

DYNAMICS BROUGHT UP INTO HINDUSTANI MUSIC SCENARIO IN SRI LANKA THROUGH CHORAL MUSIC: THE CASE OF THE COLOMBO ORIENTAL CHOIR

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Abstract

A musical style originated from an enormous tradition would have always maintained certain disciplinary which is supposed to have been constructed through centuries. Since the time of Ved chanting to the current situation, Hindustani music has formed in Orchestral and Choral ensembles to recite music in a rare condition. Out of that, significant instrumental ensemble music was found in the modern period by the contributions of Ustad Alauddin Khan and his disciple Pandit Ravi Shankar. In the case of Ved chanting and Qawwali, group of singers performances were found but it's doubtful whether it could fulfill the aspects of the real choir concept. These are some important facts that Hindustani Classical music dealt with such types of musical genres very rarely.

Therefore the research question arises whether Hindustani music can be performed in choir settings as done in Western music and if it is possible to make so in the case of the title above, what are the challenges, barriers, flexibilities, adoptions and adjustments or negotiations it has to go through and how it can improve the dynamics of Hindustani Music's on going evolution. If there are choirs of this type already established outside Sri Lanka, what are they and how are they functioning? What are the changes that Sri Lankan music connoisseur may demand from such choir to exist in the country? This research is showcasing how Colombo Oriental Choir is trying to make its efforts to serve for these questions.

Keywords: Choir Singing, Hindustani Music, Sri Lanka

Introduction

A musical style originated from an ancient tradition would have always maintained certain discipline which is supposed to have been constructed throughout centuries. Each and every characteristic of this musical style could relate a base of certain circumstance of politics, geography, social status, community, religious practices, philosophy and the spiritualism in the time of origination, evolution and the current existence. If Western originated musical genres being performed with the collaboration of Hindustani music and both of the styles being employed in one art work in a country strange for both of the styles like Sri Lanka, it can easily stand as a matter of deep study.

It seems that Hindustani music follows a monotonic sound expression which can make a base for solo performance. In the case of Veda chanting which is an ancient Hindustani Music, the main priest led and the accompaniment was provided by the other priests. In the case of 'Qawwali', it is noticeable with couple of main singers and the rest of the singers would sing the repetitions which were sometimes sung with the variations by the main singers and they joined the main singers at the chorus. These are some important observations and facts which can give a background of orchestral and choral performance in Hindustani music and its deficient dealing with so called genres and less fulfillment of the aspects of the main stream concept of choral and orchestral music.

It also seems that Choral music is a common practice in Western music. So what makes Western music to be more familiar to such a genre is also a matter of study. There are some choirs based on Hindustani music and Carnatic Music in India. There are Hindustani/Oriental music based choral music competitions held in Indian Universities and it appears as a category of All Island Music Competition organized by the education ministry of Sri Lanka laying the path to popularize them in the local audience.

After all, the establishment of ‘Colombo Oriental Choir’ merges as an attempt to Professional Hindustani and Western Music collaborative Choral Music from Sri Lanka which can be supposed to have its own identity that should be examined in this research work.

Problems and Methodology

The main problem of the research comes how the ‘Colombo Oriental Choir’ (COC) could influence the Hindustani Musical Scenario in Sri Lanka being a Choir which collaborates both Western and Hindustani music. If Hindustani Music is a unique style of music by being monotonic and melodic, how it could collaborate with another unique musical tradition having harmony dominance and different acoustic dynamic values.

What are the challenges, barriers, flexibilities, adoptions, adjustments and negotiations it has to face? Was it an experiment of curious music composers or a fulfilment of demand of the audience or both? Is it an experience that was economically or culturally successful? And finally, how has this changed the scenario of Hindustani Music in Sri Lanka?

The gap of knowledge extremely arises at the moment as COC was established and made the debut performance on 13th July 2018 and so far there has been no study done on it. And no appropriate research work or study done up to date that sheds light on how such western originated practices might appear in Hindustani music. In order to overcome this knowledge gap, literature review and Auto-ethnography and open interviews that were carried out will be analyzed with qualitative methods which will function as the methodology of this research.

Observations on the Features of Western Music in Comparison to Hindustani music in the Context of Choral Music

As a question arises whether Hindustani music can be performed in choirs as such done in western music. These are some comparative facts observed in accordance.

