

MUSIC AND DANCE IN BUDDHIST LITERATURE

Music occupies a prominent place in Fine Arts — *gītaṃ vā-dyaṃ tathā nr̥tyaṃ trayāṃ Saṅgītaṃ ucyate*. Music includes Music Vocal, Music Instrumental and Dance. Vedic and Classical Sanskrit Literature is full of the sweetness of Music as well as the references of technical terms of Music. A number of references of Music Vocal, Instrumental and Dance are found in Buddhist Literature that bring to light the prominence of the art of music in those days. Music found in Buddhist Literature has been beautifully presented in India's ancient sculpture and paintings through which a thorough study of Music and Dance of those days can be done.

The Art of Music was learnt like other *vidyās* by the members of rich and well-to-do families. Bodhisattva himself was an expert in Music and drama. The ladies of his family were also expert musicians. We get a reference in *Lalitavistara* that Māyā Devī, mother of Buddha was expert in Fine Arts. Before marriage, the would be father-in-law of Buddha had placed a condition that in order to prove himself a worthy bridegroom for his daughter who was extremely expert in arts, he would have to demonstrate his expertise in Fine Arts<sup>1</sup>. Such a bride was required for Siddhārtha who was an expert in Fine Arts as a courtesan — *Śāstre vidhigya-kuśalā gaṇikā yathaiva*<sup>2</sup>. *Buddhacarita* refers that the instruments like *mahatī*, *vīṇā*, *mṛdaṅga*, *paṇava*, *tūrya*, *veṇu* etc. were played

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1. CHAKLADAR, *Social Life in Ancient India*, p. 85.

2. *Lalitavistara*, 12, p. 139; CHAKLADAR, p. 127, 139.

for entertainment in the harems. The story entitled *Pitrputrasamā-gama* refers to the presentation of an orchestra consisting of 500 instruments at the time of the celebration of Lord Buddha's birth<sup>3</sup>. Such an orchestra now-a-days is heard at the great Govt. celebrations or the recordings of film music.

In Buddha age, Takṣaśilā was the Centre of Education where there were a number of teaching departments like Vedic Vidyā-laya, Aṣṭādaśa Vidyālaya, Śilpavijñāna Vidyālaya etc. where 500 students each used to study<sup>4</sup>. Vedic *pañca-mahāvīdyā* consisting of *śabdavidyā*, *adhyātmavidyā*, *cikitsāvidyā*, *hetuvidyā* and *śilpavidyā* was known by the technical term *pañcayāna* in *Jātaka* age<sup>5</sup>. According to *Paropahassa Jātaka*, Bodhisattva had got the training of all the *śilpas* in this very University of Takṣaśilā. Another centre of education of the same age was Vārāṇasī where there was an independent department of Music. In other universities of Nālandā, Vikramaśilā and Odantapurī also, there were independent faculties of music where India-famed musicians were appointed as Deans and Heads of the departments<sup>6</sup>. Gandhabba Veda or Gāndharva Veda was the technical term denoting music which included *gīta*, *vāditta* and *naccha* (*nṛtya*), *akkhānam* etc. Singing of ancient *ākhyāna* and *vīragāthā* was included in *akkhāna*<sup>7</sup>. This was included in 'sippa' or 'śilpa'.

The study of *Veda* and *Vedāṅgas* in *Jātaka* age was as popular as it was in Vedic age<sup>8</sup>. The *Chāndogya Carāṇa* of *Sāman* is referred to in *Tevijja Sutta*. The Ācāryas of *Chāndogya Carāṇa* are called 'Chandoka' in *Dīghanikāya*. A Brahmin named Śaila is described in *Selasutta* who was an expert in the three *Vedas* and *Vedāṅgas* and who used to teach three hundred students. During those days the tradition of reciting *Bauddha Suttas* with Svāra like the Vedic mantras was very much popular. Pāli *Mahāvagga*<sup>9</sup> and

3. BAPAT, *Arthapāda*, p. 152.

4. *Jātakakālīna Bhāratiya Saṃskṛti*, p. 98.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 98.

6. RADHAKUMUD MUKHOPADHYAYA, *Ancient Indian Education*, p. 490.

7. *Dīghanikāya* I, p. 6.

8. *Setaketu Jātaka*, 337; *Jātakakālīna Bhāratiya Saṃskṛti*, p. 97.

9. *Mahāvagga*, 5, 13, 9.

*Udāna*<sup>10</sup> refer that on the wish of Gautama, a Bhikkhu named Koṇa Kuttikaṇṇa had recited the *Suttas* of *Āṭṭhakavaggika* (*Arthapāda*) — 'Sareṇa abhāsi'<sup>11</sup>.

