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The Importance Of Notation In Rabindra Sangeet And Contribution Of Shantidev Ghosh As A Notator And Vocal Artist

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Abstract

Notation is the part of music that helps to write the tune, rhythm, and scale in sign language. Notation helps to follow the originality of the song and music. Shantidev Ghosh is the famous notator who notes the music, tune, rhythm, and scale of the Rabindra Sangeet. He is one of the great followers, obedient, and disciple students of Rabindranath Tagore. Rabindranath Tagore directly taught recitations, dramas, songs, and dances to Shantidev Ghosh in Shantiniketan. This research is based on secondary qualitative analysis and the researcher collects data from several books written by Rabindranath Tagore, Shantidev Ghosh, Amitrasudhan Bhattacharyya, Gautam Bhattacharyya, Pitam Sengupta, and Kiransosi Dey. From the secondary sources researcher collects the data about Shantidev Ghosh and his role as a notator and vocal artist. Also through the sources, the importance of notation in Rabindra Sangeet is discussed in this research. This research aims to explore Shantidev Ghosh and his contribution as a notator and vocal artist. On the other hand, this research also discloses about the significance of notation and the challenges phased due to unethical changes in notation.

Introduction

In Rabindra Sangeet, notation is an important process to note down the music. It is essential to preserve the note to guide future generations. Through notation, composers explain their ideas to the performers and singers (Shreemoyee Dutta Choudhury *et al.*, 2019). In sharing music across cultures and generations notation helps to understand the music patterns and helps to feel the emotions behind the music (Marg ERP Ltd, 2023). Learning

and teaching music notation is like “AtoZ” of music. Rabindranath Tagore notes the notation of Rabindra Sangeet in a book named Swarabitan. Shantidev Ghosh was one of the greatest artists and was equally talented as a singer, author, dancer, actor, notator, and vocal artist. He works on some poems written by Tagore and converts those into a new form of poem songs. Shantidev Ghosh was born in Bajapti, Chandpur, Bangladesh on 7th May 1910. His father Kalimohan Ghosh worked with Rabindranath Tagore to set up the Rural Reconstruction Unit at Visva-Bharati. Manorama Devi was the mother of Shantidev Ghosh. Shantidev completed his schooling at Santiniketan Ashram Vidyalaya (visvabharati.ac.in, 2024). He became an expert in dance, music, and acting from this school. Shantidev was the luckiest person because he got guidance from Rabindranath Tagore who sent Shantidev to learn dance, music, and culture of Sri Lanka, Burma, Java, Indonesia, and Bali. In 1930, when he was only 20 years old, he joined Visva-Bharati University as a teacher. After a few years, he held the position of HOD (Head of Department) at Rabindra Music and Dance in Sangeet Bhavana which is the music department of Visva-Bharati University (visvabharati.ac.in, 2024). Later between 1964-1968 and 1971-1973, he became the Visva-Bharati University principal. This overall discussion will explain the contribution of Shantidev Ghosh as a notator and vocal artist and will highlight the importance of notation in Rabindra sangeet. This discussion will focus on the skill and talent of Shantidev Ghosh as a singer, vocal artist, and notator.

Key Words

Rabindra Sangeet, “Swaralipi” (notation), Rabindranath Tagore, Visva-Bharati University, Shantiniketan, “Krishnokoli ami tarei boli”, discipline, unethical, tune, rhythm, scale.

Literature Review

As per the information of Sujitkumar Bose (who was the vice chancellor of Visva Bharati University in 2002), Shantidev Ghosh was like a holder and carrier of Rabindranath melody. His role was too much vital in the growth of Rabindra Sangeet's culture overall world. Shantidev Ghosh promotes the literature, culture, songs, music, and art of his “Gurudev” (Rabindranath Tagore) in front of the world with his skill. According to the opinion of Amita Sen, Shantidev Ghosh inspired and encouraged the folk culture and worked to make progress in folk culture (Bhattacharyya and Bhattacharyya, 2002). As per the word of Supriyo Mukhopadhyay, not only folk culture but also Shantidev likes folk music like his father. Shantidev shows his affection towards Rabindra Nritya. After getting an attachment of Rabindranath Tagore he was inspired by Rabindra Sangeet and Rabindra Nritya. At 19-20, he was appointed as a teacher at Visva-Bharati University in the Department of Dance, Music, and Acting or Drama. Shantidev was especially talented in playing Esraj and Veena (Bhattacharyya and Bhattacharyya, 2002). In the book “Rabindra-ganer Swaralipikar” Pitam Sengupta explains that Shantidev Ghosh composed about 70 Rabindra sangeets (Sengupta, 2018). He was famous for the song “Krishnokoli ami tarei boli”. Shantidev Ghosh said that Dinendranath composed the notation of this song but Rabindranath Tagore taught this song to Shantidev Ghosh as a recitation which is not possible to make any notation. In the

