

ACHARYA CHINMOY LAHIRI : A GLIMPSE ON HIS MUSICAL PERSONALITY

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Abstract:-

It is an unequivocal truth that Bengal is superiorly developed in the field of music, art, literature & culture among the other states of India and Kolkata, the capital of Bengal is the heart of Hindusthāni classical music. From the medieval period, the music stalwarts had given their utmost energy to uplift the Bengali music. That galaxy of maestros penned the name of Bengali music in front of the music lovers beamingly. I have chosen such a sage in music, whose versatile musicality towards the development of Indian as well as Bengal's music and it will be my subject to be discussed. He is Acharya Chinmoy Lahiri. The contributions of Acharya Chinmoy Lahiri, in the field of Hindusthāni classical & semi-classical music in Bengal, are immense. Though he is a Bengali, by birth, he took most of his music lessons outside Bengal like Lucknow & around. Then he returned to Bengal to contribute to the world of Hindusthāni classical & semi-classical music. There, he introduced his own style of rendering music to enrich the Bengal's classical music which was so innovative that, if we compare with the then stalwarts of Indian classical musicians of that era, he was no less adorable, if not better. That's why Ptd. Lahiri has become a phenomenon in the Hindusthāni Classical music in Bengal. His contributions towards *Khayāl*, *Ṭhumrī*, *Rāga-Pradhān* Bānglā gāna, *Gīt-Ghazal* etc are highly remarkable in the history of Bengali music. He will ever be remembered as the Father of Bengali classical & semi-classical music for his lifetime contributions.

Key Words:- *Khayāl*, *Ṭhumrī*, *Rāga-Pradhān Gāna*, *Ghazal* .

Introduction:-

According to Indian philosophy, music is God's voice. Today's music, as we know it, has been changed to its traditional forms which flow down from the time immemorial. Since the ages, music has been one of the most sought after culture taken up by many maestros. Music is the soul rejuvenating form for the mankind. Many a learned persons who are masters of music, has passed on their life-long meditation on music to our generation. Bengal has a glorious musical history as many musicians gave their life-time contributions to enrich the music of Bengal. As modern Bengali literature will be incomplete without such names like Rabindra Nath Tagore, Saratchandra Chattopadhyay, Bankimchandra Chattopadhyay etc, similarly, music history of Bengal will be incomplete without such music giants of 20th century like Bhishwadeb Chattopadhyay, Tarapada Chakraborty, Jnanendra Prashad Goswami etc. Out of all those music galaxy, Acharya Chinmoy Lahiri is one of the great and shining stars; who not only introduced a unique style of vocal recital [*Khayāl, Ṭhumrī, Bhajan, Rāga-pradhān, Rāgāśrayī Bānglā gāna*] but also composed a good number of excellent songs.

Acharya Chinmoy Lahiri comes of a Zamindar family and was born in 'Tāntibandh'; a village in Pabna district (Banladesh), on 20th March, 1920. His father Shreejeebchandra Lahiri was an engineer and his mother's name was Sarajuwala Devi. He was brought up at Lucknow of Uttar Pradesh as his father shifted his work base from Bengal. He was an avid physical exercise lover as well as has a sweet tooth for music. He was initially admitted to Anglo Indian Boys School, later shifted to Marris College of Music, where his genius for music started blossoming.

Musical forms in which Acharya Lahiri cherished his musicality:-

Prior to the advent of Acharya Chinmoy Lahiri in Bengal, the music scenario was quite a different. In those days, what we have seen the Bengali songs, particularly, were of three or four coins.... Like (i) Bengali songs concerning with the drama and theatres (theatrical or dramatic songs), (ii) *Rāga-pradhān Bānglā gān* , (iii) *Brahma-Sangīt*, (iv) the old traditional Bengali songs like Bengali *Ṭappā*, *śyāmā sangīt*, *Yātrā gāna* etc, (v) Rabindra-Dwijendra Lal-Atul Prasad-Rajanikanta-Najrul gīti etc, which were mass song were nursed by the comings and (vi) Basic songs which were concerned with literature and romanticism. Those songs were composed since the post-First World War till the beginning of the Second World War. Besides those, some Hindusthāni other forms of song like *Dhrupad*, *Khayāl*, *Thumrī* and *Ṭappā* which were also called court music (art music), were existed in Bengal and the music maestros of different *Gharānās* came to Bengal and maintained their livelihood in different *darbārs* of local *zamindārs* during 19th century.

