MUSIC

It is difficult to trace a systematic development of music in Bengal during the middle ages for want of details. The far eastern province of Bengal wanted to retain its free identity as far as possible in every sphere of life and the big cultural movements in the western sector did not easily find their course in Bengal. The result was that Bengal retained its pristine structure of music when new developments were forging ahead in western India specially in the regions of Agra and Gwalior. During the early Mughal period the old complicated form of music had undergone a revolutionary change by the creation of Dhrubapada and while this novelty achieved great success in the imperial Durbar Bengal was satisfied with the old Prabandh music. Even the Padavali Kirtan established by Thakur Narottam in the Vaishnava festival at Khetari (Rajshahi District) was only a modification of this old form. During the Sultanate period the rulers of Bengal like the lords of the west enjoyed Turkish or middle eastern music in their courts and foreign singers or instrumentalists visited this land at special invitations. There is no proof that they had any contact with the native musicians and the musical culture at the court remained entirely distinct from the indigenous music. Yet it is presumed that certain forms of western developments had very slowly crept into the music of Bengal and there are evidences that songs like Chutkala (Chitrakala) and Dhrubapada were well known in Bengal at the end of the seventeenth century. It is said that Chutkala was formulated by Sultan Hussain Sharqi of Jaunpur who had been sheltered by Sultan Alauddin Hussain Shah of Bengal after his defeat at the hands of Sultan Bahlul Lodi. An example of Dhrubapada has been quoted by Ghanashyamdas in his Bhaktiranakar from Jayadeva's Git Govinda. All these forms were in the fold of Ksudragiti (small lyric songs) and were simplified modifications of the western Dhrubapada. It has been stated in Ragadarpan (1666) written by Saif Khan Faqirullah that two eminent singers visited Bengal with Sultan Shuja and one of them, Misk Manjan Dhari was a pupil of Bilas Khan, son of Tansen. There were very few who could compete with him in Bengal. This information gives us an indication how the Seni style of Dhrubapada found its way in Bengal. It is, however, difficult to conjecture how far the songs of Tansen had spread in the Bengali circle as there is no evidence to show that they had left any native disciples. Ramprasanna Bandyopadhyaya says in his Sangita Manjari that one Bahadur Sen (Shah Bahadur or Bahadur Khan) was invited to Bishnupur by Raghunath II in the early 18th century with a view to acquaint the local singers with the Durbari music. It is believed that this Bahadur was the founder of Seni school of music at Bishnupur. This also cannot be accepted without doubt because the identity of the so-called Bahadur Sen is shrouded in mystery. Anyhow, Tansen's songs were known
to Bishnupur during the latter part of the 18th century and gradually a new style developed in that region forming a distinct pattern of its own.

Apart from the vocal songs it is observed from various references in the Mangala Kavyas during the declining Mughal rule that all the well known string and percussion instruments of western India were in use in Bengal. It is presumed that instruments like Rabab and Pakhawaz were played in the current style of Raga music which was not different from the other parts of the western India. If so, vocal music should also have been equally forward. Whatever might be the position of music in India at the end of the 17th century, there can be no doubt that there was a rapid stir in the musical circle of Bengal at the beginning of the 18th century.

The Nawabi rule in Bengal from Murshid Quali to Alivardi brought internal peace and during this time the popular music of Bengal made a headway as against the old and static classical form. The most outstanding creation of this age was the Kavi songs. It was a very lively variety since it was wordy duel set in tunes. Generally an episode on the life of Shri Krishna and Gopis was the theme and one party raised an issue while the other gave a fitting reply when the former ended. Its movements were distinctly different from the existing classical types. Movements like Chitan, Parchitan, Fuka, Melta, Mahara, Shawari etc. used in Kavi (or Danda Kavi) were not conventional movements which were Sthayi, Antara, Sanchari and Abhob used in classical songs. The Kavi songs were akin to Qawali songs in many respects and equal importance on percussion instruments was laid in both these varieties. It appears that the idea of kavi songs occurred from Qawali songs held among the aristocrats of the ruling circles and an indigenous form was established by degrees. Kavi songs possessed a type of love song called Kheur and along with it a song of Tappa style was set in the end. Another form known as Turja was definitely modelled on the lines of Urdu or Persian song of that type much in use at the end of the Mughal rule. Panchali was an old form current upto the end of the nineteenth century. Ghanashyamdas in his Sangita Sarasangraha (early eighteenth century) has mentioned this as a form of Ksdragiti. According to the authority quoted by him it was a very long turned narrative sometimes rendered solo or sometimes in chorus. He has not quoted any example but has said that Panchali was well known in the country of Gauda. This well known variety was not, however, prevalent at the time of Bharatchandra (1760) who had set up a new model and thereafter Dasharathi Roy introduced it in an entirely new fashion. The only common thing was that in all cases it remained a long narrative. However, the chanting of Panchali is not what counts but the short Tappa and other varieties of lyric songs within it were its singularities.

