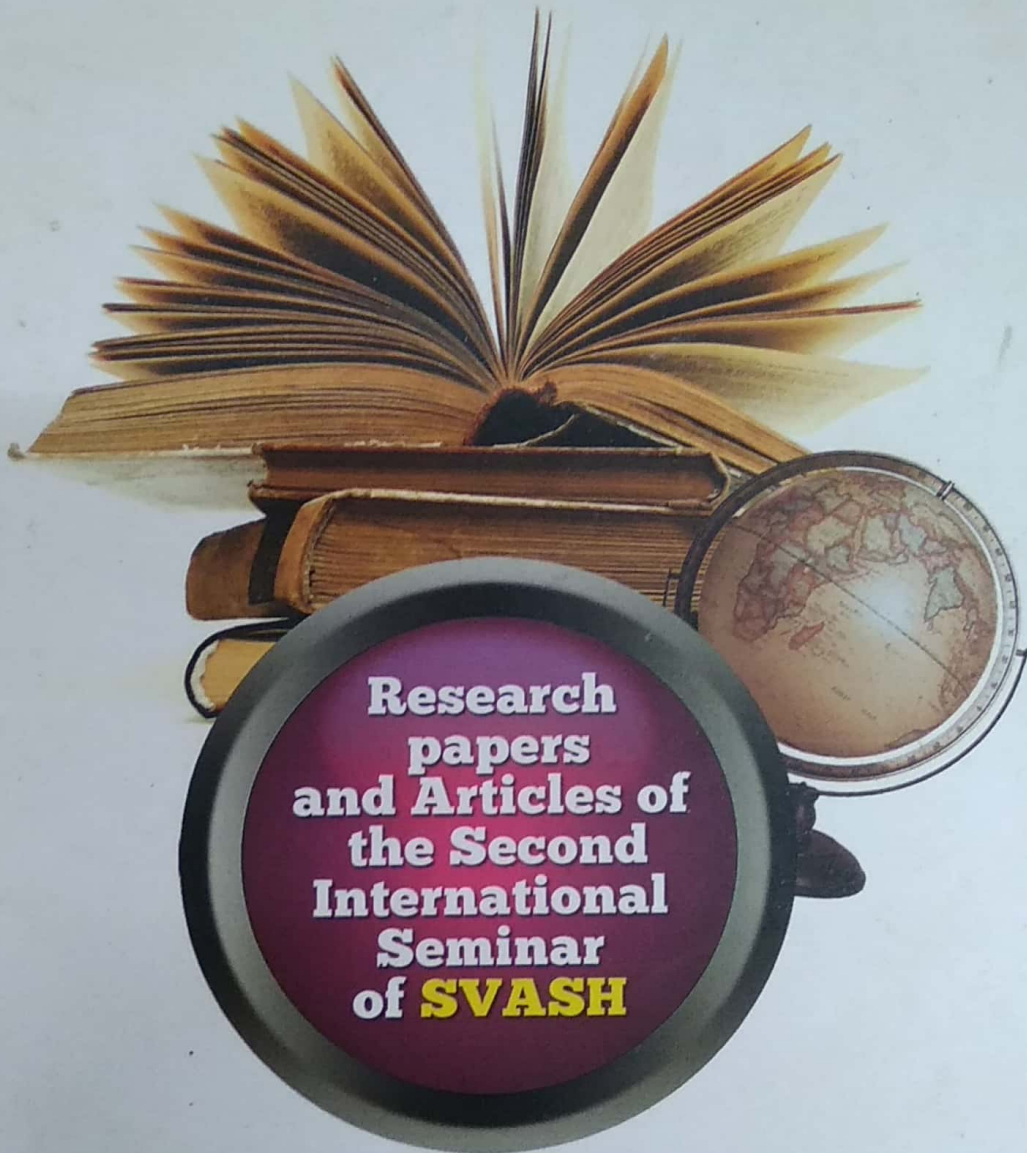


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TRADITION IN CARNATIC MUSIC

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Tradition is defined as a set of beliefs and customs handed down from ancestors to posterity. The socio-cultural sphere of human life always has a link to tradition. In the subsequent eras of human history new trends emerged which surpassed the test of time and became part of tradition. Social customs like marriage, naming ceremony, funeral and many others are performed in accordance with one's own religious tradition. Certain cultural practices like wearing sarees, dhotis etc continue to be an Indian tradition of dressing, even in the midst of many advanced dress wears. The existence of all these announce their continuous and wide acceptance by all.

Traditional music and music traditions are two terms usually spoken of, the former referring to the music strictly adhering to the principles of tradition and the latter represent the systems of music handed down through centuries. Carnatic music is a rich musical tradition of South India which strictly adheres to certain unchanging principles, customs and beliefs. Infact, any other genre of music (folk music or pop music) has its own traditional structure, which when violated will affect its intrinsic form. The tradition bound system of Carnatic music is deep-rooted in the melodic, rhythmic and compositional diversities. The freedom to improvise on the stage through varied aspects like raga alapana, niraval and kalpanasvara is a hallmark of South Indian Music. Each of these has a long tradition.

