Role of Performing Arts in Vadya – Vrinda

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ABSTRACT
Since ancient times, music is known as a strong medium to express the human emotions. Different types of sounds express different emotions and musical instruments were originated to create these different sounds. In Indian music reference to orchestra called Vadya-Vrinda is available in ancient literature. Existing primarily for religious and socio cultural purposes, Vadya-Vrinda accompanied different kinds of performing arts at that time.

The genuine evidences regarding the existence of orchestra in India during ancient times accompanying dance and drama are found from the sculptures and bas-reliefs of different Buddhist stupas, railings and gates, monasteries and Hindu temples. One of the paintings of Ajanta caves (2nd-7th century AD), depicted a theatre-stage and a green room with a dancing girl, accompanied by her attendants and female musicians.

The performing arts such as Opera, Theatre, Dance-Drama etc have played a very important role in positioning Vadya-Vrinda as an essential accompanying art since ancient times. Geya-Natakas are the combination of musical and literary forms. Music is the vital part of the play and it acts as a powerful commentary in several drama situations. One owes modern ballet in India to Pt. Uday Shankar. Many maestros like UstadAllaudin Khan, Timirbaran, VishnudasShirali, Pt. Ravi Shankar, Anand Shankar, Laimani Mishra etc have contributed a lot in making vadya-vrinda more popular in the masses. Since then experiments and fusion are going on in a big way which in turn are giving a new dimension to vadya-vrinda.

Innovations have taken place in orchestral compositions. New combinations in Indian instruments as well as Indian and western are being tried. Many folk instruments are being revived and used according to the theme in these art forms and thus projecting this as an independent art form.

Introduction
Since ancient times, music is known as a strong medium to express the human emotions. Different types of sounds express different emotions and musical instruments were originated to create these different sounds. In Indian music reference to orchestra called Vadya-Vrinda is available in ancient literature. Existing primarily for religious and socio cultural purposes, Vadya-Vrinda accompanied different kinds of performing arts at that time.

Vadya-Vrinda is a word given to the ensemble of instruments playing music collectively on an “Indian form”. The word Vadya-Vrinda consists of two words: Vadya and Vrinda. The word Vadya is made up of a dhatuVad which means ‘to speak’ and Vadan means ‘to make it speak’. Vrinda means ‘collection’. Hence the word Vadya-Vrinda means the collective playing of instruments.

The urge to express, to communicate, to share something beautiful gave birth to performing arts. The progressive impulse to the timeless universal got its shape in creative designs. In each form of performing arts, Vadya-Vrinda has an important place. It helps in heightening the intensity of human emotions. Performing arts and Vadya-Vrinda has always been interlinked in the past. The popular performing art forms in India are Opera, Theatre, Dance-Drama etc.

Operas and Theatres

Opera is a highly complex form enlisting many different arts in its service such as music (both vocal and instrumental), drama, poetry, acting, dance, stage-design, costuming, lightening etc. “Opera” is a western word. One of its aspects is its virtue of being an unrealistic art form. It is accompanied by well-trained orchestra. According to “The Harvard Brief Dictionary of Music” opera is defined as “A drama or a play with scenery and acting, which is in general sung throughout to the accompaniment of an orchestra”. In India music and dance were associated with drama from the earliest of times. ‘Natya’, ‘Natyakam’ are the words for drama in India. Music and Dance were indispensable in Indian drama and therefore drama or Natya in India was an audio-visual representation and was of the operatic type.

The earliest reference for the operatic type of plays can be found in ‘Harivamsa’ (200 AD) based upon the great epic ‘The Mahabharata’, ‘Rambhahisava’ based on the ‘Ramayana’, another based on the story of Kubera etc. In the fifth century Kalidas brought the musical executions in his drama.

Here is a brief view on Indian operas like Geya-Natakas, Natya-Kutupas and regional theatre forms.

Geya-Natakas
It is the name for Indian Opera. The nucleus of Geya-Natakas can be traced to the early twelfth century AD when the...
poet Jaideva composed the Giti-Natya namely ‘Gita-Govinda’. Geya-Natakas are not merely musical plays but are a combination of poetry, music, dance and symbolism. It is the combination of musical and literary forms. Music is the vital part of the play and acts as a powerful commentary in several dramatic situations. Particularly in opera, as speech is not employed, the music serves four different purposes:

1) Documentation- As a vehicle for reciting the verse.
2) Decoration-Music sets out to charm on its own account using the text only as a medium to bring out the music excellence.
3) Depiction- Attempts to illustrate certain picturesque details of the text
4) Expression- to give utterance to the emotional implication of the situation in the text which is the most important function of music in an opera.

The orchestras or what was called as Samuh-Vadya were also a part and parcel of the Indian Operas.

**Natya- Kutupa**

Natya-Kutupa means the combination of musical instruments meant for drama. Sharangdeva divided Natya-Kutupa’s into three classes according to their merits.

1. **Uttama**(Best)- it was consisted of four main singers, twelve accompanying singers, four flutist and four drummers.
2. **Madhyama**(Medium)- It was consisted of two main singers, four accompanying singers, two flutist and two drummers.
3. **Adhama**(Trite)- It was consisted of one main singer, three accompanying singers, two flutist and two drummers.

