

THE CONTRIBUTION OF MUGHALS IN THE FIELD OF MUSIC (1526-1707)

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Abstract

The purposed research analyses the instrumental and vocal music, musicians and singers through the lens of great Mughal emperors from Babur to Aurangzeb. The research investigates the interest and efforts of Mughal emperors to ameliorate music. The paper more focuses on the donations, titles, economic rewards and employment of musicians and singers in the Mughal court. It highlights the position of musicians and singers in the royal court and their extravagant lifestyle. It describes different categories of singers and musicians on the basis of skilled and unskilled professionals. The research investigates the significant role of Mughal nobility and amirs in the field of music. The research will culminate the status of music, musicians and singers in the Mughal court. It will examine the instruments used by musicians.

Keywords: Great Mughals, Khanyagaran, Diwan-i-Khas, Imperial Musicians, Instrumental and Vocal Music.

INTRODUCTION

Music is an art which awakens or expresses the mental feeling of human beings. Taste for music or song is universal and can be found everywhere. The art of music may be divided into two categories, vocal and instrumental, the former being more primitive for it was created out of a cry in the same way as the latter was the outcome of a noise. Music became melodies as soon as it freed itself from the primitive stage of barbarism. The melody is to music what imagery is to poetry it is the very essence of it. India, a seat of ancient civilization could very proudly boast of highly developed forms of music both vocal and instrumental.¹ In the medieval history, music played significant role in the court of Mughal emperors. Both vocal and instrumental music were important in the Mughal court. From the Mughal emperor Babur to Aurangzeb, music and musicians were promoted and given big titles and donations.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Both qualitative and quantitative method is used. The research work mostly relies on the qualitative data which is collect from the primary sources of the Mughal court and their account of their courtiers. Through analytical approach, various Autobiographies and private accounts were studied. In quantitative method, secondary books are considered.

ROLE OF GREAT MUGHALS IN MUSIC

The Babur (1526-1530) is said to have been skilled in the art and to have written a treatise upon it and although no definite evidence of Humayun (1526-1556) attitude towards music survives, it was probable that he shared the family taste for song and dance. Somehow, Babur, the first Mughal emperor, supplemented his wine parties with music and his son, Humayun enjoyed a book and a song with palatable food and flasks of wine.² This shows the Mughal emperor Babur and Humayun does not fond of music at big level.

In the times of Akbar (1556-1605), his courtly biographer Abu-I-Fadl, leaves us in no doubt regarding his patron devotion to the art declaring that the emperor pays much attention to music and is the patron of all who practice this enchanting art. There were numerous musicians at his court like Hindus, Iranis, Turanis, Kashmiris, both men and women. According to Abu-I-Fadl, Akbar's interest in music was not merely that of a cultured listener. He had acquired such a knowledge of the science of music as trained musicians do not possess, he was no mean performer on the *nakkarah* (kettle-drum), he made a special study of Hindu vocalization under Lal Kalawant who taught him every breathing and sound that appertains to the Hindu language. He himself harmonized two hundred old Persian tunes. As a result of Akbar's encouragement of the art, music enjoyed great popularity and the vocal side of it with its *rags* and *raginis* was widely cultivated³ The Mughal emperor Akbar was a great patron of singers and musicians. He created a separate department of *Khanyagaran* (musicians). Many of them were raised to the rank of *amirs*. The court musicians were divided into seven groups, one for each day of the week. Akbar educated himself in the art of music⁴ The Mughal emperor Akbar himself gain a good knowledge of music and he settled a separate department of *Khanyagaran* for musicians and singers.

In the reign of Akbar, throughout the country, the nobility and the wealthy classes emulated the ruler's zeal and exerted themselves to improve the art. Skilled singers were often rewarded with costly presents as for example Ram Das who received a *lac* of rupees from Abdurrahim Mirza Khan Khanan and the famous Mian Tansen to whom Akbar presented a reward of two *lacs* of rupees. The chief instruments used at this time in instrumental music or to accompany the voice were the *sarmandal*, *bin* (vina), *nai*, *karans*, *tamburah*, *ghichak*, *Qubuz*, *surna* and *qanun*.⁵ A number of skilled singers and musicians were patronized by Akbar and his nobles.

