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# CLASSICAL MUSIC CONFERENCE CULTURE OF NORTH INDIA WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO KOLKATA

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## Abstract:

The music of any country has its own historical and cultural background. Social changes, political changes, and patronage changes may influence the development of music. This may affect the practices in the field of music. This present study does the scrutiny of the broad sociocultural settings in context to the music conferences of India. The study then mainly probes and explores the prime music conferences of India, with special reference to Kolkata, from a century ago till the present time. It shows the role of music conferences in disseminating interest and appreciation of Classical music among the common public. The cultural climate shaped under the domination of British rule included the shift of patronage from aristocratic courts to wealthy persons and a mercantile class of urban Kolkata. This allowed the musicians to earn a livelihood, and at the same time, provided them with a new range of opportunities in the form of an increasing number of music conferences. This happened at a time when a new class of Western-educated elites was formed in Kolkata. Analyzing the present scenario, made it clear that Kolkata still leads in the number of music festivals / Classical music conferences. The present study also points out the contemporary complexities that conference organizers face, and to conclude, incorporates suggestions to sustain the culture of the conference.

## I Introduction

Music may be regarded as old as nature itself. Music is an integral part of nature, indestructible, and inseparable. Music is the omnipresent and universal

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language. Music is there in the whistling of the wind, chirping of the birds, roaring of the sea, the rattle of the wheels, and so on and so forth - music merely is unending. Each one of these sources of music represents a different note, a different feeling, and a different joy. To feel the music, an individual must be attentive and possess an eager heart. Music is one of the best media of expression. For accomplishing excellence and refinement of this art form, numerous saints, artists, and music lovers for ages have worked hard. They beautified Swar (Voice) with the harmonious amalgamation of Taal (Rhythm), Laya (Timing), Sur (Melody), and other ornamentations and thus developed an art that suited all times and moods and simultaneously also excelled in joy and purity.

During the Vedic period, which ranges between 2000 B.C. to 600 A.D, the development of music primarily took place through mantras and Vedic hymns. The Vedic hymns served mainly as a prayer to Gods and Goddesses.

“Through these mantras and hymns, the scales of music were developed through musical notes. These scales later became the fundamental principles in the further development of music” (More and Anuradha, 2013).

According to Hindu mythology, in the heaven of Indra (God of Rain), there were singers (Gandharvas), female dancers (Apsaras), and Kinnaras playing instruments. Even the Goddess of learning and music sits on a lotus of white colour and plays the Veena. It is believed that Narada, a sage brought the art of music to the earth among humans (Dubey, 2015)

Initially, Classical music in India was confined only to temples/ashrams and royal courts or durbars (M. Banerjee, 2010). It is believed that from the time of Shah Alam II, musicians started losing royal patronage. From the year 1765, under the British raj, Shah Alam II held a purely formal position without any real authority, and it became difficult for him to sustain the music culture, practiced by his ancestors. As a result, musicians started leaving Delhi and arrived at various royal courts of nawabs, maharajas, and zamindars of different princely states such as Awadh, Bishnupur, Bardhaman, Betia-Rewa Rampur, Boroda, Dhaka, Dharampur and others (Swami, 2011). In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, many British traders and merchants came to India, and soon the Western Education system was introduced. With the advent of Western education, the political, social, religious, literary, and cultural scenario started changing, and the 19<sup>th</sup> century marked the transition to the modern age from medieval age (Bose, 2011). During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the advent of chamber concerts outside the religious centers and durbars were initiated by the Classical music connoisseurs (Banerjee, 2010). In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Classical music concerts ultimately moved to a much bigger cultural public sphere in large auditoriums, halls, and open ground pandals (Bakhle, 2005; Mallick, 2016). The transition from chamber concerts to public sphere concert became inevitable with the gradual decline of princely states and royal courts, which were the prime source of patronage (Mukherjee, 1989), and therefore the musicians had to depend on the public music concerts. At the time of rapid Westernization of Indian culture under the British rule, the classical music connoisseurs by holding music programs, intended to rejuvenate the fading

