

MUSIC IN LICHHAVI AND MALLA PERIOD: AN OVERVIEW

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Abstract

Music is a universal language which transcends all barriers of country, race or religion. The people of Nepal are immensely music oriented. This paper attempts to discuss the music conditions during Lichchhavi and Malla periods of Nepal in relation to development, extension and its practices in Nepalese society. All evidences have been taken from several documentaries. Whatever we practice as traditional Music today has taken the step of development in this very age. The evidence shows that specially raga based traditional Music was practiced in those periods.

Key Words

Baditragosthi: A house where musicians play instruments. A kind of 'trust' in the Lichchhavi period founded for musical activities.

Shankhabad: The court's employee for blowing conch in the royal palace in the Lichhavi period.

Nandibad: Auspicious musical player/singer appointed at the Lichchhavi palaces.

Introduction

In the history of Nepal, Lichhavi and Malla periods were the golden eras for institutionalizing Music and Arts and these two were widely accepted by the kings and high rank officials of the time. The period 185 AD to 733AD is called Lichhavi Period. During this period, Music was used for the purpose of religious and social activities and it took the step of development in this very age. The historical records and inscription provide the fact of the presence of the tradition of Music in Nepal of

that period. In Lichhavi era, the uses of musical instruments were made in religious occasions and music remained as an integral part of the Lichhavi culture. The Instruments played on religious and festive occasions were mridanga, baansuri and sankha which are chiselled in to the idols of Uma Mahesswor family. The stone inscription dating back to 505AD erected in the Pashupati Kailash Suryaghat slope on the western side of Jalahari eulogizes King Mandeva who had also trained his daughter Bijayabati to become master of all arts and she became a famous artist. His queen Bhogini as a gifted one with melodious voice tantamount to Veena, further proves the fact that veena was a popular instrument during the period (Bajracharya, 1974, p.245). The Vaditragosthi established during the Lichhavi period in Lele of Kathmandu in 604 A.D. (found in an inscription) still exists in the form of musical 'guthi' practised by the Newari community (Tuladhar 1979, p. 73). The existence of Vaditragosthi in the Lichchhavi

era to run music and arts classes as alluded in archival documents are the evidence of the institutional growth of music education of the time. The responsibilities of the Gosthi included both playing and teaching music (Bajracharya, 1974, p.224). An analysis to the contemporary music suggests that they used music in cultural functions and as means of entertainments, and the Hindu society largely used music and dance in observing cultural functions. This apparently presents that different cultural groups on the basis of their ethnicity, caste, religion and places practised ethnic, folk, semi-classical music.

The Lichhavi kings used to follow an ancient tradition and appointed Nandibad and Sankhabad for the purpose of singing and playing 'Mangal Baaj Gaan' (singing and playing instruments on auspicious occasions) at the court. In the Lichhavi era, they held worship of deities in the temples in a grand way by playing music with dancing Devdasis (women servants of God). Several idols of Deities belonging to the Lichhavi era are in dancing postures which also justifies the popularity of dance in those days. The aforesaid evidences amply suggest that in Lichhavi era, music and dance were practised for religious purposes.

Lichhavi period

Lichhavi Kings came from the Vaishali of Bihar, India. Lichhavi period is also included in the ancient period of Nepal. In this period, Nepal maintained close ties with India and also had economic and political relations with Tibet and thus it became a cultural centre linking

central and southern Asia. The era ended when Ansuvarma who founded the Thakuri dynasty in the mid-8th century (www.britannica.com). It is said that the Lichhavi period was the golden period of art and culture whose evidence is found in Nepalese history, culture and political books. In this period, Music was widely recognized in Nepal and it appeared on the political map of South Asia in the middle of the Fifth century A.D. Music and Arts saw good time during this period when it was widely accepted by the kings and high rank officials. As the Lichhavi era was the period of renaissance in Nepalese arts, crafts, architecture, education, and culture, music took the step of development in this very age. The Lichhavi kings placed education as "optional" not "requisite" and so as with the music education. General education and music were limited to some aristocratic people at the "gurukul" or with the private tutors (Sharma, 1990, p. 1). The education tradition of ancient Lichhavi period can be divided into two parts on the basis of that period. The first was Vedic education in which the Gurukul, Rishikul, Devkul and Pitrikul were in practice. Another was Buddhist education system which was applied after the rise of Buddhism. In this system, there were the schooling traditions in Vihars, Bahals, Maths etc. This system was more organized than Gurukul system and mostly bhikshus or lamas (Buddhist monks) were the Masters or teachers. In Gurukul, whatever Guru said was the rule and the education was given as a charity (Adhikari, 2003, p.3). Sanskrit was the court and literary language of Nepal during this period (Shah, 1992, p. 37). It was used in the inscriptions

