

Exploring the rich music traditions in Sachin Dev Burman's compositions

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Abstract

Indian music especially, Bengali Cinema and Bombay film music scenario changed entirely after S D Burman entered the panorama. His songs were not just ordinary musical pieces. They are classics because they are eternal and extraordinary in terms of keeping with the film's narrative. All his non film compositions too carry that sense of evocativeness. And this is the real quintessential spirit of a man who had the privilege to be born to royalty but he freely assimilated the local spirit of the largely unexplored territories of folk and tribal music and suffused them in his large musical inventory.

This paper aims to explore the musical intellect of this genius who was perhaps the first who brought in such fresh, original rhythms without much ostentation. All his music is actually about the celebration of Music and how Music truly is one of the effervescent elements of the Universe.

Keywords: Universe, Repertoire, Music, Tripura, Bombay Cinema, Comilla, Trajectory, Pyaasa, Devdas, Sujata, Bandini, Guru Dutt, Vijay Anand, Johnny Walker, William Wordsworth, Baul, stanza, Talat Mehmood, Rahul Dev Burman, Subodh Mukherjee, Nutan, Daffodils, Sahir Ludhainvi

Introduction

Sachin Dev Burman's musical repertoire is beyond the paradigms of the basic aural comprehension, sensibility and understanding that we generally associate with Indian Cinema. He has infused a tremendous humanism in his musical compositions in Bengali and Bombay Cinema. Music in itself is one of the highest forms of abstract arts and to even make a seeming attempt in fathoming what Music comprises of is not a mean feat. It requires unbounded imagination, patience, humility, serenity and devotion. Because in the Universal order of things, Music holds the same domicile that marks the beginning of all existence.

Hailing from the royal dynasty of Tripura but because of some unfortunate circumstances and destiny's cruel intervention, S D Burman's father, Nabadwip Chandra Bahadur was cruelly deprived of it and exiled permanently to the British controlled Comilla, the headquarters of Chakla Roshanbad which is today in Bangladesh. We would have lost a rich heritage if Sachin Dev Burman's father had become the King because then Sachin Dev Burman reaching the shores of Bombay would have become a rarity. His odyssey would have been something far away from being a music composer for films.

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Sachin Dev Burman's rich trajectory in music is also one of the rarest of incidences where he got the opportunity to be exposed to both in classical music and the cadences and intricacies of folk music, its structure, its philosophy, of its various forms- baul, murshidiya, fakiri, darbeshi, kirtan, agamani, bijaya, maharmerjari, nilpujargaan, manasarbhasan, jhumar, bhatiyali and so on. This folk music emanates from the folk customs and practices that came from undivided Bengal, the interior villages of Manipur, Assam and other regions of the North East. Later, in all his music, he brought in this music like the Baul music in films like Pyaasa and Devdas and the Bhatiyali tradition in films like Sujata and Bandini.

Each of his compositions is flawless in terms of musical scale, interlude pacing, voice rendition, tempo and above all the melody. Even his light humored songs are laced with such brilliant melody that it is a study in music and bear a scientific perfection in his musical notes. Listening just to a plain audio or hearing his songs in the entire semblance of the film's narrative, his songs leave a long lasting impact on the viewer. The listenership comes added with an intrinsic worth much beyond the mere face value of the film. Such was the power of Burman's music that his musical renditions were part of the rich tapestry of the film. A case in example would be the year 1957 and three films with Sachin Dev's musical score appeared in the Cinema halls. 1957 was the year when Vijay Anand's Nau Do Gyarah, Subodh Mukherjee's Paying Guest and Guru Dutt's Pyaasa got release and the music of all these three films were vividly different from each other. There is a distinct characteristic that reflects the powerful musical spectrum like for example, in Pyaasa Mohammed Rafi sings the song of a masseur, 'Sarjo tera charaye.' (If your head is spinning with stress..) then on the other end, there is the heart stopping, 'Yeh duniya agar mil bhi jaaye to kyahai.' (And what good is it even if you get to own this world...) The masseur song is being enacted by the comic relief in the film, Johnny Walker. And the same voice is used to bring forth the sheer luminescence of Sahir Ludhianvi's poetry where the great disenchantment with the nation's independence is brought forth by the Sahir's enigmatic poetry ebbing out his inner most pain and cynicism with the nation's affairs. The credit goes to Burman because of his sheer confidence and the conviction to deliver both the songs with the same playback and modulate to fit the polarities of context and character.

