AN ANALYSIS OF AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT BY INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC ARTISTS AND DANCERS DURING LOCKDOWN VIA SOCIAL MEDIA

Sudha Ravishankar

Mr. Neil Banerjee

Abstract

To find out how a fraternity firmly centered around public performances and an urge to find their creative expression is coping with the lockdown imposed for the COVID-19 pandemic. The trend showed a gradual increase in Indian Classical Music and Dance artists performing online. This showed a number of new faces including veterans in the online space. The debate around Indian Classical Music and Dance losing its essence when experimented with excessively, has been goingaroundforlong.Theorthodoxversustheunorthodoxdebatehasalsobeencentral to the fraternity and between its members on a host of different issues for a long time. The reaction to such a change which everyone is compelled to adapt to or choose not to perform in, is an unprecedented predicament facing the Indian Classical Music and Dance fraternity. Audience engagement and the potential scope for it is one of the most objective components that lets us contextualize how the new change is impacting the fraternity.

Therefore, to assess the sacred performer-audience relationship and the response to the disruption of the status quo it followed, we understand the artist response and the audience behaviour in our research.

Keywords: Audience engagement, Hindustani Classical, Carnatic music, gharana, raga, tala, Shastriya Devesh, critical response/appreciation

INTRODUCTION

With the freedom of India came an end to the different royal principalities that continued to govern it during colonial rule. This disrupted a long followed status quo for the Indian Classical Music and Dance community. Not only did it leave many artists out of work and modes of sustenance, but in order to find newer modes of survival and preservation of their form many old traditions and practices came to a halt. The first amongst these was the beginning of the gradual erosion of the *gharana* system in practice. Since there was no royalty giving patronage to artists to create, promote, and preserve their respective style very often identified with the region they hailed from, better opportunities taking artists to newer places with their *gharana* took with it the *gharana* to melting pots of culture like Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore and Kolkata. These places gained precedence over others because the onus of promoting and preserving culture shifted to the government and the organization of it became largely administrative. The other change was observed in the training of Indian Classical Music and Dance. The *gurushishyaparampara* which was central to the teaching-learning process of Indian Classical Music and Dance started changing with a change in the sustenance patterns in the lives of singers, musicians, and dancers (which we shall elaborate on later). This led to a gradual decline in the rigidity of the *gharanas*. Students were beginning to learn from teachers belonging to different *gharanas*. The relationship from being completely of devotion and love started changing to be transactional. The performances in royal courts were replaced by music and dance festivals, different government-organized music and dance conferences, and publicconcerts.
Sustenance patterns for artists in the Indian Classical Music and Dance community changed. Many of them started pursuing the craft by choosing other professions for survival while many shifted to pursuing popular and film music and doing choreography for film dance sequences with training in the Classical forms. A major number of people began teaching Indian Classical Music and Dance in schools and colleges to pursue their art and trainstudents.
Social media has revolutionized life since its inception. The penetration of social media in India, and the phases in which the digital divide has reduced for more number of people to catch up in pace with it is unique. Social media

https://www.gapinterdisciplinarities.org/

in pre- smartphone era versus social media in the post-smartphone era is largely the cusp from which we shall understand the scope of Indian Classical Music and Dance on social media.

Indian Classical Music and Dance has kept up in pace with the availabletechnology and the developments in music fraternity across the globe. Internet with its advent in India began with democratizing knowledge to its users. In its pursuit of that, the internet since the early 2000's came about to become a repository of Indian musicology and scholarship restoring many texts and digitizing them to make it available to everyone.

With the advent of the smartphone era and the launch of Jio on September 5, 2016, data charges across the telecommunications sector reduced manifold. Users started tapping into the potential that social media and the internet offered, but this largely involved popular culture trends. The Indian Classical Music and Dance fraternity too wasn't very late to catch up, but in their approach weren't digital-first. The critical appreciation and scholarship around Indian Classical Music and Danceseemed to capture more space than an active performer participation. With more social media platforms coming into play apart from the regular Youtube and Facebook, things started to change. The launch of Instagram and other platforms which are visual-heavy and text-light Indian Classical Music and Dance, started featuring in more. This was also encouraged by innovations in the portals, like Instagram adding IGTV and Facebook opening up the space for more active promotion of user-generated content with paid promotions. However, throughout this churn of events an orthodox hegemon versus the unorthodox novice prevailed. This in no way discounts the determined attempts made by people belonging to the community and spirited connoisseurs. Websites and pages like Nartaki.com, Meetkalakar, KalaKonnect, Unekha, PriyaLasya, Naatyagruha and Kala Depot have made a significant contribution in promoting Indian Classical Dance and dancers online. The same holds true for Satrangi Art Point, medieval.com, Carnatic.com and many more active Facebook/Instagram pages for Indian Classical Music. This also involved patronage from corporate sponsorships, leading on to professionalizing the online space for arts like *HCLConcerts.*