In western music the musician/composer plays a major role that the musician composes the music and the artists perform it. So, the performance doesn't require the physical appearance of the musician. And the musician has more scope to blend the tonal qualities of more artists to sound his or her music much beautiful.	Hindustani music is a solo Artist/Musician based music style in which the artist and the musician is the same who functions his or her intelligence to create the music and also perform in front of the audience instantly with some accompanying artist/s. Which is much likely to be independent and not in group.
Western music has pre fixed composition which are called music pieces. So that it makes time space to imagine and produce music for higher number of artists and arrange themselves in the music.	Hindustani music follows improvisation system which has short fixed composition and the rest is improvising by the artist on the spot of performance for what a group cannot be supported.
Western Music is an art of the expressions of multi tonal sounds which itself indicate the necessity for more than one artist to make sound.	Hindustani music is an art of mono tonic or melodic expressions where a single melody is employed and variations added in improvisation where more people are not supposed to involve simultaneously.

Western music has developed a well-defined notation system to note down the musical compositions with complex tonal capacities. It functions as the mediator in the process as the musical creation converted into notation and notation converted into performance.

Simple notation system is utilized in Hindustani music which shows the certain “Swar” (notes) and Lyrics fixed to “Taal” (beat) which is not developed enough to support choral music.

The movement of the melodies are more straight in the comparison of Hindustani melodies and well-fixed to the beat. Almost every time employs all the seven notes of simple major minor scales so that the harmonizing part of different notes is very possible.

The movement of the melody is much volatile sometimes flows in ex-tempo in the case of “Alap” (beat-less improvisation). Doesn’t employ all the seven notes every time in the case of five and six note Raagas and non-similar ascending descending ordered Raagas. So, the harmonizing part is difficult.

These facts are more than enough to realize that western music has more intensity to exist in group of musicians like choral music and what does make more potentials for western music to be more familiar for group musical performance than Hindustani Music.

Hindustani Music and Choral Performance in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka, for the reason of being an island experiencing many immigrant musical genres from other regions has been influenced on the musical behaviors of the people inside. The main influence of Hindustani Music happened in 1877, as a Parsi theater troupe from Mumbai (Then Bombay) named the ‘Hindustan Dramatic Company’ brought a new form of theater to Sri Lanka as well as Hindustani Raaga and Taala Music (Ariyaratna, 1983). In 1882 the other troupe, K. M. Baliwala’s Elphinstone Dramatic Company. The next impact of Hindustani Music on local connoisseur was made by Rabindranath Tagore’s visits to Sri Lanka being the 3rd one more important which happened in 1934 that he staged the ballet “Shap Mochan” along with 23 students from Shanthi Niketan (Coperahewa, 2012). It was Sri Lankans’ first experience seeing a Ballet which had Hindustani music in the background so the local young generation got inspired and left for India to learn Hindustani music at the music institutions like Shanthi Niketan and Bhatkhande College of Music.

From then and up to the moment many artist, musicians, academicians and scholars returned to Sri Lanka. There are some evidence that musicians influenced by Hindustani Music formed instrumental ensembles other than choirs. Hindustani classical choir in Khayal style is found in all island inter school music competitions (classical and creative choir performance based on Hindustani music are two categories) which shows a slight impact of choral performance on Hindustani Music in mid and high school level in Sri Lanka. They are formally bound to many rules and regulations as few of them mentioned as follows.

- 1) Limited time duration.
- 2) Only prescribed Raaga, each in one performance to be used.
- 3) Restrictions on the instruments to accompany.
- 4) Restrictions on the techniques and methods of variations and improvisations. i.e. the techniques of western music or any other genres not to be used.

So being in some limitations on its creativity and existing only in the of school related audience, it is doubted whether it can vastly contribute to the Hindustani music connoisseurship in Sri Lanka.

Towards the Idea of Establishing COC.

There are few choirs which perform associating Hindustani music in Delhi or India mentioned as follows from which the author cum the founder of COC was impressed:

- 1) Gandharva Choir- Gandharva Maha Vidyalaya, Delhi.
- 2) Gargi College Choir- Delhi University.
- 3) Hansraj College Choir- Delhi University.
- 4) Miranda House Choir- Delhi University.
- 5) Music Department Choir, Faculty of Music and Fine Arts- Delhi University.

