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Nagendranath Bhattacharya: Forgotten Genius, Unforgettable Contributions

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Abstract:

Hindustani classical music, an offshoot of Indian classical music, evolved during medieval period as a consequence of the culture of Court-music in northern India. Raga being an integral part of Indian classical music and a prevailing cultural tradition of India naturally enriched Hindustani classical music through various forms and styles. The popular Classical and Semi-classical Genres of such music were aptly performed by the Court-musicians and the Gharana exponents as well. The learning of the same are supposed to be transmitted from one generation to the other in Gharana system, being exclusive in Hindustani classical music. The trend of Hindustani classical music initially flourished in central and western regions of northern India which gradually pervaded over the eastern regions.

Nagendranath Bhattacharya of Bengal put his great and versatile contribution in the field of Hindustani classical music during from the mid of nineteenth century A.D. to the first phases of twentieth century A.D. This paper seeks Nagendranath's salient contributions in Hindustani classical music in many quarters despite a great deal of contributions of other contemporary music practitioners of Bengal to their respective fields.

Keywords: **Classical and Semi-classical Genres; Contemporary music practitioners of Bengal; Cultural tradition; Gharana exponents; Raga.**

Introduction: *Hindustani classical music evolved from Indian classical music through various forms and styles in northern India which began to be developed as well as flourished during the period from 14th century A.D. to 18th century A.D. with the abolition or alteration of the Prabandhas (Ghosh 26, 41). Starting from the 16th century A.D. some popular derivative forms of the Prabandhas such as Dhrupad, Dhamar, Khyal, Tappa, Thumri, Tarana etc. among other forms developed during these periods. The other forms comprised Dharu, Sadra, Vishnupada, Ragmala, Tribat, Chaturang, Pancharang, Haptarang, Quaul, Gulnaksh and so many which have become faded or obsolete in course of time. The popular forms of Hindustani classical music, already been mentioned are still prevalent at this present age and the Gharana representatives are mostly recognised through the forms like Dhrupad, Khyal, Tappa and Thumri as per Vocal Music is concerned. Raga is the core of Indian classical music which plays a vital role to express proper feeling with*

the help of *Swaras* (musical notes), Rhythm and exact Articulation of the voice. *Dhrupad* and *Khyal* are considered to be the Classical Forms through which *Raga* may properly be expressed. *Tappa* and *Thumri* being the Semi-Classical Genres which were later on adopted by the Court-musicians as well as the *Gharana* representatives. These Forms or the Styles of Singing got Royal patronage to a large extent and thus are rightly recognized as *Darbari Sangeet* (Court Music).

Taleem, the term commonly used in *Hindustani* classical music since from the medieval period is deeply associated with proper learning of *Ragas* or *Bandishes* (Compositions) under the tutelage of a *Guru* (Trainer) belonging to a particular *Gharana* for a long consecutive years. A *Shishya* (Disciple) having learnt profound knowledge in this process may be considered as an able representative or exponent of a particular *Gharana* under such consideration. After receiving a good deal of knowledge a representative explores himself as a Performer (Vocalist or Instrumentalist) or as an Exponent whose ideas or way of music are supposed to be followed and exercised by the learners or trainees of that particular *Gharana* generation after generation. Many innovative ideas irrespective of the Musical Forms, Styles of Singing or Instrument playing might be taken care into in this case. The repository of *Hindustani* classical music thus gets enriched by the noble contributions of so many.

Nagendranath Bhattacharya (1856-1933) of Bengal became famous by his prudent attitude and manifold activities. He was a noted performer of *Khyal* and *Tappa* (**Sengupta & Basu 235** and **Mukhopadhyay 51**). Although he had full command over *Dhrupad* and *Thumri* and he used to perform as well as teach them with same excellence. All these information have been collected as secondary data, mostly from printed sources. A very less amount of information regarding the excellences of Nagendranath Bhattacharya is available in most of the printed sources except some evidential work done by Dilip Kumar Mukhopadhyay, a renowned musicologist. An ardent attempt has been made to prove Nagendranath's greatness towards *Hindustani* classical music in support of the remarkable contributions he put forward.

Highlights on Nagendranath's Musical Expertise: Nagendranath Bhattacharya was born at Malipota near Ranaghat of Nadiya district. He was initiated training of *Dhrupad*, *Dhamar* and *Tappa* from childhood by his father named Umanath Bhattacharya (**Mukhopadhyay 52**). Umanath himself made his son acquainted with some aristocrat families which enabled Nagendranath in later years to perform in the residences of the *Paul-Chowdhurys*' at Ranaghat, the *Acharya-Chowdhurys*' at Muktagachha of Maimansingha, the *Mukherjees*' at Ula (Veernagar) and at Gobordanga, the Royal Court of Tripura and in many other places. He used to perform in the Concerts at several places of Kolkata, Bengal, Varanasi, at the Royal Court of Nepal etc. and earned profound fame (**Sengupta & Basu 235**). He usually performed *Khyal* and *Tappa*, sometimes initiated with *Dhrupad*. He used to perform major *Ragas*, preferably *Khumbaj*, *Bhairavi* etc. and occasionally with *Dev giri*, *Natnarayan*, *Devsakh* etc. (**Mukhopadhyay 45**).