book “Montro-Kobita-Gan” Shantidev explained that in the song “Krishnokoli ami tarei boli” the word “Kalo” doesn't have any music (Sengupta, 2018). The singers have to recite the word “kalo” as per situation and circumstances. Shantidev said that it's not possible to compose any note for the recitation so he add rhythms and pitch for the specific words in which notation is not possible in “Krishnokoli ami tarei boli”. Once Rabindranath Tagore makes an argument with Dilipkumar Roy on the purity and accuracy in notation, rhythm, and pitch. Tagore argued and explained that he never gave the right to anyone to moderate the songs that he composed and wrote (Sengupta, 2018). Also, he states that he can give the authority to modify or upgrade his songs whom he can believe but some singers already disobey his rules, and instead of following Tagore's words they provide excuses only. Shantidev Ghosh got into the company of Rabindranath Tagore for so many years and during this period he became the most trusted one in the eyes of Tagore. Shantidev wrote an essay on the impact of musical notes, classical, thungri, baul, and foreign music and songs in Rabindra sangeet. Shantidev wrote that Rabindranath Tagore doesn't like feminine tone. But he loves to listen to his songs in the voice of female singers. Some people can argue and state that he disrespect the female voice but it was wrong. She loves to hear his songs by female students but he dislikes the feminine voice, like low scale and low right voice. Even he scolds his male students and singers when they cannot raise the scale and grave voice. He loves the ordained and grave voice in his songs. In 1945 Visva-Bharati University honored Shantidev Ghosh with the tile of “Desikottam” (Sengupta, 2018). In 1976 Music Drama Academy selected Shantidev as a “Fellow” and in those years he was honored with the title of “Padma Bhushan” by the Indian government. His notations are collected in “Swaralipi 54 and 12 (Tasher Desh)” individually. Also, his notation is collected in multiple “Swarabitan” (Sengupta, 2018). In the year 1930 Shantidev got the opportunity to learn newly composed songs of Rabindranath . Gradually in 1934 and 1935 when the famous artists Roma Kar and Dinendranath expired, Rabindranath Tagore started teaching his new songs, drama songs, and dance-drama. Once Shantidev said that when Rabindranath Tagore wrote any new songs he shared a copy of his songs with Shantidev and later he starts taught the tune, note, voice pattern, rhythm, and pitch. Shantidev first listened to Tagore very carefully and observed his feelings while singing the songs. After understanding the tune, rhythm, and pitch he started to sing the song with Tagore. Later when Tagore got satisfied with the voice and singing pattern of Shantidev then he ordered Shantidev to sing individually. One famous person argued that Rabindranath never gave freedom to the singers to moderate the tune and rhythm (Sengupta, 2018). He also states that Rabindranath was influenced by European vocal and instrumental music. European singers compose the notation of vocal and instrumental music very accurately and it is the culture of European music to follow the notation as it is. Against this calumny, Shantidev Ghosh explains that Rabindranath doesn't allow singers to change the note, rhythm, and tune because it was the impact of Indian classical music, not European music (Sengupta, 2018). Shantidev Ghosh said that Rabindranath Tagore had serious issues while he wrote a song and composed the tune. After composing a song and tune he connects with the person who can write notation. He did so because he could not

memorise the music, tune, and rhythm after some time when he composed that (Sengupta, 2018). Tagore comes to Shantidev multiple times to compose the notation of his new songs and tunes. Shantidev Ghosh shared an Incident that took place with him. He said that in 1930 when Rabindranath saw him, at the moment he became so happy and told Shantidev to compose a notation on his song “Ebar bujhi bholar bela holo..”. At that moment Tagore's close student Dinendranath lived in “Surpuri” which is not so far from the place of Tagore. But as per his short memory of remembering the rhythm, tune, and music, he cannot wait for Dinendranath and told Shantidev to listen to the music, rhythm, scale, and tune, and compose a notation (Senagupta, 2018). Later Shantidev visited the place of Dinendranath and sang the song by following the pattern of Tagore. Within a short time, Dinendranath learned and understood the music pattern and taught the same to his students.

