-cultural contact through music in the subcontinent.

This paper outlines the development of institutional education in North India during the end of British rule and through the first three decades of independence. Two modern institutions are isolated as case studies to show the role of institutionalized music education in North India today. The adaptive strategies that the teachers in these institutions employ are indicative of the issues currently facing the traditional music teacher in North India.

Guru-Shishya Parampara: **The Teacher-Disciple Tradition**

The most important aspect of traditional instruction in North Indian music is embodied in the special relationship which exists between teacher and student, a relationship called *guru-shishya parampara*. *Guru* means teacher, spiritual guide; *shishya* means disciple; and *parampara* means tradition. The complete term not only describes the special relationship between teacher and student but also carries implications for the system of transmission that was dependent on that relationship. Musicians still consider *guru-shishya parampara* important today, many older musicians having received their training as *shishyas* in a *guru-shishya parampara*.¹ However, without court patronage, few are now able to teach in this traditional way. It is therefore recollections, not current practice, that provide the key elements that define a *guru-shishya parampara*. Writers such as Neuman, Owens and Deva have documented these key elements.

Social Organization of Teachers and Students

Traditionally, students lived with their teacher, ideally in the same house. They received musical knowledge from their teacher and learned a way of life that revolved around music (Neuman 1980:54). Their teacher was respected not only in musical matters but also in all aspects of moral and physical behaviour (Shankar 1968:58), and provided food and clothing for them (Nag 1985:27-8). Students were regarded as family members and the ideal teacher-student relationship was almost homologous to that of father-son (Neuman 1980:45). Many students were indeed family members, and it was not uncommon amongst Muslim musicians for nephews to learn from their uncles (Shukla 1971:19; Yodh 1978:18; Owens 1983:175). Stylistic schools, called *gharanas*, were formed around

these families of musicians, and, in order to perpetuate uniqueness, students were discouraged from listening to other performance styles during their formative training (Owens 1983:171). These social conventions and obligations served several purposes. Among the most important was the creation of a total learning environment. Training was enhanced by the teacher's discussions, performances and demonstrations as they occurred during the natural course of the day's events. The training received from a teacher held special significance and was referred to as *talim*.

Talim: A System of Oral Training

Given the lack of documentary evidence about the essential features of any one *guru's talim*, it is almost impossible to discover any pattern for the training carried out in a *guru-shishya parampara*. Yet certain attitudes and characteristics seem to be consistent across a broad spectrum of cases.

Talim seems to have been characterized by strictness in matters of practice and in one's devotion to music (Nag 1985:78; Owens 1983:172; Deshpande 1973:9). Notation was rarely if ever used (Athavale 1970:30; Nag 1985:78); thus, the student was forced to learn everything by rote. This required much repetition in formal training methods and practice (Van der Meer 1980:139; Ranade 1984:33). Consequently, *guru-shishya parampara* embodied a process of oral transmission which necessitated constant contact between teacher and student (Deshpande 1973:9). The oral nature of this transmission explains the special relationship between teacher and student as developed in the *guru-shishya parampara*.

Orality implies the pervasive presence of sound. The student's role as listener and receiver was as important as the *guru's* in sustaining memory and recalling oral concepts (Ranade 1984:28). Learning continued outside the specific formal musical instruction (*talim*) that a student received from his *guru*, through constant interaction with a *guru* in formal instruction, accompanying him during performance, and listening to him during practice sessions. Therefore, it is hardly surprising to find almost no documentary evidence for what could be said to have comprised a traditional *talim*. It defied documentation and appeared to exhibit inconsistency because of its very nature as an element of the oral tradition.

