

The Pedagogical Crisis in Organising Contemporary Indian Music Conferences: Reclaiming the Educational Mandate

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Abstract - In the modern era, while music conferences and seminars are frequently held, they often serve as mere entertainment or a superficial formality. Over the last five decades, the foremost challenge in the field of classical music has been the extreme commercialization of stage performances. Driven by a desire for wealth and fame, musicians now present their art as a commodity—marketed through advertisements and promotional media to meet consumer demand. This paper examines the systemic transformation of scholarly "conferences" into commercial "musical fairs," the disparity in performance opportunities for emerging talent, and the shifting psychographics of listeners in the digital age. By analyzing these challenges, the study concludes that a balance between theoretical integrity and public accessibility is essential for the revitalization of Hindustani Classical Music.

Keywords - Hindustani Classical Music; Sangeet Sammelan; Pedagogical Stewardship; Cultural Commodification; Shastra-Prayog; Music Conference Management; Digital Sociology; Aesthetic Bliss (Ananda).

I Introduction

The tradition of musical gatherings in India has historically been a bridge between the preservation of ancient traditions and the education of the public. However, the contemporary landscape of music conferences presents a complex array of challenges that threaten the core of Hindustani Classical Music. As organizers prioritize commercial success over scholarly discourse, the "Sangeet Sammelan" (Music Conference) is undergoing a crisis of identity. This research explores the friction between the preservation of artistic sanctity and the demands of modern commercialism, setting the stage for a critical discussion on the structural reforms required in the cultural sector.

The Surge of Commercialism and the Crisis of Commodification

In the contemporary era, music conferences and seminars are undoubtedly held, but they often serve merely as a means of entertainment or a superficial formality. Among the problems that have emerged in the field of classical music over the last five decades, the foremost is the extreme commercialization of stage performances. Today, lured by wealth and fame, the musician seeks to present their art as a commodity of

consumption—pushed into households through advertisements and promotional media based on consumer demand. Furthermore, a large number of ‘Organizers’ (Samyojak) have emerged who have adopted music as a business, subsequently exploiting both listeners and artists. Artists, ranging from novices to established names, are constantly searching for promoters. The majority of performers remain confined to time-bound presentations, interested primarily—before and after the performance—in their remuneration (Dakshina). Similarly, many directors and curators today are not true connoisseurs of music but business-oriented managers.

II. Corporate Sponsorship vs. Artistic Freedom

A critical evolution in the 21st-century music conference is the shift from individual philanthropic patronage to corporate-led sponsorship. While corporate funding provides the necessary capital for large-scale events, it often introduces a 'branding bias' that dictates artistic curation. Large corporations frequently pressure organizers to prioritize 'marketable' performances over experimental or theoretically dense presentations. This has led to the 'festivalization' of classical music, where the visual branding and social media aesthetic of the event often take precedence over the acoustic and spiritual integrity of the Raga. Furthermore, smaller, independent promoters who lack corporate backing find themselves unable to compete, leading to a monopolistic culture where only a few 'brand-safe' artists are repeatedly showcased, effectively stifling the diversity that once characterized regional *Sammelans*.

The Transformation of 'Conferences' into 'Musical Fairs'

Contemporary music conferences have often been likened to musical exhibitions or short-lived circuses. In these two-to-three-day general fairs, there is no longer any room for scholarly musical discourse. There is no scope for the exchange of ideas concerning the nuances of the art. The primary concern of organizers is the maximization of ticket sales. Programs often run until seven in the morning, only to resume from ten in the morning until three in the afternoon. Amidst this crowded schedule of artists and media personnel seeking photographs and interviews, who has the time for a profound, substantive discussion on music? Even scholars, deprived of sleep during the night-long performances, find themselves dozing during the day.

They possess neither the time nor the inclination to deliberate on the grave questions facing the musical world. In ancient times, experts did not equate musical debate with conflict; today, it is viewed as a "fight" because those who cannot engage deeply simply exit the conversation through confrontation. Organizers, too, are so preoccupied with scheduling the next act that they view scholarly discussion as a futile waste of time. They have no reason to initiate such discussions, knowing well that neither the audience nor the performers are focused on this aspect. Even if a few scholars are present, their voices are lost in an environment that has no place for such discourse.

