

## BISHNUPUR GHARANA AND ITS MUSICIANS

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### Abstract

Mallabhum is recognised for its temples, tanks, terracotta sculptures on the walls of temples, Dashabatar Tas and also for its own music style. Malla kings were patron of all above. With their help the musicians of Bishnupur created a new music Gharana i.e. the Bishnupur Gharana, a unique style of Bishnupur which ruled over Bengal and other parts of India once. There were many famous musicians of Bishnupur Gharana who showed their great performance of music in many courts of kings and zamindars over Bengal. The world of music in Bengal in 19th century and also 20th century were ruled by them. But slowly this unique style of classical music has started to wane. In this article, we will be looking for these musicians of Bishnupur Gharana.

Research Methodology: The work is an analytical research.

Keywords: Bishnupur Gharana, Raghunath Singha II, Gopeswar Banerjee, Jadubhatta, Shibsingha Malla, Ramshankar Bhattacharya

### INTRODUCTION

Raghunath Malla or Adi Malla was the founder of Malla dynasty. It is assumed that he became king in 695 A.D. But during his reign Bishnupur was not the capital of the Malla kingdom. His capital was at Praddumnapur. Probably during the reign of Jagat Singha of the line, the capital was transferred to Bishnupur. The most famous king of the dynasty was Bir Hambir. He was contemporary of Mughal emperor Akbar and a friend of him. Tradition says that during the reign of the king Raghunath Singha II, the contemporary of Mughal emperor Aurangzeb, Bahadur Khan, a descendant of famous Tansen of the royal court of Akbar came to Bishnupur on invitation of the king and with his coming to Bishnupur a new era in music in Mallabhum started.

But Music had not been totally unknown to royal court of Bishnupur or among common folks of Bishnupur before coming of Bahadur Khan to Bishnupur. Tradition says that ShivSingh Malla, a predecessor of Bir Hambir was the first king who had a keen interest to music. He gave music royal status for first time in Bishnupur. After coming of Srinibas Acharya, a famous Vaishnava saint, to Bishnupur during the reign of Bir Hambir, Kirtan developed in all parts of the Malla kingdom. Many Vaishnava literatures were also written in this time of whose verses were in form of song. Bir Hambir and later Gopal Singha composed Vaishnava lyrics. In fact Dhajamani Pattamahadevi, the queen of Gopal Singha copied the famous Premvilas Kavya of Nityananda Das. Sculptures of the temples of Bishnupur also give evidence of passion of the Malla kings for Kirtan. Various types of folk songs were also popular in various parts of Mallabhum.

When Aurangzeb became Mughal emperor due to zeal for Islam he prohibited all type of music in the Mughal court. So musicians from Mughal court fled and went to different places of India. In this time there was the Malla king Raghunath Singha II on the throne of the Malla kingdom of Bishnupur. During his reign there was a stable condition in Malla kingdom. Art and architecture flourished and Malla kings honoured and gave regular salary to the artists. Coming of Srinibas Acharya in Bishnupur during the reign of Bir Hambir, one of the predecessors of Raghunath opened the way of developing literature especially Vaishnava literature. Poets of Dharmamangal kavya got also help from the Malla kings. Bahadur Khan, the descendant of famous Tansen fled from the Mughal court to eastern India with his mate Pir Bax, an expert in Mridanga. It is said that Raghunath Singha II invited them to the royal court of Bishnupur. Bahadur Khan became his court musician. Raghunath Singha II had a keen interest to music. That is proved by the work of taking Lalbai with him to Bishnupur. Bahadur Khan also considered Bishnupur as the perfect place to groom his career. In Bishnupur he taught his art to some of his disciples. Most famous of them were Nitai Nazir, Brindaban Nazir, Gadadhar Chakraborty and others. Gradually a new Gharana of music evolved which is Bishnupur Gharana, the only music Gharana of Bengal. That is probably the mixture of Delhi Gharana which Bahadur Khan took to Bishnupur and the Vaishnava and various traditional songs of Bishnupur. Bahadur Khan also composed a song praising his patron Raghunath Singha II. Here are some lines of the song:

“Sabguna Nidhan Maharaj Raghunath

Tua Darbar Satya Safao ch.”

[It means that Raghunath possesses all the noble qualities. People of different talents always seek your favour.]

After him Gadadhar Chakraborty became the court singer of the royal court of Bishnupur. Many people of the family of Gadadhar were also famous musicians of Bishnupur Gharana. Anantalal Chakraborty was a descendant of him who was the music teacher in the court of Maharaja Jatindra Mohan Tagore.

