

ORAL TEACHING SYSTEMS VERSUS ONGOING CANONIZATION IN HINDUSTANI VOCAL PRACTICE

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This paper discusses the use of teaching methods, theoretical aspects and the notation system of North Indian music proposed by Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande during the first half of twentieth century. The appropriation of his methods in Sri Lankan music practices and music education is emphasized in this paper. Further, this paper discusses how important are other elements of “terminology used such as the body language, metaphors, symbols, representative expressions while teaching North Indian music in addition to using canonized terminology and their definitions. As there are numerous studies done about Bhatkhande’s contribution to music and its deficiencies in Indian context (Nayar, 1989), this paper will discuss the matter mainly in the Sri Lankan context, where teaching Hindustani Vocal Music is a basic appearance from elementary up to tertiary music education.¹

North Indian music has been an oral tradition which passed through lineages known as banis or gharanas. Classical music of India has been vastly changed from its first known nature of which some elements can be found in some major treatises such as Natya Shastra (2nd century), Brihaddeshi (7th century), and Sangeet Ratnakar (12 century) (Ghosh [transl.] 1951) Since then, many theoretical works were produced revealing music genres, theories and musical concepts in respective periods (Bakhle 2005, Rowell 2015) The coming of Persians and other foreign cultures to India made the North Indian music different from South Indian music which was unified and theorized to a large extent by South Indian musicologists in the 17th century with the highly influential work known as Chaturdandi Prakashika by Veṅkaṭamakhi (1934). North Indian music was very popular among Moghul and Muslim colonizers who enriched it with passion and generous patronization. However, there have been so much disagreements, arguments and miscomprehensions among its musicians and musicologists about ragas and music theories endangering some essential aspects of Indian music (Hansen 2001, Farrell 1999, Rahaim 2011, Weidmann 2003). From the end of the 19th century to the mid of the twentieth century, two musicologists i.e. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande and Vishnu Digambar Paluskar took decisive steps with the same ambition but different pathways to enhance North Indian Music in this regard.

INTRODUCTION

It will not be wrong to state that the most influential musicologist in North Indian music from the 18th century to the current so far has been Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande who lived from 1860 to 1936 in India. One of the arguably most important has been the one of two musicologists in the same period who struggled and dedicated to unify and to preserve the classical music which has been dangerously changed

¹ I.e. since the Shrimallakshya Sangeetam: The first affiliated branch of the Bhatkhande Music College in Sri Lanka was established by Vilmata A. Perera (1969) at the Arundathie Hall in Sri Paalee Kalayathanaya. It operated according to the general rules given by the Bhatkhande Music College.

by lacking scholarship on unification and preservation of primarily musical knowledge. Bhatkhande's theoretical reformation for the sake of Indian music has been spread wider than any attempts by other contemporary musicologists. Bakhle (1989:124) states her view on this "For Bhatkhande, classicization meant at least two things: system, order, discipline, and theory, on the one hand, and antiquity of national origin, on the other. Of course, these requirements equally define the very character of modern music. The first set of elements he could not find in contemporary practice, and he had toured the country in search of them. He found confusion, not order, and an emphasis on spontaneity rather than disciplined performance. So he set out to impose order on contemporary music."

His featuring contribution to North Indian music is as follows:

- Raga classification system
- Establishing the **theory of time** for singing or playing the ragas
- Invention of a notation system
- Definitions for raga: for a raga to be classified as such, it must minimally contain five pitches and an interval of either a fourth or a fifth.
- Introducing the foundational scale as Bilawal Thaata.

Teaching methods exemplified by Bhatkhande:

- His modern scientific method of teaching to a group of students using notations (Nayar, 1989:55).
- Explaining all the peculiarities of the raga according to Shastra (previous classical literature) explaining characteristics of allied ragas in brief
- The nature of the raga through illustrations (alap and palta).
- Sometimes, he used to demonstrate 22 shrutis between the seven intervals and which one of them is sung in which raga. [specific ways of making ragas understandable].
- Sargam geet, Chota khyals, Bada khyals [specific styles].
- Taan [specific melodic treatment].