Such was the condition of music in the middle of the eighteenth century when the country was passing into the hands of the British from the Muslims. The technique of Dhrupad was known to the higher class as
will be evident from the description of the court of Maharaja Krishna Chandra Roy as given by Bharatchandra in his *Annadda Mangal*. Bharatchandra mentions the name of one Kalawant Bishram Khan who was present at this court. In those days only the singers of Dhrupad were known as Kalawants or Kalwants. Not only Dhrupad but Kheyal, Tappa and other western Indian forms were also known to some degree as is proved by the compositions of Kavirajan Ramprasad (1720-28) many of whose songs were sung on measures (Tal) like Jaiad Tetaia, Ara and Ektal. His own style known as Ramprasadi did not follow the tradition of Dhrupad but Dadra or Ar-Khemta, also Lopa in some cases. Agamani songs which were introduced by him also followed the tradition of Tappa.

The most talented composer of lyric songs in Bengal was Ramnidhi Gupta, better known as Nidhu Babu. He was born in 1741 and died at the age of ninety-seven in the year 1839. We do not know how far he was trained in the Raga music current in Bengal but we are aware that his outlook of music changed at Chhapra where he picked up Tappa songs of western India. The short and suggestive Tappa songs, their plaintive character reoriented his imagination and kindled the creative force in him. It is said that his tutors were reluctant to impart the lessons he wanted apprehending that his genius would render him a greater master than any of them. He was disgusted with this niggardly treatment and promised to open a parallel course in his own language where he intended to put forth the best he achieved from them. The success was unique. He was practically the founder of the modern Bengali songs and his influence on Rabindranath Tagore who came much later and at an entirely different period was not insignificant. Ramnidhi was an educated man and had a very cultured mind. His poems, mostly of a few lines, were elegant, deep, emotional and perfectly finished. His style of Tappa was different from the western style. He introduced a technique which was most suited to the sentiment of Bengal and the art of poetry found its expression much more in it than the display of musical technicalities. His followers, however, could not retain this character. Gradually the gravity of this art was lost and the Tappa of Bengal degenerated into erotic songs and were most lightly treated by frivolous singers and dancing girls so common in the later Babu culture until the middle of the nineteenth century. There were hundreds of Tappa composers since Ramnidhi Gupta but a handful of them deserved real recognition. Kali Mirza was a contemporary of Ramnidhi and was a singer of great reputation. His Tappas were of high order. Sridhar Kathak who was also a later contemporary of Ramnidhi composed a number of masterly Tappa songs rich in musical as well as literary qualities.