traditional Indian music, simultaneously strengthening oneness/unity among Indians. Their love for Indian art forms may also be the reason for organizing these music programs. However, this sort of endeavour by them promoted the spread as well as the practice of Indian Classical music, and as a result, interest for Classical music started growing among the common public. It is not that only nawabs and maharajas organized these concerts, but people from other spheres of work such as notable citizens, bureaucrats, religious leaders, politicians, and others took an interest in organizing these music programs (Banerjee, 2010). People like Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande (1860-1936) and Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (1872-1931) made great efforts out of love and support for the country to impart the status of a nationalistic project to Hindustani Classical music. This was a part of the reform process of classical music in modern India by the duo (Atarshi, 2015). There were also ticketed music concerts by Ustad Abdul Karim Khan and Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar (Kosambi, 2017). Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, arranged music concerts, charging moderate ticket rates. These concerts were open to the rich as well as the common man (Mishra, 1981). In one of such concerts (1922), organized by Pandit Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, Herabai Borodekar gave her first public performance (Ray, 2005).

The First All India Music Conference in Baroda, under the guidance of Pandit Bhatkhande, and patronage of the ruler of Boroda was organized in the year 1916, in which musicians from various gharanas performed in the presence of the common public. Owing to the financial problems, the second All India Music Conference was arranged in Delhi in the year 1918. The Nawab of Rampur acted as the president in this second session. The third and the fourth All India Music Conference was organized at Benaras (1919) and Lucknow (1925), respectively (Banerjee, 2010).

Around the decade of the 1930s, a renaissance was observed in the sphere of classical music in Kolkata. This was evident from the fact that an increasing number of music conferences were held at Calcutta every year and appreciation of classical music was reflected among the middle-class peoples (Atarshi, 2015). Before this time, Kolkata had already become a seat of cultural activities. It needs to be mentioned that around 1856, Wajid Ali Shah, the last nawab of Awadh, Lucknow, was exiled by the British, and he shifted to Kolkata (Llewellyn Rosie, 2001). He brought with himself one hundred hundred and eight musicians, which also included Baijis. Wajid Ali Shah and his musicians greatly enriched the music of Kolkata. With his death, maharaja Shaurindramohan Tagore (1840 – 1914), gave shelter and patronage to some musicians and involved himself in authoring Sanskrit scripts like '*Sangeetsara*,' '*Sangeet Darpan*' and others. Zamindars of Bengal also offered patronage to musicians (Mallick, 2016).

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Zamindars and merchants of Bengal preferred to move to urban locations, centered around Calcutta, to involve in trade and pleasure. There the mercantile class ended buying lands and estates and attained prosperity with the help of British free traders. Small courts in these estates attracted several

musicians from unsound royal courts (Mukherjee, 1998). The coalescence between English culture and Bengali culture gave rise to 'babu culture,' in Kolkata, a city associated with the British raj and East India Company (Bose, 2011). The babus were flamboyant urban men of Bengal who had intimate interaction or association with the East India Company and the British rulers (Gupta, 2009).

The wealthy patrons of Kolkata included the Thakurs of Jorasako and Pathurighata, the Mullicks of Sindurpatti, the Nandis of the Kashim Bazar Raj Palace, the Debs of Shovabazar and Shimulia and several others. Raichand and Bishenchand Boral, who were brothers, in memory of their father, Lalchand Boral, started a music conference '*Lalchand Smriti Utsab*,' in the year 1928, which continued for few years (Gupta, 1990; Sanyal, 1998). When Delhi became the capital of India in 1911, there was a negative impact on Bengal's economy. Commercial activities of all sorts were moved to Bombay. During such time, the Marwaris gained prominence, strength, and wealth in Kolkata. These non-Bengali class also started serving as patrons. This included Shyamlal Kshetri, Rustamji of the famous Madan company, Seth Doolichand, and others (Angurbala, 1965).

With independence, the Indian government patronized Indian Classical Music employing All India Radio, which started broadcasting Classical music programs. The programs benefited the artists and were appreciated by listeners and lovers of Classical music. The minister of Information and Broadcasting, Dr. B.V. Keskar, started a national program of music in 1952, in which an artist's performance could be broadcasted at the same time throughout the country. The broadcasting time was one and a half hours, every Saturday at 9.30 of night. In 1954, a new program started, which came to be known as '*Akashvani Sangeet Sammelan*,' where artists performed in front of invited audiences. Similar to the former program, this program was also heard at the same time throughout the country. Both the radio programs were a huge success. Musicians from across the country performed in it (Banerjee, 2010).