His explicit contributions are described by Nayar (1989: 74) as follows:

- Collecting the scattered treasures
- Providing the theoretical framework
- Establishing the academic status and methodology of music
- As a composer
- Music conference as a tool and strategy
- Forming a notation system
- Overcoming social taboos

Regarding the latter, Nayar mentioned issues such as religious restrictions of singers or questions regarding educational principles within gharanas, text limitations, and gender restrictions.

Some Sri Lankans were inspired by North Indian music that they have experienced through Bombay theatre practices which took place in Sri Lanka at the beginning of the twentieth century (Hansen, 2001, Meddegoda & Jähnichen, 2016). Subsequently, they went to India and studied North Indian music mainly at the Music College that was established by Bhatkhande in 1926 in Lucknow. After Rabindranath Tagore visited Ceylon and demonstrated North Indian ragas and his own music compositions, some Sri Lankans preferred to learn

from him at Shanti Nikethan in Bengal and could learn the Rabindra Sangeeth and Bengali folk songs in addition to North Indian Raga based genres. It might have been easier to follow North Indian music after Bhatkhande's systematization of North Indian music. Since there has not been a proper syllabus and certification at Shanti Niketan by that time, Tagore has recommended his Sri Lankan students to learn at Bhatkhande Music College where certain titles such as Sangeeth Visharadh and Sangeeth Nipun with respective certificates were offered after the successful completion of the course work. Most Sri Lankan musicians at Bhatkhande Music College could obtain the title "Sangeet Visharadh" which was highly regarded and a standard criterion for getting government jobs in the field of music in Sri Lanka until the end of the last century.

In 1952, the School of Arts was established in Colombo by Lionel Edirisinghe who got his music education in Shanti Niketan and later Bhatkhande Music College. Edirisinghe has been the first candidate who obtained a music Degree in Sri Lanka. Later, North Indian music was included in school syllabuses and it still continues with periodical modifications.

Teaching Methods

Many musicians who teach North Indian music in Sri Lanka believe that Bhatkhande's system of teaching can only be applied for group learning. In order to get a broader picture, being myself a teacher of Hindustani vocal music in Sri Lanka, anybody of my colleagues could be a strong example for a necessary analysis, however, the following was exceptionally willing and provided very fresh impressions: My colleague Asith Atapattu has been learning in Sri Lanka since he was five years old from his Guru Premadasa Mudunkotuwa who got his music education for ten years staying in North India. Mudunkotuwa started an affiliated branch of the Bhatkhande Music College in Sri Lanka and continued the same pattern of teaching. For further learning, Atapattu went to India and continued his Undergraduate Degree at Bhatkhande Music College in Lucknow and Master Degree at Banaras Hindu University. I could videotape his teaching at his residency in Makuluduwa on 21st May, 2018.

Video Demonstration: this video [AEMR-EJ-02-Chinthaka P Meddegoda ex1: 20th May 2018] shows Asith Atapattu, a Lecturer at the University of the Visual and Performing Arts. He teaches a number of students in his home. The video shows the methodical teaching style. It is what Bhatkhande perhaps used to practice and expected from others to continue. (Demonstration by Asith Atapattu).



→ video example.

The video demonstration of Atapattu shows some expressions that he used to explain North Indian melodic aspects which are not mentioned in the same way in previous canons. The video demonstration includes the order of teaching a raga starting from verbal introduction of the raga to the fast taan singing. He indeed does explain some terms in words but mostly through expressions which is rather convenient for the students to realize and learn through imitation. This study opens up and should encourage further additions on an elaborated analysis of musical expressions through body language rather than the use of verbal definitions of any fixed terminology while teaching.

Atapattu describes his Guru's (Ganesh Prasad Mishra in Lucknow) teaching techniques as following "When he is teaching a single student, his method is changed, because he identifies the individual student's level of understanding, but when there are numerous students, he supposes all students being in the same condition and continues teaching step by step an average level. He mostly teaches one student at a time. His way is very tough. The student has to sing exactly how he sings. We had to write it down and next day had to sing exactly the same way he taught previously. Amazingly, he remembers exactly what he taught and if I sang differently he becomes angry. But once I fully understand the raga, he asks me to sing freely, and not to depend on what he taught. However, during public performances, I still sing sometimes what I used to remember. Therefore, his method was actually useful as a basic framework."