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objectives of the research is to understand how much has audience engagement changed for Indian Classical Musicians and Dancers during the lockdown via social media, whether the performance behaviour and the fundamentals of Indian Classical Music and Dance change in such a unique setup and to study how differently are the orthodox and legacy artists reacting to the situation vis a vis new artists who are finding a large audience engagement without infrastructural constrains. The study uses both Qualitative and a Quantitative method thus making it a mixed research. Personal interviews were conducted with 7 Indian classical singers, musicians, and dancers (without a conscious count of each but a just representation of all) for Qualitative and a survey was conducted with 70 respondents. A personal interview consisting of 10 common open-ended questions was designed for this research in order to get varied responses to the same questions by artists. A survey consisting of 8 close-ended and to open-ended questions is conducted.

FINDINGS & OBSERVATIONS

This chapter allows in testing the hypothesis of the study and attaining the objectives of the research methodology. After proper interpretation and analysis of the data derived from the 7 personal interviews and survey conducted across 70 people, the following findings were made.

To understand how the Indian Classical Music and Dance community is reacting to the new performance culture on social media during the   lockdown. The reception to social media for performance started more out of compulsion for the non-availability of platforms to perform by the Indian Classical Music and Dance community during the lockdown, than as a conscious choice. While artists are making the most out of the available medium, but the reaction hasn't been the same for everyone. One can sense that in hindsight the artists recognisethe indelible of social media to adapt to this situation more comfortably. More than audience engagement one can say it is also largely about the angst that an artist feels to reach out to people and perform, that one realizes without the social media wouldn't have been possible in this situation. Of course such significant shift comes with mixed responses, but no reaction is absolute in regarding the change between good or bad. Since the overall experiential shift is so nuanced so is the reaction. The qualitative study conducted with 7 Indian Classical Music and Dance artists revealed to us that although one misses out on the physical interaction but performing online is not highly discouraging, it is a medium that gives greater agency to an artist over oneself in terms of deciding the overall creative output of the performance no matter on a smaller scale but with an individual mark(a consequence also largely generating out of not being able to collaborate instead of just choosing not to collaborate which is convenient for a person to handle in such a medium), one misses out significantly on the enthusiasm and encouragement a live audience brings in, lesser known artists finding a platform to put out their talent to the world in a platform which currently the world has its eyeballs on, and a general sense of finding peace in the setup only with the consideration of taking it as a makeshift solution to the problem and not a permanent change. The reaction from artists who are digital native and a few who are slightly

older but think due to logistical constraints haven't got enough chances to perform and on social media are beginning to get their due, with a sense of longing for the regular setup of auditoriums filled with people applauding to live Indian Classical Music and Dance concerts do hope for a coexistence of both the platforms for benefitting from the merits it readily gives. The audience response from the quantitative study based on the user survey suggests that they are still getting familiar with such a setup and quite liking it for the current circumstances, but not with a clear leaning but have a subtle preference for auditorium performances than online being the only medium available for watching Indian Classical Music and Dance.

To know to what extent the orthodox approach to Classical Music and Dance performance has changed and how it has is received. Our study revealed that nothing major is being compromised on in order to make Indian Classical Music and Dance adaptable to the online platform, however, there are numerous shifts in the small elements that are characteristic to it. Artists are managing with the best possible setup available right now, only with the hope of getting back to the system they are used to. Nobody has serious complains with the shift because it only alters from the orthodox, substitutes slightly, but doesn't fundamentally change what is held by the orthodox method. But there is surely a longing for the elaborate process that enhanced the craft of each artist significantly. For instance, live music for dance performances is not possible, similarly a singer has to only manage with an electronic tabla or tanpura for sangat(accompaniment), asitarorflute player can only play solo and unless together in front of the same screen with another cannot seamlessly perform in a jugalbandi (collaboration), dancers have to only focus on solo pieces and cannot work on something as central to Indian Classical Music Dance as group compositions, dancers also face difficulty in performing within a prescribed space that fits in the frame and have to keep in mind that the adequately manipulate with the frame to not let any important aspect like the mudra (gesture) or eye expression, and the limitations realised by each goes further. Artists who have not just learnt and performed in a setup markedly different from what is at hand but have also been taught by teachers who in their lineage of students and teachers have not faced an unpredictable situation like this can at best make the most out of the platform available by making an attempt to recreate the experience but in no way can shift away from where they have come outof.