## II

### Music Conferences of Different States of India

According to senior vocalist and musicologist Pandit Vijay Kichu, around the 1950s and 1960s, West Bengal used to host nearly two hundred music conferences, and the majority of these conferences were held in Kolkata (Kichlu, 2015). During such time, comparatively few music conferences were held in other states of India, such as Punjab, Bombay, Pune, Delhi, and Benaras. An account of the old music conferences of different states are briefly presented below:

#### ***Hariballabh Sangeet Sammelan***

This music festival existed even before Pandit Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande made a sincere effort and employed methodical approaches of spreading and propagating Indian Classical music among common man. In the latter half of the 18th century, the birth of baba Hariballabh took place in Bajwara village, located in the district of Hoshiarpur, Punjab. While still in his teens, he was brought to

Jullundur by his maternal grandfather. Hariballabh's maternal grandfather, when visiting Devi Talab and listening to Swami Tuljagiri's Bhajan in Dhrupad style, used to often take young Hariballabh with him. These meetings of Hariballabh with Swami Tuljagiri made a strong impact on his mind. When Hariballabh was seated in the steps of Devi Talab, with closed eyes, and in deep meditation, Swami Tuljagiri was standing and watching him. When Hariballabh opened his eyes, he was taken as a disciple by Swami Tuljagiri. Hariballabh became a great bhajan singer in Dhrupad style. In 1874, after the demise of Swami Tuljagiri, Hariballabh, in honour of his guru, organized a memorial ceremony on the day of his first death anniversary in December. There saints and sadhus sang devotional songs for two days. After the death of baba Hariballabh, his disciple Baba Tola Ram carried forward his tradition, and in the honour and memory of his guru, he organized the Hariballabh Sangeet Sammelan. Baba Tola Ram began inviting reputed Classical musicians, and gradually with time, the conference became a significant Classical music festival. This music festival is now more than 140 years old and is still organized (Banerjee, 2010).

### ***Sankat Mochan Sangeet Samaroh***

This festival takes place in the premises of Sankat Mochan Temple of Benaras and was instituted to celebrate the Hanuman Jayanti, nearly ninety-five years ago. The temple's god is Hanumaan. This temple is said to have been founded by Tulsidas, the author of 'Ramcharitmanas.' This festival was a 2-day event in the 1960s, and now it has become a six-day music festival. The performances at the festival begin in the evening and continues till the morning (Interview to the Organizing Committee of Sankat Mochan Sangeet Samaroh in 2017).

### ***Swami Haridas Sangeet Sammelan and Kal Ke Kalakar***

Among the old music conferences of Bombay, Swami Haridas Sangeet Sammelan and Kal Ke Kalakar may be mentioned. These two conferences were organized by Sur Singar Samsad, a Bombay based cultural organization, founded by Pt. Brij Narayan. Swami Haridas Sangeet Sammelan was started in the memory and honour of Swami Haridas, a 16th-century saint and Classical musician. Both of these conferences are still held (Kichlu, 2015; Shanker, 2017).

### ***Shankarlal Music Festival***

This music festival began in Delhi, on the eve of independence day on 15th August 1947, in the form of an all-night musical program organized by Smt Sumitra Charat Ram, a noted Indian arts patron. Greatest Classical musicians of that time, such as Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan, Ustad, Allaudin Khan, Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan, and others performed till the morning hours before an audience. The huge success of this musical program was followed by the formation of Jhankar Music Circle, which used to organize monthly and yearly music festivals. In 1952, when Bharatiya Kala Kenda was formed, the Shankarlal Foundation (a body formed in the honour and memory of Sir Shankarlal, the father in law of Smt Sumitra Charat

Ram) took the responsibility of organizing and supporting the yearly music festival. The music festival came to be known as Shankarlal music festival (Shriram Bharatiya Kala Kendra, n.d.). Very recently, this music festival had its 72nd session.