Atapattu is a lecturer at the University of Visual and Performing Arts where I am working, too, within the same courses. He believes that "the University education and gurukul education is very different. We should spend more time with the teacher to learn better, but we get only little time face to face teaching in the university education system. Also, students have to stick to various course work and have to compete with each other which is not helpful in learning music. Recently, students should ask always questions. When I studied in India, I was afraid to ask my Guru questions. He became often angry. I had to learn asking questions at the right time. Banaras differs in that matter from Lucknow as I was given unlimited freedom of creativity from the beginning compared to my first studies in Lucknow. The Bhatkhande system is possibly good for group learning. I guess Lakshana geet and Sargam geet are Bhatkhande's inventions."

Janaki Bakhle states that “Bhatkhande had no interest in showing that Indian music and musicians could do all their Western counterparts were capable of, such as assembling bands and orchestras. Indeed, he not only had no knowledge of Western classical music, he had very little interest in it, and as a model for Indian music, the only aspect of it that was relevant was the bar system, which he used to notate meter. ... When he looked for models either to oppose or mimic, he looked to North and South Indian music” (Bakhle, 2005: 108).

Bhatkhande invented a notating system for writing raga compositions in his books. The preceding Gurukul system of learning did not incorporate a practice of writing down raga compositions. The gharana authorities were careful not to teach their compositions to outsiders. There were very few possibilities for others to learn compositions if they are not taught orally from the teacher to student unlike the possibilities of today that anyone can record the teacher secretly using their smart phone and imitate it later. Bhatkhande was obviously skilled enough to meet traditionally renowned gharana musicians and writing down their compositions using his own notation method. He printed nearly 1850 of those composition in his book series Kramik Pustak Malika.

HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC IN SRI LANKA

In Sri Lanka, Bhatkhande’s notation system is widespread. The pioneers of North Indian music in Sri Lanka have noted down music compositions using Bhatkhande’s notation system for teaching books and spontaneous orchestrations at recordings and public music programs. In an interview, Hemanta Manohari Randunuge (2018) says that “In India, actually the orchestration includes Staff notations, but in Sri Lanka, Bhatkhande’s notation system is used in orchestras which caused some conflicts about music among Sri Lankan musicians in 1952.

Many musicians had the strong idea that North Indian music is the ideal music.² They believed using the structure like Sthai, Anthara, and the style of North Indian music for composing songs are the supreme way in presenting highly developed musical performances.

NOTATION SYSTEM

The pioneering musicians of Sri Lankan public institutions obtained their music education using Bhatkhande’s notation and they used those notation methods for orchestration even for music played in the so called “Western style”.

² Another study dedicated to this broad topic and is already in print (Meddegoda, 2018).

(५५६)

राग भीमपल्लासी-त्रिताल (मध्यलय).

स्थायी.

सा	म	म	ग
सां - नि	ध प गु म	प गु - म	ग रे - सा
५ गो ५ रे	मु ख सों ५	मो रे ५ म	न भा ५ वे
०	३	×	२
रे	सा	सां सां सां	सां
नि सा म गु	रे रे सा सा	नि नि नि सां	सां नि ध प
खु क छु प	द र स न	अ ति ही ५	मु हा ५ वे।
०	३	×	२
प	प		
मप	सां - नि		
५५	गो ५ रे		
०			

अन्तरा.

प	प	प	म	नि	पम	गु	म	त्रि	सां	प	सां - - -	
न	य	न	मि	र	गु	स	म	च	५	न्द्र	मु	खी ५ ५ ५
×				२				०				३
सां	सां	सां	गं	रे	रे	सां	सां	म	म	गु	- गु रे सा	
नि	सां	मं	गं	रे	रे	सां	सां	प	गु	- म	- गु रे सा	
ब	द	न	क	म	ल	अ	ति	स	दा	५	रे	५ ग म न
×				२				०				३
रे								म				
नि	-	सा	म	-	पगु	म	सां	-	नि			
५	छाँ	५	ड	वे	५	५५	५	५	गो	५	रे	
×				२				०				

FIGURE 1: Example for the notation of raga Bhimpalasi, a composition provided by Bhatkhande in his book Kramik Pustak Malika, volume 3 (reproduction by the author).