Institutions: A Twentieth-Century Phenomenon

It is widely recognised that the early institutionalization of Hindustani music occurred primarily because of the motivation and inspiration of two musician-educators, Pandit V.N. Bhatkhande and Pandit V.D. Paluskar. The institutions set up by these two men during the early decades of this century became the models for later musical institutions. Bhatkhande, in particular, is credited with having codified Hindustani music theory, notation and practice so that curricula could be organized systematically. His familiarity with Western education models through his own training as a lawyer undoubtedly contributed to his systematic approach to institutionalized music education. His inspiration is seen as a major factor in the founding of schools in Baroda, Gwalior, Bombay, Nagpur and Lucknow during the 1920s and 1930s (Misra 1985:12-13). Similarly, Paluskar established his first music school, the Gandharva Sangeet Mahavidyalaya, in Lahore in 1901, with another in Bombay some ten years later (Van der Meer 1980:124). Paluskar's approach to institutional music education differed from that of Bhatkhande in several ways. As a deeply religious man he viewed North Indian music from the standpoint of Hindu cultural traditions and philosophies. Yet he saw the adoption of institutional education as important for the development of Indian music in the twentieth century. Bhatkhande and Paluskar's efforts were in many ways revolutionary. To some they were a necessary step in the preservation of Hindustani music.

The system of royal patronage under which musicians had traditionally worked and taught was seen as having two faults: it had kept music within the hands of a privileged few, and in the opinion of a majority of the population music had become associated with decadent court life. Music institutions, on the other hand, gave music respectability and made way for its wider appreciation (Manuel 1986:478). Paradoxically, while the British administration in India fostered the traditional aristocratic patrons, they also introduced Western ideas of institutional education and thus encouraged a new system of patronage and musical training.

Though Bhatkhande and Paluskar are often credited with starting the first schools of music in India, closer examination of the facts shows that this trend towards institutionalization began earlier. Sourindro Mohun Tagore of Calcutta, Madhavrao Maharaj Scindia of Gwalior, and Sayajirao III of Baroda were all innovative in their experiments with institu-

tional music education. All three were influenced by Western beliefs and attitudes. Sayajirao III of Baroda founded the Bharatiya Sangeet Vidyalaya in 1886. The exact circumstances of its establishment are unknown, but by 1926 it had become affiliated to Baroda University and by 1984 it had been elevated to the Faculty of Performing Arts within that university. Similarly, the Maharaja of Gwalior founded the Madho Sangeet Mahavidyalaya during the early part of this century, soliciting Bhatkhande's help. The Maharaja sent seven musicians to Bombay to learn Bhatkhande's notation system, so that it could be used in instruction at the school (Misra 1985:45).

The earliest known music institution in India was established by the wealthy landowner Sourindro Mohun Tagore in 1871, in Calcutta. This Bengal Music School employed at least five faculty members who taught both vocal and instrumental music to over fifty students in one location. Though fifty years span the period between the founding of the Bengal Music School and the Bhatkhande Sangeet Vidyapeeth in Lucknow, there are certain similarities between the structures of these and other early music schools. This similarity resulted from the common purpose for which they were set up as well as the Western attitudes that began to permeate many areas of Indian society at this time.

Institutional music education sought to increase and preserve the appreciation of music throughout the larger Indian public. It also sought to give music the respectability of an academic discipline (Shankar 1968:51; Neuman 1980:198). Therefore schools had to cater somewhat indiscriminately to large student bodies. By the 1920s curricula were established in an effort to systematize assessment of students and to provide a basis for the awarding of degrees and diplomas. The completion of a three-year degree course became a means to increase one's prestige (Neuman 1980:208). Numerous teachers were collected in one location so that they became accessible to a large number of students. Classes of ten to eighteen students were taught in scheduled, time-bounded sessions, reducing individual teacher-student interaction.²

For this system to succeed, Bhatkhande and others thought it necessary to incorporate notation into teaching practice. This innovation not only contributed to the systematization of teaching, but also provided a means for preserving many compositions that might have been lost through the oral transmission process. Students were taught notation and tested on it. Examinations became an integral part of a student's life and Bhatkhande's books were widely used as references.