In Bengal all those forms mentioned above had been practising by the musicians with the legacy of their tradition of music. Acharya Lahiri, a Bengali Lucknow based musician who started his musical career as a performer and had given his immense contributions to the music of Bengal. One of the new forms of Bengali music named *Rāga-pradhān Bānglā gān*, became very popular at that time. Musicians like Chimoy Lahiri, Ptd. Bhisimdev Chattopadhyay, Tarapada Chakraborty etc were the pioneers of this form. The forms in which Acharya Lahiri involved deeply are now discussed below :

Khayāl:-

This is the second most popular classic form of vocal music after *Dhrupad*.

‘*Khayāl*’ is an Arabian word which means imagination, justification, elite class

art music of people etc. People from different regions of our country used to articulate this word with usual practice. In Bengal, Bengali people pronounce the word '*Khayāl*' into '*Kheyāl*', which means an imagination. Because of this, we used to imagine that *Khayāl* artistes can perform just maintaining a *Rāga* and can embellish their performance by their own imaginations and thoughts about the music. But this is not the proper way of performing *Khayāl* because *Khayāl* is a form of *Darbārī* music which is highly enriched by classic rules and thoughts of music. That's why there must have some particular rules; otherwise it should not be recognized as *Khayāl*.

Different musicologists have given their own views about *Khayāl*. They thought *Khayāl* comes from ancient '*Koibād*' or '*Kāybāl*' *Prabandha* (composition). Again, some other musicologists told that there was an ancient *Prabandha* of *sankīrṇa jāti* named *Cuṭkal* [which was in vogue Do-Āb area in U.P.]; wherefrom *Khayāl* has come. We have got a complete description about three types of *Prabandha* or classical *Rāga*-based composition (1. *Suḍ*, 2. *Ālikrama* or *Āliśāśray* and 3. *Viprakīrṇa*) in *Sangīt-Ratnākara* by Śāraṅgadeva [Approx. 1235 A.D]. Śāraṅgadeva had discussed on 36 types of *Ālikrama* type of *Prabandha* including *Kaibād Prabandha*. He wrote in his text about this *Kaibād prabandha*, "In this type of composition, *Udgrāha* (the first line) and *Dhruva dhātu* (3rd stanza) are composed by the *bol* (membranophonic syllables) of *Mridanga* (*Pāṭa*) and it concluded in *Udgrāha Dhātu*. *Pāṭa* (syllables of *Mridanga*) is divided into two types as meaningful (*Sārthaka*) and meaningless (*Nirarthaka*). Again *Pāṭa* divided into two types by order of *Śuddha* and *Miśra*. Śāraṅgadeva didn't describe more about *Kaibād prabandha* in this discussion. That's why we cannot conclude *Kaibād prabandha* as *Khayāl*. *Khayāl* became very popular among the common music-lover people during the rule of *Mughal* emperor Śāhjahān (1st half