Methodology

To understand the importance of notation and the role of Shantidev Ghosh as a vocal artist and notator this research follows multiple books that are written on the topic of Rabindranath Tagore, Shantidev Ghosh, and notation in Rabindra Sangeet. Usually, this research is based on secondary research analysis and qualitative data are collected from multiple sources. Information is gathered from various books such as “Shantidev o Santiniketan”, “Rabindro-ganer Swaralipikar”, “Rabindrasangeet Bichitra”, “Jiboner Dhrubotara” and “Montro-Kobita-Gan”. On the other hand, the researcher collects data from different websites, journals, and articles to understand Shantidev Ghosh and his skills. It was found after collecting all the data from various sources that Shantidev was not only a vocal artist and a notator but also he was famous for dancing, recitation, singing, notation, and drama. He was a compact of Rabindranath's innovations. To find information on Shantidev Ghosh's research doesn't face any struggle because in his creative life Shantidev Ghosh mates famous artists who share their memories with Shantidev Ghosh in different books and their biography. This research is based on descriptive research design because this aim is to describe a person and his skills and talents. In this research interpretivism research philosophy was adopted because it emphasizes the contextual nature of human knowledge. Interpretivism philosophy helps to understand the talent of Shantidev Ghosh as a notator and vocal artist. Through the interpretivism philosophy the opinions and knowledge of Amita Sen, Supriyo Mukhopadhyay, Kanika Bandyapadhyay, Purnanondo Chattopadhyay, Sitangsu Roy, Amitrasudan Bhattacharya, Gora Sorbadhikari, Suprio Thakur, Pravat Kumar paul, Bijoy Kumar Singha, Ashok Kumar Gangopadhyay, Gautam Bhattacharya, Ashish Kumar Hazra and other famous artists who get in touch with Shantidev Ghosh. It was not possible to collect quantitative data and primary analysis because in this generation there are not so many people who get in touch with Shantidev Ghosh. So was not possible to arrange surveys and interviews of the famous artists and students who shared the stage with Shantidev and learned Rabindra sangeet, drama, and dance. So it was not possible to collect the experience and point of view of different artists. As a result researcher collects data from secondary sources like scholars, books, journals, and articles to evaluate and explain Shantidev Ghosh and his role as a vocal artist and notator. On the other hand, research

collects data from the different research papers and Google scholar on the importance of notation in the music industry especially the importance of notation in Rabindra Sangeet. Overall it can be said that choosing secondary analysis and collection of qualitative data are the strengths of this research. This qualitative data collection makes this paper strong and efficient.

Results and Discussion

As a vocal artist, Shantidev had a melody voice. He plays Esraj and Tanpura while performing songs. Also, he played esraj when he taught students and made rehearsals for any musical occasion. During the age when his voice was not stable, he started using the harmonium and never stopped to show his devotion to Rabindra Sangeet. The tune, rhythm, note, and music pattern of Shantidev Ghosh were just like Dinendranath and Rabindranath Tagore. It can be said that Shantidev Ghosh was inspired by Dinenedranath and Rabindranath Tagore and followed them by understanding their feelings behind every song. He never feels tired while singing, instead, he can control his voice according to the songs. He can sing all types of songs with different scales, frequencies, rhythms, and tunes. As an example, he can sing “Krishnokoli ami traei boli”, “Bojre tomar baje bansi”, and “Chole jaye mori haye” in different styles, scales, and patterns. One in his casual tone he sang “Krishnokoli ami tarei boli” which notation is not available in any books. After his retirement from Visva-Bharati University Shantidev never took retirement from his passion and love. He continued his devotion to Rabindra Sangeet and taught Rabindra Sangeet to his students by playing harmonium, Esraj, and Tabla.

