

PADAVALI KIRTAN: THE DEVOTIONAL SONG OF BENGAL

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Page | 46

Abstract:-

Padavali Kirtan is a very glorious art form of Bengal which conveys the perfect blend of melody, poetry and dramatic aesthetic value. Joydev, the famous author of the “Gitagovinda (Astapadi)” is regarded as the father of Padavali Kirtan and these forms were evolved from the ‘Padas’ of “Gitagovinda”. The word “kirtan” is used all over India to signify “Songs in Praise”. The Padavali kirtan bears similarity with the ancient ‘Ela’ and ‘Suda’ Prabandha. It may be pointed out that Ela-Prabandhas were known in Bengal since the time of Matanga and one of the Ela, Gauda Ela belonged to Bengal. Therefore, generally the rules of Ela must have been known to the musician of ancient Bengal. The themes of this compositions cover the divine love, sentiment and romance (divine shringar) of Srikrishna and Radha known as rasa-kirtan and the composition was called lila-kirtan. Today, not only in Bengal even whole country is very much attached with this art form for its great dramatic music which has the essential raga frame and the variety of rhythms. From the reference of “Gitagovinda”, we came to know that Joydev mentioned about some ragas to set his compositions, which influenced the Padavali Kirtan also to set the compositions in ragas and talas. The most attractive feature of Padavali Kirtan is its tala system which makes it different from all other types of music of India, in respect of sound production with great performance and presentation, which is based on Sri-Khol.

Key words:-

Kirtan, Padavali, Bengal, Charyapada, Prabandha, Gitagovinda.

Introduction:-

Nowadays, everybody wants to express their thoughts and feelings through the medium of Arts. In this category, music is one of the most remarkable Art form which can easily interact with human emotions. Only music can help to refresh human mind and to get happiness. From ancient time, various types of music were evolved in our country such as classical music, folk music and devotional music. As we know, classical and folk music are now placed in a deserving position, whereas devotional music also became very popular for its heart touching melodies and bhabs (rasa). In Indian culture Bengal is an ideal region to produce a quality of art forms in various genre throughout all the ages. The earliest extant work in Bengali literature is the 'Charyapada', a collection of Buddhists mystic songs. The 'Charyapadas' were composed during the rule of the 'Palas', which is based on some lyrical structures. The compositions of Charyapada's are influenced by the classical music and there were some references of specific ragas. According to great scholars, 'Charyapada' is an ancient form of Padavali Kirtan of Bengal. Though, we found various poetic genres which are called Bengali religious scriptures, like Manasamangal, Dharmamangal, Krishnamangal etc. The history of Bengal says that, we can't ignore these scriptures which were helping us to establish the 'Padas' as musical compositions. As a devotional song, Padavali Kirtan is a rich musical form of Bengal and it is the original genre of Bengali music. Padavali Kirtan is regarded as an artistic achievement in the field of Indian Music and literature.

Origin of Padavali Kirtan:-

In Bengal, various musical compositions were in practice from the time immemorable. But we can have historical evidences of compositional forms from the period of 10th - 11th century. There were mainly two types of musical forms like folk and classico-folk. One of the most important musical forms, 'Charyagiti' were sung based on classical ragas and talas and had a resemblance of 'Prabandha giti'. It is believed that, the great Bengali scholar Haraprasad Shastri contained the text of said songs elaborately in Sanskrit. In this regard, we can enter into the 12th century A.D. when the 'Gitagovinda Padaganas' or 'Astapadis' were composed by Thakur Joydev. This may be called the origin of 'Kirtan'. The songs of the