of 17th century A.D). Since then, *Khayāl* had been performed by some of the court musicians. Performers used to perform the compositions of *Khayāl* for improvisation of the *Rāga* they render the same with *Ālāp*, *Tān*, *Svargam*, *Bolvistār* etc. The musical instruments used in *Khayāl* are Tanpura, Sarengi, Tabla, Harmonium etc. There is a wide variety of rhythmic patterns in *Khayāl* that could be used by the Tabla players. Tritaal, Ektaal, Jhaptaal, Jhumra, Rupaka, Dipchandi, Adachoutaal etc are the *Tālas* used in *Khayāl* performance. A complete *Khayāl* performance is covered by two compositions i.e. *Badā Khayāl* (*vilambit laya*) and *Chotā Khayāl* (*Drut laya*); usually performed in the same *Rāga* but in different *Tāla*. *Bandiśes* or lyrics are composed in Hindi, Brijia and sometimes in other regional languages and these compositions are based on diverse topics, like romantic, divine love, praise of kings or gods, the natural beauty, dawn and dusk, and the pranks of Krishna. In Bengal, Bengali *Khayāl* became very popular in early 19th century. The *Bandiś* is divided into two parts — the *Sthāyī* (or *Asthāyī*) and the *Antarā*. *Sthāyī* considered more important than *Antarā* part as it shows the melodic contours of the *Rāga*. The *Sthāyī* often uses notes from the lower octave and the lower half of the middle octave, while the *Antarā* ascends to the tonic of the upper octave and beyond, before descending and linking back to the *Sthāyī*.

Acharya Chinmoy Lahiri, who created a good numbers of *Rāga*; had also composed on those *Rāgas* a lot of songs (*Bandiś*). A few of his compositions are furnished below:

i) *Rāga: Darbari Kanada, Tāla: Tritāla (Madhyalaya).*

Sthāyī: Kyā tum ho vahi śyām sāvāriyā

Dhūṇḍ phiru bana bābariyā.

Antarā: Bāsuri ki dhvani

Bajāya kahi guni

Pukāre mohe Magana nāgariyā.

ii) *Rāga: Deśi, Tāla: Tritala (Madhyalaya).*

Sthāyī: Manaharwa curāye liyo jāy

Hiya ki pīra kise sunāy.

Antarā: Kā karu aba kuch nā suhāya,

Magana milana bina kaise bitāye,

Sakhī eri deho batāya.

Bandiś wrote by Acharya Lahiri, mostly depicts the sacred love of Radha-Krishna by mingling *Sur* and *Tāla*.

Thumrī:-

This is a very popular semi-classical form of vocal recital in Northern India. It became popular in the time of Mughal rule. Great musicologist late Dr. Bimal Roy had given an account of *Thumrī* in his text ‘**Sangīti Śabdakoś**’ (1st part). He said that the love song or poetic romantic song of Muslim era in Doāb area is evolved in Luchnow and later became popular as *Thumrī*. It’s known as **Baruyā** or **Bārwā gīt**. In 17th century a particular form of composition became very popular and it was based on *Thumrī* or *Bārwā* type *Rāga*. It had many stanzas like poetic song. Though it is not the new form of ancient *Rupaka prabandha*, but in later time there seems similarity between *Thumrī* and *Rupaka Prabandha*. In ‘**Sangit Śāstra Samikṣā (2nd part)**’, great musicologist Dr. Pradip Kumar Ghosh has also explained its history. He said that *Thumrī* is a light classical *Rāga* based romantic music form of U.P. It doesn’t have the purity of raga because of the importance of its aesthetic sentiment. We cannot deny the name of Nawab Wajid Ali Shah (13.7.1822-21.9.1887) in the history and development of *Thumrī*. But