Ramnidhi Gupta developed a form known as Akhrai, set into fashion by Kului Chandra Sen, who was his uncle. This style owes its origin to the Akhara class prevalent in the Mughal aristocratic houses (*Ain-i-Akbari, Dhap. on music*). It was a society in which women also took part in singing. It consisted of dance, songs and instrumental music.
This practice was largely in vogue among the nobles not only in the Mughal court but also in the ruling circles throughout the country. Naturally, the custom became common in Bengal also. It occurred to some enthusiasts that this art song would be a welcome novelty if brought into public view from the limited private circles. Efforts were made to remodel it according to popular taste and gradually it gained popularity. Kului Chandra Sen probably made some special innovations and earned reputation as its founder. According to some Akhrai songs were first introduced in Santipur which is also believed to be the original seat of Kheur songs. But the idea must have come from the old Akhara which was existing since a long time in the high society of Bengal. Akhrai songs in the revised form could not have made remarkable progress unless Ramnidhi Gupta had laid his hand on its organisation with his immense fame and influence. It consisted of songs and musical interludes. The songs were mostly of Tappa class often preceded by some lines sung in a slow tempo similar to Dhrupad. These were known as Bhawani Bishayak (or pertaining to Bhawani) and ended with love songs. The technique of Raga music was strictly followed in the songs and the instrumental music was specially exhilarating due to its graceful movement from slow to a very quick tempo. It is known from the description given by Iswar Gupta in Sambad Prabhakar (15th July, 1854) that violin occupied a prominent place with indigenous instruments like Tambura, Vina, Jaltarang, Flute, Sitar, Metal Discs, Drums etc. Ramnidhi Gupta had organised Akhrai songs about 1804 and violin must have been well known in Bengal by the end of the eighteenth century. The idea of orchestration first occurred in these Akhrai soirees where it was known as Saz (Persian word meaning a musical instrument as well as concord, harmony). Use of such words also suggests that this Akhrai was a modification of the older Akhara prevalent in Mughal times. This variety was further modified by Mohan Chand Basu who started Half Akhrai in January, 1832 (Kaviijivani—Bhabatosh Datta, p. 409) in Baghbazar, Calcutta. Mohan Chand Basu who was a favourite disciple of Ramnidhi Gupta relaxed the rigid classical style of Raga songs and added some new colour to it making it much more attractive than both the Kavi and Akhrai varieties.

Along with the above, experiments were carried out in other spheres also. Special mention may be made of the Panchali which has been referred to earlier. The old form of Panchali was already obsolete and the subsequent modernised form at the time of Bharatchandra was also almost forgotten. An attempt was now made to revive this in a remodelled form. In this form narratives were full of alliterations which profusely pleased the listeners. Wit and humour were added to it. The narrator had a glib tongue, ready wit and a sweet voice to render songs, if necessary. Otherwise songs were performed by efficient singers in the party. Besides Panchali there was a form of popular music sketch known as Krishna Yatra which was openly performed in the meadows and courtyards. The songs in such Yatras were simple lyrics where
all types of mixed modes were witnessed. The old Padavali Kirtan was
popularised by the creation of Dhap Kirtan which was easier and more
attractive. Madhusudan Kinnar of Jessore composed many famous songs in
this style. It was later on further developed by Govinda Adhikari and
Nilkantha Mukhopadhyaya. Dashrath Roy (1806-57) introduced a number
of songs in his Panchalis which were new from various aspects although the
traditional style was not ignored. He, however, retained Tappa largely in his
songs. He introduced several modes and measures giving a dramatic touch to
his compositions. Novelties were witnessed in Yatras which showed a
tendency to be more socialised. Vidya-Sundar was an excellent outcome of
this attempt. This Yatra was created in the third decade of the nineteenth
century and was immensely popular, specially the party organised by Gopal
Uria won an unparalleled reputation. Its songs were short and suggestive. A
new type emerged from this Yatra which was known as Ar-khemta having a
pleasing appeal to the audience. Its influence was long standing because of its
charm and softness. This lively song sketch gave a new impetus to the future
creation of lyric songs.

Wajed Ali Shah, the last Nawab of Lucknow, was interned in Calcutta
at Metiaburz during the latter part of the nineteenth century (1856-1887).
He was a great patron of music. His house was a seat of musical
gatherings. Brilliant singers used to visit him from outside and local
talents also tried to win his recognition. The result was that the Bengali
singers grew most interested in the western style of the Hindustani music
and adopted Hindi Dhrupad, Kheyal, Thungri etc. ignoring their own
precious songs. The habit of composing Bengali songs and rendering them
in the indigenous way was rapidly given up and there was a set back in the
creative force in the music of Bengal. The situation would not have
been so if the musicians of Bengal had tried to give a new colour to the
songs of their own language by absorbing the new merits which they
found in the Hindustani music. Instead they eschewed their own songs and
took more pride in getting recognition as Ustads in Hindustani music.
Many of them hastened to the representatives of the celebrated Gharwanas
and identified with them. Perhaps Bishnupur was the only centre of
Dhrupad in Bengal which jealously guarded its own tradition. It has
already been mentioned that cultivation of music began to thrive at
Bishnupur from the eighteenth century under the patronage of Raghunath
II. Thereafter various singers enriched this school and by the middle of the
eighteenth century it was at the height of its glory with the rise of
Ramshankar Bhattacharya who firmly established the fame of Bishnupur as
a seat of Dhrupad culture. He left a number of disciples who had also
become famous afterwards. Ramkeshab Bhattacharya was a renowned
exponent of Bishnupuri style of Dhrupad during the middle of the
nineteenth century and obtained patronage of Ashutosh Deb (Satu Babu)
who himself was a musician of no ordinary merit. Along with him the
name of Keshablal Chakravarty deserves mention as he had also great
reputation in Calcutta about the same time. Ksetramohan Goswami, one of
the outstanding personalities in music had his preliminary training from
Ramshankar at Bishnupur. The other two of his illustrious contemporaries
were Dinabandhu Goswami and Anantalal Bandypadhyay. The latter was
the chief exponent of Bishnupur style and had a large number of students
of whom his own sons Ramprasanna and Gopeshwar carried forward his
efforts until recent times. Among the later singers Jadunath Bhattacharya
and Radhika Prasad Goswami earned wide reputation. The former is well
known as a composer. Both of them had their initial training at Bishnupur.

