

VARANASI: THE CITY OF MUSICAL CULTURE

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ABSTRACT

India is a diverse country and is symbolized by the plurality of its culture. India is counted in one of those countries in the world which are rich in music, dance, theatre, traditions, performing arts, rites and rituals, paintings and writings etc. Within India almost every state and city has its own set of culture. In this research paper focus is on Varanasi city of Uttar Pradesh which is famous for its musical culture. This city is considered as the oldest inhabited cities in the world. It is the hub of Benaras Gharana, famous for Hindustani Classical Music. Musical culture in Varanasi is a tradition that is linked to the ancient times of Pauranic legends. Classical Music is the soul of the city. It has its own treasure of music. It is the city where guru-shishya parampara (teacher-pupil tradition) is still alive. This research paper is based on theoretical work both quantitative and qualitative. The theoretical data is compiled from various sources like books, journals (national and international), various government websites and UNESCO documents.

Keywords: Varanasi, Music, Culture, Musical Culture, UNESCO

INTRODUCTION

Culture shapes our identity i.e. who we are. It describes the way we live. It is the way we express our thoughts through art, music and writing etc. Culture also includes our roots through which we are connected (Kalman, 2009). Culture not only shapes the personality of the individual but also decides the traits of any society. So, culture has the revitalising power to bind each and every member of the society (Nations, 2019). The specific role of culture is to connect person to his environment on one side and to create a harmonious relationship between humans on the other side (White, 2007). Culture is no longer solely the treasure of knowledge, values and meanings that have an effect on everyone's existence however additionally the way humans describes live and engage with each other both at the global as well as local level (UNESCO, The power of culture for development-UNESCO Digital Library, 2010). India is a diverse country and is symbolized by the plurality of its culture. India is counted in one of those countries in the world which are rich in music, dance, theatre, traditions, performing arts, rites and rituals, paintings and writings etc. (Singhania, 2018). Within India every state or city has its own culture. For example, Varanasi city which is known as the spiritual and cultural capital of India is also famous for its musical culture.

Varanasi city is located in south-eastern state of Uttar Pradesh, India. This city is located on the banks of river Ganga. It is known by various other names like Kashi, Benaras or Banaras. Varanasi is considered as the oldest inhabited cities in the world.

By the 2000 BCE, it became the seat of philosophy and Vedic religion. This city also grew commercially and industrially (Frese, 2015). The city became famous for various things like muslin, silk fabrics, ivory works, sculptures and perfumes etc. Varanasi has always remained the significant city of religious, educational and artistic activities (Gutschow, 2006). The city includes syncretic tradition of Muslim artisanship. Varanasi is the main centre of music. It is the hub of Benaras Gharana, famous for Hindustani Classical Music. Musical culture in Varanasi is a tradition that is linked to the ancient times of Pauranic legends. Lord Shiva, who is believed as the creator of this city is credited with developing of different forms of dances and music. Distinguished musicians of the city are iconic Sitar player Pandit Ravi Shankar, Shennai maestro Ustad Bismillah Khan, Sitar player Pandit Shiv Nath Mishra, Pandit Deobrat Mishra and Vocalist Vidushi Girija Devi (Administration, 2021).

The research paper is divided into six broad headings. Heading I includes introduction, heading II includes research methodology, heading III deals with review of literature, heading IV deals with results and discussion, heading V includes conclusion and the last heading is references.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper is based on theoretical work both quantitative and qualitative. The theoretical data will be compiled from various sources like books, journals (national and international), various government websites and UNESCO documents.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Literature reviewed shows that culture is something that is placed in relation to crucial aspects like personality and society. He discusses that we do not have an encompassing definition of culture i.e. we cannot define culture in a single definition so those who work on culture need to define the aspects they are taking of culture for their research purpose (Groh, 2019). He has given various theories of culture but warns that before going into deeper thought we must understand that culture is the result of collective human behaviour (Gutschow, 2006). Culture is an intermediate through which persons express their capability to accomplish themselves and hence culture becomes an essential part of development (Koc, 2020). It focussed on various aspects of culture that are crucial to development such as traditional livelihoods, dissemination of knowledge, nurturing and safeguarding, social practices and distinctive cultural forms etc. Cultural activities can foster social inclusion and dialogue among diverse communities. Tangible and intangible heritage are integral parts of a city's identity, creating a sense of belonging and cohesion (UNESCO, The power of culture for development-UNESCO Digital Library, 2010). It also exhibited the multifaceted world of India's blessed place Varanasi par brilliance. It unlocks a

