

Appreciating Hindustani Music
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Lecture 5
The textual Tradition

One of the hallmarks of a classical tradition of music in our context, I mentioned, is the presence of a Textual Tradition of technical writing about the music. And we do have such a tradition for classical music for Hindustani music which has texts in Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic and other regional languages. These texts describe the music, the kinds of composition or other musical components, how music is organized into notes etcetera. They are also prescriptive, you know.

They talk about what makes for a good singer or a bad singer. For some reason 10 is a favorite number and we have 10 features of ragas, 10 vital elements of tala, 10 good qualities of a singer or 10 bad ones and so on. This is- I am talking about some texts.

Now, these texts are the source of our understanding of how our present musical traditions have evolved and these texts are also a source of musical concepts of understanding the musical concepts that we employ today and they help us situate our understanding of this music in a historical context.

In this video there will be a very brief survey of a few important texts and writers that you will hear about in this course from ancient to contemporary times. The Sanskrit texts called Lakshana Granthas spanning two millennia contain descriptions and prescriptions of music of their times. Early texts discuss dance too since song, dance and instruments were considered a composite form a composite performance form called sangeeta.

Sangeeta in today's language, today's usage, sangeeta means just music right, but in the early texts it stands for this composite form that included song, dance and instrumental music. And early, an important text very important text is the Natyasastra, which is attributed to one Bharata Muni and this is actually a manual for theatre. It is a magnificent treatise that goes into the details of every aspect of production and mounting of a play.

Many aspects of performing arts today still carry on with practices, prescriptions and the worldview of that text. Rasa for example, is a very important idea that was first found in the Natyasastra in the context of what the ultimate purpose of theatre is or should be. Na hi rasaadrte kascid-arth- pravartate that is Bharata in the Natyasastra says that there is no meaning without rasa that is rasa is the ultimate goal of theatre. And what is rasa?

Rasa is one of those untranslatable terms, but it is something like the heightened emotive experience that we call aesthetic experience today. In a casual way rasa is also spoken off in the context of music of raga sangeet, but there are problems here which we will go into later. Now, the 20th chapter of Natyasastra is concerned with music since music was a critical aspect of theatre at that time.

Two kinds of music are described in a text ritualistic music or gandharva which is meant to please the gods and invoke their protection. And then you have the music that is used by the characters in the play, the songs that they sing, all the music that plays during the as interludes, this is called gana. Matanga Muni's Brhaddesi of the 8th century describes regional musical styles.

Desi means regional regional styles. Oh, Brhaddesi, it is a great work that talks about the regional styles. And in the in this text in fact, we have what is the most famous definition of raga and the most most quoted definition of raga.

The Sangita Ratnakara of 12th century written by Sarangadeva who was of Kashmiri origin, but settled in the Deccan is also a very famous text an encyclopedic text and it is believed that this was written before the bifurcation into Carnatic and Hindustani music and we will have some occasion to refer to this text too. We have many texts after the 14th century and some of these like Sangita-Damodara of Ahobala and Raga-Vibodha of Somanatha and many other texts are relevant to understanding some of the aspects of today's performance. In modern times 20th century onwards we have writings in English, Hindi and in regional languages notably in Marathi and Bangla. Among these the most important as far as its impact on the world of performance goes is the series of books by Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande.

He consolidated, organized and offered a clear theory with the intent of streamlining practice and he also published hundreds of compositions that he collected from hereditary musicians who were for most part unwilling to part with them.

He notated these compositions and all this at a great personal cost. He along with Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar were two visionaries and reformers who helped Hindustani music enter into the brave new world of modern India as this music transitioned from courtly to public patronage. Pandit Vamanrao Deshpande has been a very influential writer and perhaps his most important contribution is his theory of Gharana that is what makes the stylistic differences in Khayal. Pandit Babanrao Haldankar has also written about the same issue and has in fact, written in some kind of a critique of Vamanrao Deshpande's suggestions and theory. Dr. Ashok Ranade is an eminent musicologist whom I have already referred to and he has written about many many aspects of the performance world. Western scholars too have contributed significantly to the historical socio-cultural and aesthetic analysis of this music. While this course is based mainly on practice and all of us presenting this course are musicians. First and foremost we do draw upon theoretical writings such as those mentioned above.