



# GURUDEV RABINDRA NATH TAGORE'S INNOVATIVE CONTRIBUTIONS TO A NEW MUSIC FORM AND ENRICHMENT OF HINDUSTANI SHASTRIYA SANGEET AT HIS VISVABHARATI GURUKUL AT SANTINIKETAN

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**Abstract :** India has always had a great tradition of Teaching and Learning methods where the ancient Gurukul System was one of the core ways to prepare shishyas with deep learning. This paper focuses on this system of Guru and shishya and the innovative contributions of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore at Viswabharti Gurukul at Santiniketan, West Bengal.

**IndexTerms -** Indian Classical Music, Music Education, Rabindranath Tagore, Gurukul, Guru Shishya Parampara

## I. INTRODUCTION

### 1. Historical Background of Gurukul System of Learning

India has a long history of organized education. The Gurukul system (also known as Ashram or Hermitage) of education is one of the oldest and it formalized the ancient Guru-Shishya tradition, in which students were taught orally and the teachings were passed on from one generation to the next. Gurukuls were traditional Hindu residential schools of learning; typically, the teacher's house or a monastery. Education was free (and often limited to the higher castes), but students from well-to-do families paid Gurudakshina, a voluntary contribution after the completion of their studies. At the Gurukuls, the teacher imparted knowledge of Religion, Scriptures, Philosophy, Literature, Warfare, Statecraft, Medicine Astrology and History (mythology). Only students belonging to Brahmin and Kshatriya communities were taught in these Gurukuls. However, the advent of Buddhism and Jainism brought fundamental changes in access to education with their democratic character. The first millennium and the few centuries preceding it saw the flourishing of contemporary equivalent of higher education at the Universities located at Nalanda, Taksasila, Ujjain, & Vikramsila. Art, Architecture, Painting, Logic, Grammar, Philosophy, Astronomy, Literature, Buddhism, Hinduism, Arthashastra (Economics & Politics), Law, and Medicine and Music were among the subjects taught and each university specialized in few fields of study.

The Gurukul System was prevalent in the Vedic period, Pauranik and in the period of Natyashastra. However, it got a major setback during the reign of Mughals, as education got inter-linked with religion. Under some Mughal rulers, Music per se was more a part of entertainment than a serious subject of study. The British rulers were neutral about Indian music and did not try to suppress the tradition. However, as the Britishers started universities to promote education amongst middle classes in India, these did not match with the old Gurukul system.

Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, who was dissatisfied with the western model of education, introduced in India during the British rule where a primary emphasis was placed on learning English Language and the other Western subjects. He felt that the Gurukul system had several merits and could prove useful in educating the children of India in natural surroundings and building their character and sense of appreciation. He said, "My view is that we should follow the ancient Indian principles of education."

### 1.1.: Making of Visva-Bharati and Santiniketan: The abodes of learning through Gurukul System

The tremendous excitement and cultural richness of his extended family permitted young Rabindranath to absorb and learn subconsciously at his own pace, giving him a dynamic open model of education, which he later tried to recreate in his school at Santiniketan. As an alternative to the existing forms of western education, he started a small school at Santiniketan in 1901 that developed into a university and rural reconstruction centre, where he tried to develop an alternative model of education that stemmed from his own learning experiences. He dedicated forty years of his life to his educational institution at Santiniketan in Bengal. Rabindranath's school contained a children's school as well as a university known as Visva-Bharati and a rural education centre known as Sriniketan. Santiniketan, Visva Bharati and Sriniketan may be said to constitute Tagore's educational trinity through which he endeavoured to develop his education theme. In Tagore's philosophy of education, the aesthetic development of the senses was as important as the intellectual--if not more so--and music, literature, art, dance, and drama were given great prominence in the daily life of the school. This was particularly so after the first decade of the school. Drawing on his home life at Jorasanko, Rabindranath tried to create an atmosphere in which the arts would become instinctive. One of the first areas to be emphasized was music. Rabindranath writes that in his adolescence, a 'cascade of musical emotion' gushed forth day after day at Jorasanko. 'We felt we would try to test everything,' he writes, 'and no achievement seemed impossible...We wrote, we sang, we acted, we poured ourselves out on every side.' (Rabindranath Tagore, *My Reminiscences* 1917: 141). As Rabindranath began conceiving of Visva-Bharati as a national centre for the arts, he encouraged artists such as Nandalal Bose to take up residence at Santiniketan and to devote themselves full-time to promoting a national form of art. Without music and the fine arts, he wrote, "a nation lacks its highest means of national self-expression and the people remain inarticulate". Tagore was one of the first to support and bring together different forms of Indian dance. To encourage mutuality, Rabindranath invited artists and scholars from other parts of India and the world to live together at Santiniketan daily to share their cultures with Visva-Bharati University.

Thus, Rabindranath Tagore at Santiniketan named Brahmacharya Ashrama modeled on the ambience of the ancient Gurukul system. The university gave personal guidance to all students. Students lived in close proximity to nature, and teacher-student relationship followed pattern of Gurukul system of ancient India and it is still following the pattern of Gurukul.