Ramsankar Bhattacharya was born in Mallesewar Kadakuli of Bishnupur in 1761. His ancestral home had been at Rajshahi. His forefathers had migrated from Rajshahi and had settled in Bishnupur. His father Gadadhar Bhattacharya was the court pundit of the Malla royal court during the reign of Malla king Chaitnya Singha. From his father he took the lessons of Sanskrit and became a scholar on the language in a few days. But his interest on music turned his road from a Sanskrit scholar to a great musician of Bishnupur Gharana. He became the court musician in the royal court of the king

Chaitnya Singha. He built a music school in his house. Here he taught many students without any cost. He was the first musician who composed Dhrupad in Bengali. He had some renowned disciples. Kshetramohan Goswami, Anantalal Banerjee, Jadunath Bhattacharya, Dinabandhu Goswami and others. One of famous Dhrupad in Bengal of him is:

“Aggyana Tama Nikare Garamayi Patite,  
Gyana Kinchita Bitare Jagadambe.”

He also wrote manuscripts on “Virat Parva” and “Van Parva” of the Mahabharata. He was died in 1853.

Jadunath Bhattacharya was one of the most popular singers of the Bishnupur Gharana. He was popular as Jadubhatta to common people of Bengal and also of India. He was born in Bishnupur on 1840. His father Madhusudan Bhattacharya was the court singer of the king Nilmani Singha. At first he started to learn classical music from Ramsankar Bhattacharya from the age ten or eleven. After death of Ramsankar Bhattacharya, he went to Kolkata in 1855. He learnt classical music from Ganganarayan Chattopadhyaya. At first he became the court singer of Kuchikakol royal family. He became court singer in the royal court of Panchakot and Tripura. He got the tittle “Ranganatha” from the king of Panchakot and also got the title “Tanraj” from the king of Tripura. It is said that once an ustad came to the court of the Tripura king Birchandra Manikya. He sang a song in the Natanarayan rag and challenged Jadubhatta to sing a song in same rag. Though Jadubhatta had not known the rag he listened to the song of the ustad carefully and understood the details of the raga. On the next day Jadubhatta composed a song in the Natanarayan rag and sang it in the court. All were amazed to see his skill of creating a song in a different rag, unknown to him, and listened to his song. Bankimchandra learnt music from Jadubhatta from some years. It is assumed that Jadubhatta was the first person who tuned the Bandemataram first. He was also a tutor of music of Rabindranath Tagore. Many songs of Rabindranath were influenced by Jadubhatta. He was also appointed as a teacher of music in “Adi Brahmasamaj Sangeet Vidyalaya.” Jadubhatta was died in 1883 when he was of only 43 years.

Keshavlal Chakravarty was a famous disciple of Ramsankar Bhattacharya. He was patroned by a rich man Taraknath Pramanik. Ramprasanna Banerjee was also an expert in Bishnupur Gharana. He could play Vina, Surbahar, Mridanga and Esraj.

Radhika Prasad Goswami was a renowned singer of Bishnupur Gharana and also of Indian classical music. He was born in Bishnupur in 1852. His father Jagatchand

Goswami was an expert in playing Mridanga. Radhika Prasad took his lessons on music from Anantalal Banerjee, Dinabandhu Goswami and Jadunath Bhattacharya of Bishnupur Gharana respectively. He was well-known in Khayal, Dhrupad, Thumri, Tappa and rag pradhan songs. He was at first in Bishnupur court. Later he went to the house of Raja Manindra Chandra Nandi in Kashimbajar. After the death of Raja Manindra Chandra Nandi, he went to the Pathurighata Thakurbari. He took his nephew Jnanendra Prasad Goswami here. Here he met Rabindranath Tagore and he was very respectful to him. Later Rabindranath took him to Santiniketan. Radhika Prasad had some famous disciples like Jnanendra Prasad Goswami, Girijasankar Chakraborty, Mahindranath Mukhopadhyay, and Jogindranarayan Roy who was the zamindar of Nator, Bhutnath Bandopadhyay, Satkari Malakar and others. He died on 1925.