According to the observations the choirs mentioned above deal on some basic elements of Hindustani Classical Music and typical aesthetical approaches as follows:

1) Adaptations of Western Music methods

- Harmonizing (Mudgal, 2017).
- Using Chords backup either by western musical instruments or by voice itself (Swaranjali, 2016).
- Combining Male-Female voice tonality in SATB structure (Mudgal, 2017).
- Over-lap singing (Canon Singing) (Goswami, 2018).
- Vocal Counter parts (Foundation, 2017).
- Acapella style (Singing without Instrumental backup) (Dobhal, 2018).
- Usage of western instruments.

2) Adaptation of typical Hindustani techniques

- Various melodies of Hindustani Raagas.
- Various beat circles of Hindustani “Taala”.
- Using compositions of various singing styles ex. Khayal, Dhrupad, Tarana and Chaturanga etc.
- Typical improvisation methods (pre-set) i.e. ‘Alaap’, ‘Taana’, ‘Bol Baant Upaj’, ‘Swar Baant Upaj’ and ‘Nom Tom Alaap’ etc.
- Using Accidental Notes (Vivadi Swar).
- Raaga Mala presentation and ‘Tirobhav-Ahirbhav’.
- Usage of Hindustani instruments.

3) Other unique techniques concerning Hindustani Western collaboration

- Employing more than one Taala (Beats Circles) in one recital.
- Singing/Reciting Hindustani classical rhythmic compositions i.e. ‘Paran’, ‘Mukhada’, ‘Tukada’, ‘Chakradhar Tihai’ (ATKT.in, 2017).
- Introducing experimental practice of using Vivadi Swar (accidental notes by voice or instruments) in order to employ the harmonies of chords (ATKT.in, 2017).
- Singing the Hindustani Notation (Sargam) in Harmonies that each harmony line has different Syllables of the notation (ATKT.in, 2017).
- Employing more than one Raaga in order to show scale differences.
- Using some collaborations with Carnatic music (Raagam, Talam and Instruments) (Swaranjali, 2016).
- Using the accompaniment of both western instruments like Piano, Drums with Hindustani instruments (both melodic and rhythmic instruments) i.e. Tabla, Pakhawaj, Tampura (Drone Lute), Sitar, Violin, Harmonium.

Considering all the facts, the C.O.C., otherwise Colombo Oriental Choir was formed as an ensemble of singers. The noun “Choir” stands for the ensemble of singers, the term “Oriental” brings an important idea to this choir by meaning the choir not only performs certain type of music like Indian music though the founder and rest of the members are based on Hindustani music but also any musical genre represent the oriental region like Sri Lankan folk music, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali and Chinese music etc. The noun “Colombo” means that all gathered at the metropolitan city of Sri Lanka which can make the choir with country’s identity that can be beneficial in the overseas stage.

“The C.O.C. is Sri Lanka’s first and pioneer ensemble of singers which performs and promotes classical, semi classical & folk musical genres which have the soil bond to oriental region of the world. In reality of the C.O.C., is not only performing the pieces of the authentic resources but projecting them to the audience in an experimental way” which will lead the connoisseur to expand their level of music understanding, criticism and out of box thinking. Finally the mission is to make a path in SL music industry to produce typical and identical music to be represented in the world’s music arena and do some world influencing music originated in oriental region and to the local connoisseur as well.

The Physical Structure of the C.O.C.

Choristers: The C.O.C. had eleven members at the time of establishment and out of them, six members are female and the rest are four male singers and one percussionist. The six female choristers are used for the two types of harmonies consecutively lower harmony and higher harmony as simply as how soprano and alto function in western choirs. The male singers have the lower parts like in tenor and bass although it’s not about harmonizing unnecessarily as the melodies which are performed through the choir are more of rapidly moving Raaga Tunes. It needs gradual flow that all being in one melody, emphasize on some parts with the help of the different variations.