the existence of *Thumrī* can be traced even before the time of Wajid Ali Shah and Nyamat Khan Sadarang. Another book ‘**Tuhfat-ul-hind**’ (1670 A.D) Mirza Khan said that *Thumrī* is a *Rāgīni* among five *Rāgīnis* of *Rāga Śrī*. He also had said that, this *Rāgīni* was quite popular in Doyāb (middle place of Ganga and Yamuna which is known as Ayodhya). In ‘**Rāga Darpan**’ (1666 A.D), Fakir Ullah said another name of *Thumrī* is *Baruwa* or *Bāroā*. *Thumrī* or *Bāroā* was very popular song among all classico-folk music forms in Doyāb. Other songs are Kajjalī or Kajrī, Chaitī, Birhā, Sauni etc. It is clear that *Thumrī* existed from 17th century, before the birth of Wajid Ali Shah. Secondly, *Thumri* or *Bārūyā Rāgīni* comes from folk tune. Thirdly, all types of folk song in Doyāb used to be performed with dance. In ‘*Āin-i-Ākbarī*’ (1580-1593), Abul Fazal described about all types of popular folk songs but didn’t mention about *Thumrī*. It is proved that *Thumrī* born in the first half of 17th century. Also he told that those people who were related to dance or music, they were called *Naṭ*, *Naṭuwā*, *Kāncanī* etc in North India. In *Doyāb*, they used to dance with the folk songs based on *Barūyā rāgīni*. In later time, those folk songs became popular as *Thumrī*.

Musical instruments used to accompany with *Thumrī* are almost same as used in *Khayāl* song. The *Tālas* suitable with *Thumrī* are *Jat*, *Tiluwārā*, *Dipcandī*, *Kāhār wā*, *Dādrā*, *Madhyamān*, *Tritāla* etc. and the *Rāgas* used are *Khāmbaz*, *Pīlu*, *Gārā*, *Bhairavī*, *Pāhārī* etc. Acharya Lahiri also composed a lot of *Thumrīs*.

Example: *Rāga: Khāmbaz, Tāla: Jat*

Thumrī: Sthāyī: Akhiyā kāhe ko milāi

Mohe kiu prem ki rāha dikhāi

Barabasa pāsa bulākar apne

Ab kiu nainā curāi.

Antarā: Terā mana nā jānu tu acaraja ki nāi

Ānkho ojhalā honā thā to phir kiu muskāi.

Chaitī and Kajrī:-

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They both are originally folk type of songs (of Doāb area) called Classico-folk. In these forms, *Rāgas* are used very light in natur. *Chaitī* is performed in the month Chaitra (mid of March - mid of April).

Kajrī:- (Composed by Ācharya Chinmoy Lahiri.)

Sthāyī: Gheri kārī badariyā

Piyā rahile kaun nagariyā

Dekhi mana barsāy

Ghar āngana kacunā suhāy.

Antarā: Bijalī camake jaba jor

Dharakata hai hiyā mor

Lipata rahu suni sejariyā.

Rāga-Pradhān Gān:-

Originated and popularized in Bengal during in the first half of 20th century. The name *Rāga-Pradhān* had given by the late musicologist Suresh Chandra Chakraborty. The songs in where *Rāga* is chiefly based; in fact they are all poetic songs. This type of song may accept any *Rāga* based musical form or not. When it follows any musical form; then it follows all the steps of the particular form. The forms it may follow are: *Dhrupad*, *Dhāmār*, *Khayāl*, *Ṭappā* and *Ṭhumrī*. But in Bengal, sometimes they are not followed in toto. This is mainly due to soft language of Bengal. In every case, in *Rāga-Pradhān Gāna*; the characteristics of a *Rāga* whether pure or mixed are followed, when the principles of *Rāgas* are not strictly followed, then they are identified as ‘*Rāgāśrayī Bānglā Gāna*’.

Ghazal:-

Ghazal is a form of verse which is originated in Persia, which is usually recited with tunes. Of course, it is not a musical form. Therefore, any kind of tune may be applied when the composer of the verse recites. Normally, rhythm is avoided in recitals. So, originally in *Ghazal*, *Tālas* are not set. In later time, when *Ghazal* is used in other poetic form of songs (*Kāvyaḡīti*) then *Tālas* and *Rāgas* began to be used frequently.

However, there are some parts in *Ghazal- Matlā, Maqtā, Beher, Kāfiyā* and *Radif*.