The musical situation of Bengal was not very encouraging at this time.
The old stalwarts had gone leaving several imitators who corrupted music
to such an extent that it catered pleasure only to the Babus and the rich.
Light and amorous songs with very little musical value were the fashion
of the day. Kavis and Panchalis were degenerate to the extreme and their
vulgaries were immensely enjoyed leaving aside all other good qualities
of the pristine music. This unfortunate situation was considerably saved by
a puritanic reaction which gathered momentum by the rise of the Brahma-
sect in Bengal. Rammohun Roy himself composed devotional songs for his
prayer and it is said that he had his music lessons from Kali Mirza, a
famous contemporary of Ramnidhi Gupta. Rise of Brahma culture in
Bengal was a boon to the existing society since it had kindled a spirit of
self criticism and helped the preservation of what was really good and
worthwhile. A serious endeavour was made by the educated elite to retain
the deserving tunes and type. Although the ideal of Brahma-sangeet was
chiefly religious the efforts of Brahma Samaj to improve the lyric songs of
Bengal were nevertheless enormous. Because of this highly cultured
approach the educated society in general used to attend the prayers of the
Samaj and were greatly impressed by the high place given to music by
them. The formalities of classical music as well as the beauty of lyric songs
were fully retained. This balancing effect was possibly the best example
that was emulated by others in rendering the current songs in a polished
way. The foundation of the Brahmasangeet was laid by Raja Rammohun
Roy and his associates. Then came Maharsi Debendranath Tagore with a
host of friends, followers and his own descendants who established
Brahmasangeet as an art song and created varieties. Among other stalwarts
mention may be made of Acharya Keshab Chandra Sen, Bijoy Krishna
Goswami, Kunjabehari Deb, Trailakyanath Sanyal, Pratap Chandra Majumdar
and others. Afterwards men like Pandit Shivnath Shastri, Nagendranath
Chattopadhyay, Kalinarayan Gupta came forward to enrich Brahmasangeet
which also compassed the compositions of popular singers like Dasharathi
Roy, Nilkantha Mukhopadhyay, Kangal Harinath, Fakirchand and others.
Compositions of eminent literateurs like Kaliprasanna Ghosh, Krishnachandra
Majumdar, Gobinda-chandra Roy, Rajanikanta Sen, Atulprasad Sen, Swarnakumari
Devi, Kamini Roy were frequently sung and all these formed the
voluminous collection of Brahmansangeet which was invariably found in every educated household of Bengal.

