

SCOPE OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC IN GANGTOK

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Abstract: *Apart from tourism, Sikkim is also known for its rich and vibrant culture where folk music plays an important role. The diversity in communities is what differentiates the different forms of folk music in Sikkim. The expanding scope of Indian classical music in Sikkim Nepali communities remains evident. This paper intends to explore the scope of Indian classical music in two aspects of academic research and performing arts. The paper also discusses the role of educational institutions (both public and private) with regard to the scope of Indian classical music in the light of globalisation. Lastly, the paper highlights on the challenges with regard to the Indian Classical Music and its practice in Sikkim.*

Key Words: *Indian Classical Music in Sikkim, Scope of Indian Classical Music, Commercialisation and Indian Classical Music, Globalisation and Indian Classical Music.*

INTRODUCTION

Sikkim, located in the Himalayas, is a region known for its stunning natural landscapes and rich cultural variety. Indian classical music has flourished amid the beautiful mountains and peaceful surroundings of the area, enhancing its cultural fabric. This study seeks to examine the extent of Indian classical music in Sikkim, investigating its historical origins, current practices, and cultural importance.

The origins music in Sikkim may be traced back to ancient times when the area was impacted by many cultural influences from neighbouring regions such as Tibet, Bhutan, and Nepal. The movement of individuals and the sharing of ideas resulted in the integration of musical customs, resulting in the emergence of a distinctive combination of melodies and rhythms. Additionally, the support and sponsorship of monarchs and aristocrats have been crucial in the development and safeguarding of in Sikkim throughout the ages. Sikkim has a diverse array of indigenous musical genres and instruments that are firmly grounded in Culture. The area has its own autochthonous musical instruments such as the dampfu, tungna, and flute, which play a crucial role in the local folk music. Moreover, the sitar, tabla, and sarod, which are classical instruments, have gained popularity among music aficionados and practitioners in Sikkim. This demonstrates the significant impact of Indian classical traditions in the region. Indian classical music is of great cultural importance in Sikkim, since it serves as a means of expression, spirituality, and social unity. Throughout the year, music festivals and concerts are arranged to exhibit the skill of both local artists and renowned classical musicians from other parts of India. These activities serve the purpose of both entertaining and cultivating a feeling of cultural pride and identity among the residents of Sikkim, hence strengthening the connection between music and the community. In Sikkim, there are many institutes and academies that provide courses and workshops on classical music theory and technique, contributing to the development of Indian classical music.

The Sikkim State Academy of Music and Performing Arts, founded in 2009, has played a crucial role in advancing classical music education and fostering the development of fresh talent in the area. Furthermore, the implementation of music scholarships and cultural exchange programmes

has advanced the promotion of classical music in Sikkim, offering prospective musicians valuable prospects for education and development. This has greatly broadened the reach and significance of Indian classical music in the area. Indian classical music has a distinctive position in the cultural milieu of Sikkim, representing the region's rich historical and creative inheritance. The people of Sikkim, who are responsible for safeguarding this old culture, persist in commemorating and conserving classical music, guaranteeing its lasting heritage for forthcoming generations. Sikkim's classical musicians are ready to explore new possibilities and enhance the reach of Indian classical music via creativity and cooperation.