novel interpretation by providing visually captivating snapshots that emphasis on sacrosanct matters (Organisation, 2016). Past Literature beautifully compiles the literary images of Banaras or Varanasi based on the writings of various famous writers like Kabir, Mirza Ghalib, Bhartendu Harishchandra etc. (Rana P. S., 2004). The author comprehensively talks about the cultural traditions of the Banaras city and also interprets them in the purview of various cultural symbols and existed traditions which have preserved their continuity since the prehistoric times (Pradesh, 2021). It discusses the cultural and natural heritages of the city that are not only threatened by the devastation caused by the traditional reasons of decay but also by the socio-economic and political circumstances (Rana & Rana, Varanasi: Sustainable Development Goals, Smart City Vision and Inclusive Heritage Development, 2017). Different authors have critically examined the importance behind proposing Varanasi as a heritage city in the UNESCO World Heritage List and the various issues being faced by the city in this process since last decade (UNESCO, Mission_Statement_UNESCO_Creative, 2004).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the neo-Vaishnava movement, holy men singing devotional songs lured people to the fold of the Bhakthi movement, the music culture of devotional music pervaded Varanasi. According to ancient history puranic tales it is believed that Apsaras, Gandharvas and Kinnars lived in the city and promoted the rich musical tradition across the city. Music is the soul of the city (Hosagrahar, 2017). The real vibes of Varanasi is the Classical Music which can be heard all over the city gullies. Being the oldest living city Benaras or Varanasi has its own history and treasure of music. In the history we can find numerous instances which shows the evolution of dance, drama and music. Various excavations at Varanasi found a terracotta figurine, in which two musicians are playing percussion instruments. Bhakti Movement in the ancient history has also contributed a lot in the development of music in the city. Great saints for example Vallabhacharya and Chaitanya played a significant role in the promotion of musical culture within the city. Surdas, Tulsidas, Kabir, Raidas and Meera Bai have also contributed to the development of devotional music of that time. Varanasi has also emerged as the great centre for the Drupad style of singing. During the reign of Gobind Chandra in the 16th century in Varanasi Drupad style of singing was considered as the music of royals. With the development of Dhrupad style of singing, the other styles like Dhamar, Chaturang and Hori also became famous. Over a period of the time Tappa form of singing also become prevalent in the city. The Maharajas of Kashi or Varanasi also offered music support over time, which resulted Varanasi becoming famous centre of music. It's worth mentioning Maharaj Prabhu Narayan Singh's support for Bahadur Shah's court musicians like as Waris Ali, Akbar

Ali, Nisar Khan, Sadiq Ali, and the famous Ashiq Ali Khan. The sons of Basat Khan, Ali Mohammad and Ali Bux, were known as the "jewels" of Kashi Darbar. Banaras became a major hub of music as a result of a galaxy of brilliant performers. Banarasi Thumri, Dadra, Chaiti, Hori, Bhairavi, Kajri, Tarana, Ghato, and many others forms developed in Varanasi. Besides all these major streams, other lesser-known streams include Tirwat, Sadra, Khamsa, Lavni, Chaturang, Sargam, Ragmala, Kirtan, Qauwali and Kathagayan (City, n.d.).

The city has its own set of rhythm. If we look closely and try to listen we can feel the song of the city. From morning to evening, we can hear different instruments being played in the gullies of the city. Sitar is being tuned, sarods are being rehearsed, on tablas various compositions like paltas, uthans, peshkars etc. are being played and distinctions or minute details of various ragas are being discussed. In different music schools dancers fuse kathak style with flamenco (Kaur & Narain, 2015).

Classical music echoes everywhere in the city. It shows the rich musical culture of the city that goes back in time and gives us the glimpses of ancient history. Music concerts are being organised on ghats, rooftops, annual festivals, in the music shops and guesthouses etc (City, n.d.). Tabla, Shennai, Sitar, Sarangi, Santoor, Tanpura, Flute all these instruments form the part of Kashi's musical legacy. Here, congregations can hear the subtleties of the Banaras gharana in a holy environment where the guru-shishya parampara (teacher-student tradition) is still alive. Over time, some of Varanasi's musical traditions have vanished. Local organisations like Kashi Sangeet Samaj (which is almost 100 years old) and Sangeet Parishad Kashi, for example, are working to revitalise the baithak (Kaur & Narain, 2015).

Another fading custom is gulab bari. It is a musical event held in a rose garden during the week after Holi. Men in white, ladies in pink, thumri singers mesmerising the audience as rose petals are showered on them, and paan and thandai offered to welcome the entrance of spring—a it's lovely scene. Anish talked highly of the bajras heritage. During the Dev Deepavali or Budhwa Mangal festivities, enormous boats called bajras provide night time music. The shows might go on for hours. The shows may go on the night, with smaller boats cruising alongside. The annual Dhrupad Mela, held on Tulsi ghat in Kashi, is an event that no devotee of Hindustani classical music should miss. Dhrupad, a difficult vocal genre, is the oldest and purest Hindustani musical form. The one-of-a-kind event honours a musical tradition by showcasing the best dhrupad artists.

This musical culture of the city has spread all across the world. In 2015, Varanasi has been chosen as the 'City of Music' by UNESCO under the UNESCO's Creative

Cities Network (UCCN). Under UCCN, UNESCO chooses the cities all across the world on the basis of seven creative fields like Design, Music, Gastronomy, Crafts and Art Folk, Film, Media Arts and Literature. Varanasi's inclusion in UCCN was tremendous to boost the old age traditions of the city.

CONCLUSION

Culture of any area is built not in one or two days, it takes years. Varanasi rich musical culture goes back in time and gives us the glimpses of ancient history. Classical music resonances all over the place in the city. The city has its own set of tempo. If we look closely and try to listen we can feel the melody of the city. From dawn to dusk, we can hear different instruments being played in the gullies of the city. Here, parishioners can hear the delicacies of the Banaras gharana in a sanctified atmosphere where the guru-shishya parampara (teacher-student tradition) is still alive. Inclusion of Varanasi city into the UNESCO Creative Cities Network Scheme will enhance the efforts of the citizens to protect its rich musical culture.

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