Adaptive Strategies: Two Case Studies

During the 1950s and 1960s music schools were established at an unprecedented rate. Most of these early post-independence schools chose to copy the Bhatkhande model. Set curricula and examinations were the basis for awarding degrees (Deva 1970:8). Not long after the rapid establishment of these schools in the 1960s, dissatisfaction with the new institutional patron began to grow amongst musicians. This growing sentiment can be seen in a variety of articles and books as well as in comments by musicians and scholars throughout the decades since independence (for example, see V.G. Jog quoted in Misra 1985:69; Van der Meer 1980:118; Athavale 1970:30; Deva 1970:7; Deshpande 1973:95-6; Neuman 1980:50). These comments do, nevertheless, acknowledge the function of institutions in promoting music appreciation amongst a wider audience. However, music appreciation and music performance do not require the same kind of training. Musicians over the past two decades have found it increasingly necessary to readopt aspects of the *guru-shishya parampara* to train competent performing musicians, thus conjoining two models — one a conceptual remnant of the *guru-shishya parampara*, and the other a legacy of early twentieth-century Westernization in education.

Changes occurring in music schools today demonstrate the adaptive strategies employed by traditional musicians in a modern environment — an environment that has been influenced by India's colonial past. They also highlight the aspects of the *guru-shishya parampara* that are relevant to the teaching of Hindustani music today. These adaptive strategies allow one to study an important aspect of intercultural contact through music in North India.

The Sangeet Research Academy, Calcutta

The Sangeet Research Academy was established in 1978 as an institution for the preservation and transmission of Hindustani music. Wholly funded by the India Tobacco Company, it is located in the southern area of central Calcutta. Its objectives, quite simply, are to recreate the atmosphere of the *guru-shishya parampara*. There are six teachers at the academy, each representing one vocal genre or *gharana*. *Tablā* accompanists may be hired to accompany formal instruction and performances, but there is no solo instrumental teaching.

The campus includes the main administration building and adjacent

housing for faculty and student-scholars. Each faculty member has his or her own house or flat, which often includes rooms for student accommodation. Students who cannot be accommodated with their teachers are given rooms in an adjoining hostel. The academy covers all lodging expenses in addition to the regular faculty stipends.

Students must undergo an audition before a panel of expert musicians prior to entering the academy. A student selected by this panel must choose a teacher, who may then accept or reject the student. Students are called 'scholars' and receive a stipend and free accommodation. A scholar has indefinite tenure and continues studying with the same teacher as long as the teacher wishes; the scholar receives formal instruction only from the initially selected teacher. Thirteen scholars were enrolled at the time of my research in 1988. Some teachers had only one scholar studying and living with them. However, any teacher may accept general students who come to the house for intermittent formal instruction. These students do not live on campus, and do not pay fees or receive a stipend.

All formal instruction occurs in the houses of faculty members. No syllabus is followed. Once a year each scholar must give a performance that is recorded and evaluated by a panel of expert musicians, to ensure progress. Apart from this performance there are no examinations.³ The academy does not award a degree or diploma.

Sri Ram Bharatiya Kala Kendra, New Delhi

Pandit⁴ Amarnath, a vocal teacher at the Sri Ram Bharatiya Kala Kendra, offers an interesting comparison to the Sangeet Research Academy. The Kendra was organized by the central government's music bureau — the Sangeet Natak Akademi — as a centre for the teaching of the performing arts. It is largely funded by government grants, though students pay fees. Solo instrumental music and vocal music are taught in addition to three types of classical dance. Pt. Amarnath is the leading vocal teacher at the Kendra.

Pt. Amarnath is in full control of the selection of his students. A student he accepts receives automatic clearance from the administration. The Kendra refers all students directly to Pt. Amarnath if they wish to study with him. Students may continue to study with Pt. Amarnath for as long as they are able and for as long as Pt. Amarnath wishes. Therefore, no formal convocation marks the end of training.

In 1962 the Kendra became affiliated to a larger institution to facilitate

the awarding of degrees. The examinations set by this larger institution are offered to all Kendra students. However, Pt. Amarnath does not allow his students to take these examinations. This is made clear at the time of a student's enrolment and is one of the criteria by which a student is accepted.