As we know, Sikkim is a land known for its rich culture that involves folk music from diverse communities. Although the musical scenario has been changing over the course of time, folk music is still seen to be highly practiced by the musicians in Sikkim. The disparate communities are represented by their culture, customs and traditions (Gazetteer of Sikkim, 2013). The State Socio Economic Census (2006) marks total of 20 ethnic communities namely, Lepcha, Bhutia, Tamang, Limboo, Bahun, Chhettri, Pradhan/Newar, Rai, Mangar, Gurung, Sunuwar/Mukhia, Thami, Jogi, Dewan, Bhujel, Kami, Damai, Sarki, Majhi, Sanyasi/Giri and others. Chhetri & Sharma (2021) points out that the folk music of Lepchas are Sumong Kung Aoraa Sa, Raungyu Rungit tulka. Similarly Bhutia community have their own folk music namely, Beyul Demojong, Denjong Chha-Lu; The folk music of Limboo community are Yea Kakma, Damke Akme, Hakpare Samlo, Sakpa Palam, Kemba Palam; Gurung community comprises of music like Dohori and Sorathi; The Rai music are known as Aalla Inga Samloaa, Sunnimma Emi Muma and The Tamang community have their own music called Tamang Selo. Despite the rich folk music associated with Sikkim and its culture there are other forms of music that can be observed in the Sikkimese society. Amongst many, the Indian Classical Music may be considered to be one of them. Having mentioned there are different forms of music practiced and performed, this paper mainly focuses in the scope and demand of Indian Classical Music. In the present scenario Gangtok one of the districts of Sikkim (as per Act no. 15 of The Sikkim (Re-Organisation of Districts) Act, 2021) can be witnessed as a key centre imparting education and training in Indian Classical Music. There are currently four major institutes which associate with the learning of Indian Classical Music. One out of four is the central public university i.e. Sikkim University and the remaining three are private music institutions, namely Reeyaz Sangeetalaya, Remanti Sangeet Academy and Gandhar Music Academy. Apart from the aspect of teaching and learning the growing sector of consumerism with regard to Indian Classical Music can be witnessed in Sikkim.

METHODS OF STUDY

This study is an exploratory study and purely qualitative in nature. Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim is selected as the study area because the major institutions associated with imparting lessons on Indian Classical Music is located in Gangtok. The data has been collected from respondents of four major institutions namely, Sikkim University, Reeyaz Sangeetalaya, Remanti Sangeet Academy and Gandhar Academy based on their association with Indian Classical Music. Interviews have been conducted with the help of open ended questions designed with semi structured interview schedule among forty students who are pursuing Indian Classical Music academically and also

among those who are taking private lessons. Ten respondents each has been selected by employing convenience sampling in order to find out their involvement and understand the scope of Indian Classical Music particularly in Sikkim. Discussion has been carried out with the respondents on if studying Indian Classical Music has remained beneficial to them. Also an attempt to understand and identify the platform for doing research as well as performing Indian Classical Music particularly in Sikkim has been made in the study.

ROLE OF INSTITUTIONS IN EXPANDING SCOPE OF INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

The growing scope of Indian Classical Music particularly in Sikkim cannot be understood without exploring the prominent role of institutions imparting lessons and knowledge to the students. If the public university namely Sikkim University acts as a pivot for imparting lessons and provides an academic space to the students. Then the private institutions are also seen as playing an active role in both imparting lessons as well as providing a platform for performance. In this line a respondent from one of the private institutes stated:

I have performed a lot in other genre but particularly talking about Indian Classical Music I along with other students of my institute have performed at an event called Amrit Yuva Kalotsav organised by Sangeet Natak Akademi held in Manan Kendra, Gangtok. We got the chance to represent our institute.

The role of institutions remains imperative to the growing interest and awareness on the Indian Classical Music of the younger generations. It caters to the vital needs of improving the voice texture, tonal quality, ornamentation and techniques as reported by the majority of students. Moreover getting lessons or enrolment in the institutions has also provided them with economic opportunities and helped them to perform better in commercial fields. These arguments can be situated on the following statements reported by the students of the institutes.

A respondent pursuing Masters in Sikkim University with specialisation in Hindustani Classical Vocals states:

I run a small academy in my hometown, Rhenock. People from my place is completely unaware of this form of music and by learning Indian Classical Music in Sikkim University I am able to teach my students the basics.

Similarly another respondent who is a well renowned flutist in Sikkim working in many musical reality shows as well as one of the active band members of a popular singer in Nepal, Sikkim and Hilly regions of West Bengal reports:

I particularly play flute in Indian Classical genre and because I have been able to learn many techniques and enhance my skill, knowledge I am able to use that knowledge in commercial fields.