We get a list of the means of livelihood prevalent in those days in *Jātaka granthas* which includes the following categories — *nāṭa*, *nartaka*, *gāyaka*, *bherivādaka* and *nāṭakakāra*<sup>12</sup>. All these are connected with music to some extent in one or the other way. All these had their own *saṅghas* and separate *upaniveśas* were arranged for them in the town. In those days, courtezans and dancers commanded high respect in the society like an expert musician. *Gaṅgamāla Jātaka* describes that 16,000 female dancers were invited to present music and dance at the auspicious occasion of the marriage of Princess (III.452). According to a work, *Sumaṅgalavilāsini*, a number of expert female dancers were appointed in the harem of Kāśīnareśa<sup>13</sup>. In those days, *gaṇikā* (courtezan) commanded higher respect in the society than the ordinary *veśyā* (prostitute) because she was expert in the art of music. *Gaṇikā* used to know a number of *Śāstras* which included music also — *Śāstre Vidhigyakuśalā gaṇikā yathaiva*. For the efficient rule of the country, besides chiefs of departments, *Ekādaśa Aṅga* was also required which included *gaṇikā* (see *Kurudhamma Jātaka*). *Veśyā* commanded national respect in the form of *Janapadakalyāṇī*. The *Pañcaśīla-dīkṣā* was essential for her (see *Dummedha Jātaka*).

The art of music and drama had a very high place in Buddha age. For the development of the art of music and drama, royal patronage is a must and the same was available to these arts in those times. Artists like musicians (vocalists), instrument players, and male and female dancers were formally appointed for the royal kingdom. *Milindapañha* refers to the appointment of 16,000 female dancers in a royal *sabhā* (*Solassa nāṭakisahasessu*)<sup>14</sup>. In a royal *sabhā* where 16,000 female dancers are permanently ap-

10. *Udāna*, 5, 6.

11. BAPAT, *Arthapādasutta*, Introduction, p. 1.

12. *Milindapañha*, 331; B.C. LAW, pp. 66-67.

13. LAW, *Tribes of Ancient India*, 1943, p. 110.

14. B.C. LAW, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

pointed, we can easily infer the beauty and grandeur of the royal musical performances which occur there. Although there were permanent singers, instrument players and dancers in a royal *sa-bhā*, courtezans were specially invited to present music vocal, instrumental and dance when need be<sup>15</sup>. The kings and the distinguished personalities of those times used to support the Baudha *vihāras* financially and otherwise too. Adequate finances were provided to the *ārādhaka* artists by the royal kingdom. They were appointed in the *vihāras* for *ārādhanā*. The royal kingdom had its full control over these artists. We come to know from a cave-inscription found in Saragujā state that there was a *devadāsī* named Sutanukā in the *vihāra* situated there. She had an affair with the *ārādhaka* of the *vihāra*. Both of them were given severe punishment for that.

There were a number of celebrations and festivities which included music vocal, Instrumental and Dance in the Society of Buddha period. The Travelogue of Fa-hi-yan clearly indicates such celebrations which took place in Magadha. These social celebrations were known by the term *Samaja* or *Samāja*. The inscriptions of Aśoka provide ample proof that such group celebrations (*Samajja*) were regularly organised in the society. In *Vidhura Paṇḍita Jātaka* we get a description of a *samajja* in which all men and women had presented music and dance<sup>16</sup>. We come to know from *Sigālovāda Suttanta* that *ākhyānas* were also sung in such social festivities<sup>17</sup>. As in the modern age, grand music concerts are organised in beautiful auditoriums and great personalities of the society are invited, similarly, in that age also, group celebrations were organised on the tops of mountains and other pious places and the respected members of the society were specially invited to attend those functions<sup>18</sup>. *Visuddhimagga* describes a celebration in which 500 female dancers were invited<sup>19</sup>.

*Pekkhā* or *Prekṣā* was the technical term for *Nāṭya* in Buddha

15. *Ibid.*, p. 166.

16. *Jātaka*, 6, 277.

17. See R. DAVIDS, p. 83.

18. *Ibid.*

19. *Vimānavatthubhāṣya*, 62-74; *Tribes of Ancient India*, p. 218.

age. The director of *Nāṭya* was called *Naṭācārya*. The epithet of *Naṭagāmaṇi* was used for the foremost *Naṭa*. The *Naṭas* used to entertain the audience with the presentation of different types of acting on the stage — *yo so naṭo raṅgamajjhe samajja-majjhe sac-cālikena janam hāseti rameti*<sup>20</sup>. In the presentation of a drama, *naṭī* was also there with the *naṭa*. *Naṭīs* did not command respect in the society because sometimes they indulged themselves in the business of their physique by way of decoration and their expertise in the arts of music and Dance. We get a peculiar reference in *Kuśa Jātaka* where it is mentioned that the king having no progeny from his wives used to send them in the form of *dharmanaṭīs* to other males of their choice for conception<sup>21</sup>.

