

MUSIC

A scholarly musician

**MEENA BANERJEE**

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In an insightful chat with Meena Banerjee, Dhrupad exponent Nirmalya Dey brings out the finer nuances of the Dagar tradition.

For over six decades, the five-night-long Dover Lane Music Conference of Kolkata attracts people from all walks of life and the world over! The audience consists not just of music aficionados and initiated listeners but also many who want to enjoy the experience of the event.

This time it was wonderful to find a few changes in the otherwise 'fixed' itinerary of this famed conference. Dhrupad exponent Nirmalya Dey's name was one such pleasant surprise

who featured in a jugalbandi with rudraveena exponent Bahauddin Dagar, ably supported by Sanjay Agle on the pakhawaj. As the second item of the second night, his voice enhanced the evocative beauty of an hour-long alap in raga Jog and further crystallised it with “Naad-bhed so nyaro”, steeped in spirituality, set to Teevra (tewra) taal.

Born in Assam, brought up in Bengal, groomed in Bhopal (Dhrupad Kendra) and now based in Delhi, Dey has been performing as a soloist in the Dagar tradition and trying to promote and propagate this dwindling art by teaching diligently. During a conversation one could make out that the edifying answers from a musician interested in scriptures and musicology.

Excerpts:

As a soloist, what made you take up this jugalbandi with rudraveena?

This was just another link in the long chain of such musical collaboration between two soloists. Apart from vocals, rudraveena and surbahar are the primary instruments which feature in Dagar tradition consistently. Apart from solo events these are also played along with the vocal rendition as an accompaniment or dual experience (jugalbandi). The latter demands two instrumentalists, two vocalists or a vocalist and an instrumentalist, who complement each other in terms of tonal quality, melodic phrases, improvisation, aesthetics and principles of Indian **classical music**.

The self-esteem of a musician is inevitably reflected in his creations, but in case of jugalbandi the mental and emotional issues of the musicians need to maintain a close harmony between the self-esteem and respect for the co-musician. Such duets become a magnificent musical experience for the ardent connoisseurs, as they get the opportunity to observe and listen to the musical dialogue that envisages the exquisite manifestation of the musical art emanated through their body, mind and spirit – integrated and strongly focused on experiencing the beauty of their creation.

Such duets in Dhrupad tradition can be traced back to the 19th Century. Ustad Allahbade Khan and Ustad Zakiruddin Khan, Ustad Nasir Moinuddin Khan and Ustad Nasir

Aminuddin Khan, Ustad Nasir Zahiruddin Khan and Ustad Nasir Faiyazuddin Khan are a few among the popular duos in Dagar tradition. Rudraveena maestro Ustad Zia Mohiuddin Dagar and vocalist Ustad Zia Fariduddin Dagar established a brilliant example of jugalbandi. Fortunately, both Bahauddin bhai and I are their disciples. This bond helped us immensely in highlighting Dagar tradition through our music.

What are the significant features of Dagar tradition?

The significant features are exposition of the raga (alap), presentation of the song-text and improvisation; all three are virtually based on the principle of Ragalapti, Rupakalapti and Bhanjani – mentioned in Sangeet Ratnakar of Sharangdev (13th Century). Exposition of the raga (alap) is one of the most intricate processes of extempore creation of the musicians from Dagar School which is based on the principles of swar-vistar. Dagar musicians make various ornamentations of each and every note and tone of the raga to form melodic sentences for presenting alap. These microtone enriched tonal shades help forming palpable phrases for establishing the mood of the raga. The alaap is divided into: sthayi, antara, sanchari and abhog which has a close reference to the four parts of Ragalapti, mentioned in Sangeet Ratnakar as udagraha, melapak, dhruva and sanchari.

The song-text (composition) presentation is also divided in: sthayi, antara, sanchri and abhog; with focus on introduction of the textual content, initiation of the poetic idea, augmentation and putting forward the thematic content and enumerating the entire idea of the poetry.

Improvisation of the song-text in Dagar school is primarily based on the upaj (extempore experience) of the musicians. The core idea of the textual content and the melodic mood of the raga are the primary factors that inspire the musicians for improvisation. Mathematical progression of the textual content is not the principal source of inspiration for such creativity.

How can one differentiate Dagar style with other schools of Dhrupad?

The alaap containing all the subtle nuances and finesse is the unique quality of this tradition which is broadly cherished by the musicians and the audience as well, especially because it contains all the elements of geet, vadya and nritya, as mentioned in the old Sanskrit texts. Presentation of the composition also has a distinctive texture. While presenting the song-texts, musicians need to maintain the principle of phonetics and aesthetic values of the poetry. As a reason, in this tradition the song-texts are often presented in a gliding, serpentine way; and not by emphasising the taal beats. Unlike other Dhrupad traditions, improvisation of the song-texts does not rely solely on the mathematical variation of the tempo (termed as layakari); but occasional glimpses of mathematical permutation are incorporated in order to make some rhythmic variations for attractive aesthetic appeal.

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