‘Gitagovinda’ are the ‘Prabandha’ types of gitis and it is a good combination of Prakrit and Sanskrit language. From the reference of ‘Srichaitanya Charitamrit’ we found that Mahaprabhu used to listen to the songs of Chandidas and Vidyapati, which indicates that some elementary form of Padavali were in practice before the life and time of Mahaprabhu. Besides this, another musical form ‘Mangalagitis’ were in practice and all the themes were taken from different ‘Mangalkavyas’. During this period, each and every ‘Mangalkavyas’ was of great value and were composed by various authors based on simple poetry to glorify a particular God or Goddess. This type of songs were known as ‘Mangal gaan’. According to some scholar, it was the pioneer of Padavali Kirtan and Padavali style was very much influenced by these ‘Mangal gaan’. After that, we can see Vaishnava Savants like Vadu Chandidas, Kavi Vidyapati and others as composers of ‘Gitagovinda Padaganas’ with the help of classical ragas and talas. Vidyapati composed his songs in Maithili and the poets of Bengal tried to follow the style of Vidyapati by introducing a new literary language of ‘Braj-bulli’. But it is not ignorable that Sri Chaitanya Mahaprabhu is the father of ‘Nama kirtan’ and ‘leelakirtan’. There are strong indications that, during the time of Mahaprabhu, Kirtan music was very popular. But then, there was no definite musical style known as Padavali Kirtan in Bengal.

Contribution of Thakur Narottam Das:-

At first, in the 16th century Thakur Narottam Das introduced the classical type of ‘Padavali Kirtan’ on the basis of the ‘dhruva prabandha gana’. After the death of Sri Chaitanyadev, a great Vaishnava Savant Thakur Narottam Das felt that he has to do something to develop the Padavali Kirtan of Bengal. He restructured the kirtan style by following the rules of classical music. Actually, Narottam has taken musical training from Swami Haridas, who was very popular for his great disciple Miah Tansen, a legendary musical personality of classical music. After receiving all musical training, Narottam came back to his village and gave full attention to organize the Vaishnava community. To establish the style of Padavali Kirtan, he arranged the ‘Khetory Utsav’ in Brindavan, where the thousands of Vaishnavaites were present. In his own way he made a team of four members. They were Gouranga Das, Devi das, Sri Das and Gokulananda. The basic musical tone of Narottam style emerged from Dhrupad, the oldest classical form of India, which is

known for its depth and devotional mood. He made use of talas and rhythms, elaborate the melodic structure of laya (tempos). It is believed that Narottam also created some new talas for Padavali Kirtan. We can say it was a good combination of North Indian tala system and South Indian tala system. This trend was given a new thrust and colour by Narottam. He made compulsory the singing of “Gourachandrika” as a preface to Padavali presentation. By “Gourachandrika” we mean songs in praise of Shri Chaitanya, who is also known as ‘Goura’ or ‘Gourchandra’. Narottam introduced the idea of presenting the various aspects of the Radha-Krishna story and the life-story of Shri Chaitanya separately with presentations. Jayadev or Badu Chandidas was very much inspired by this work of Narottam. His method was to collect and compile the songs on various shades of a particular sentiment and arrange them into a pala which has a “Gourachandrika” to express its theme. This idea was also approved by the Vaishnava Scholars. Shri Chaitanya created a great popular enthusiasm about Padavali Kirtan, while Narottam gave it a musical direction.

The limbs (anga) of Padavali Kirtan:-

The great Vaishnava Savant has created the main five limbs of Padavali Kirtan, which was known as ‘Anga’. The limbs are: Katha, Doha, Tuka, Chhuta and Ankhara. Each one has its own meaning like ‘Katha’ means language, the main text of a song. But the word ‘katha’ is also used to mean some other contexts. It signifies conversation, particularly in the form of question and answer between Radha, Krishna and Barayi. It also means the connecting link between one piece of song and the other. When the kirtan singer explains the meaning of a line or a stanza in plain prose, it calls ‘katha’. ‘Doha’ indicates the stanzas of various forms in Padavali lyrics, which helps a singer to recite in their performance. ‘Tuka’ is an ornamental part of a song which is traditionally handed down from one generation of singers to another. ‘Chhuta’ is a part of a kirtan stanza. When a part of a stanza is presented instead of the entire stanza, it becomes ‘chhuta’. The last one is ‘Ankhara’ which is the most significant limb of Padavali Kirtan. It is unique to Padavali Kirtan and is a principle means to enhance the sweetness of the music and highlight the bhava of the topic. It may be described as small phrases and the performers use it in the middle of their song. Actually to highlight a particular emotion of the scene, everybody wants to describe it without break the emotional

continuity of the original Pada. ‘Ankhara’ is not written down or codified like the Padas. They are usually handed over from the guru to the shishya through generations.