Besides Kutupa-Vrindas (orchestra) Gayani-Vrinda (chorus) was practiced during ancient period.

Indian Opera is steeped into folk antiquity. The Vaishnava tradition even in the hay-days of Muslim rule found expression in some utterly lyrical passages of folk opera. Thus satisfying the devotional urges of the populace. In the British Days we saw some rousing patriotic operas on the Swadeshi Movement or in the memory of martyrs.

Some of the popular regional operas are

1. **Jatra/Yatra of Bengal**- The Jatra is essentially musical and operatic in form with very distinctive characteristics. It is one of the most crystallized folk-theaters in India reflecting the best of Bengal’s folk tradition and literature. Music is the very heart of this theatre. The most popular ragas have always been Bhairavi, Bhairav, Adana, Bhageshwari and Bihag used according to the dominant mood of the situation. The musicians sat on two sides facing each other which included the singers, the harmonium players, flutist. Drummers. Of late, violin, clarinet, trumpet were also added.

2. **Natunki of U.P.** - The Natunki is the folk theatre of Uttar Pradesh. It is a folk-drama and consists of dance with commentary in songs. The music of Natunki is not classical in nature though it is based on classical ragas. The Natunki uses an orchestra consisting of Nagara which is the main musical instrument along with Sarangi, armonium and Dholak.

3. **BHAVAI OF GUJARAT**- Bhavai is actually a series of playlets, which deal with medieval stories of chivalry. The music is folk-type. Brass-trumpets and Cymbals are used for the orchestra.

4. **OPERAS OF SOUTH INDIA**- In South India, it is a type of musical form which contains a story set with songs in classical tradition and verses. The evolution of opera in South India can be traced out from the ‘Uparupakas’. In these Sanskrit forms, music and dance predominate and mostly they don’t have any prose-passages. The Ragas which are used in the operas of South India are mostly Bhakti Rasas. The music will be of simple and expressive type without Sangatis and Gamaks. The tala will also be of a simpler type. all the three types of tempos are used. The small orchestral bands are ever-present in the traditional theatres of South India such as Kudiyattam, Krishnattam, Kathakali, Yakshagana etc.

Thus operas and theatres were an integral part of India’s musical heritage. They not only provided a novel entertainment to the public but also indirectly promoted the growth of Indian music and Vadya-Vrinda.

**dance- drama**

‘Dance-Drama’ or ‘Nritya-Nataka’ or ‘Ballet’ is a little different from the ‘Geya-Natak’ or Opera. An ensemble of dances, a suitable theme, a specially orchestrated music and an imaginative use of lightening and stage props-a ballet is a culmination of all and much more.

One owes modern ballet in India to Uday Shankar. The great maestro imbibed the best in western balletic style through the several sojourns of the cultural capital of the world and created master pieces one after the other. Though Uday Shankar was not a musician, he understood the part that could be played by orchestra in ballet. He took the services of noted musicians like Allaudin Khan, Ravi Shankar, Timirbaran, VishnudasShirali in the creation of his ballet. These maestros concentrated on the rhythm, melody and sound effects by using instruments such as Manijra, Jhanj, Jal-Tarang, Tanpura, Sitar, Sarod, Bansuri, Sur Bahar, Mridanga and Tabla. The results were so lively that the orchestra itself could portray the theme independent of ballet.

Uday Shankar was an orthodox where the musical instruments were concerned. He believed only in the Indian musical instruments. Although he was hesitant in using violin he sometimes used the Gongs and Gamelan of Indonesia. He experimented with different combinations of Indian instruments. For example he used five Mridangas to represent Shiva, Kartala and Khol instruments to represent Parvati, Drums for the Gayasur in his dance. Some of the famous
ballets presented by Uday Shankar are Labor and Machinery, Rhythm of Life, Shankar Scope and Buddha etc.

Timirbaran offered his orchestra to many ballet. He adopted different instruments of various countries in his Vadya-Vrinda. Despite is fascination with Western orchestra his compositions got a distinct place with intermingling of the East and West. Some of his various orchestral compositions are – Peace Symphony, Tagore’s hungry stones, Alladin and his wonderful lamp etc.

In 90’s Anand Shankar (son of Uday Shankar) was the guiding force behind Indian Dance-Dramas. He too believed in the fusion of Indian and Western music. Some of the distinctive features of his independent orchestras are

1) Only thematic compositions.
2) Based on Beats only.
3) Harmony used on the Western lines.
4) Included western instruments like Piano, Organ, Violin and types of Drums along with Indian instruments like Sitar, Israj, Tablaetc.
5) Used choirs wherever it suits the theme.

Some of his famous orchestral compositions are Jungle Symphony, Mamta, Almora, Dancing drums etc.

Orchestra thus gained a lot from ballet. Many folk instruments were revived and used according to the theme in dance-drama. New combinations of different instruments were tried and thus ballet participated very strongly in the overall development of orchestra in times to come.

It would not be wrong to say that the performing arts such as Opera, Theatre, Dance-Drama etc have played a very important role in positioning Vadya-Vrinda as an essential accompanying art. With the improvement in VadyaVrinda, the regional art forms also improved. As we know the regional art forms of India have a long history and throughout its life it developed at an extremely slow pace. The development got kicked off in a big way as a direct result of improvement in Vadya-Vrinda.

References