Musicality of Ācharya Chinmoy Lahiri:-

Chinmoy Lahiri came attracted to music at his very tender age. In his family everyone used to appreciate music but nobody were involved professionally. He was the fourth son to his parents. His brothers were fond of the *Raga* music very much and one of his brothers Sachinmoy Lahiri was a disciple of famous dancer Sambhu Maharaj. His father Shreejeebchandra Lahiri was an amateur Esraaj player. His younger brother also involved in music. His proper *tālim* of vocal music started under the guidance of his *Guru* Ptd. Shrikrishna Ratanjhankar; when he was a student of Marris College of Music, Lucknow. He had taken the musical lessons from Ptd. Ratanjhankar for a long time as his *Gāndā-bāndh śāḡīrd* (disciple). He came in contact with many music experts of different *Gharānās*. He furnished his performance in a unique shape by the influence of eminent musicians like Dilip Chandra Bedi, Dhruvatara Joshi, Khalifa Khursheed Ali Khan etc. Dilip Ch. Bedi was the disciple of Ustad Faiyaz Khan. Ptd Ratanjhankar also went through the *tālim* of Ustad Faiyaz Khan to nourish his music after learning from ptd. Bhatkhande. He devoted himself to Ustad Faiyaz Khan. Acharya Lahiri got a great opportunity to furnish his music in the fine touch of Dilip Ch. Bedi. He was very expert in various types of *tān* and *sargam*.

Acharya Lahiri used to accompany him for learning his excellence and gradually it was blooming very beautifully in the young heart of Acharya Lahiri. He became the king of *Tānkāri* and was highly applauded by the listeners. Though he had a soft corner for Seniā-Dhrupad *Gharānā*; but he never followed the style. He went to Khalifa Khurshid Ali Khan of Golaganje, Lucknow of Seniā *Gharānā* for made his knowledge wider.

Acharya Lahiri had started his musical career as an approved artiste in All India Radio, Lucknow in the time of its very beginning, 1936. After working there in Lucknow radio he shifted to Dhaka and joined as a music producer in Dhaka Radio by the help of Sangīt Śāstrī Suresh Chandra Chakraborty. His song were broadcasted by Dhaka Radio regularly and his music widespreaded in all the areas of Bangladesh. He became very famous as a classical artiste and teacher among the people. At that time Acharya Lahiri met Gul Muhammad, great musician lived in Dhaka. Again, he started to nourish his talent under the guidance of Gul Muhammad. In 1944, H.M.V. record company was moving in many places. They were searching for the budding stars to record their songs. They had recorded two *Rāga-Pradhān* Bengali songs in *Khayāl* style of his own composition i.e. ‘*Nā māne mānā*’ and ‘*Duwāre elo ke*’ written by Gopal Dasgupta at Nārī Śikṣa Mandir, Dhākā. Gradually, a lot of students started to come for learning the music under the guidance of Chinmoy Lahiri. His creative mind always made him busy to create new *Rāga* or other compositions. Before the separation of the country, he resigned his job and came to Calcutta permanently for establish his talent among other musicians in 1947. He started to perform in different soirees and mesmerized all his listeners with his various patterns of *tānkāri*, rhythmic improvisation, alluring *bol vistār* and very charming voice throwing. In the same year, he was invited by the All Bengal Music Conference

and had performed there *Rāga Yaman*. People highly appreciated his mastery. Again he got the opportunity to show his talent in the same stage for the second time. He performed his own created *Raga* ‘Nandakonś’, *vilambit* ‘*Byākul nainā nīr bahi āye*’ and *drut* ‘*Paḍu tore mein paiyā*’. That was a very successful recital for him.