The following notations are prepared for instrument players in orchestras to accompany popular songs that are often consumed today through live performances in Sri Lanka (Figure 2 & 3). Bhatkhande's purpose of inventing a notation method was mainly to preserve raga compositions for the posterity. However, Bhatkhande's notation methods have been modified through extensive application by Sri Lankan musicians for popular music practises where music instruments are played in small or larger groups. A few signs used by Bhatkhande were not adapted for reasons such as some of those indications cannot be played in unison, and rarely applied or not used at all in Sri Lankan popular music practices. Hence, it is noticeable that some of signs indicated on Bhatkhande's notation (Figure 1) are not used in the popular music notations (Figure 2 & 3) where many additions can be noticed.

Muwa Mukthalatha

Excerpt for mandolin or sitar or guita

The first system of music consists of two staves. The top staff is in treble clef and the bottom staff is in bass clef. Both are in the key of B-flat major (two flats) and 4/4 time. The first two measures feature a long, sweeping melodic line with a slur over it, starting on a whole note in the bass staff and moving up to a whole note in the treble staff. The last two measures show a vocal line in the treble staff with eighth notes and a quarter note, while the bass staff has a simple accompaniment.

5 Violin solo

The second system, labeled 'Violin solo', spans measures 5 to 8. It features a single treble clef staff with a complex melodic line consisting of eighth and sixteenth notes, some with slurs. The bass staff contains rests throughout this system.

9

The third system, starting at measure 9, continues the violin solo. It features a treble clef staff with a melodic line that includes a long, sustained note in the final measure. The bass staff has rests.

13

The fourth system, starting at measure 13, shows a continuation of the violin solo. The treble clef staff has a melodic line with some rests, and the bass staff has rests.

17 Mandolin solo

Vocals

The fifth system, labeled 'Mandolin solo' and 'Vocals', spans measures 17 to 20. The top staff (treble clef) contains a fast, rhythmic melodic line. The bottom staff (bass clef) has rests. The system concludes with a vocal line in the treble staff.

21

The sixth system, starting at measure 21, continues the mandolin solo. It features a treble clef staff with a melodic line and a bass staff with rests.

25

29

33

37

41

45

Brass

Brass

Brass

Brass

Brass

Brass

(only 2nd time)

FIGURE 3: The first 48 bars of the previous song transcribed into Western staff notation with descriptive additions of which instruments play in what place (Transcription by the author). The introductory music piece is titled “Intro”. The title of the song Muwa Mukthalatha (in Sinhala letters) includes and indicates clearly the metric situation as being 4/4; the key signature is Cm, the notation is prepared for mandolin, sitar, and guitar.

the path for North Indian music to be institutionalized and theoretically systematized, Sri Lankan aspirants might not have got the opportunity to learn and subsequently instruct North Indian music in Sri Lanka. As Bakhle finds, Bhatkhande did not search for or compare North Indian music with other music systems he got to know except the South Indian music system, and therefore he could apply the simplest way to formalize a notation system keeping to the basic philosophy of North Indian music. His goal was to preserve music and making it easier to study music through using notations but not to use them in orchestras. However, he could not prevent that his notation system, once introduced beyond the Indian world, will be used in orchestras.

In the case of Sri Lanka, North Indian music was widely practiced and learning Western notations was seen as additional work for musicians. There was little expertise about Western classical music throughout the history. Western music has been a “white” tradition for the majority of the growing middle class who would not be able to afford or have an interest to learn Western classical music that contains European terminology, overtly strict training rules, and disciplines. This topic deserves further studies.

The teaching methods introduced by Bhatkhande were widely improved by Indians who were not hereditary musicians or teachers. The reason was that hereditary musicians used to pass the knowledge only among them and to the aspirants who were educated at a Guru’s house for their household service and for loyalty in every aspect to the Guru. Asking questions from the Guru was not welcome mainly because such a behavior was understood as disrespect to the Guru’s methods of teaching.

Though Bhatkhande’s teaching methods were based on simplifications and unifications that eased the way of group teaching, those methods are still most effective in a face-to-face teaching and therefore, students should spend more time with their teachers. The novelty was rather the focus on musicality gained than on loyalty which produces a modified set of localized body languages, metaphors, and other expressions which redefine traditions older than Bhatkhande’s findings and farer from their place of creation. There is still a large number of related issues to be investigated in the near future.

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