Abu-I-Fadl in his work *Ain-i-Akbari* mentioned the name of 36 musicians under the title '*The Imperial Musicians*'. Miyan Tansen, Baba Ramdas, Surbha Khan, Miyan Chand, Bichitr Khan, Muhammad Khan, Bir Mandal Khan, Baz Bahadur, Shihab Khan, Daud Dhari, Sarod Khan, Miyan Lal, Tantarrang Khan, Mulla Ishaq Dhari, Usta Dost, Nanak Jarju, Purbin Khan, Surdas, Chand Khan, Rangsen, Shaykh Dawan Dhari, Rahmat Llah, Mir Sayyad Ali, Usta Yusuf, Qasim, Tash Beg, Sultan Hafiz Hussain, Bahram Quli, Sultan Hashim, Usta Shah Muhammad, Usta Muhammad, Hafiz Khwaja Ali, Mir Abdullah, Pirzada, Usta Muhammad Husayan.⁶ Miyan Tansen was a great musician in the court of Akbar. Abu-I-Fadl said about Miyan Tansen, 'A singer like him has not been in India for the last thousand years.'⁷ Among thirty six musicians no more than three were the Hindus. Abu-I-Fadl listed no less than twelve musicians belong to Gwalior. It showed that Gwalior as the seat of Tansen's school of musicians played an important role in the development of music in that area. Tansen grave at Gwalior is visited even today by the musicians of the subcontinent, who mention his name with great respect. Baz Bahadur also has received his share of praise from Abu-I-Fadl who calls him 'a singer without rival'. Ten of the musicians mentioned by Abu-I-Fadl were from

Muslim countries outside the subcontinent which shows that the Mughals had not abjured their love of Central Asian music. Music had thus become almost a Muslim monopoly who contributed greatly to its development.⁸ The list does not include any women. Several of the persons named were poets as well as singers.⁹ In the court of Akbar, the musicians of Hindu religion were also employed. But the number of Muslim musicians was higher than Hindus.

In the *Ain-i-Akbari*, four kind of instruments were mentioned. In the first kind of stringed instruments, there were Vina, Kinnar, Amriti, Rabab, Sarmandal, Adhati and Kingara. Pakhawaj, Awaj, Duhul, Dhadda, Ardhawaj, Daf and Khanjari were fall in the second category of instruments. Tala and Kath Tala comes under the third kind of instruments and Shahna, Mashk, Murli, Upang considered under fourth kind of instruments.¹⁰ The instruments were mainly divided into four categories.

Abu-I-Fadl mentioned various categories of singers under the title '*On the classes of Singers*'. He specified the chanters of the ancient hymns were called *Vaikaras* and their teachers were styled as *Sahakaras*. The *Kalaants* or *Kalavants* were well known and sing the *Dhurpad*. The *Dhadhis* were the Punjabi singers played upon the Dhadda and the Kingara. They chiefly chant the praises of heroes on the field of battle and lend fresh spirit to the fight. The *Kawwalis* were the professional chanters and story tellers. The *Hurkiyah* men played upon the *Huruk* which also called Awaj and the women the Tala and they also sing. The *Dhadhi* women chiefly play on the Daf and the Duhul and sing the *Dhurpad* and the *Sohla* on occasions of nuptial and birthday festivities in a very accomplished manner.

The *Sezdah-tali* class have large drums and the women while they sing play upon thirteen pairs of talas at once. The *Natwas* played upon the Pakhawaj, the Rabab and the Tala. The *Kirtaniya* were Brahmans, they dress up smooth faced boys as women and make them perform, singing the praises of Krishna and reciting his acts. The *Bhand* play the Duhul and Tala and sing and mimic men and animals. The *Kanjari*, the men of this class play the Pakhawaj, the Rabab and the Tala while the women sing and dance. The *Nats* were the rope dancers and perform wonderful acrobatic feats. They play on the Tala and Dahul. The *Baharupi* exhibits their mimicry by day. The *Bazigar* performs wonderful feats of legerdemain and by his dexterous conjuring deceives the eye. Their extraordinary performance is beyond description and each of them affects a special style of vocal accompaniment.¹¹ Different types of singers were played different roles in the court of Akbar. Both men and women were participated in the classes of singers.

Like his father, Jahangir (1605-1627) was found of music. In the *Iqbal-Namah* mentions the name of singers of Jahangir's court like Jahangirdad, Chatar Khan, Parwizdad, Khurramdad, Makhu and Hamzah.¹² William Foster in his *Early Travels in India 1583-1619*, highlights that hundreds of people attend Jahangir court day and night, they may be ready when the King or his women shall please to call any of them to sing or dance in his *moholl*, he was

given to them stipends according to their unworthy worth.¹³ Under Jahangir as well, the leading court musicians were belong to Muslim religion.