Acharya Lahiri was not only a great performer but also a very talented composer. It is wrong to identify him as a sole *Khayāl* artiste as he was equally good in rendering *Thumrī*, *Gīt-Ghazal*, *Bhajan* and *Rāga* based modern Bengali songs. He composed a good numbers of songs which were recorded by the renowned artistes of his time. Another gems created by Achaya Lahiri is the beautiful *Rāgas* i.e i) *Nandkounś*, ii) *Śyāmounś*, iii) *Lalitā*, iv) *Kusumkalyān*, v) *Rajanīkalyān*, vi) *Dagdheswarī*, vii) *Rāgeśrī-Basant*, viii) *Sant-Bhairav*, ix) *Pancameswarī* etc.

Acharya Lahiri was an outstanding trainer and teacher. Though he was simple and childlike by nature, he could be equally stern and strict in practice (*Riyāz*). His students and followers could be found many places outside Bengal and even beyond India. Some of them who made their names afterwards are- Begum Parveen Sultana, Ptd. Shyamal Lahiri, Bidushi Mandira Lahiri, Birendranath Phukan, Hiren Sharma, Kalipada Chakraborty, Bijoy Chakraborty, Meera Chattopadhyay, Uma De, Pdt. Dinanath Mishra, Shipra Bose, Haimanti Sukla, Akhilbandhu Ghosh, Sanat Sinha, Alpana Bandopadhyay, Arati Mukhopadhyay, Satinath Mukherjee, Utpala Sen and Neelratan Banerjee etc. Starting as a part time employee at A.I.R Lucknow, he went on to become voice trainer in H.M.V. Some who got benefited from him as voice trainer at H.M.V are- Satinath Mukhopadhyay, Sandhya Mukhopadhyay, Manabendra

Mukhopadhyay, Prasun Bandopadhyay, Shyamal Mitra, Aangurwala Devi, Bani Ghoshal etc. Many social institutions were proud to have him as a member. He was music teacher at Technique School of Music, Sargam, and Metropolitan School of Behala. He became lecturer in music at Rabindra Bharati University on 1967. Later he resigned only to rejoin after two years, 1974-75.

His first recording was in 1944 at Dhaka. H.M.V Company gave him an opportunity to make his first recording as an effort to support and search rising singers. His two songs recorded at that time were-‘*Nā māne nā...*’ and ‘*Duwāre elo ke....*’ lyric by Gopal Dasgupta and composed by the singer himself, both the songs composed in the style of *bandiś*. Later megaphone made a cassette on him, co-artiste were Bhishwadeb Chattopadhyay and Tarapada Chakraborty. His contributions towards film music were also phenomenal. His first playback was in the film ‘Mandanda’. Other films are ‘Dvairath’, ‘Antaraal’, ‘Shapmochan’, ‘Jeeban niye’ ‘Bapu ne kaha tha’ etc. His song ‘*Tribenī tūrtha pathe.....*’ became a milestone in the history of Bengali film music, in the film ‘Shapmochan’. It was a duet song with Pratima Bandopadhyay.

Conclusion:-

He is the rarest of rare musician, not only Bengal but also whole of India. Art is never static; changing with time is its characteristics. Bengali classical songs were influenced a lot by music from other states at the beginning of twentieth century. Artistes like Ustad Faiyaz Khan, Ustad Amir Khan etc. were most famous amongst Bengali *Rāga*-based music arena. During those days, a Bengali newcomer appeared in the field of Bengali music. As he was grown up in Lucknow (U.P.), Pandit Chinmoy Lahiri was blessed with many renowned musicians outside Bengal at that time. After coming back to Calcutta, he could make his own path after having influenced so much from the maestros he came in

contact with. His signature style is so unique; it can be called ‘Chinmoy Lahiri style’ all by itself. This style is famous and recognized in all India level. Also he enriched the Bengali music by his immense contributions, and reformed a strong future generation of North Indian Classical; semi-classical and light music through his dedication towards teaching. His legacy as rendering his own style and compositions has been handed over to future generations. The final curtain came down of this wizard of music on 17th August, 1984 at Neel Ratan Sarkar medical college, where he was being treated for his cardiac ailment. It was a great loss for music but he will live for years to come for his noble creations.

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