The enjoyment of a note (*svara*) presented by playing on an instrument is called instrumental music. According to Bharata-muni, musical instruments have been classified into four groups — *tata*, *avanaddha*, *suṣira* and *ghana* as follows:

*tataṃ tantrikṛtaṃ jñeyam  
avanaddhaṃ tu pauṣkaram.  
ghanaṃ tālas tu vijñeyah  
suṣiro vaṃśa ucyate.*

(*Nāṭya-Śāstra* - XXVIII.2.)

The references of all these four types of instruments are found in Buddhist Literature. Musical instruments using stretched strings — be they of grass, animal gut or metal wire and which are played by fingers (e.g. *svaramaṇḍala*, *tambūrā*) or by the help of *koṇa* or *trikoṇa* (e.g. *viṇā*, *sitāra* and *saroda*) or *gaja* (e.g. violin, *sāraṅgī*, *isarāja* and *dilarubā*) or stick (e.g. *santūra*) — are called *tata* instruments (cordophones or stringed instruments). Among the *tata* instruments, the following are referred to in Buddhist Literature — *viṇā*, *parivādinī*, *vipañcī*, *vallakī*, *mahatī*, *nakulī*, *kacchapī* and *tumbaviṇā*. In fact, all these are the different types of *viṇās*.

20. *Gāmanisanyutta*, 4, p. 306; KANE, *History of Sanskrit Poetics*, p. 323.

21. *Jātakakālina Bhāratīya Saṃskṛtī*, Vīyogī, p. 14.

We get the reference of nineteen types of *vīṇās* in the *Sāṅgīta-makaranda* composed by Nārada. They are *kacchapī*, *kubjikā*, *ci-trā*, *vahantī*, *parivādinī*, *Jayā*, *ghoṣāvātī*, *jyeṣṭhā*, *nakulī*, *mahatī*, *vaiṣṇavī*, *brāhmī*, *raudrī*, *kūrmī*, *rāvaṇī*, *sārasvatī*, *kinnarī*, *sairan-dhrī*, and *ghoṣaka*. Originally, there was only one type of *vīṇā* which was multiplied in different types of *vīṇās* with different numbers of strings in them and also with different ways of playing in due course of time. This fact is brought out by Someśvara in his *Mānasollāsa*:

*Tantribhedaiḥ kriyābhedair vīṇāvādyam anekadhā.*

(III.572).

The *tata* instruments referred to in Buddhist Literature are in fact different types of *vīṇās*. *Vīṇā* was the general term for *tata* instruments in those days. *Vīṇā* was the most popular instrument of that time. *Dīghanikāya* mentions that the music presented with the playing of *vīṇā* is so pleasant to the ears of the listener that even Buddhadeva, who had renounced the world was attracted by it. The story runs thus: there was a Gandharva named Pañcasikha who fell in love with Sūryavarcasā, daughter of Tumbaru, a famous Gandharva. Depressed in his affair, one day, he was singing a pathetic song with the playing of *vīṇā*. The co-ordination and harmony presented by the notes produced by playing on *vīṇā* and the words of that pathetic song were such that compelled Lord Buddha to be pleased and applaud the music thus: Oh! The effect of music is imperishable.

Fine Art like music etc. received royal patronage. A number of concerts and competitions of the *vīṇā* players were organised in which winners had the privilege to receive awards and royal patronage. In those days, there were a number of expert *vīṇā*-players. *Mūsila Jātaka* presents testimony to the efficient playing of *vīṇā* in those days. There is a story that jealousy arose between two: Mūsila, the famous *vīṇā*-player of Ujjayinī and Guttila, the famous *vīṇā*-player of Vārāṇasī. Although, Mūsila had learnt the secret intricacies of *vīṇā* playing from Guttila himself, but now he wanted to defeat him in *vīṇā*-playing. A competition between the two was organised in the royal assembly. Guttila started his grand

performance on *vīṇā*. He, while playing on the seven strings of the *vīṇā*, broke its strings one by one and continued to play notes on the remaining strings. During the last moments of his performance, when all the strings had been broken, the notes were still resounding as if they were coming out from the *vīṇā-daṇḍa* itself. This brings to light the fact that the technique of producing more than one note at a time by the *karṣaṇa* of the strings of *vīṇā* was popular in those days. *Vīṇā* was played with the help of *koṇa*.