Shahjahan (1627-1658) was a great patron of music. His two vocalist great singers were Ram Das and Mahapattar.¹⁴ Shahjahan himself had a good knowledge of music. He was particularly conversant with the techniques of Indian music. In the times of Shahjahan, in the Diwan-i-Khas, emperor and his choice associates gathered here and spent some two hours, at first in attending to the administration and afterwards in pleasure. But it was pleasure of an elevated and refined character. He heard music, vocal and instrumental and often deigned to join in it. Shahjahan was a past master of Urdu song and his performance were so sweet and charming that many pure souled Sufis and holy men with hearts withdrawn from the world, who attended these evening assemblies, lost their senses in the ecstasy produced by his singing.¹⁵

Under Shahjahan, out of the three prominent musicians, two were Muslims. Lal Khan, son-in-law to Bilas (who was Tansen's son and like him a Muslim) was given the title of *gunasamundar* that was the ocean of excellence. He had acquired the knowledge of music from Tansen's pupils and did not have a peer in singing dhrupad. His four sons provided the accompaniment. One of his son Khushal was a good composer. The best composer and writer of songs however was Jagannath who was on this account given the title of *Kavi Rai*.¹⁶ Jagannath dedicated twelve of his compositions in dhrupad to Shahjahan in the eighth year of his reign. The emperor was so pleased that the musician was weighed against gold and gave him the amount as his fee, which were given to him as a reward.¹⁷ In the court of Shahjahan, the status of musicians was high and he honoured them with great titles and rewarded with gold.

The most important part as far as the society of the Mughals was concerned was played by women singers. They great influenced the morality of the courtiers and the aristocracy. By the time of Mughal emperor Shahjahan, to a great extent they were responsible to the loose moral and sensuous vagaries of the nobles, the officers and the soldiery. They sang at feast and marriage festivals. There were many groups of them known by different names. The most favoured class which has access to the court was called *Kanchanis* the name given by Akbar to a class of singing women who were formerly known as *Kanjaris*. In Shahjahan reign they were allowed to appear in the court twice a week.

As many as five hundred of them attended the court on these days. They belonged to the private and respectable class of public women, richly clothed and riding, highly embellished vehicles. They had supple limbs and danced with perfection. They were handsome and attractive. The class of women singers, remarked by Manucci was more esteemed than others by reason of their great beauty.¹⁸ In the category of singers, *Kanchanis* or *Kanjaris* was highly admired class in the times of Mughal empire but on the other side they blamed as responsible for the immoral practices of the nobles and amirs.

The last great Mughal emperor, Aurangzeb (1658-1707) himself was an accomplished player of the *veena* and patronised music during the first ten years of his reign. But growing puritanism and a false sense of economy made him banish the singers from his court. Instrumental music however continued. Despite Aurangzeb's jibe to the protesting musicians to bury music deep, Aurangzeb reign saw the production of a large number of books on music.¹⁹ But at the latter part of Aurangzeb period, music fell upon evil days. Apart from the active encouragement given to it by the earlier Mughal emperors, music had always been popular with all classes as the Rev. Edward Terry noticed during his comparatively brief visit to India. Consequently it must have been with feelings of amazement and dissatisfaction that they learned of the Emperor's orders prohibiting music and that he had actually created a new department for the express purpose of reducing the number of professional musicians.

The officials of the department did their work only too well. According to Manucci, they entered any house or place whence the sound of music and singing was audible and broke the instruments of the performers and they generally made matters so unpleasant for the singers and their audience that the professional musicians found themselves in danger of losing their livelihood. Notwithstanding the ban which he placed upon music, however Aurangzeb, according to Manucci's testimony continued to entertain dancing and singing girls in the palace for the diversion of his ladies and so far unbent as to confer special names on their female superintendents.

Bakhtawar Khan states that the emperor understood music thoroughly and made no attempt to interfere with the art during the first few years of his reign. His subsequent objection to music was based on the teaching of the great Muhammadan Imam, Shafi and in pursuance of his policy he was prepared even to grant cash allowances or land to musicians who declared themselves to be ashamed of their calling and desirous of relinquishing.²⁰

FINDINGS

- The Great Mughal emperors like Akbar, Shahjahan and Aurangzeb themselves a competent musicians.
- The Mughal emperors rewarded the skilled singers and musicians with costly presents, great titles, gold and silver.
- Among the all great Mughals, Akbar contributed a lot to instrumental and vocal music with the establishment of the separate department of *Khanyagaran* in which thirty-six musicians were engaged.
- The Hindus, Turanis, Kashmiris, Iranis and Muslims were employed as court musicians of Mughal empire but majority established by Muslim musicians.

- Women singers were played dominant role in the Mughal court but *Kancharis* or *Kanjzris* were most admirable group among the women singers and they enjoyed extravagant lifestyle.
- With the accession of Aurangzeb, instrumental music was continued at some extent however vocal music was reached at bad state.

CONCLUSION

The research concluded with the fact that from the great emperor Babur to Aurangzeb, all are fond of music. There is little evidence find out about the Babur and Humayun in the interest of music. From Akbar to Shahjahan, both vocal and instrumental music was important and they were employed skilled and unskilled musicians and singers in the Mughal court. But at the latter period of Aurangzeb, vocal music was banned and most of vocalists lost their jobs. On the other side we found out most of the books regarding music were written in the times of Aurangzeb.

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