### 1.2.: Aspect of Music in these Gurukuls:

Rabindranath's titanic intellect found manifestation in almost every facet of fine art. One of the most outstanding amongst them is Rabindra-sangeet, which embodies a breathtaking fusion of his musicianship and poetic genius. What Rabindranath was doing in literature he also tried to do in music. While caring for both the traditions, classical and folk, he respected the inviolable sanctity of neither and freely took from each what suited his purpose. He was not even averse to borrowing from western melodies, although he did very little of that and made his own whatever he took from other sources. If his creative contribution in music has not received the same recognition as his contribution in literature, it is because, in the first place, the classical tradition of music in India, unlike that of literature, is still very alive and vital and there was no vacuum to be filled. In fact, Rabindranath did not attempt creation of new forms in abstract music. What he did was to bring it down from its heights and make it keep pace with the popular idiom of musical expression. In the second place, his own music is so inextricably blended with the poetry of words that it is almost impossible to separate the mood from the words and the words from the tune. Each express and reinforces the other. Hence his songs have not the same appeal outside the Bengali-speaking zone as they have in his native Bengal. In Bengal, however, each change of season, each aspect of his country's rich landscape, every undulation of human heart, in sorrow or in joy has found its voice in some song of his. They are sung in religious gatherings no less than in concert halls. Patriots have mounted the gallows with his song on their lips; and young lovers unable to express the depth of their feelings sing his songs and feel the weight of their dumbness relieved.

Rabindranath had said, "*Whatever fate may be in store in the judgment of the future for my poems, my stories and my plays, I know for certain that the Bengali race must accept my songs, they must all sing my songs in every Bengali home, in the fields and by the rivers... I feel as if music wells up from within some unconscious depth of my mind, that is why it has certain completeness.*"<sup>1</sup>

### 2. Popularization of Ragas through Rabindra Sangeet in Hindustani Classical:

The influence of Classical music on Rabindra Sangeet has been amply analyzed and now stands as an accepted fact. There has been a pronounced influence of Rabindra Sangeet on some of the noted classical instrumentalists of North India. Hence, it has been attempted to investigate, what elements in Rabindra Sangeet triggered this kind of influence on Indian Classical and what consequences it led to. The elements of Indian classical music have been used in an extremely intelligent and effective fashion in Rabindra Sangeet. It is indeed one of its most significant features. The application of this ingredient was however dictated principally by the perceived requirements of the mood evoked in the song, which was after all the core entity of his creation. Therefore, the application of classical elements, often, had been subtle, and only to the extent necessary to express the emotive content of the song. The urge to evoke a particular mood to his own satisfaction, often led him to blend ragas in unexpectedly beautiful and interesting ways, or to look for uncharted and unexplored nuances within the known frameworks of ragas.

For example, in the song *Shedin dujone* one finds such an entrancing portrayal of the Raga Peelu; here the notes of this rather common raga have been played with creative mastery. In "*Chokhe-r aaloey*" one finds a simple yet serenely beautiful depiction of Raga Yaman Kalyan. This was converted into a medium tempo composition set to Teental. A scintillating fast Teental composition of Khambaj was created from "*Amar kantha hote gaan ke nilo*". The rhythm of the original song (Dadra) had to be entirely changed in order to adapt it to the ambience of an instrumental presentation. This was necessary as the idea was too present not just the song but a full-fledged classical composition derived out of it. The basis of this transformation was the beauty of the melodic outline of the song. In contrast, *Jodi e amaro* is a striking example where not only is the melodic construction but also the rhythmic framework has been followed into a composition based on Raga Kafi. Here as well, Tagore entrances us with the rare, beautiful yet unmistakable approach to Kafi starting from the note Dhaibat. Out of Tagore's many songs based on Raga Bhairavi, *Tabo daya* is one of the most outstanding considering the exquisite

<sup>1</sup> [https://visvabharati.ac.in/Tagore\\_The\\_Founder.html](https://visvabharati.ac.in/Tagore_The_Founder.html)

application of notes that heightens the expression of beauty and devotion. This prompted the creation of a medium tempo gat, largely maintaining the note sequences but changing the rhythmic framework to the somewhat-more-brisk Teental. There are more examples of this nature, such as *Shey kon boner horin* (Raga Hemant), or *Shopney amar mone holo* (Raga Hameer).

Sometimes, Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore's flights of imagination had led to such emotional moods, that the tonal colors available from the basic Ragas were not adequate to express them. Under such circumstances he used his artistic liberty to blend Ragas. This resulted in masterful combination of some of the known Ragas producing unforeseen melodic shades of the highest artistic order. One sees such a marriage between the Ragas Todi and Bhairvi in the song "*Rajani-r shesh tara*". Another unparalleled confluence of Raga Bahar and Raga Basant is noted in the song "*Ami tomari shonge*". There may be many more examples. However, in the context of this discussion, it can be mentioned that both songs have provided potent ideas not only towards framing beautiful bandishes but also creating new kinds of blended Ragas.

#### **Conclusion:**

We can see that the idea of keeping Gurukul system of education remained alive as Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore was successful in imposing this system in his institution. How he tried to advance a new music form, i.e., Rabindra Sangeet, while teaching and composing various geets in classical based forms, and formulating the compositions in classical Ragas, have helped popularizing Hindustani Classical Music for over hundred years. In conclusion, the Gurukul at Santiniketan has not only enriched the performing aspects of music, but has taken it forward, which every form of art envisions for its progress.

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#### **Links:**

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