and the kings' official papers of the time. The quality and standard of Sanskrit verses inscribed on the stone slabs are the proofs of the literary and intellectual achievement of the Lichhavi period, which equalled the aesthetic success in the field of architecture and sculpture as well as fine arts. Mana Deva was the most famous king among the Lichhavi rulers. Historians differ about the period of his rule. However, according to the inscriptions of Changunarayan temple at Bhaktapur, Mana Deva ruled Nepal from 464 AD- 491 AD He is considered to be the first king of Nepal having historical authenticity. The pillar inscription found at Changu Narayan Temple is regarded as the first written evidence found in Nepal. In this period, the Kathmandu valley was already ruled by rulers who had not only established feudal patterns, but also brought in Aryan or Brahmanic traditions, Sanskrit language and forms of arts from India. Hinduism and Buddhism were practised side by side and they had considerable influence on the culture of this valley (Rana, 1995, p. 27). Manadeva, the First Lichhavi King, gave shape to Nepalese society. Virtually nothing is known about the Nepalese Art and culture before his reign and he laid the foundation of it and from then on Nepalese art, architecture, religion, social norms, customs and rituals acquired their concrete shape, size and continuity (Amatya, 1983, p.10).

Malla Period

It is said that Malla period was around 1382AD-1769 AD The Mallas were originally monarchical and later became republican maintaining the title of King came from Malla

Mahajanapada of North Eastern India. The Mallas were allies to the Lichhavis both of whom later relocated to Kathmandu valley because their territories were usurped by the Magadh Empire. The word 'Malla' in Sanskrit means 'wrestlers' who were probably adopted by the rulers of the time by testing the skills of success in wrestling contests with their adversaries and rivals (Shaha, 1992, p.46). The Mallas implemented republican type of ruling at Kushinagar, Pawa in Northern India and in the neighbourhood of Vaisali before the 6th century BC.

During the Malla period the education system followed the same as the Lichhavi period. The system was managed by the private and public institutions like Guthi, Vihaar, Math, Gurukul and some of them were supported by the King. This was the golden period of music and arts. Music was widely accepted by the kings and upper class of people. History shows that despite abundance of reports relating to the Hindu classical music found in Malla period Nepalese music was said to have reached its height of development. Numerous Jatras (festivals), dramas observed in Kathmandu valley, colourful dances, varieties of musical instruments played in temples and shrines and the commencement of Bhajanmandali (Hymn singers) were originated in the Malla period. Malla rulers were also very fond of composing of plays and acting them and writing of digests and lyrics. Beginning from the 14th till 17th century, songs like Mangalochar, Sagun, Fag, Dhamari, Chaita, Chanchari, Bharat etc. were popularly sung on religious ceremony, festivals, auspicious occasions, social and

cultural events.

Malla kings were religious and music loving. The place of music at special festive occasions and religious celebrations points both to their religious bent of mind and love for music. In Malla period, Hindu system had a stronger impact on Buddhist society and social classifications. Sub castes based on occupation started forming in this period. Jayasthiti Malla (1382 AD-1395 AD) was a famous king of the period, who was an ardent patron of performing arts tried acculturation through this arts and dramas based on Vaishnava themes. But he did not directly interfere with practices of other religions (Rana, 1995, p. 43). King Jayasthiti had a great interest in literature, drama, and music. Under his patronage music and literature flourished, beautiful books were written in Sanskrit and Newari, a local language. To accompany the funeral procession of kings and to cremate them in accompaniment with Deepak Raga and the playing of kahal instrument became mandatory during his reign. His passion for music and arts motivated him to organize dramas on Ramayana and Bhairavananda on his son's sacred thread and marriage ceremony (Sharma, 1951, p.137). The Malla era had been rich in arts and craftsmanship. Many single idols in dancing posture of that period can be found in the temples and shrines of the Kathmandu valley. In fact, JayasthitiMalla's main aim was to bring stability in Nepal where chaos and confusions had prevailed and the people had become tired, timid and directionless. Hindu Buddhist and tantric religious places started being developed as the centres of cultural growth (Rana, 1995, p.63).

King Jagat Jyotir Malla (1610-1635 AD) of Bhaktapur wrote an anthology of essays, music, dance and drama. He also wrote another digest on music and dance named Sangeet Chandra. There are 11 different manuscripts preserved in the National archive in the name of Jagat Jyotir Malla. They are like Geet, Geetsangraha, Nanageetam, Geetpaschasika, Dashawataar Nrityam Geetam, Nadotpatti, Mridangotpatti, Bhashasangeetam, Ragadhyanam, Raga Bhajan Sangraha, Sangeetchandra, Sangeet Chintamani and Sangeetsar Sangraha (Regmi, 2003, p.163). King Siddhi Narsingh Malla (1618-1661) was also known as a music lover who used to play different kinds of music instruments such as Mridanga, Veena and he could sing as well. King Pratap Malla (1641-1674) of Kantipur had exceptional talent in music, literature and arts. He built Nasal chowk (courtyard) to conduct musical and dance programmes. He had also created 10 stanzas of Sanskrit hymn and performed Narshingha dance while worshipping Lord Shiva (Natyeshwar). The evidence of his love for music can be drawn from the incidence of his death which occurred while he was watching the 'Harisiddhi' dance in Hanumandhoka Palace at Basantapur, Kathmandu. (Regmi, 2003, p. 163).