Shantidev Ghosh was just like a reflection of Rabindranath Tagore. He never recorded multiple songs like other artists and never demanded excessive fees for his performance. He suffered from huge financial problems but never sold his talent, skill, and morale to earn money. By nature he was kind-hearted and friendly with his friends, colleagues, and students. Before presenting any songs in the program he daily engages his time in rehearsal to present the song accurately. As per the word of Bijoy Kumar Singha, if in a program Shantidev makes a contract to play one song only then before 6 to 7 days of the program daily he practices the song 8 to 10 times to make it accurate. He was very serious about the Rabindra Sangeet and never felt tired of singing the Rabindra Sangeet in different scales, tunes, rhythms, and frequency. Before parenting any song in the program Shantidev wrote the lyrics of those songs in large font sizes and later he wrote the notation in red ink just above of the letters with tune variation, and ragini. Besides singing he was equally talented in performing recitation. Before performing the recitation Shantidev Ghosh wrote the poem on separate pages and highlighted the words and letters that he had to give special care, also he noted down some factors by using signs where he should stop, use a soft voice, use a heavy voice, and rhythm. After making the sign instructions he practiced the recitation multiple times before performing it on the live stage. Shantidev Ghosh explains that tune is not enough to learn a song but also it is important to learn rhythm, frequency, lyrics, scale, and pitch. Music notation is a pattern that notes pitches, tunes, rhythms, and frequency of scale. Composers write the ideas of concertos, symphonies, and songs (Clark et al., 2020). If a song contains multiple melodies then it will be

critical for the notator to compose the note. Over the last thousand years, music notation has helped in the growth, development, and evaluation of many musical styles and helps to preserve the music culture and pattern. To explain tune, rhythm, and frequency Kiransosi Dey wrote a book named “Rabindrasangeet e pramanno sur prosongo” and published the book on 8 th May 1976. Also, Shantidev wrote an essay in “Desh Patrika” about “Rabindra Sangeet er swarolipi bibhrat” . In this essay, Shantidev Ghosh describes that before publishing, if it is required to make some change it is important to show evidence with essential valid information. The bibliography of Visva-Bharati University follows this process while publishing the stories and poems of Rabindranath Tagore. But, unfortunately, the book bibliography department of Visva-Bharati does not follow the rules for changing notation in Rabindra Sangeet. Kiran Sosi Dey published and wrote the book “Rabindrasangeet e pramanno sur prosongo” to aware the buyers who purchase the books of notation in Rabindra sangeet about the unethical practice of Visva-Bharati University. It is also found in the book that in 1948, the bibliography department developed a “Swarolipi-Somiti” (Notation-Society) to maintain and preserve the notation of Rabindra Nath Tagore. But unfortunately, multiple disciplinary cases happen in this society. Shantidev Ghosh was a member of the Notation Society but he highlights the unethical practices that the society became involved. This effort of Shantidev was appreciable because he always stood beside the truck and was honest. After the death of Rabindranath Tagore, the notation of his song phases multiple challenges. Multiple dishonest singers changed the notes, tunes, and scaler as per their choice and never took any permission from Visva-Bharati University and other authority. Shantidev Ghosh explained that from 1947 to 1958 multiple changes happened in notation. In 1967 Notaion-Society of Visva-Bharati University arranged a session to control the unethical changes of notation but as the workers of the Bibliography department ignored the session the unethical practice became a massive challenge.

On the other hand, the notation which was approved by Tagore itself, people started publishing its new version with massive changes which created challenges for the singers who learned and know about original tunes and notes from their teachers. The singers face challenges during any program and face humiliation. Many singers claim that multiple publishers and singers changed the notation of Rabindra sangeet. On the other hand on 26 th June 1967 Prafulla Kumar Das who was a superintendent of the bibliography department at Visa-Bharati University stated “Desh Patrika’ and claimed that if any changes happen in the books of notation, singers must understand and detect the change they will definitely raise companion and prohibit the selling of books. He also said that some singers spread rumors that some publishers changing the notation of Rabindra Sangeet but this is wrong. The original books of story and poem and “Sangeet” of Tagore are fully collaborated with notation. So if any publisher wasn't to change the note then they must show evidence with proper justification in the acknowledgment portion of the disclaimer. Notation is important to develop the culture of music and spread it globally. It is true that if anyone starts listening to the songs from 1910 to 2024 then everyone can notice the change in tune, scale, frequency, rhythm, music pattern, and notation. Many dishonest publishers and singers

indeed change the notation, tune, and rhythm of Rabindra Sangeet as per their preferences. There is no doubt that Rabindra Sangeet is a treasure for Indians but Indians cannot maintain the actual shine of the diamond (Rabindra Sangeet).

Conclusion

For Music it is important to note the notation. It helps the singers follow the notes and spread the actual tune, rhythm, and frequency to the next generation. Shantidev Ghosh the famous notator and vocal artist contribute his whole life to devote Rabindrasangeet and Tagore's other innovations. Changing the note is acceptable when the person who changed the note show proper evidence with proper justification. Shantidev was just like a shadow of Rabindranath Tagore and spread his knowledge and learning to the next generation.

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