A building adjoining the main teaching studios provides accommodation for approximately twenty students and five faculty. The majority of faculty and students live off campus as hostel space is given on a priority basis to foreign students. Pt. Amarnath lives off campus and travels to the Kendra every morning six days a week to teach from 9.30 am to 12 noon. Students are scheduled to receive formal instruction only two or three times in a week but are encouraged to attend as many classes as they wish. An average of five students are present in class even while only one pupil receives formal instruction. The class is structured to allow learning through observation and discussion as well as individual formal instruction. I observed class discussion on such diverse topics as health, homeopathy and religion in addition to questions of general musical knowledge. Pt. Amarnath has approximately twenty-five students, four of whom also study at Delhi University in various degree programs. Most students study only with him, and none attends other classes at the Kendra.

Pt. Amarnath claims to teach his students in the *guru-shishya parampara* manner. It is apparent from a variety of sources that Pt. Amarnath's own training under Ustad Amir Khan followed this traditional model (Van der Meer 1980:139; Saxena 1974:11; and personal communications). However, the presence of the Kendra constrains several aspects of his teaching.

Conclusions

Teachers in the Sangeet Research Academy and the Bharatiya Kala Kendra believe that the modern/Western institutional system has significant ills that must be redressed through the adoption of the *guru-shishya parampara*. The assimilative process rejects those elements of an institutional education that are incompatible with the *guru-shishya parampara* while maintaining elements required by changing circumstances. The two institutions take different approaches to this assimilative process. Yet the musicians at each school have adapted to the institutional system in similar ways. They have all accepted an administration as a necessary element in management; maintained

teacher control over student selection; eliminated time-bound classes in formal instruction; eliminated curricula, examinations and degrees; and tended toward a complete training atmosphere conducted by a single teacher.

Most noteworthy in both cases is the elimination of curricula, examinations and degrees. For Pt. Amarnath and the teachers at the Sangeet Research Academy evaluation is acceptable, but it is never an ultimate recognition of the completion of study. For them, the transmission of knowledge cannot be structured into the time-restricting framework of a degree course, and, therefore, even examinations that include a practical performance component can show little about a student's achievements as a performing musician. The highest accolade for which students strive is the positive appraisal of teacher and peers, not a Bachelor of Music degree. Yet, the acceptance of an administration is an acknowledgement that institutionalization holds certain benefits in an environment of government and private corporate patronage. Were a teacher to teach privately, certain necessary financial restrictions would be placed on both student and teacher that would hinder the transmission process.

The remaining areas of assimilation indicate the particular structures in these two situations that maintain the dominance of a single teacher over a given student's training. This occurs in both student selection and formal instruction. At the Sangeet Research Academy the residential *guru-shishya parampara* situation is approximated, thereby enhancing this total learning environment. While Pt. Amarnath cannot create this same residential atmosphere, he has at the very least structured his classes to enhance student-teacher interaction.

The adaptive strategies seen in these two case studies show an assimilation of elements of the *guru-shishya parampara* that arise from and are compatible with the oral nature of Hindustani music. The complete learning atmosphere that existed in the *guru-shishya parampara* is still considered the best means for transmitting an oral tradition, consequently the teachers in both cases rejected certain features of institutionalized music education that had compromised the oral transmission process.

Notes

- 1 For both Hindu and Muslim musicians, the teacher-disciple tradition was an important social relationship in which musical knowledge was transmitted. The term *guru-shishya parampara* has

predominantly Hindu connotations but nevertheless is often used by both Hindu and Muslim musicians.

- 2 Many people are now realizing that Bhatkhande's education ideals have in some cases been misconstrued. Class size may by necessity have been close to twenty, but Bhatkhande himself never believed all twenty students should sing in unison. In most institutions today, a great deal of unison singing occurs. A reappraisal of Bhatkhande's works might well show other such examples.
- 3 This matter was coming under review while I was visiting the academy in January 1988.
- 4 *Pandit* is an honorific term for a Hindu teacher and is often abbreviated as 'Pt'.

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