Technological Impact on Performance Length

The transformation of conferences into fairs is further exacerbated by the 'digital shortening' of performances. In the era of streaming and short-form content, the psychological attention span of the average listener has noticeably decreased. Organizers, fearing audience attrition, have begun imposing strict time limits on performers, often reducing a traditional three-hour *Mehfil* to a mere 45-minute set. This constraint prevents the slow, meditative unfolding of the *Vilambit* (slow tempo) phase of the Raga, which is essential for establishing its emotional essence. Consequently, artists are forced to

skip intricate developments, moving directly to high-speed Taans and rhythmic Tihais to elicit quick applause. This 'fast-food' approach to classical music not only dilutes the artist's creative process but also trains the new generation of listeners to appreciate only the superficial, athletic aspects of the art rather than its deep, contemplative core.

The Paradox of Intellectual Pretense

If these conferences are merely fairs, why are audiences subjected to long speeches on the miracles of Hindustani music? Why is there an invocation of divine figures and legends like Gandharvas, Shiva, Narada, Saraswati, Hari Das Swami, Tansen, Baiju Bawra, Nayak Gopal, and Sharngadeva? Why are themes such as "Artist and Society," "Music and Devotion," "Music and Salvation," "Music and National Culture," or "Music and Modern Education" commented upon when there is no intention of hosting a genuine debate? Occasionally, a scholar is invited to inaugurate a conference, delivering a profound speech on aesthetics, beauty, and human perception. While organizers applaud and newspapers print long laudatory notes the next day, the reality remains unchanged. The organizers celebrate a "grand success," the audience enjoys entertainment, and the artists are satisfied with their fees. The only "aggrieved party" is Hindustani Classical Music itself—which remains misunderstood and unobserved.

The Role of Academic Institutions

The paradox of intellectual pretense also points to a widening gap between academic music departments and the professional performance stage. While universities continue to churn out doctoral research on musicology, these scholarly insights rarely influence the curation of mainstream music conferences. The 'Conference' has become a performance-only platform, whereas its original intent—as seen in the Bhatkhande era—was to be a laboratory for musical reform. There is a desperate need for a 'Theory- Practice' (Shastra-Prayog) reintegration, where academic researchers are given an active voice in conference advisory boards. Without this, the scholarly aspects of music remain confined to dusty library shelves, while the public stage remains a site of repetitive, un-critiqued entertainment.

Disparity in Opportunities and the Struggle for Recognition

A significant challenge lies in the inequality of performance opportunities. Every aspirant dreams of becoming an established artist through talent, perseverance, rigorous practice (Riyaz), quality training (Taalim), family support, personality, luck, and the guidance of a mentor (Guru). Today, opportunities are either unavailable or biased. There is no standard criteria for the selection of artists; instead, selections are often based on personal preference. We lack a structured system that allows a talented young practitioner to climb the ladder from local to international levels. Consequently, many honest practitioners spend their lives waiting for a stage that never comes, leading to frustration and despair. Conversely, top-tier artists receive constant invitations, and their honorariums skyrocket beyond the reach of average organizers. Institutions such as the Sangeet Natak Akademi and various cultural departments should consider categorizing artists and determining an annual quota for programs, similar to the protocols of All India Radio i.e. Akashvani. It is imperative that cultural organizations stop chasing only "big names" and provide platforms to talented but less-famous performers.

Audience Engagement and Criticism in the Digital Age

Scarcity of time and late-night schedules prevent many from attending. Furthermore, the 21st-century digital revolution—accelerated by the COVID-19 era—introduced a

new format of virtual concerts and webinars. While this was a welcome initiative during a tragedy, it cannot replace the physical experience of a live Mehfil. A new mentality has emerged where listeners compare every performer to "top stars" on their devices rather than listening with an open heart. Additionally, film music and "light" genres have diluted classical festivals. The days of fearless and honest reviews have vanished. Today, healthy criticism is taken negatively, hindering the success of both the artist and the art. Instead of self-reflection, artists often question the critic, leading to a culture of "false praise."

The Sociology of Global Digital Consumption

The 21st-century digital landscape has created a global, yet fragmented, audience. While platforms like YouTube and Spotify have democratized access, allowing a listener in New York to hear a Khayal from Lucknow, this has also led to the 'homogenization' of style. Younger artists, observing which clips 'go viral,' often imitate the mannerisms of famous maestros to gain social media traction, leading to the erosion of regional Gharana nuances. This digital sociology creates a 'confirmation bias' where the most popular (rather than the most profound) styles are algorithmically promoted. The organizational challenge now involves curating 'phygital' (physical + digital) experiences that leverage the reach of technology without succumbing to its tendency to prioritize viral gimmicks over authentic artistry.