### ***Sawai Gandharva Sangeet Mahotsav***

To commemorate the death anniversary of the great vocalist Swai Gandharva, his disciple, Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, started this festival in Pune, Maharashtra, in the year 1953. The responsibility of the conference was taken by Arya Sangeet Prasarak Mandal, guided by Pandit Bhimsen Joshi himself up to the year 2002. Thereafter, Shrinavas Joshi (son of Pandit Bhimsen Joshi) and Srikant Deshpande (disciple of Pandit Bhimsen Joshi) are actively functioning in the organizing committee of this music festival (Banerjee, 2010). This festival is usually held every year in the month of December. Pt. Bhimsen Joshi had been the concluding artist in this music festival, till his retirement in 2004. Recently, after the death of Pandit Bhimsen Joshi, this music festival has been renamed as the '*Swai Gandharva Bhimsen Mahotsav*'. This is a very popular and one of the most sought-after music festival in the country.

## **III**

### **Music Conferences of Kolkata**

Around the end of the 19th century, from mehfilis and jalsas of music, Bengal slowly inclined towards association or committee organized music programs. In this context, the name of Bhowanipore music conference has significance (Mallick, 2016), since it is believed by the organizers to have been established in 1900, which makes this conference older than the All India Music Conference and All Bengal Music Conference.

The influence of popular national music conferences organized by Bhatkhande and V.D. Paluskar, most likely induced interest and feeling of appreciation of classical music among Bengal middle-class peoples (Atarhi, 2015). This possibly made way for the starting of grand/ mega public music conferences in Kolkata.

### ***Bhowanipore Sangeet Sammelan***

This conference began its journey as *Bhawaniapur Sangeet Chakra* in the residence of one of its founder member, Ramesh Chandra Mitra, a judge of High court of Kolkata. From a small musical program, it slowly attained high status. Keshabchandra Mitra became the first official chairman in 1935. At that time, the office of the committee associated with this conference was housed at 79, Padmapukur Road. Many eminent personalities such as Atul Krishna Basu, Sir Ashutosh Mukherjee, C. R. Das, and musicians, viz., Radhikaprasad Goswami, Mantu, Banerjee, Girija Sankar Chakraborty, Aghornath Chakraborty were associated with the committee of the conference during those days. Reputed exponents of Classical music like Vishnu Digambar Paluskar, Alladiya Khan, Amir Khan, Ata Hussain Khan have performed in this conference (Sengupta and Basu, 1988; Mallick, 2016). Efforts of



many have made it possible for this music conference to continue even after independence. Presently, the address of this conference is 4, Ramesh Mitra Road of Kolkata, and with great responsibility, the conference is still continuing to enhance the musical environment of the city.

### ***All Bengal Music Conference***

Around 1932-1933, the Allahabad music conference was organized by Dakshinaranjan Bhattacharjee. Bhupendranath Ghosh of Pathuriaghata, Kolkata, got inspired by the conference and organized the First All Bengal Music Conference in the year 1934. All across Bengal, tremendous enthusiasm was there for this music conference. The first session of the grand conference was inaugurated by Rabindranath Tagore in the Calcutta University Senate Hall. Many supported the conference. This included Damodar Das Khanna (Lala Babu), the raja of Natore, maharaja Udaychand of Bardhaman, the maharaja of Kaimbazar, raja Pradyot Kumar Tagore, nawab of Murshidabad, Pradyot Kumar Barua (raja of Gauripur, Assam), jamindar Jagatkishore of Muktagacha, music director Raichand Boral. Artists who performed in the first session included Alauddin Khan, Abdul Karim Khan, Faiyaz Khan, Bade Ghulam Ali, Amir Khan Mustak Hussain Khan, Kesarbai, Bhishmadev Chattopadhyay, Tarapada Chakraborty, and many others. Music competition formed a vital part of this conference, where young musicians from middle-class families used to participate. The second session of the conference was held in 1935, and in this session many there were many female participants. Bhupendranath Ghosh was bedridden owing to illness during the 1940 session of the conference. In the course of time, theatres of Kolkata, such as Roxy, Minerva, Shri, and Star served as venues for this conference (Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1940; Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1947; Das, 2008; M. Banerjee, 2010; Deb, n.d; Mallick, 2016; Atarhi, 2015).