Instruments: The percussionist is dealing with the bass, mid and high/light Tabla, western Kason, chimes and some folk percussion instruments like ‘Geta’ Drum, ‘Yak’ Drum and ‘Daula’ etc, according to the necessity of the item. It is choir’s privilege to have the percussionist can play all of them. The director cum the leader of the choir sings while accompanying on the key board with the chord backup to the melodies.

All the members have pursued a degree in music and nine members out of them have the post-graduation. All the members have been to India to gain their rigorous training in Hindustani music and pursue at least the under graduation or post-graduation degree which helps the perfect outcome of the choir. The choir concern about its display that all the members wear in one theme and one color at any performance.

Notation System: As the choristers and instrumentalists are much familiar in to memorize the compositions with particular harmonies, they don’t require well defined notation but in order to remember the lyrics, sequences and parts etc. on a simple glance, a type of notations is used which can be called not formal nor systematic notations. It basically follows Hindustani, Bhatkhande notation system (Komangoda, 2018). But the symbols of the certain ‘Thala’ are not shown. To note down the harmonies more than one line in the same bar (‘Vibhag’) are used. Lyrics of the compositions are written without notations as the choristers catch lyrical compositions first. The instrumentalist follow the vocal notation otherwise no different notation provided. The keyboardist is most likely to play a backup rather than the chords just because chords cannot justify the Raaga melodies every time. This notation system can be improved further.

New Creative Work of the C.O.C.

- **Ashta Prahar Raag Maala:** Mash up of eight Raagas which covers the eight time periods of the 24 hours prescribed in the time theory of Hindustani music. In a philosophical view, it is a musical interpretation of the 24 hours. In the technical side of the Raagas, it can be found that significant 'Swaras' (notes) dominate in particular time period of the day or night, the movement of the notes and the unique flow of the Raaga differ themselves time to time. So the Raagas which employ the certain notes and the characteristics will be recited in a particular time as Bhairav, Lalit, Todi, Jaunpuri, Multani, Yaman, Rageshri, Darbari Khanada were followed in this presentation. In this item, Khayal compositions, Ending Tarana composition Pre-Set Alap and Taans were used with some variations like Harmonies, Counter points Minor to Major Chord changing. The Percussionist plays the basic Taala Accompaniment in Teen Taal and EkTaal on the Mid tone Tabla. In between he uses the Kahoon to provide 4/4 beats. Keyboard Chord Back up also provided. Time length 35 Minutes.
- **Sarasvati Vandana:** A musical arrangement devoted to the goddess 'Saraswati' the supreme authority of Music and Arts in Hindu mythology. Based on 'Sarasvati Sotra' chanting. In order to get the sound like a 'Pkhawaj', the ancient classical percussion instrument of Hindustani Music, the percussionist has to do 'Paran' improvisation on bass Tabla to bring the majestic feeling in this musical piece. Keyboard Chord Back up also provided. Vocal Harmonies used. Time length 5-6 Minutes.
- **Ganesh Vandana:** A musical arrangement devoted to the god 'Ganesh' the head of wisdom and knowledge in Hindu mythology was made according to a demand of an event. It uses the low range of notes movement which shows the epic and majestic musical approach of the chanting. Percussionist plays the Bass Tabla. One specialty of this item is that two unique verbal rhythmic compositions made for Kathak Dance (Ganesh Kavitta) and the percussion instrument Pakhawaj (Ganesh Paran) are recited in which the choir tries enhance the beauty of those Rhythmic Compositions. At the beginning of the Vandana, "Om Sarvesham Swastir Bhavatu" the short Sanskrit 'Sotra' for asking the wellbeing and prosperity is presented. In that, all the three notes of the Root Position of the C, Bb and C# chords are shown on the voices. At the end of the presentation, a verse and the chorus of "Shree Ganeshaya Dheemahi" song composed by Shankar Mahadevan from the Bollywood film 'Virudh' are sung. Time length 4-5 Minutes.
- **Compiling of Devotional Music:** In this item, a compilation of selected compositions from Buddhist chanting, Hindu Bhajan, Christian Gospel and Sufi Songs is performed. No hundred percent Islam representation took place in this recital instead of Sufi Tradition did (Branch of Islam). Minor scale in low range of notes in Buddhist Chanting, Melodiousness of Hindu Bajan, Tonality expressions of Christian Gospels and Strength and Higher range of Notes in Sufi Music are some pointed aspects presenting this item. Time length 12-13 Minutes.
- **'Teinak', Fusion of Compositions having meaningless Syllables:** Fusion containing 'Taanama' from Sri Lankan traditional dancing compositions, 'Tillana' from Carnatic music and 'Tarana' from Hindustani music is jammed and performed in this item. In this presentation, the percussionist also has a big role to play presenting specific rhythmic compositions from each tradition on its relevant instrument i.e. 'Yak Beraya' from low country dance of Sri Lanka, 'Mridangam' from Carnatic music and 'Tabla' from Hindustani music. The term 'Teinak' has been placed from a Sanskrit term which means the meaningless syllables comes under the description of 'Prabhandha'. Time length 6-7 Minutes.
- **Hindustani Flamenco fusion:** This was made according to a demand of an event in which combined the choir performance on Khayal rendition in Raag Darbari Khanada along with a flamenco Guitarist associating the same Minor scale. The Khayal Composition in Pasto, official language of Afghanistan "Yar-e-man biya biya" has an historical value as it has been composed by Delhi Sultanate emperor, Ala-Ud-Deen-Khilji's court musician and poet Ameer Khusro in the 14th Century. It starts with an flamenco guitar piece and then a preset "Sargam" improvisation is sung in which 3rd, 5th and octave harmonies are used and slightly entering to the composition which is set to mid-high tempo (Drut) 'Ektal' (6/8 in western time signature) it flows with some melody and harmony variations which concludes with flamenco Guitar and Tabla fusion making the atmosphere for a 'Tarana' improvisation using "Upaj" system with harmonies too. Time length 6-7 Minutes.