Newari language, which was extensively used by the people in the valley and neighbouring areas, was considered as the principal language by Malla Kings. Writing songs and prayers in Newari (Nepal Bhasha) language became popular which was used simultaneously with Sanskrit in religious practices. Dramas were written and staged in this language. Maithili was another popular

language in the Malla Courts. Maithili speaking ladies of the royal household, the priests and the advisors accompanying them popularised its use in the palace. There are thirty seven Dramas said to have been written by Ranjit Malla, the last ruler of Bhaktapur, (Rana, 1995, p.75). He was kind and a man of peaceful temperament. He had collected many relics of ancient art. He had deep interest in musical instruments. There was no first to him in classical music. He had written two religious plays known as 'Krishna Charitra' and 'Ramayana' (Shreatha & Singh, 1972, p. 69). At the age of seventy five Ranajit Malla desired to go to Kashi on pilgrimage. On his way to pilgrimage when he reached the top of Chandragiri mountain, he had a last glimpse of the Kathmandu Valley. Then and there he composed and sang a sorrowful song in which he found fault with himself and begged pardon of gods and goddesses for his fault (Shreatha & Singh, 1972, p.71). Likewise King Yog Narendra Malla (1684-1707 AD) of Lalitpur, King Jitmitra Malla of Bhaktapur, his son Bhupatindra Malla and his grandsons Jagat Prakash Malla, Shri Niwas Malla were also recognized as the musicians who cultivated taste for music, arts, and culture. King Bishnu Malla of Patan had begun the tradition of playing Gujarati instruments with a group of 15 people at TalejuBhavani. Traditional music was played routinely in the palace. A huge bell and gigantic drums were placed before the palace and played in the mornings and evenings at fixed time (Rana, 1995, p. 76). The religious song and dance called Charya was brought in Nepal by Indian 'Tantriks' (transcendentalists)

which were largely incomprehensible yet quite popular in Nepal during the Malla reign. The famous Jatras (festive) such as, Indrajatra, Bisket Jatra, Rato Matsyendra Jatra, Seto MatsyandraJatra, Gai Jatra, Ghode Jatra, and Kumari Jatra etc. characterize the Malla period and these are still conducted in Newar community in Kathmandu valley. From the availability of the collection of poems and dramas in Sanskrit, Braja, Maithili, and Hindi language of that period it is understood that the foreign scholars had tremendous influence on Nepalese Arts and Culture during the Malla period. The devotion towards Lord Krishna by Jaya Dev, Bidhyapati, and Swami Chaitanya etc. had also influenced the music tradition of Nepal. Music and Architecture were developed a great deal under the patronage of the Malla kings. The Malla kings kept themselves engaged in building temples and in making their respective kingdoms artistically beautiful. PratapMalla in Kantipur, Siddhi Nara Singh Malla in Lalitpur and Bhoopateendra Malla in Bhaktapur by renovating their respective palaces made them artistically beautiful. The temples of Swayambhu, Pashupati, Guhyeshwari, BauddhaNath, Nyatapola, Dattatreya, Krishna, Maha-Bauddha even today stand as the specimens of Nepalese art of exquisite beauty. Not only architecture, but sculpture, painting, dancing, music, playing on drums and other musical instruments were also highly developed. The metal and wooden images of Buddha, Taras and other Buddhist gods and goddesses were used to be kept for display in the month of 'Shrawan'.

Dances were also in vogue but they were mainly religious. Nava-Durga dance in Bhaktapur, Bhadrakali dance in Kantipur, Harisiddhi dance and Kartik dance in Lalitpur are still in vogue which have their origin in the Malla period (Shreatha & Singh, 1972, p. 79). In this way the Malla period was really rich in the field of Fine Arts. Music, literature, and arts and the scholars got royal support in this period. They received special favour because the kings of the Malla period were themselves lovers of art, literature, and music. Therefore music was mandatory in all kind of fetes, festivals and religious ceremonies in that period. Due to the Patronages offered by Malla kings, music is still alive in public functions, worshipping in temple, Jatras etc.

Conclusion

It can safely be concluded that music was fully developed during Lichhavi and Malla periods. The practice of music more flourished in Malla period in comparison to Lichhavi period. Nepalese ancient and medieval society was musically and culturally well organized and it seemed in today's life especially in Kathmandu valley.

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