### ***Conferences of Kolkata After Independence***

The number of conferences in Kolkata increased manifold after independence. A few sessions of *All India Music Conference* were arranged in Kolkata after independence (Atarhi, 2015). At Kolkata, in the All India Music Conference, musicians from various regions of India came for displaying their art and skill before the audience. Damodar Das Khanna used to organize the All India Music Conference in theatres of Kolkata, such as Paradise Cinema and Orient Cinema (S. Banerjee, 2017). In the 1949 session of the conference at Kolkata, Pandit Balwantraai Bhatt got the prize of 'Tansen' in the Vishnu Digambar competition, arranged by the conference (Swarganga, n.d.).

After the death of Bhupendranath Ghosh in 1941, his elder son Manmatha Nath Ghosh took the initiative to arrange the *All Bengal Music Conference*, and with his much effort, after a gap, the reopening of the All Bengal Music Conference took place in the winter of 1947. In 1953, Rangmahal theatre was the concert venue. The 22nd session was held at 47 Pathuriaghata street in 2013, for four days. For the 23rd session, Babulal Ghosh of the Pathuriaghata Ghosh family associated with

Sangeet Research Academy, to hold the conference at 47 Pathuriaghata street in 2014, for four days (Amrita Bazar Patrika, 1947; Das, 2008; M. Banerjee, 2010; Deb, n.d; Mallick, 2016 ; Atarathi, 2015; Ray Chowdhury, 2015). Lack of patronage has made the fate of this conference uncertain nowadays.

Moreover, in the immediate years of independence, Dover Lane Music Conference, Tansen Sangeet Sammelan, Murari Sangeet Sammelan, Sadarang Sangeet Sammelan, Bani Chakra, Gunidas Sangeet Sammelan and several others were seen enriching the cultural environment of Kolkata.

### ***Dover Lane Music Conference***

This music conference started its journey in 1952, when music connoisseurs of Dover Lane and nearby localities of South Kolkata, came forward to organize a three-night cultural program, of which one night was assigned to Indian Classical music. This program formed the foundation of the conference, which is continuing even in recent times with full glory. Actor Jahar Ganguly and Pahari Sanyal also contributed to its start. The conference first started in 3 Dover Lane, at a playground, and then Singhi park of Dover Lane, Nalini Sarkar Mancha (during 1982), Hindustan Park, Vivekananda Park had been its venue. Sri Narendra Singh Singhi of Singhi Park came to be associated with this conference. After a 12 year gap, this conference was revived in 1982, and it became a registered society between 1982-1983. During this gap, Dover Lane Music Soiree was formed by the same people involved in the Dover Lane Music conference, and this organization carried of musical and cultural activities. Regarding this conference, Pandit Vijay Kichlu (2015) once remarked:

“We used to go and just park our car outside the pandal and plenty of cars...30, 40, 50. People just remaining in their cars drinking coffee, tandoori chicken...whatever...spending all night there...listening to the conference from outside. This was the culture.”

This conference encourages established as well as youngsters. The performances begin at the evening and continue the entire night for four days. Now the conference venue has shifted to Nazrul Mancha, an auditorium of Kolkata (Gupta , 1990; Banerjee, 2010; Chakraborty, 2014; Kichlu, 2015; Sen, 2015). Over the years, this annual music conference has become one of the highly respected cultural event of the present time, in the entire country.

### ***All India Tansen Sangeet Sammelan***

The prime organizer of this conference was Sri Sailen Banerjee, under the aegis of Tansen Sangit Sangha, established in 1943. He was the disciple of Ustad Dabir Khan. He used to run Tansen Music College in Bhowanipur of Kolkata. The conference started in 1947, immediately after independence. This conference was named after the famous and great Indian musician, Miyan Tansen. The 6<sup>th</sup> session of this annual conference was held in 1953 at Bharati Cinema. Previous three consecutive sessions were held in Indira Cinema. Tansen Sangeet Sangha's music



competition was a significant attraction in this conference, which promoted many rising musicians. (All India Tansen Sangit Sammelan-Souvenir, 1953; Beck, 1993; S. Banerjee, 1997). This conference used to attract a huge crowd. In a session of Bismillah Khan and Vilayet Khan's duet performance, the crowd was overflowing. Even symposiums arranged as part of this conference for promoting Classical music gained enormous attention among the public (Atarhi, 2015).