Traditional social customs followed by musicians

Just like any other discipline related to indigenous culture, in music the old tradition of offering gurudakshina at the beginning of learning process and sitting on the floor while learning, practicing and performing still continues making alive the social customs of the past.

Tradition in melody and rhythm

Certain age-old principles and practices underlying the melody which constitute tradition in Indian music are:

The naming of the universally accepted 7 notes as sa, ri, ga, ma, pa, dha and ni.

Assigning the ascent and descent of a raga with fixed number of svaras

Peculiar gamakas or oscillations given to the notes of a particular raga

The setting of a melody to a particular rhythm

The concept of kalapramana or tempo in a musical piece

The counting of rhythm using the kriyas of talas beaten with hand

The concept of different degrees of speed

These are unchanging phenomena and the list may lengthen if one analyses the concept in depth.

Tradition in the structure of musical forms

The division of a krti (a musical form) into sections like Pallavi, Anupallavi and Charana and the repetition of pallavi after each section is a feature which seems to have originated in the 18th century, but the division of musical forms into different sections had been present in the musical forms of ancient period like prabhanda. Each musical form like Varna, pada, javali and tillana are structured on certain well defined forms which are intact.

Tradition in the introduction of themes

Religious themes form the subject matter of Carnatic music compositions, with a few exceptions. It has not been altered even this day.

Tradition in Improvisation

The trio of manodharma – Alapana, Niraval and Kalpanasvara with the strict format never changes. Of these, singing kalpanasvara is of a later origin tracing back to the end of 19th century. The rendering of alapana with the syllables 'ta, da, ri' is an accepted norm. Pallavi singing in 108 talas is now extinct which dominated the field till 18th century. New styles of manodharma singing developed in the subsequent eras of history enriched the concept.

Tradition in performance

The emergence of krti as the dominant musical composition in concerts during the post trinity period is unquestioned for the last two centuries and it has become a rich tradition. Likewise, Violin proved to be a powerful accompanying instrument of South Indian Concerts after its introduction in India during the Trinity

period and still survives so. The performance of a concert with the accompaniment of Violin and Mridangam with upapakka vadyas viz: Ghatam, Morsing and Ganjira also has been a tradition accepted.

The acceptance of changes in trend indicates the significance of innovation in enriching traditions. The great Tyagaraja himself might have been considered to be a tradition breaker during his times, whose innovations like the composing of krtis/keertanais with the incorporation of sangatis later immortalized the melodic aspect. Likewise Muthuswamy Dikshitar assimilated the melodic elements of North Indian music such as the adoption of Hindustani ragas, and the introduction of the dhrupad style in krti composing which were acknowledged by the posterity. Thus 18th century witnessed many changes in trend, which might have been treated as tradition breaking then, but gradually attained an elevated stature in tradition. The oft quoted lamenting over the changes in the traditional singing of the Trinity's compositions refers to the assimilation of new trends in singing which had negative impact.

Bani/style of singing

Banis or styles of singing/playing are named after persons/schools/regions. Ariyakkudi bani, GNB bani, Madurai Mani Iyer bani are well known styles of singing which became schools of music. Tanjore bani is known for mridangam play, Dhanammal bani is famous for Vina play, whereas Lalgudi tradition, MSG bani and M. Chandrasekharan bani are famous violin banis. Most of them outlived other mediocre styles and are carried over to the subsequent years. The outstanding

performers of today belong to anyone of these banis .Each of them tried to maintain the style of their predecessor and enriched it by innovation in the melodic,rhythmical and compositional aspects both through kalpana and kalpita music. Sometimes bani is equalized with the term tradition/sampradaya .But tradition is a wide concept encompassing many features as discussed above and bani is one among them.

Vanished tradition in music

Many practices like gurukula sampradaya of learning ceased to exist. It gave way to institutionalized teaching and learning, and even to e-learning now-a-days. Instead of the old practice of singing without any technology, today microphones and amplifiers help even the feeble sound reach a large audience. Live concerts alone quenched the thirst of music lovers earlier, but now the recording technology has converted music into a market commodity and made its access easy to one and all.

Conclusion

Each and every innovation needs to be validated by time to become a tradition. New trends are always subjected to criticism, and may not have been accepted for the time being, but in due course, those which possess values will be appreciated and manifested as tradition. Hence there is no need to frown upon the emergence of new practices since it is time that validates their existence. Palakkad Mani Iyer says-Tradition or sampradaya connoted usage and practice and in classical music it meant the form and structure in presentation in which music had been handed down as a fineart meant to win the appreciation of the people. There was no point in discussing any tradition which did not find favor with

the public and which was unrelated to it. (Iyer ,1999:490)

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