The instruments hollow from inside and covered with the hide of animals and which are played upon by hands or sticks are called *avanaddha* or *ānaddha* instruments (Membranophones). According to Bharatamuni, there were one hundred types of *avanaddha* instruments but he has not given detailed description of each of them. *Avanaddha* instruments referred to in Buddhist Literature are *mrdaṅga*, *paṇava*, *bherī*, *ḍiṇḍima* and *dundubhi*. *Daṇḍa* was used for playing on *mrdaṅga*. A number of *koṇas* and *vādana-daṇḍas* have been found in excavations carried at the following places: Kauśāmbī, Rāmanagara, Rājaghāṭa, Mathurā and Bhītā. The instruments which are played by striking with a stick or rubbing are called *ghana* instruments (idiophones). Any two pieces of solid struck or rubbed together can become an idiophone. These do not require any special kind of tuning and can be played as they are made. *Ghaṇṭā*, *jhallarī* and *kāṃsyatāla* were among the famous *ghana* instruments popular in those times. Instruments that use air directly or indirectly to produce sound are called *suṣira* (wind) instruments (Aerophones). In most of the wind instruments, air is made to vibrate and is the cause of tones, but in some cases, as in the harmonium, air is only a means to vibrate a reed which gives out a note<sup>22</sup>. Among the *suṣira* instruments referred to in Buddhist Literature are *śaṅkha*, *tūrya*, *kurala*, *śṛṅga* etc. In ancient times, playing of *tūryas* was popular on the auspicious occasion of child-birth and marriages etc. and also at the time of battle for which we get different terms e.g. *maṅgala-tūrya* and *yuddha-tūrya*. There were *yāma-tūryas* also for the announcement of time. The sounds pleasing to the ear of auspicious *tūryas* could be heard not only on

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22. B.C. DEVA, *Musical Instruments of India*, p. 103.

earth-but-also-in-the-path-of-Gods<sup>23</sup>.

In the age of Buddha, besides *svara*, *grāma* and *mūrcchanā*, the singing of *rāgas* also came into being. It was the general opinion that sweet music can attract even animals and birds. A number of researches are being carried out these days in this regard. In Vocal and Instrumental Music, the presentation of the notes in their exact form and their sweetness are most essential. The presentation of notes in their exact form means the very correct use of notes and the sweetness means that the presentation of the notes of music should be pleasant to the ears of the listener. *Visvaratva* is a great defect of *gāna* or *vādana*. If a person presents *visvara* note, the effect of music vanishes. It was the firm belief of the musicians in those days that a short *susvara-gāna* (Song presenting exact notes) is far better than a long *visvara-gāna* (Song presenting wrong notes).

To conclude, it can be said that all the three aspects of music e.g. Vocal, Instrumental and Dance were in their developed stage in Buddha age. People used to sing. Singing was accompanied by the playing of numerous instruments. All the four types of instruments were played. Alongwith music vocal and instrumental, dance was also very popular. Hundreds and thousands of distinguished female dancers were specially invited on specific occasions for their dance-performances. Music had a peculiar place in drama also. Arts like music and drama received royal patronage for their development. Music was utilised for both the purposes: *pāramārthika* as well as erotic. Bauddhas favoured that music only which did not come in the way of their spiritual practices. For the worship of music *ārādhakas* and *devadāsīs* were permanently appointed in *bauddhavihāras*. Royal kingdom had its full control over them. The group performances of music were organised on the auspicious occasion of the famous festivities like *giragga*, *samajja*, and *nakkattakilam*. On these occasions, singing of the *nāṭya* and *ākhyānas* was also presented alongwith music.

Keeping in view the references found in Buddhist Literature pertaining to music and dance, it can be inferred that their au-

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23. *Tevijjasutta*, *Dīghanikāya*, 251, LAW, p. 224.



thors were well-versed in vocal music, instrumental music and dance. They had sound knowledge of all the four types of instruments prevalent in their times. They had not only the theoretical knowledge of these instruments, but also expertise in their practical performance, otherwise, they could not have successfully described minute intricacies of the various instruments and their playing in their works. It appears that these authors had mastery over the knowledge of *trividha-saṅgīta* (threefold music) and its various aspects such as occasion of playing particular musical instruments, their co-ordination with singing and dancing etc. To understand the real meaning of various words used by these authors in their works in the context of music, it is desirable to have an interpretation based on *Saṅgītaśāstra* (musicology) otherwise it is difficult to appreciate their works in its real perspective.

A brief account of the music pertaining to Buddhist Literature is presented here. During that period, what was the exact form of all the three aspects of music; did musicians and artists command high respect in the society; what was the influence of the music of Vedic age on the music of Buddha age; what was the influence of the music of Buddha age on the music of the classical Sanskrit age etc. are some topics on which researches are urgently needed. Researches done on these topics will bring to light new facts which will highlight the importance of Buddhist Literature.