To assess how one section of young and non-legacy artists is finding a voice amidst this crisis and feels empowered because of social media during the lockdown. Many young artists and artists who do not belong to a legacy of musicians admitted to having faced difficulty in breaking into the circle that has a hegemony over the public performance and institutional grant system, and in such a short while say that they are massively benefitting from performing online by not just putting out their talent to the whole world but also having a level playing field in the internet which is the only medium available to artists from the most celebrated to the ones without enjoying much access. In another way what is helping lesser-known artists of the community who are geographically removed from the primary centres of Indian Classical Music and Dance training and the bureaucratic circles that work for its promotion and organisation are also getting access to a large pool of talent hidden in unknown corners of the country otherwise left unnoticed in the competitive bandwagon of performing arts. However, there is a resentment in the undercurrent with the traction substituting for critical appreciation on the subject that can get misleading for people joining in. The moment one tries to justify the quality of one's performance with the quantity of one's admirers, then the purpose of Indian Classical Music and Dance somehow fails. However, theonlinespace too is filled with people aware and erudite about the forms to judge for themselves the good from the bad. The young artists admittedly say that the platform benefits them in putting their real talent to test by finding a direct connect to the screens of the people who have on authority on the form.

H1- Audience engagement by Indian Classical Music artists and Dancers via social media during the lockdown has increased.

The study reveals to us both through quantitative and qualitative analysis that there has been an increase in audience engagement by Indian Classical Music artists and Dancers via social media during the lockdown. We can arrive at this conclusion because although the main centres of audience engagement, i.e. public performances are shut, the regular audience to those concerts have made a smooth transition to online platforms of performance. Additionally, due to enhanced accessibility the non-regular audience to Indian Classical Music and Dance performances has started taking interest in Indian Classical Music and Dance. Also, the artists who didn't have access to the proper infrastructure and logistics required for Indian Classical Music and Dance public performances are getting a wide reach to audiences.

H0- Audience engagement by Indian Classical Music artists and Dancers via social media during the lockdown has not increased.

Much like Indian Classical Music artists and Dancers even the audiences have shifted to online spaces for the lack of watching live performances in public spaces. This predicament has led them away from the Indian Classical Music and Dance community. The overall audience engagement might remain stagnant, but individually artists are losing out on audience engagement due to simultaneous LIVE sessions online and artists having uncontrolled access to perform as much as they deem fit increasing the clutter.

Conclusion

The study revealed many truths that usually remain hidden from the perception of how artists conduct themselves. The fact that the purpose of an artist is to perform and synergize their thoughts into their craft under all circumstances, and find newer platforms to reach out with that to people is what the recent shift to social media for audience engagement during the lockdown highlighted. Audience engagement is not just about the number of people one reaches out to, but the number of people take note of it and spread your art is crucial. Indian Classical Music and Dance have evolved through centuries, and in a situation like this could be made palatable to the options available to us in constrained circumstances tells us about the timelessness of itsappeal.

One can understand that the shift is not just functional but also aesthetic in terms of the altering that happens to one's craft. Audience engagement in social media too is of a different nature, which is more inclusive for the unfamiliar and gives connoisseurs access to more artists to listen to. The shift in audience engagement is not just statistical but also experiential. How an audience enjoyed Indian Classical Music and Dance online is markedly different from how he or she does that offline. This also gives room for innovation in terms of performance and arrangement of logistics to enhance the performance on the part of the performers.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

1) Samidha Vedabala. "Indian Classical Music in a Globalized World". India: 2016
2) Samidha Vedabala. "Indian Classical Music Traits and Trends". India: 2017
3) Soham Bhatt. "Are Tabla Gharanas Relevant Today?". India:2018
4) Gaveesh, M. "Arousing Interest and Making Hindustani Classical Music (North Indian) More Popular Among the Masses: With Special Reference to Khayal Singing Style".:2015
5) Bhattacharya GURU-SHISHYA PARAMPARA "Transmission of traditional Kathak and Baul" :2017

