

## The Impact of Rabindra Sangeet on Sri Lankan Music

H.M.U.T.K. Herath

*Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya*

In the early phase of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Sri Lankans were seeking for a culture that could be identified as pure Sri Lankan or Eastern in order to resist British rule. Accordingly, the arrival of Rabindranath Tagore (who was an eminent poet, musician, painter, etc.) in Sri Lanka, motivated many individuals to depart to Tagore's education institute - *Shanti Nikethan*, in India to learn Eastern aesthetics. Tagore's ideology and aesthetics was an excellent blend of Indian classical, Bengali and Western musical characteristics with a superior writing pattern. Hence it could motivate those Sri Lankans who studied there, to develop Sri Lankan music in a new direction.

The *Rabindra Sangeet* impact can be seen in several ways. The major fact is that it resisted imitation of Hindi melodies into Sinhala lyrics. Accordingly, by the influence of Tagore music characteristics, people who learnt at *Shanti Nikethan* composed simple lyrics and melodies with more folk-like music patterns. Ananda Samarakoon is one such important person. He created several compositions such as *Wile malak pipila kadimai*, *podu mal ethano*, etc. in the style of *Rabindra Sangeet*. Although it is not entirely similar to *Rabindra Sangeet* melodies, it follows Tagore's ideology which is "simple" in structure. Hence, his compositions do not show complexity. Other than Ananda Samarakoon, Sunil Santa also appeared to have been influenced by *Rabindra Sangeet*. His *Ridi Walaawa* song is one such song.

Creating awareness of Bengali songs among Sri Lankan musicians and listeners is another outcome of *Rabindra Sangeet* ideology in Sri Lanka. The reason is that, as *Rabindra Sangeet* is a mixture of Indian, Western and Bengali folk music patterns, people who followed Tagore's ideology became also interested in this new music style - Bengali or rather *Wanga* style. As a consequence, at the request of Premakumara Epatawala, Pt. Amaradeva used the Bengali folk music style called *Bhattiyali* and *Bondure* (a Bengali song) in Premakumara Epatawala's ballet *Thiththa Batha*. Moreover, both Pt. Amaradeva and Sunil Santa have sung Bengali songs in SLBC recordings such as *Se yaachu de* and *Bondure*.

Apart from the popular music stream, other musical usages also show evidence of the influences of *Rabindra Sangeet*. One such instance is the melody of the school song, *Me siri lakbima thun Sri Pali ape thaksala dine*, of Horana Sri Pali College (the school which was initiated by Tagore in 1934) which is taken from *Rabindra* song-*Ekla cholo re*. Even today, the students sing Bengali-influenced songs and *Rabindra* melodies written in Sinhala in their morning assembly every week. One such example is *Jaya jaya sri maatha apa rejini* which is similar to melody of Indian National Anthem that is also influenced from Bengali folk songs.

The effort of W.D. Makuloluwa, which can be considered as an indirect offshoot of *Rabindra Sangeet* and its ideology, gave considerable attention towards following a similar path to systemise our own roots in music. Hence, it is clear that there are direct and indirect influences of *Rabindra Sangeet* that lie underneath the context of Sri Lankan music.