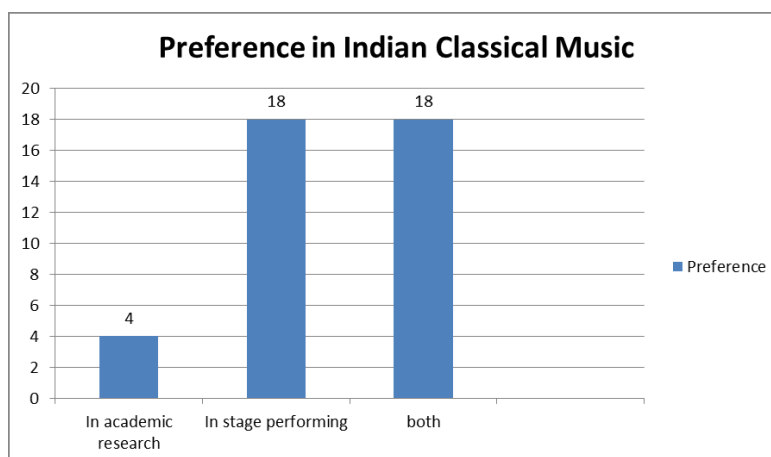
Highlighting the key role of private institution, a respondent commented:

I was very interested in learning music but before joining my institution I had never heard about Indian Classical Music but only pop and folk genre. I wanted to improve my singing skills so I joined the institution and it is from there I became aware and the techniques I learn from Indian Classical Music is also very helpful when I am singing any form of songs.

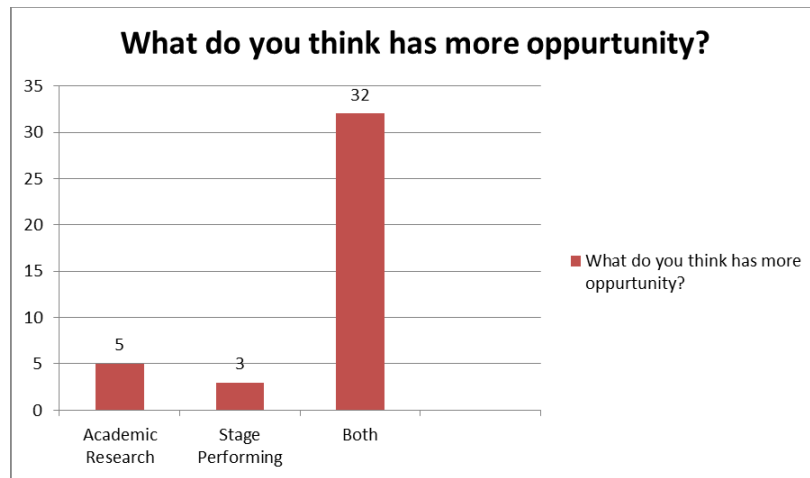
When the role of institutions is discussed the impact of globalisation remains imperative. The mainstream Indian Classical Music has interpenetrated with the local Sikkimese culture including music. As a result of which the younger generations are now actively involved in pursuing the Indian Classical Music at large as a professional course in the university and as additional skill in the private institutions. To substantiate, according to the Sikkim University Annual Report 2021-2022 the total enrolment of students in Under Graduate course is 49, Post Graduate is 23 and M.Phil and PhD is 4 and 14 respectively. Similarly, in the Gandhar Music Academy approximately over 100 students have enrolled for the lesson. While in Remanti Sangeet Academy, the enrolment is 120 approximately. In Reeyaaz Sangeetalaya the enrolment number of students is approximately 80. The growing popularity of Indian Classical Music therefore cannot be refuted in the globalised era and the possible commercialisation scope of it amply elucidates this in the context of Sikkim as well.

SCOPE IN ACADEMIC RESEARCH AND STAGE PERFORMING: A CONTESTATION

To understand the scope of Indian Classical Music in two aspects of academic research and stage performing, two questions were asked to the respondents. The questions were i) *Do you prefer to make an academic career as a researcher or establish a professional career as a performer? Or both.* And ii) *What amongst the two do you think has more opportunity in Sikkim?*



The above chart indicates that 18 (45%) of the respondents have stated to prefer to become stage performers over academic research. Another 18 (45%) prefers both stage performing and academic research when it come to their personal choice. While the remaining 4 (10%) majorly from the university pursuing music as their academic course have shown their preference as being academic researchers.



The above chart shows that significant 32 (80%) considers both academic research and stage performance having equal opportunities in Sikkim. Following 5 (12.5%) is of the opinion that there is more opportunities in academic research. Whereas opportunities in regard to stage performing in Sikkim has pointed out by the remaining 3 (7.5%).