The Pedagogical Imperative: Realigning Conference Structures with the Educational Mandate

The revitalization of music conferences requires a nuanced approach that balances tradition with modern accessibility. The below points are proposed to be considered:-

Format Integrity: It is not advisable to radically change the format of music conferences just to fill the galleries. The objective should be to make classical music comprehensible while ensuring the core foundations and theoretical integrity remain secure.

Tiered Appreciation: The deepest intricacies can remain the domain of experts, but the art must reach the common man.

The Selective Nature of High Art: Pure classical music is like a diamond—it is not for everyone. Understanding it requires the grace of Goddess Saraswati and the fruit of virtuous deeds.

Institutional Support: If the state and society provide generous support and liberality to these music conferences, the "Ocean of Music" will surely surge with grand waves once again. The treasury of Goddess Saraswati is unlimited; it only requires the right stewardship to flourish.

Theoretical Re-Integration (Shastra-Prayog Nexus)

The fundamental crisis in contemporary organization is the systemic decoupling of performance from its pedagogical roots. Historically, the Sangeet Sammelan was designed as an extension of the Gurukul, serving as a public classroom where the audience was initiated into the complexities of the Raga system. To rectify this, conferences must move toward a 'Lecture- Demonstration' (Lec-Dem) integrated model. Rather than a string of disconnected performances, organizers should curate themed sessions that explain the historical and theoretical lineage of the compositions. Without this instructional framework, the audience remains a passive consumer of sound rather

than an active participant in a living heritage, effectively defeating the educational purpose of the art form.

Cultivating 'Ananda' over Fleeting Entertainment

Classical music's ultimate aim is Ananda (Eternal Happiness/Aesthetic Bliss), a state of consciousness that transcends mere sensory excitement. Organizational challenges, such as shortened performance slots to accommodate "star" schedules, force artists to skip the meditative Vilambit (slow) phases. This prioritizes "entertainment" (speed and gimmicks) over "enlightenment." To restore the original aim, organizers must educate the audience on "Deep Listening." By curating sessions that allow for the full, unhurried development of a Raga, the conference fulfills its duty to provide the listener with a profound spiritual experience rather than a temporary distraction.

Institutional Stewardship and Talent Incubation

Education is not limited to the audience; it extends to the "education of opportunity" for practitioners. National bodies like the Sangeet Natak Akademi must act as pedagogical stewards rather than just funding agencies. By creating "Educational Performance Circuits" in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities, we can decentralize the "Star Culture" and provide a platform for graded, scholarly artists who prioritize traditional purity over commercial virality. This systemic shift ensures that the educational mission of the conference—producing both knowledgeable artists and informed listeners—survives the pressures of the digital age.

Recommendations - The Pedagogical Imperative

From a cultural policy perspective, the role of national bodies like the Sangeet Natak Akademi needs to evolve from being mere funding agencies to becoming active 'talent incubators.' Current grant-in-aid schemes often reach established institutions, leaving independent, grassroots organizers in the lurch. International research journals often point to the 'European model' of state-funded arts, where dedicated budgets are set aside for 'risky' or 'non-commercial' traditional forms. India requires a similar 'Artist Protection Policy' that guarantees minimum performance opportunities for graded artists. By decentralizing the festival culture away from metros and into Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities through government-backed circuits, we can ensure that classical music remains a living tradition rather than a museum piece reserved for the urban elite.

III. Conclusion

The revitalization of Hindustani Classical Music conferences necessitates a paradigm shift from commercial exploitation back to pedagogical stewardship. This research concludes that while the democratization of the art form is essential, the dilution of its educational and didactic foundations to satisfy market demands is a detrimental compromise. The very purpose of a Sangeet Sammelan is defeated when the pursuit of ticket sales eclipses the pursuit of Vidya. By reintegrating scholarly discourse, fostering fearless criticism, and leveraging state support, we can reclaim the conference as a sacred space of learning. Only then can the "Ocean of Music" provide the eternal happiness and intellectual enlightenment it was originally destined to offer.

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