



## IMPACT OF COVID-19 ON INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

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### ABSTRACT

The present manuscript aims studying the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the Indian Classical Music. COVID-19 has virtually rehabilitated the very basic realms of human civilization and Indian Classical Music is no exception to it. COVID-19 brought both positive and negative outcomes to the scenario of Indian Classical Music. The cancellation of concerts and workshops in the face-to-face mode led to stern undercutting of livelihoods of musicians. Introduction of concerts in the virtual online mode opened up new avenues and thus provided some financial respite to the musicians. The teaching of Indian Classical Music is a very intricate phenomena and was also transitioned on the online platform. On one hand advanced learners were able to benefit from this transformation and on the other hand beginner students intrinsically faced many obscurities. Internet glitches are prominent in India and this adversely affected the quality of streaming of concerts and lessons. Evolution of online platforms amiably led to series of interactions with eminent musicians and enabled audiences to get a better understanding of the virtues and outlook of the artists. This form of interaction was minimal in pre-COVID era.

**Keywords:** COVID-19; Virtual concerts; Online Teaching; Indian Classical Music; Interactive Sessions

### INTRODUCTION

COVID 19 pandemic shall be considered as one of the darkest phases in the history of mankind. The excessive loss of human life has shattered the world and we have witnessed unparalleled challenges to public health, biosphere of work and food systems. COVID 19 has severely crippled economies around the world and virtually every human being has been impacted by the repercussions caused by this pandemic. Millions of people have been driven into extreme poverty and survival has been very difficult. Enterprises are being shut and large workforces are losing their livelihood. Lockdowns, curfews and restrictions have immensely modulated the functioning of human civilization. Work from home and indoor engagements have become the new normal in various sectors wherein it is possible to make transition. Mental health of individuals during these tough times have been severely affected. It is basically arts and more specifically music where people generally turn towards during tough times as music brings solace to the mind and heart<sup>1,2,3</sup>. Indian classical music is the purest form of music which invokes positivity and provides spiritual insight. Indian classical music witnessed a huge impact due to COVID-19<sup>4</sup>. The fraternity was devastated with the death of some very eminent musicians<sup>5</sup>. Live concerts got postponed and cancelled and so were the live classes. This led to harshly undercutting the livelihoods of musicians. COVID 19 has also altered the mode and delivery of classical music and also the manner in which the students learn this art form. There have been both



positive and negative impacts which can easily be gauged. On one hand, live face to face concerts came to a complete halt and on the other hand, the trend of virtual concerts has started picking up pace. However, these virtual concerts do not directly build up the type of connection which is very unique in live concerts. Furthermore, teachers have been exploring novel possibilities of imparting knowledge of music in a virtual mode which is indeed very challenging<sup>6</sup>. Indian classical music, being a very intricate form of music requires one on one interaction amongst the teacher and student and virtually doing this is very perplexing.

The present manuscript aims at highlighting the impact of COVID-19 on Indian Classical Music. Section 2 aims at underlining the details of transformation of concerts from real to virtual mode. The consequences of teaching of Indian Classical music from face to face to online mode are discussed in Section 3. Section 4 deals with the details of interaction sessions with eminent musicians. Finally, the conclusions are drawn in Section 5.

## **TRANSFORMATION OF CONCERTS FROM REAL TO VIRTUAL MODE**

The very nitty gritty of delivery of Indian classical music lies in the form of interaction amongst the artist and the audience. Prerecorded CD's, Audio and Videos files are available in the market as well as on the internet. This mode of listening to Classical Music is though quite popular, yet it has never replaced the live concerts, which takes music to an altogether unique altitude. The audience of Indian classical music is very insightful and this makes the live concerts very interactive. The artists as well are very enthusiastic about performing live in front of the audiences and even the audience love the listen a live concert in the real world.