Vedabala and Bandopadhyay (2018) with regard to the Sikkim’s youth involvement in music argue that “The youth’s aspiration in making a musical career often is affected by the critical cause involving the conflict over the choice of career in academics or professional career in music”. Particularly when scope is debated on while the respondents pursuing private courses unanimously agreed on both academic research and stage performing having growing scope in Sikkim over the years. However, when it came to personal choices, the majority preferred to be an artist’s performing Indian Classical Music on stage. Willingness in continuing to learn and get training in Indian Classical Music to improve their skills which in return would expand their chances in the musical job markets was also evident. Nonetheless, amongst the students of the University, the academic career particularly in research and teaching remains a promising area in Sikkim. At present, the gradual flourishing of research in general can be observed and music remains a topic where many researches are being carried out in Sikkim. Hence, the scope in academic research particularly in the globalised era cannot be neglected. In the line of presented arguments a respondent pursuing post graduation with specialisation in vocals stated:

I wanted to get into academics for my personal growth as I also teach Indian Classical vocals to my students. But I am aware of my limitations and I do not see myself as a performer in Indian Classical Music. I want to establish myself as a researcher and I want to be academically strong.

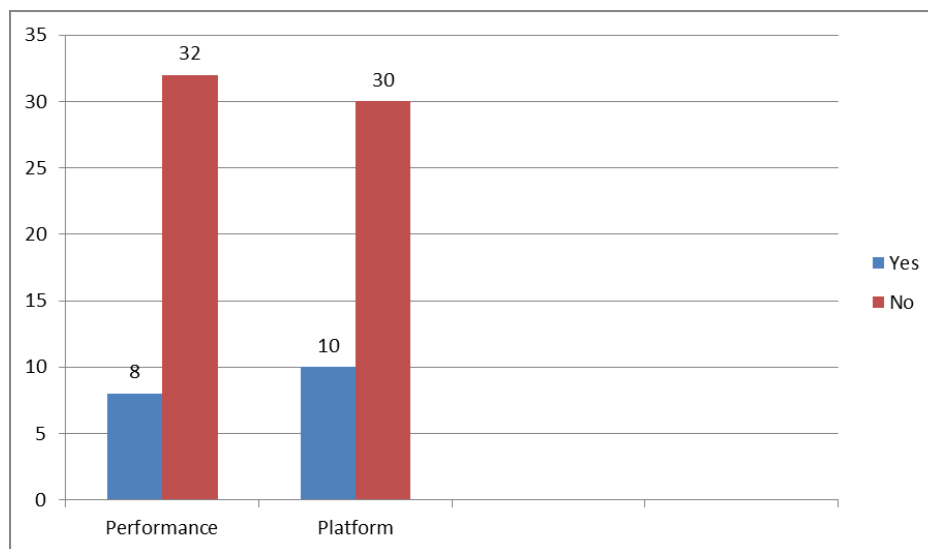
Similarly a respondent who has been awarded PhD degree recently under the Department of Music, Sikkim University expressed:

I have always thought of taking Indian Classical Music mainly to develop an academic career as a researcher and not a performer.

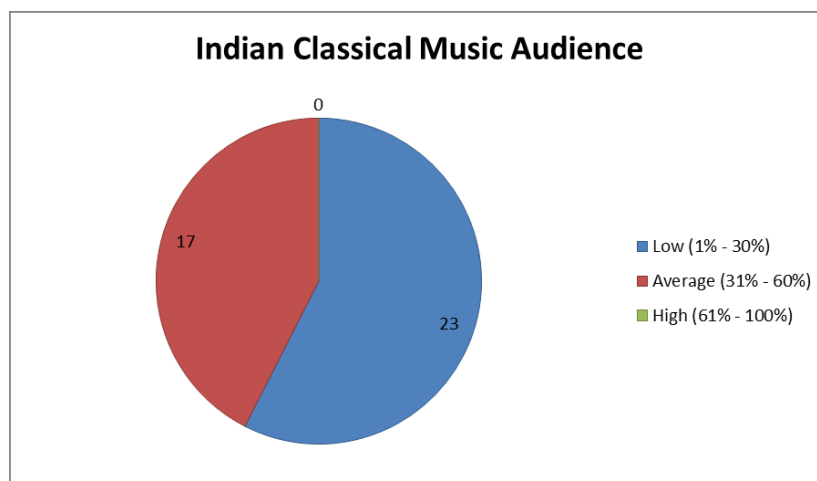
Besides the growing prospect in academic research as well as stage performing, the certainty of challenges remains apparent and cannot be ignored. The key challenges faced by the respondents' may be identified in the sphere of both academic research and stage performance.

