

MUSIC

Retrieving lost ground at Sangeet Piyasi in Kolkata



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Female artistes held sway at the annual conference of Sangeet Piyasi, in Kolkata

A night-long soiree exclusively by women artistes was the idea behind the 28th annual conference of Sangeet Piyasi, organised under the inspiring guidance of tabla maestro Samar Saha, who is known for his unique thematic events. The word ‘unique’ triggered a question deeply embedded in the ‘sociology of music’ – since when women strived to make a ‘comeback’?

In a culture like ours, we, unquestioningly, accept that Brahma, the creator and personification of celestial music, created Narada, the divine sage who sang praises of Lord Vishnu, and Saraswati, the goddess of learning. Both played Veena. Their sole aim was to disseminate music among gods and Gandharvas, who meditate on music, and Kinnaras, the propagators. Apsaras (Rambha, Menaka) were the pride of Indrasabha. In Bharatmuni’s Natyashastra, no Kutapa (musical orchestra) was complete without the equal participation by men and women.

The social scene changed drastically when invaders and traders began to settle down in India’s Northern region – along with their culture. Highly qualified women chose to buy respectability at the cost of self-negation, and those who didn’t, were hailed as ‘Nagar-vadhu’ (Aamrapali), ‘Bawari’ (Meerabai), Devdasi, Tawayaf (Bai, Jaan, Mirasan) till the mid-20th century. Albeit admired, they remained ostracised. Educated teen Dipali Nag’s participation in a conference (1946) won her the title ‘the first lady of classical music’. Instruments remained in male bastion till the rise of a few enlightened ladies like Kalyani Roy and Sharanrani Bakhliwal. ‘Vidushi’, the honorary title for top graded female artistes of Akashvani, is a very

recent phenomenon that eluded such performers like Siddheshwari Devi, Begum Akhtar and numerous others. There are very few women percussionists and harmonium/sarangi accompanists even now.

Musical rendezvous

But an undaunted Samar Saha converted this soiree into a meeting ground of amazing talents from all over India. The crescendo started building up after midnight when kathak exponent Shinjini Kulkarni (granddaughter of Pandit Birju Maharaj) and her accompanists Deepmala Bhattacharjee (brilliant disciple of Samar Saha), harmonium wizard Rupashree Bhattacharya and Pallavi De (bol padhant) put the stage on fire! Soothing music followed it next. Eminent vocalist Indrani Mukherjee's introspective Lalit and a lilting jhoola received the same amount of musical regards from the much awarded, perceptive tabla of Sangeeta Agnihotri, a Madhya Pradesh based worthy disciple of Pandit Dinkar Majumdar.



Sitarist Mita Nag

Indrani's harmonium accompanist Paramita Mukherjee (Delhi) is widely known for her quick adaptability. Finally, compatibility between erudite Vishnupur Gharana-sitarist Mita Nag (raga Basanmukhari) and ace tabla player Anuradha Pal (Mumbai-based disciple of Ustad Zakir Hussain) was extremely enjoyable.

Earlier this bonhomie was absent in famous soloist Rimpa Shiva's tabla complement for amicably accommodating sarod of a fast rising starlet Debasmita Bhattacharya who remained focused on her choice, Kausi Kanada. Gharanedar musician Reshma Pundit's tabla solo, with Paramita Mukherjee's competent harmonium lahara, could do better with such killer instinct of a soloist. Upcoming vocalist Rageshree Das (raga Rageshri, thumri and Bangla song) was in the seasoned company of Sunayana Ghosh (brilliant disciple of tabla legend Pandit Shankar Ghosh) and Rupashree Bhattacharya (harmonium). Enterprising youngster Nayanika

Sengupta, groomed by gurus Jayanta Sarkar (vocal), Sandip Pal and Samar Saha (tabla), played tabla effortlessly while singing khayal in raga Yaman in the brief opening slot of this unique event with lovely ladies as ushers and anchors.

Perhaps, beginning of an uprising against concert stages that even now bar women, however competent, this was time for all distinguished male artistes to relax and get a sense of changing times in a packed Uttam Mancha, Kolkata.

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