It is to be noted that Gwalior, Madhya Pradesh, also holds a music festival known as Tansen Sangeet Sammelan. Gwalior was the home for Miyan Tansen. After his demise in 1589, his followers paid homage to him by performing on his tomb in Gwalior. Later, the maharaja of Gwalior patronized the event. This event is now looked after by the cultural department of the state government there. The festival is arranged for five days and night. A very prestigious award, Tansen Samman award is given to deserving musicians during the sammelan, by the state government (M. Banerjee, 2010).

### ***Murari Sangeet Sammelan***

Mohini Mohan Mishra was the father of a famous and popular female singer, Nirmala Mishra of Kolkata. His elder brother was Murari Mohan Mishra (1916-1940). He was a brilliant vocalist but unfortunately died very young. In his memory, the Murari Mohan Sangeet Sammelan was started in 1941 by Manoj Mohan Mishra, son of Pandit Mohini Mishra, in association with Bhupendranath Ghosh, the maharaja of Nator, the maharaja of Coochbehar, Damodar Das Khanna and others. It was initially held at Bhupendranath Ghosh's house at 46 Pathurighata street. Gradually, it transformed into a public music conference of Chetla, Kolkata. There is hardly a music exponent of the country who had not been in some way associated with this conference. Many big names in the world of Classical music has performed at this conference. Along with the conference, music competitions attracted many. Although there had been a break in organizing this conference, from 1978, this conference is continuing till date (Chetla Murari Smriti Sangeet Sammilani, n.d.; Ghosh, 2017).

### ***Sadarang Sangeet Sammelan***

This conference derived its name from Niamat Khan's pen name "Sadarang." He was a very popular and respected musical composer, who was active in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The name Sadarang is found in many of the Khyal compositions, which are thought to composed by him (Sharma, 2006). This conference was started in Kolkata by Kalidas Sanyal, who also acted as the general secretary of the conference (N. Gupta, 1990; S. Banerjee, 2012). Swadesh Sanyal was also associated with the organizing committee. Musicologist Aneesh Pradhan, mentions the name of Farhat Said Khan, as the president of this conference (Pradhan, 2016). A search in the youtube, a popular social media, reveals many of the audios of performance by maestros, were recorded by Farhat Said Khan, which makes it very clear that every stalwart musician of their time has performed in this conference. Farhat Said Khan and Rahat Said Khan were brothers. Both were sons of

Muhammad Ahmad Said Khan (1888-1982), the Navab of Chhatari, a town of British India, in Uttar Pradesh. Farhat Said Khan had a deep interest in Hindustani Classical music and even learned music at Sangeet Research Academy, Kolkata (Who's who, 1936 ; Mukhopadhyaya, 2006). Pandit Vijay Kichlu (2015), recently shared his experience regarding this conference in a seminar:

"What I saw in Calcutta in 1956 with my own eyes nobody would believe it today. It was the 1956 Sadarang Conference. It was held in Darbhanga Square; the corner plot of the Chauranghee Road and Harrington Street. There was not anybody who was not performing in that conference. Ali Akbar Khan Sahib, Pandit Ravi Shankar, Amir Khan saab, Bade Ghulam Ali Khan Saab and Birju Maharaj, Roshan Kumari...you name anybody and they were there. Two programmes each and there were 5000 persons sitting inside the pandal and 35000 people outside on the roads! Chouranghee and Harrington Street — you could not cross the road after 12'0 clock midnight and this was permitted by the order of the Police commissioner! It used to be whole night conference."

The first author's *Guruma*, Sunanda Patnaik of Gwalior gharana, a disciple of Pandit Vinayak Rao Patwardhan, spellbound the audience and Ustad Vilayat Khan, with her performance in September 1957 session of this conference in Kolkata. On public demand, Kalidas Sanyal made her sing for the third night in the same conference (Banerjee, 2012). In the late 60s, in this music conference, the Dagar brothers used to perform often at Mahajati Sadan of Kolkata.

### ***Bani Chakra Music Conference***

This conference was founded in the memory of Bani Das (1937-1955), the only son of S. Rabindra and Sm. Renu Das. The president of the committee that held this conference during that time was Sm. Ava Chatterjee. Additively, Pandit Narayan Rao Joshi was one of the members of the executive committee, and the advisory members of the committee included Pandit A. Kanan, Vidushi Dipali Nag, and others (Bani Chakra, 1957). Many well-known artists of their time performed in different sessions of this conference. The conference is still active. Now the conference is better known as Banichakra Sanskritik Mahotsav.