CHALLENGES

Three questions pertaining to their performance in Indian Classical Music particularly in Sikkim were asked to the respondents; i) *Have you ever performed Indian Classical Music in Sikkim?* ii) *Do you think you have obtained enough platforms to showcase your talent/knowledge in regard of Indian Classical Music in Sikkim?* And iii) *According to you what is the range of Indian Classical Music audience here in Sikkim?*



With regard to performance, 32 (80%) respondents have not performed Indian Classical Music in Sikkim while 8 (20%) have performed. When asked regarding the platform 30 (75%) respondents pointed out that there are not enough platforms particularly in Sikkim. The remaining 10 (25%) have stated that there are platforms available in Sikkim.



The chart above shows that 23 (57.5%) respondents have indicated the Indian Classical Music audience being in low brackets, 17 (42.5%) have pointed out being average. None of the respondents considered the range of audience being high.

Even though there are major and well renowned institutions imparting education and private lessons on Indian Classical Music, the capital of Sikkim, Gangtok is widely impacted by the western culture. The influence of the western culture can be seen as being dispersed throughout and in major towns of Sikkim. Out of many, music remains one such area where the taste and preference can be observed as being influenced by the western culture. The study carried out by Vedabala and Bandopadhyay (2018) aptly explains this by pointing out “Western form of music is the most preferred form of music among the youths in Sikkim followed by the Bollywood music”. Therefore, the audience or listeners of Indian Classical Music is limited in Sikkim. This poses an immense challenge to the practitioners and aspiring performers who seeks to build their musical career. Besides, in the academic research the narrow and limited vacant position remains a key challenge to those aspiring academic careers. This scenario corresponds to the popular Darwin’s concept of “survival of the fittest”. Following, the respondents have unanimously pointed out not being able to commercially perform Indian Classical Music on stage due to the limited platforms being available in Sikkim. The need for out migrating from Sikkim to other states so that more opportunities can be secured is expressed by majority of the respondents. Nonetheless, all of the respondents indicated optimism in the growing audience as well as the popularity of Indian Classical Music. The following statement of a respondent elucidates this argument and many had similar views:

I feel there is very limited platform for artists who perform Indian Classical Music in Sikkim. Once or twice a year some organisation like Sanskar Bharati may provide us with the platform but generally it is very hard to get chance because we are just in the process of learning. I feel even the established professionals get very less platform out here as compared to other places. But over the years I see it growing because people are coming to know about Indian Classical Music.

Given the limited platform for artists and performers, the role of social media creating a digital platform comes into play. Social media is an alternate open platform which artists can utilise to their benefit. However, it depends on one’s creativity and marketing skills to draw attention of the audience and gain popularity in the digital platforms.

CONCLUSION

Institutions play a crucial role in shaping the career of individuals in Indian Classical Music, both as performers and researchers. These institutions provide a solid foundation for aspiring artists and scholars, offering structured training, guidance and exposure to the rich cultural heritage of Indian Classical Music. Aspiring music students in Sikkim can benefit from institutions that specialize in teaching and promoting Indian Classical Music. For those interested in pursuing research in Indian Classical Music, Sikkim University provides valuable resources. Despite the growing popularity of Indian Classical Music in Sikkim among the students of the mentioned institutions, the lack of

platforms and audience still remains a major challenge. However the students that aspire to learn Indian Classical Music both in research and as performers are rapidly increasing. Awareness spread by these institutions can also be observed as widening the scope in both academic research and performance prospects over the years. This paper has attempted to explore the scope of Indian Classical Music specifically focusing on a group of students based on their active involvement and participation in the genre of Indian Classical Music. Therefore this study is limited to the perspective of the stakeholders and further study can be accomplished by incorporating the audiences' outlook on Indian Classical Music.

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