Gopeswar Bandopadhyay was a most famous person in the world of the Bishnupur Gharana. He was born in 1879 in Bishnupur. His father Anantalal Bandopadhyay was also a great musician of Bishnupur Gharana and a disciple of Ramsankar Bhattacharya. Gopeswar at first learnt Bishnupur Gharana from his father. But he had a keen interest on painting than music. But it is his father who told him to go with music. Anantalal sent Gopeswar to then Calcutta in a very young age. Here he learnt Dhrupad from Shiv Narayan Mishra and Khayal from Guru Prasad Mishra and Khayal and Tappa from Gopal Chakravarty. Then Gopeswar Bandopadhyay was appointed as the court musician by the Burdwan Zamindars. Here he spent twenty years of his life from 1895- 1915. In this time he met with some famous musicians. With this meeting he realized that a musician should know the history of music with regular practice of music. He now devoted himself to know the history of music. Here he got help from Kshetramohan Goswami and Raja Sourindra Mohan Tagore. It is said that once he defeated two famous usatads in a debate on theory and history of music. Being pleased, the Zamindar of Burdwan honoured him with the title “Sangeet Nayak”. Just think about his dedication. To know history of music better he learnt Hindi, Sanskrit and Persian language. Gopeswar Banerjee was also an exponent in instrumental music. He could play Surbahar, Sitar, Esraj, Pakhwaj and Tabla. He could also play Nyas-tarang. It was the effort of Gopeswar Bandopadhyay on which Music was included as a subject in the curriculum of Calcutta University. Later music was also included in the curriculum of higher secondary education. In this time he was appointed as the principal of “Sangeet Sangha”, an institution run by Lady Pratibha Choudhury, the wife of Justice Ashutosh Choudhury of the Calcutta High Court. He was a very good teacher who was never bored. He liked ordinary students as well as brilliant students. Gopeswar Bandopadhyay had a wish to disseminate Indian Classical music to every part of the Indian society. He wrote some books on

Indian classical music to know future generations about the Indian classical music. Most famous books were two volumes of “Sangeet Chandrika”, “Geeta Mala”, “Tana Mala”, “Sangeet Lahari”, two volumes of “Bharatiya Sangeet Itihas” and many others. Gopeswar Bandopadhyay had a close connection with the Tagore family of Jorasanko. He contributed many articles in the “Sangeet Prabeshika”, a monthly magazine ran by Jyotirindranath Tagore. He was also the chief editor of the “Sangeet Bigyan Prabeshika”. In 1919 and 1924 Gopeswar Bandopadhyay was invited to the All India Music Conference. In 1924 he was in the executive committee whose work was to maintain the standard of music and drawing up a syllabus of music in the college and universities over whole India. After breaking up of the World war in 1939, he left then Calcutta and came to Bishnupur. Here he established a college of music. Rabindranath Tagore, one of the great admirers of Gopeswar Bandopadhyay conferred him the title “Sura-Saraswati” on the behalf of the Vishwabharati. He became a visiting professor of Vishwabharati in 1956. He was honoured with the “Desikottam” title in 1961 by Jaharlal Nehru, then prime minister of India. He was died in 1963.

Acharya Jnanendra Prasad Goswami was a legend in the world of Bishnupur Gharana. He was born in 1902. His first lesson on Bishnupur Gharana started from his house. His father Bipin Chandra Goswami guided him at first. Then he learnt from his uncle Radhika Prasad Goswami, another legend of Bishnupur Gharana. He was adept in Khayal, Dhrupad, Thumri and Tappa. He was a close friend of Kaji Najrul Islam and recorded many Najrul geeti. He had also some famous disciples. Nalin Chandra Malakar, Devaprasad Garg of Mahisadal, Onkarnath Chattopadhyaya of Bankura and others. Of them Nalin Chandra Malakar was of lower caste and Devaprasad Garg was of the zamindar family of Mahisadal. But Jnanendra Prasad never differentiated them for their caste. He was in Kolkata for many years. He was a director of Gramophone Company. But after 1938, his mind changed and he returned to Bishnupur. He died on 1945.

Gokulchandra Nag was another great musician of Bishnupur Gharana. He was one of the famous disciples of Ramprasanna Bandopadhyay. In 1906 he was born in Rampur of Bankura. He joined in the dancer group of famous Udaishankar and travelled in many parts of India from 1934 to 1936. He taught pundit Rabishankar many tricks of sitar. He joined in the Music Academy at Kolkata in 1956. His famous disciples were Abanimohan Dolui, Tapas Mitra, Ira Landgarten and many others. He was died in 1983.

Pundit Manilal Nag was born in 1939. He was an expert in Bishnupur Gharana. He was also skilled in playing sitar. He learned playing sitar from his father Gokul Nag.

He began his career in 1953 in the All India Music Conference. Thereafter he has performed in large parts of India and abroad including U.S. and European countries. He got the Sangeet Natak Academy Award in 2001. He also received many honours and awards. He was awarded the Padma Shri Award in 2020.

## CONCLUSION

So it is seen that Musicians of Bishnupur Gharana once ruled over whole Bengal and a large part of India. They had a great contribution to reach Indian Classical Music over whole world. Actually they gave Bengali songs a new shape. Rabindranath Tagore and later other musicians have taken Bengali songs on a high peak in world of music the base of which was started in Bishnupur. But in the course of time, Bishnupur Gharana has started to shrink down from the mind of people.

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