Contribution of the C.O.C. to the Local field

- First time in Sri Lanka a choir of this type established to perform oriental music.
- Adapting many of the positive challenging techniques of the Hindustani Choirs mentioned above.
- Showing new path to the “Art Music” concept of the local music industry.
- Making new dynamics in Oriental Classical music to be developed further.
- Choir is targeting both musically educated crowd and entertainment seeking audience which leaves learnt and unlearned connoisseur’s gap.
- Taking initiatives to build up a well-defined concept for Oriental Cantata.
- Making the necessities for adjustments on the Hindustani (Bhatkhande) Notation System.
- Experiment of adjusting the ‘Taal’ of a traditional composition in to another ‘Taal’ (Komangoda, 2018).
- Bringing the melodic dynamics of Oriental music through acoustic dynamics of Western music.
- Valuing up the well-trained artists in classical music and promoting them to the common audience in the country in a new way.
- Contributing to the idea, music as a universal language by bridging eastern music with western music.

Literature Review

(Stewart, 2000) in his PhD thesis examine about the ideological concepts surrounding the early development 1930-60 of South African urban music. The social and political impacts of building nationalism on African music as in the case of the origin of African Jazz Music etc. The four parts choral music adaptation in African music is also studied in the research which is according to Stewart is influenced by Christian missionary system.

Major & Dakon (2016) experiences that choristers were dedicated when they did not have conflicts; felt committed; had an engaging, dedicated, and encouraging full-time faculty instructor. The proposed study investigates the intensities of the college, and university students to perform in music groups where western vocal music employed.

According to Deborah Gail Bradley in her conference paper, ‘Singing in the Dark: Choral Music Education and The Other’ (Bradley, 2013) adding different musical cultures to choral music is a result of promoting official multiculturalism and serves to sustain the choral music publishing industry that can course anti-racist perspective in music education. This idea will be discussed in Sri Lankan and Indian music education context.

Rene Human (2007), in his dissertation for Master of Music investigate about the music from an African choir culture which is translated for non-African choirs in order for these choirs to perform this music as part of their repertoires and argues that the translation of contemporary African music for choirs can only be brought about by means of cultural dialogue, within cultures and between cultures. But Hindustani Music is supposed to surround with many other different facts to exchange its music with Choral Music which is shown in this paper.

Conclusion

Music being a dynamic performing art, and so is Hindustani music, has come to a new point of its evolutions. So, the Hindustani music has adopted the western musical concept 'Choir' through many challenges. Colombo Oriental Choir is also playing its part to the local audience in the practice of being unique in the universal music scenario.

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