He was one of the rare *Bengalees* who fortunately received immense *Taleem* both in *Dhrupad, Khyal, Tappa* and *Thumri*. He learnt mainly from Banne Khan, Ahmad Khan, Jadu Bhatta, Imam Bandi, Bade Dunnai Khan and Srijan Bai (**Mukhopadhyay 52-53**). He is claimed to have learnt from other maestros also. According to those references he also learnt from Badal Khan, Mahesh Chandra Mukherjee, Lakshminarayan Babaji and Ramjan Khan, son of Imam Bandi (**Das Sharma 143, 335**). The name of Mahesh Chandra Mukhopadhyay, a maestro of Tappa and popularly known as Mahesh Ustad is found as a Guru of Nagendranath Bhattacharya from another source (**Mukhopadhyay 7**).

His heartiest desire made Ranaghat an ideal place of learning *Hindustani* classical music to a large extent. He dedicated himself for the promotion of the same sacrificing his own bright musical career. He didn't stay outside Ranaghat permanently and produced a large chain of disciples therein. *Nagendra Sangeet Parishad* was established during his life time by Nagendranath Dutta and other disciples as well as admirers for the purpose of conducting Classical Music Conferences. Many a Music Maestros like Ustad Badal Khan, Ustad Ramjaan Khan, Gopal Chandra Bandyopadhyay --- the *Dhrupadiya* (performer of *Dhrupad*), Harekrishna Shil, the performer of *Surbahar*, Sangeet Ratna Bhishmadev Chottopadhyay etc. put their performances there in different times. Nagendranath was capable enough to hold up both training and performances till the end of his life (**Mukhopadhyay 58**).

Nirmal Chandra Chottopadhyay, publicly known as Padmababu and Nagendranath Dutta became very much popular among his disciples (**Mukhopadhyay 41, 43**). They used to perform *Khyal* and *Tappa*. Satyendranath Bhattacharya, his nephew was another disciple who also earned fame. Pramathanath Bhattacharya, another nephew of Nagendranath Bhattacharya could not flourish his musical career due to sudden death. The names of other disciples were namely Sauresh Bandyopadhyay (maternal grandson), Suprakash Bandyopadhyay, Haridas Bandyopadhyay, Durgaprasanna Mukhopadhyay, Pramathanath Chandra, Atindra Bandyopadhyay, Charan Kundu, Tarunendu Ghoshal, Sudhir Das, Satish Mukhopadhyay and many. Shibkumar Chottopadhyay, the son of Nagendranath's granddaughter learnt at his childhood from Nagendranath (**Mukhopadhyay 43, 55**).

Nagendranath Dutta, disciple of Nagendranath Bhattacharya became famous as a Trainer apart from his performance. He successfully instilled the trend of his Guru's learning into his disciples. He produced many disciples both in Kolkata and Ranaghat. Bhishmadev Chottopadhyay, the Sangeet Ratna and Sachindranath Das (Motilal), the performer of *Khyal* and *Thumri* initially learnt from him. Nagendranath Dutta had other disciples also. They were Gopal Dasgupta, Bibhuti Bhushan Dutta, Shailesh Dasgupta, Bijan Kumar Basu, Shibkumar Chottopadhyay etc. (**Mukhopadhyay 42**).

Apart from performances in the Concerts, acquiring huge amount of learning *Dhrupad, Khyal, Tappa* and *Thumri* from several maestros of renowned *Gharanas* and traditionally generating a large number of disciples which continued through generations Nagendranath

Bhattacharya had the quality to compose songs especially *Tappa*. Those compositions were popularized by his disciples (**Mukhopadhyay 48**).