There exists a different level of connection amongst the artist and the audience and some very exclusive etiquette is followed<sup>1</sup>. There are some unspoken rules for the audience and they are expected to observe pin-drop silence during the tuning of the instruments and strange as it may appear, the listeners may utter praises loudly as the concert is in progress. There is a lot of sentiment involved both at the part of the artist as well as the audience. There is immense respect and reverence for one's surrounding and of the performer as well. This very essence of live interaction gets lost in the virtual mode. However, due to different SOPs, lockdowns and curfews, the live face to face concerts were either cancelled or postponed. This eventually led to the organization of concerts in the virtual mode. This form of presentation came as a big relief for some artists whose income would otherwise have been sternly compromised. However, barring a few exceptions, there was very less or no payment made to the



artists. Thereby, many musicians are struggling financially. This is a very grave reality and needs some serious intervention. Also, not all musicians were technically comfortable in switching to an online mode.

This changing scenario had some positive aspects as well. Audiences did not have to go through the trouble of commuting and parking at the concert venue. By a simple click of the mouse, one could discover new talent and also listen to their favorite musicians. The organizers of the event did not have to worry about the booking of venues, logistics of the travel, hospitality and about the trouble of bringing the artists to a particular location. This obviously led to cost cutting. The organizers arranged tickets for the audience in a virtual mode wherein a link active for a certain period was given after the payment was made.

Two different modes were used in the organization of concerts. In the first mode, the concert was streamed live to the audience and in the second mode, the artist recorded the presentation beforehand and later it was broadcasted. However, live streaming posed lot many technical glitches. Many a times there appeared time lags and audio and video segments were not synchronized. Any technical problem at the end of the artist caused several difficulties in the streaming. The listener was also required to have good internet connectivity. These issues related to connectivity are quite prominent at different locations in our country and thereby impacted the quality of delivery and broadcast.

## **TRANSFORMATION IN TEACHING OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC FROM FACE TO FACE TO ONLINE MODE**

One very important consequence of COVID-19 was its impact on teaching of Indian Classical Music. Teaching in almost every field of education was transformed from face to face to an online format and Indian Classical Music was no exception to this scenario. Online teaching is a format wherein information technology and communication are used for the delivery and attainment of knowledge from different geographical locations. Teaching of Indian Classical Music is inherently very different from teaching of other subjects. For both, vocal and instrumental music, a one-on-one interaction amongst the teacher and student is required. The teacher is referred to as “Guru” and the student is referred as the “Shishya” and in Indian Classical Music a lot of respect and reverence is observed at the part of the Shishya for the Guru. Traditionally, before starting a lesson, the “Shishya” touches the feet of the “Guru” and seeks blessings. The entire process of learning is deemed to be very sacred, spiritual and divine.



Generally, a one-on-one interaction between the “Guru” and “Shishya” takes place during teaching. However, artists do conduct workshops wherein a number of students are taught simultaneously, although individual focus is also laid upon concurrently. These workshops were transitioned to an online mode and came as a respite to the artist in these tough times. However, these workshops were generally meant for advanced learners who have prior knowledge of the subject. Another aspect of the workshop was that individual focus was laid upon students, wherein the teacher sent separate recordings to the students for a particular segment or to focus on the point where the student was lacking behind. This form of online teaching was also practiced earlier on, specifically for the foreign students who have had their initial training in live face to face mode. It is not possible for these foreign students to stay in India for longer durations as learning of Indian Classical Music is not a process takes place in a set duration. It takes years and years to master even a single Raga. These students are still continuing their lessons in the online mode. However, internet glitches are eminent in India which does lead to asynchronistic display of audio and video content or disruptions in streaming.