Gradually a spirit of evaluating the merits of the music of Bengal created during the two centuries arose among the next composers who liberally adopted the better technique and enriched the music with their enlightened and conscious contribution. This impetus was given by Jyotirindranath Tagore who made various experiments with lyric songs accompanied by piano, organ and harmonium. He was followed by his younger brother Rabindranath Tagore and a host of famous contemporaries. Rabindranath Tagore accepted the best in the existing music and introduced them in his compositions with an open and liberal mind. While he was greatly influenced by the suggestive expressions in the earlier Tappa compositions he was no less influenced by the sober well-knit structure of Dhrupad and both the qualities are equally prominent in his own compositions. He had also a deep regard for folk tunes which he successfully mingled in many of his songs patriotic as well as purely lyrical. Certain trends of European music were also liked by him and he carried on experiments with them. These qualities are equally applicable to Dwijendralal Roy, another celebrity of this age. He brought a manly vigour to the music of Bengal which was deplorably wanting so long. His national songs still remain unsurpassed in charm and energy. He was an admirer of the manly qualities in European music manifested them most successfully in his own creations. Later on came Rajanikanta Sen and Atulprasad Sen who have left their mark on patriotic and lyric songs already enriched by the above personalities who practically represented Bengal towards the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of this century. Besides the improvement made by the above intellectuals there was a development of music in the newly established theatres. New ideas of orchestration were introduced by Jyotirindranath Tagore and songs of multifarious types were contemplated by him, his brother Rabindranath, Dwijendralal, Girish Chandra Ghosh and others. Many composers also grew up who set tunes to the dramatic songs and were not themselves literary producers. Manomohan Bose was an assiduous thinker in this sphere and was himself a composer of lyrics. Even the novelist Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay wrote several songs including his famous Bande Mataram which were profusely sung. *Ali Baba*, a play written by Kshirode Prasad, brought a healthy turn in the dramatic music and has remained ever green upto this time. It was an age of lyric songs and its field was much broader than the age preceding because of varieties and novelties. Success was more abundant during this age because the composers were mainly intellectuals. They not only opened new avenues in music but also created literature. The age of Tappa, Kavi, Akhrai, Half Akhrai and Panchali does not bear any comparison with this age because the past talents were considerably immature and their show was directed to the unenlightened public rather than to the intellectuals.

Lastly, a survey of the theoretical studies is essential to have a correct
appreciation of the endeavours up to the dawn of the present century. Radhamohan Sen, a contemporary of Ramnidhi Gupta and an inhabitant of Calcutta, published a grammatical and historical work on music in poetry named *Sangeeta Taranga* in 1818. He was well versed in Sanskrit and Persian and drew his materials from both the sources. This book is a valuable guide to the research workers till to day. Krishnada Vyasdeva published his four volumes of huge anthology titled *Sangita-Ragakalpadruma* in 1846. The contribution of this devotee of music who did not belong to Bengal is immense and this was one of the earliest attempts to compile the musical composition of all composers throughout India. He also incorporated the Sanskrit musicological texts as far as could be collected by him. This endeavour was supplemented by Raja Shourindramohan Tagore in association with his tutor Ksetramohan Goswami. His works are more than ten in number out of which special mention may be made of "Hindu Music from various authors" and "Universal History of Music". He took great pains to compile all the essays written by European scholars on Indian music and published them in the form of a compendium. He also wrote a hand book of musical instruments specially used in Bengal. His "Yantra Ksetra Dipika" is also valuable in as much as it gives a good idea of the Ragas prevalent in Bengal during his time. He founded the Music Academy which was one of the earliest endeavours to spread the academic culture of music. Another noble venture was his compilation of Sanskrit treaties which he published under the title "Sangita Sara Sangraha". Practically the whole of *Sangit Ratnakar* of Sarnga Deva has been incorporated in the volume. Though much of the content is in corrupt form nevertheless it must have served the research workers very well at that period. Ksetramohan Goswami is famous for his "Sangit Sar" and "Kantha Kaumudi". He also published some notations of Jayadeva's Gita Govinda which are specimens of the traditions of this great musical production coming down through generations. Krishnadhan Bandyopadhyay was a thorough critic of Indian music and published his famous "Gitasutrasar" in 1885. He discussed the merits and demerits of the existing as well as ancient music with open mind and was very much objective in his approach. Although he has been highly praised for this work his assessment does not appear to be correct in all cases and he did not do justice to the authoritative Sanskrit works having prejudiced views and adverse conceptions. In many cases his observations have been rude and unwarranted because of his lack of adequate study in Sanskrit musicology. Nevertheless he was a practical observer and made certain wholesome suggestions for the improvement of contemporary music. He was in favour of introducing European Staff Notation in our music but was not successful in establishing it as his views were perhaps too forward for his age. Numerous types of notations were contemplated about the end of the last century but only the *Akarmatrik* system evolved by Jyotirindranath Tagore was ultimately adopted being easy to render and follow. This system was very ably demonstrated by Jyotirindranath Tagore himself in
his *Svaralipi Gitimala* published in 1897. He was also the founder of Bharat Sangit Samaj which greatly helped the spread of music in the cultured circle of Bengal. Besides he edited two well known music journals viz., *Vina Vadini* (1807) and *Sangit Prakashika* (1901). These two journals, specially the latter which lasted for ten years, are highly valuable for musical essays and notations of old and current songs. The idea of maintaining biographies and retaining musical compositions of the erstwhile musicians also occurred in the last century. Ramnidhi Gupta himself published his *Gitaratna* just before his death. Iswar Gupta did the pioneering work of collecting the biographies and compositions of musicians including Kaviwallas and published them in his journal *Sambad Pravakar*. Later on it became a practice to publish musicological discourses in the literary journals such as Tattva-Bodhini, Balak, Bharati, Sadhana etc. in which, among others, Rabindranath Tagore was a most prominent writer. In this way musicology has become part and parcel of Bengali literature.