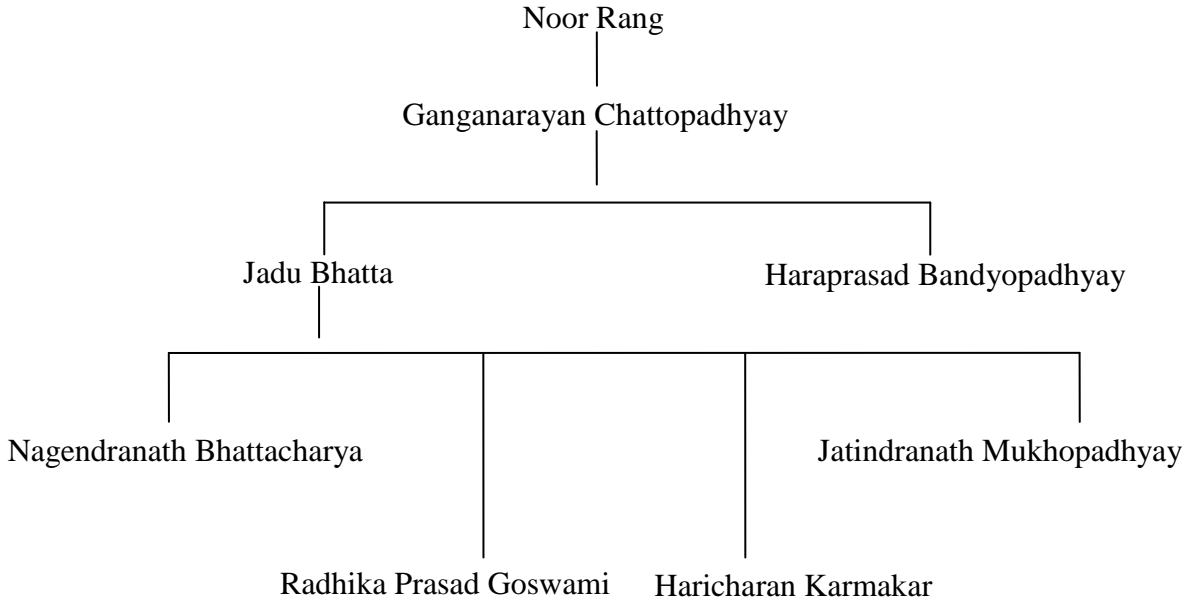
Critical Analysis: Nineteenth Century A.D. might be considered as the phase of overall practice and the growth of *Hindustani* classical music in Kolkata and other parts of Bengal. During the mid of nineteenth century A.D. a systematic practice of *Hindustani Dhrupad*, *Khyal* and *Tappa* began to be exercised among the *Bengalees* as the same of Kolkata came into contact with the maestros belonging to *Prasaddu-Manohar Gharana*, *Gwalior Gharana*, *Rampur Gharana*, *Agra Gharana*, *Kashi Gharana*, *Kirana Gharana* etc. and extensive learning and practice of such Music continued in a full swing. The practice and development of *Thumri* in Kolkata among the *Bengalees* happened due to the courtesy of Nawab Wazid Ali Shah of *Metiyaburz* Royal Court (**1856-1887** A.D.) and the disciples of Ganpat Rao of *Gwalior Gharana*. The *Bengalees* initially embraced *Dhrupad* and *Tappa*; and began to learn and practise them as well. *Khyal* and *Thumri* were exercised by them a bit later (**Goswami 68**).

The contribution of both the Jorasanko and the Pathuriyaghata Tagore families for the exercise and spread of *Hindustani* Classical Music is innumerable. Residence of Satu Babu (Ashutosh Deb **1805-1856** A.D.), the same of the *Lahas'* at *Thanthaniya*, the *Sinhas'* at *Jorasanko*, the *Shobhabazar Rajbadi*, the *Kashipur (Baranagar) Rajbadi*, and the Royal Court of Nawab Wazid Ali Shah at *Metiyaburz* were significant places of Kolkata where the maestros of *Hindustani* classical music performed and got patronized. The *Bengalees* of mid nineteenth century A.D. availed adequate scope of learning *Hindustani* classical music from different *Gharana* maestros which culturally enriched Bengal with varied virtuosity.

Possession of *Taleem* (training) under *Gharana* system implies the degree or excellence of a Performer which is obviously applicable for Nagendranath Bhattacharya. He received adequate *Taleem* of *Dhrupad*, *Khyal*, *Tappa* and *Thumri* under the tutelage of renowned *Gharana* maestros which enabled him to excel with the same height of the contemporary Performers of Bengal in the field of *Hindustani* classical music. He learnt *Dhrupad* from Jadu Bhatta (**1840-1883** A.D.) for five years while the latter spent last phases of his life at the Royal Court of Tripura (**Mukhopadhyay 367**).

Jadu Bhatta, though initially trained by Ramshankar Bhattacharya (**1761-1853** A.D.) of Vishnupur at a very tender age, learnt *Dhrupad* mainly from Ganganarayan Chattopadhyay (**1808-1874** A.D.) and followed the latter's tradition of learning. The followers of this tradition used *Khandar Vaani* (particular style) in *Dhrupad*. This *Dhrupad* was devoid of long *Alaap* (expansion of musical notes that enables to unfold a *Raga*) which comprised *Gamak* (quiver) along with the applications of Rhythm, Tempo and other embellishments. Ganganarayan is considered first to have introduced *Khandar Vaani Dhrupad* in Bengal. He made other disciples such as Haraprasad Bandyopadhyay, Sriram Siromoni, Srichandra Gupta, Rajnarayan Mukhopadhyay etc. Haraprasad made a huge range of disciples for which enormous practice and development of *Dhrupad* sustained in Bengal till the first few decades of the twentieth Century A.D. (**Mukhopadhyay 230**).