Specific ragas and talas uses in Padavali Kirtan:-

Page | 50

Vaishnava literature mentioned that the Padavali singing had started in the early 16th century, along with Nama-sankirtana. However, there is a common notion that the classical type of Padavali Kirtana was an innovation of Narottam Das. Though Padavali Kirtan is very much influenced by the classical music, but it does not strictly follow the classical Raga Sangeet music. The Vaishnava Padavalis are essentially lyrical. Therefore, each Pada has been marked with a specific raga. The name of the ragas commonly found in various anthologies are Dhanasi, Pahida, Sindhura, Kanada, Kamoda, Shri, Gurjari, Adana, Vibhasa, Kedar, Bihagda and others. Apart from the use of common ragas, other ancient ragas are also common like Kedarbihagda, Deshabaradi, Vibhas- Lalit, Karun- Vibhas etc.

Without the tala system music doesn't get its proper structure. So, there is also another great diversity in Kirtan, which is rendered in three tempos: druta or speeds, madhyalaya and vilambit or slow. As we know, Narottam Das also devised some new talas of Padavali Kirtan. The rhythmic part of the Padavali Kirtan is fascinating. The Kirtanias of Bengal have developed a scientific system of tala, many aspects of which are quite independent of the modern Hindustani tala paddhati. Normally in a single composition, the number of talas is more than one. Though Kirtan claims to have more than one hundred patterns, most of them are very complex in composition. Among them, “Daskosi” is one of the instances of the most significant Tala of Padavali kirtan which used in its different classifications. “Bara Daskosi” is a tala of 28 beats (matras). Some of the names are common but arrangements of bars (time measure) are in some cases different. The popular names are: Teot, Ektali, Daspyari, Rupak, Teora, Jhamptal, Jhanti, Dharata, Madandola, Chutha, Nandan, Indrabhash, Jhurjhuti etc. It should also be mentioned that the performance on khol, with all its boldness and the changing phases of each tala, stands as a predominating aspect of music in Padavali kirtan.

Major Gharanas of Padavali Kirtan:-

With the musical direction of Padavali Kirtan, Narottam introduced the first kirtan style, which was based on classical form 'Dhrupad' name as 'Garanhati gharana'. It was regarded as a basic kirtan gharana with slow tempo and it was compared with the dhrupad gharanas of Hindustani classical music. But day after day it became quite difficult for learners and performers. Then the next kirtan style was developed by a Vaishnava Savant named Jnanadas, who lived in a village called Kandara under the administrative unit Manohar Shahi. So his created style was identified as 'Manhar Shahi gharana' of Padavali Kirtan. Jnanadas made his style a little easier than the Garanhati style. He added some speed to the tempo (rhythm) and opted for vocal improvisation to make the composition more attractive. This singing style of Padavali Kirtan was counted as being equivalent to the khayal gharana of Hindustani music. The third Kirtan style was devised by Vipradas Ghosh and it was the 'Reneti Gharana' of Padavali kirtan. The word 'Reneti' is the abbreviated form of Ranihati, a regional administrative unit. Vipradas opted for further speed in the tempo and for sweetness and charm of music. The 'Reneti kirtan gharana' is compared with the Thumri gharana of Hindustani classical music. The fourth kirtana style is known as the 'Mandarini gharana', propounded by Venidas. Popular acceptability was the motto of this gharana. It was stripped as far as possible of the intricacies of raga music. Only the easy rhythmic patterns were sustained. The fifth and the last style of Padavali Kirtan which was developed by Kavindra Gokul, was known as 'Jharkhandi gharana'. It was devised in the Jharkhand region. The 'Jharkhandi gharana' was denied all the classical or the semi-classical modes of the earlier gharanas and blend with the colors of folk music. It even accommodated some elements of ethno-music of the indigenous people of Jharkhand.

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