### ***Gunidas Sangeet Sammelan***

In 1977, this conference started its journey under the aegis of Lalit Kala Nidhi, Maharastra, by Pandit C. R. Vyas in honour of Pandit Jagganathbuwa. Many well-known musicians have performed at this conference. Although it was started in Mumbai, Kolkata has served as its venue in some of the sessions (Banerjee, 2010). The 32nd Gunidas Sangit Sammelan was held in GD Birla Sabha Ghar of Kolkata in 2008.

### ***Some Other Music Conferences of Kolkata***

Musicologist and music critique, Nilaksha Gupta in the chapter "Classical music in modern Calcutta" authored by him for the book "The Living City," names many more conferences that were active in the musical scenario of Kolkata. It mentions the music programs of Kalasangam, dating from the 1970s, which

attained popularity as a single raga music festival. It also mentions Suresh Sangeet Sammelan, Park Circus Sangeet Sammelan, Calcutta Music Circle, the one-time huge conferences such as the Hafiz Ali Khan Memorial Festivals held in 1973 and 1977, the 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary (1988) Sangeet Sammelan of ITC- Sangeet Research Academy (Gupta, 1990). Some other old / reputed conferences of Kolkata included Damrupani Sangeet Sammelan held by Damrupani Bhattacharya, Sangeet Sammelan of Bhismadev Sangeet Parishad (started from 1960), Nikhil Bharat Sangeet Sammelan, Jhankar Music Circle, Surdas Sangeet Sammelan which had Manmatha Nath Ghosh among its patrons, Nikhil Bharat Abdul Karim Sangeet Sammelan and many more.

In the present time, lack of sponsorship and patronage is a major issue in organizing a concert. The sponsors are more inclined towards sponsoring Bollywood events in order to attract the crowd. In the past, corporate houses or sponsors used to consider the sponsoring of Classical music events, as an integral part of their social responsibility towards society. With time things have changed, and social responsibility has been replaced by “casual, soft advertisement.” Even the coverage of Classical music events in media has become limited. The sponsors want to draw youngsters to their shows, as most of the sponsoring bodies are interested in marketing their products for young consumers. Most of the conferences of recent times depend on donations (Ray Chowdhury, 2015).

One may argue that the number of concerts is declining nowadays in Kolkata. However, although many of the conferences are stalled or are suffering from financial problems, Kolkata still maintains its rich musical heritage and conference culture. In addition to the earlier discussed music conferences of Kolkata, many big and small conferences continue to be organized now and then in the city. The list of these conferences includes but are not limited to the following- Salt Lake Music Festival, Ramkrishna Mission Institute of Culture, I.T.C.-Sangeet Sammelan, Chowdhury House Concert, SPICMACAY (Society for the promotion of Indian Classical Music and Culture Amongst Youth) Convention, Annual Gana Prava Musical Festival, Shastriya Sangeet Sammelan by West Bengal State Music Academy, Birthday celebration of Shree Thakur Satyananda by Satyananda Devayatan, Saptasur Nag Academy-Cultural Programme and others.

#### IV

#### Conclusion

Music conferences are arranged primarily to serve high grade Indian classical music to the public by reputed exponents of classical music. These conferences also provide a platform for promising musicians. These music conferences contribute a lot towards the revival of widespread interest in classical music. At a time when traditional and ancient heritage in the Indian Classical musical sphere is under the crushing avalanche of modern music, the valuable service rendered by Classical music conferences cannot be overlooked or considered unimportant. Classical music, besides, being a subtle and succulent art, is also an intricate science handed down to the present generation by our ancestors and developed

through centuries by several immortal masters and musicians, so humble and sincere effort is needed to foster the spirit of classical music among the masses and music lovers, to make its culture available to all. This can be achieved by arranging more and more Classical music conferences. Effort and financial support from the government and private sector will be necessary for sustaining the conferences which are active. Indian Classical music may be only for a niche crowd, but in order to appreciate it, youngsters should be exposed to it, which may lead to the exploration of this traditional art form as well as the preservation of culture. This will also cultivate among the future generation of listeners, the kind of aesthetics required to appreciate Classical music.

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