With the spread of COVID, all educational institutes were closed and the government ordered for transition to online format of teaching. For most of the subjects, this transition was practically viable<sup>7-10</sup>. The use of Learning Management Systems (LMS), power points, pen-tabs, audio and video content and various platforms made teaching and learning successful<sup>11-13</sup>. It must be noted that Indian Classical Music is also taught across schools, colleges and universities in India. Lesson delivery for this teaching modality was very challenging in online mode and had some very intrinsic drawbacks. Learning Indian classical music requires years of training and loads of practice on the part of the student. There needs to a very intricate communication amongst the teacher and student during a lesson wherein the scale and pitch should be synchronized. For the case of instrumental music, the instrument needs fine tuning and generally students are not able to tune their instrument as it takes years of practice except for the case wherein the student is exceptionally good. Also, for the beginner students of instrumental music, a lot of focus is laid upon the sitting posture, finger positioning and finger movement. This is practically impossible to cater in an online mode. Thus, for beginner students, online teaching of Indian Classical Music is extremely difficult and is not that successful. Furthermore, the students from educational institutes are generally not from well off families and most of the times, purchasing their own instrument for practice or “riyaz” is not a financially feasible option. Also, the students belong to very remote areas where internet facilities are not good. Thereby, teaching them online is practically impossible.



## **INTERACTIVE SESSIONS WITH EMINENT MUSICIANS**

One very positive outcome of virtualization during COVID times was the interaction sessions that were organized with eminent musicians. This gave an opportunity to the audience to interact with the artist and learn about his/her views. Prior to COVID, these types of interactions were very rare. The audience would listen to the artist in a concert but was hardly able to interact personally. Just before or after the concert, a few people would get the opportunity of meeting with the artist in the green room. But this kind of meetings are generally very formal and very few people are able to do so. The audience always felt that there is a dearth of interaction with the artist. Very few interviews with the artist used to be conducted by magazines, television and radio. The audiences always wanted to know a lot about the artist whom they adore so much as the amount of knowledge which an artist possesses through years of evolution is very useful for the audience, many of whom are themselves practicing Indian Classical Music and who always look forward to guidance.

The music journey of an artist, the learnings and lessons, the outlook, interpretation of music, intricacies involved in the music and many more were conveyed during these interactive sessions which were streamed live on You tube, Facebook and other interactive media. The audience got to ask questions to the artist and thereby interact with the artist on a personal one on one basis. The organizers and moderators of such interactions did very commendable jobs and such interactions shall be archived in the world of Indian Classical Music.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The harsh repercussions of COVID-19 jolted the ways in which human beings functioned. Survival in itself became a mammoth task for many and livelihoods were destroyed to a great extent. These tough times had severe implications in the world of Indian Classical Music. Indian Classical Music and musicians faced severe unprecedented times, wherein survival of many in itself seemed bleak. The loss of some very renowned artists came as a shock to the entire fraternity.

COVID-19 brought negativity and stress amongst the masses and many resorted to music for tranquility. The very aim of Indian Classical Music is to provide peace, joy and solace to the mind. Technology and internet brought in some positive outcomes and streaming of Indian Classical Music on online platforms was elevated. Online concerts eliminated the hustle of dealing with logistics involved in organizing live face to face concerts. However, technical glitches were eminent. These online concerts were well appreciated but inherently lacked the elevated interaction that takes place amongst the audience and the artist in live face to mode. Barring a few

cases, hardly any honorarium was given to the artists. This is a very grave reality which poses punitive effects on the livelihood of musicians.

Teaching of Indian Classical Music altered distinctly and online platforms were used for delivery of lessons. Workshops were also conducted by artists in an online manner. These workshops and online lessons have a different level of reception based upon the learner's stage. Advanced learners benefited from them immensely as they were well versed with the involved minute intricacies. The same was not true for beginners who need a lot of personal attention regarding the grasping of vivid aspects of Indian Classical Music. Students from remote areas did not have good internet connectivity and this adversely affected their learning. A good bandwidth internet connection is required for broadcasting and learning purposes so that good transmission of concerts or lessons takes place and synchronicity of audio and video signals is maintained simultaneously. Finally, one of the positive impacts of virtualization on Indian Classical Music was the broadcast of interviews and live interactions with the eminent musicians of the fraternity. These kinds of interviews were rarely conducted and the audiences have always felt this dearth. These interactions filled the audience and learners with zeal and enthusiasm as they could now have the opportunity to understand the insights, virtues and perception of the artists whom they adored otherwise.

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