Sachin Dev Burman's adaptability with various poet lyricists is also an extraordinary and noteworthy element of his musical oeuvre. He worked with great ease with Sahir and Majrooh Sultanpuri. Though he was not well conversed with Urdu and Hindi spoken in Hindi films, he painstakingly made it a point to understand the phonetics and the pronunciation and permeated the words with life, through his music. His fastidiousness and dedication to music was so great that he overcame the language hurdles easily and went on to prove that Music speaks the language of the Cosmos.

The musical interludes in his songs are evocative of sensitive imagery and in William Wordsworth's lines from the poem, Daffodils,

*'For oft when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood
They flash upon the inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude...'*

And like a true artist, the images that his musical strains create in our mind are much after we have actually finished listening to the song. A striking example here would be from Bimal Roy's Sujata (1959) and of the song in the film, 'Jalte hain jiske liye..' (For who, I pine..). It is sung in the tremulous and sensitive voice of Talat Mehmood. The beginning piece of an accordion actually brings forth the pain and despair of Sujata, who is an untouchable by birth. Her name, Sujata (gloriously and effortlessly performed by Nutan), signifies the lotus. Like the lotus remains untainted and untouched by the grime and filth of the pond that it grows in, Sujata also implies of belonging to a pure caste. The demeanor of this song is a romantic number sung over the telephone by her lover. It is not really a romantic song then because though it is sung to her in a solo voice- it is actually the musical interludes that wipe off that veneer to reveal the sadness and the loneliness in Sujata's life.

Then there is the other instance of a song in the film Solva Saal (1958) where the song, 'Yehbhi koi roothne ka mausam hain deewane.' (This is no season to remain aloof, dear one..). The four interludes that appear between the opening stanza (mukhda) and the middle stanza (antara) are repetitive yet they convey a different meaning each time they are heard. There is a piece of a rustic reed flute played and it is so intense in its simplistic essence that it beseeches the listener and takes her/him to some forgotten memory of a rainy afternoon ages ago when the tryst with love happened for the first time.

His experimentations with music are immense and brilliant. For example for Gurudutt's Baazi, (1951), he picked up a Ghazal (Urdu poetry) written by Sahir again and gave it a fast paced tempo and made it into a club song. The result was 'Tadbeer se bigdi huyi taqdeer banaa le..' (Amend the misfortunes inflicted on you and make them your destiny..) Or the indigenous brand of his music that he created by mixing folksongs with modern and classical music that remained his forte.

Sachin Dev went on to prove that age is no inhibition for creativity. He gave us the maximum number of successful songs (film wise). He was also the only composer who remained in demand till his last breath while most of his contemporaries had faded away. He was also incredible because he composed the most jazzy and trendy numbers while attired in a dhoti and a shawl thus reiterating the distinction between being modernized and westernized.

In his autobiography, Sargamer Nikhad; he writes:
'My only identity is that I am the child of mother Bengal; my music is the wealth of all Indians- my tune is a symbol of India.'

Then again he concluded, 'In the sunset of my life, I don't want anything-anymore-I only want to remain as lees in the seventh musical note.'

Sachin Dev Burman's music remains a testimony to a man whose virtuoso and intellect towards music remains unparalleled in this country. His son, Rahul Dev Burman is another testament to the vast repertoire of music that both have left behind.

References

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