REFERENCES:

- Ravishankar, Sudha "Nurturing Communication- Media and Academics" *N.L.Khandvala College* (2007)
- Ravishankar, Sudha "Women in Contemporary Society: A Media Perspective in Emerging Markets" *Women Empowerment and Entrepreneurship, a National Conference organized by Tolani College of Commerce* ISBN no. 978-93-82429-99-9 (2012).
- Ravishankar, Sudha "Community Development and Media – An Emerging Economy Perspective" *Service Sector in the 21st Century, a National Conference organized by SIES College of Arts, Science and Commerce* ISBN no. 978-93-82429-97-5 (2013).
- Ravishankar, Sudha "Professors as Expert Communicators" *Higher Education and the Challenges of Communication, a UGC-sponsored National Conference organized by PrahladraiDalmia Lions College of Commerce & Economics* ISBN no. 978-81-926019-3 (2013).
- Ravishankar, Sudha "Relevance of Ethics in Media" *Srujan, the research journal of K.C. College ISSN no. 2277-5900* (2015).
- Ravishankar, Sudha "Leveraging Voice, Vernacular and Video to generate digital dialogue in semi-urban and rural India" *LEaDMe International Conference* (2020).
- Ravishankar, Sudha "Changing narratives ... Beyond books- Digital media Literacy redefined for Primary and Middle school Children" *Digital Media Literacy Conference*, (2021).
- Ravishankar, S. &Ratda, K. "A Comparative Content Analysis Study of Pedophilia Related News In Two Newspaper Dailies Of Mumbai" Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 3, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2016).
- Ravishankar, S. &Sohoni M. "A Study of Usability and Accessibility of Digital Library Websites in India" Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 3, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2016).
- Ravishankar, S. & Bhattacharya, T. "A Comparative Study on the Significance of Political News Reportage on the Front Pages of Two National Dailies" Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 4, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2017).
- Ravishankar, S. & Sanyal S. "A Study on the Viewership Pattern of Web Series in Mumbai" Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 5, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2018)
- Ravishankar, S. &Varawalla S. "Micro-Fiction Platforms on social media in India - A Perspective on Storytelling" Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 6, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2019).
- Srinivas, M &Narwani, N "Content Analysis of Messages in Advertisements of a Two-wheeler Automobile Industry" Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 3, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2016).

https://www.gapinterdisciplinarities.org/

- Srinivas, M et.al. "Increasing Print Media Reportage on Gender-based violence - A Short Content Analysis Study" Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 3, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2016).
- Srinivas, M. & Patel, M. "A Study Of Visual and Textual Language of Print Advertisements in Bollywood" Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 3, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2016).
- Srinivas, M. "Content Analysis on Financial and Economic News in a National Daily" Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 4, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2017).
- Srinivas, M. & Bhagwat, R. "A Survey on the Factors That Affect the Making of a Lifestyle Blog Post Title Appealing", Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 5, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2018)
- Srinivas, M. & Agarwal V. "Content Analysis of Newspaper News Websites in Terms of Their Accessibility and Elements of Communication" Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 5, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2018)
- Srinivas, M. & Sharma, M. "A Study on Changing Trends in Corporate Public Relations Agencies in Mumbai" Media Research and Communication Studies Journal, Volume 6, ISSN 2394-7594 (February 2019).
- Srinivas, Manjula "An Impact Assessment of Media Ownership & Media Control on Dissemination of Information to Public, Dimensions in Research" *Rizvi Institute of Management Studies Research, Mumbai India.* (2013)
- Srinivas, Manjula "Foreign Direct Investment In Print Media: State of the Fourth Estate." *CMBE, International Conference on Management, Business &Economics, Vijayawada, India* (2013).
- Srinivas, Manjula "FDI in Media" *NCMC (National Conference on Media & Communication), Jaipur, India* (2013).
- Srinivas, Manjula "Media Learning & Media Unlearning *Srujan, Vol.3, Mumbai, India.* (2014).
- Srinivas, Manjula "Media Business of Marathi Newspapers of Mumbai" *St. Xavier's College, Goa.* (February, 2017),