We thus find Bengal quite forward in music when the country was on the threshold of another national movement in 1905 when further possibilities of music opened before the modern thinkers, creators and intellectuals. This period, popularly known as Swadeshi movement, witnessed the growth of patriotic songs which opened a new chapter in the history of the music of Bengal.

The noblest inspiration of patriotic songs came from the Hindu Mela which was established in 1867 headed by Ganendranath Tagore and Nabagopal Mitra. The former himself showed the way by composing লজ্জায় ভারতবর্ষ গাহি কে করে (How in shame should I sing the glory of Indial) which was sung in the fair. One of the pledges taken by the organisers was composing and fostering of national songs. The most famous song in this fair in 1868 was গাও ভারতের জয় (Sing the glory of India) composed by Satyendranath Tagore. Originally this was sung in Raga Khambaj by Vishnu Chakravarty, the renowned Ustad of the house of Tagores and also widely known in the cultured society of Calcutta. Afterwards it was sung in a different tune in the Great National Theatre. Another popular song sung in this fair was মলিন মূর্খচন্দ্র ভারত তোমারি (India, your moon-like face is sad) composed in Rag Nat-Bihag by Dwijendranath Tagore. Among the other contributors mention may be made of the contemporary musical thinker Monomohan Basu, social leader Dwarkanath Gangopadhyay and composer Govindachandra Roy who wrote কভাকাল পরে বল ভারতের দুঃখাগর সাতবারি পার হবে (Tell me India, how long will take to swim across the sea of grief). On the other side, patriotism in music was gaining momentum with the composition of "Bande Mataram" by Bankim Chandra Chattopadhyay and every political uprising inspired the poets to produce a number of songs imbued with national feelings.

The nature of these songs was, however, not provocative nor could these be called war songs. These reminded the people of their own
weakness which had to be overcome. These songs appealed to them to shun their defeatist mentality and rely on their inner strength which alone could remain unbending in all circumstances. The country was looked upon as the divine mother whose honour had to be protected at all costs. The composers chiefly looked into the indigenous modes and styles to portray their feelings so that the songs could easily reach the hearts of the people and move them. Rabindranath Tagore possibly achieved the greatest success in this respect. In his songs he introduced in a great measure the folk tunes of Bengal and thereby produced a moving appeal to the sentiments of millions. He was probably the first composer to turn our mind to the simple songs of the rural people and to show that the qualities in these unsophisticated songs were worthy of appreciation and adoption in the art songs as well. This example was also followed by Rajanikanta Sen and many of his songs became extremely popular during these days. D. L. Roy was a different personality. It has already been said that he did not hesitate to adopt the European technique to strengthen his songs. He had put forth a vigour in his songs hitherto unknown and the inspiration instilled in his chorus songs was unique. Among the others whose songs aroused profound national and emotional feelings and had a great influence special mention may be made of Kaliprasanna Kavyavisharad, Kamini Kumar Bhattacharya, Monomohan Chakrvarty and Sarala Devi. There was some anonymous songs as well which inspired people of different localities.

Altogether it may be said that the patriotic songs of this age encompassed all conceivable sources of music having original characteristics which could be claimed as the nation’s own possession and also foreign elements that could be harnessed to produce an inspiring effect as well as musical fervour. These patriotic songs have become classical and gone into history.

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