Ganganarayan learnt *Dhrupad* from Mir Nasiram, a *Dhrupadiya* (*Dhrupad* singer) as well as a *Veenkar* (*Veena* player). Probably Nasiram was a *Hindu* and Mir was meant for a title for him. (**Mukhopadhyay 230-231**). From another source the name of Ganganarayan's *Guru* is denoted as Noor Rang instead of Mir Nasiram. A list of the Performers maintaining the tradition of *Dhrupad* is also obtained (**Roy 161**).

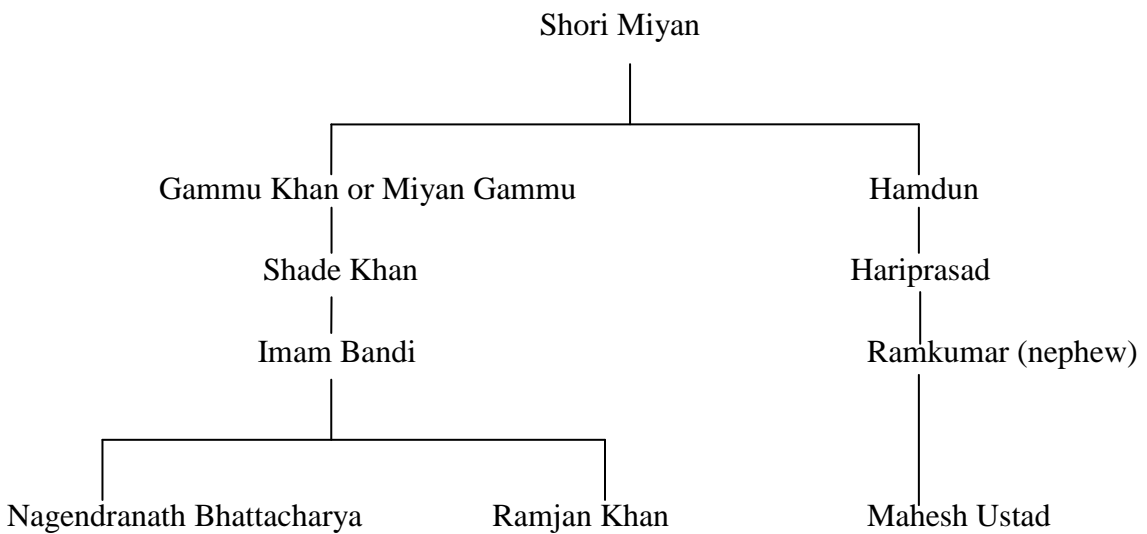


During the second half of the nineteenth Century A.D. the *Bengalees* who made astonishing success in the performance of *Dhrupad* were Jadunath Roy, Ramdas Goswami, Gopal Chandra Chakraborty (known as Nulo Gopal) and Lakshminarayan Babaji (**Goswami 69**).

Nagendranath learnt *Khyal* from Banne Khan, Ahmmad khan and Bade Dumni Khan. Latter Ustads trained him with *Telena* (*Tarana?*) and *Tappa* respectively. He learnt both *Khyal* and *Thumri* from Srijan Bai. Nagendranath received maximum lessons of *Tappa* from Imam Bandi (**Mukhopadhyay 53-54**). Ahmmad khan was a *Khyaliya* of Lucknow *Gharana*. He had connection with the Royal Court of Wazid Ali Shah of *Metiyaburz* (Kolkata) and the Pathuriyaghata Thakurbadi. He taught Nagendranath and Bamacharan Bandyopadhyay, another *Bengalee* in the tradition of *Khyal*. There was a contemporary Performer of *Khyal* named Satkadi Malakar, These three *Bengalee* made the *Khyal* singing popular in Bengal (**Mukhopadhyay 45**). The *Pal-Chowdhurys'* of Ranaghat played a vital role to arrange a congenial place of learning traditional music. Nagendranath availed this opportunity. He learnt mostly *Khyal* and *Thumri* from Srijan Bai due to the courtesy of that family. She had mastery upon *Dhrupad*, *Khyal*, *Tappa* and *Thumri* (**Mukhopadhyay 45**).

Imam Bandi had also connection with the Royal Court of Wazid Ali Shah of *Metiyaburz* (Kolkata) who was a Court singer of the King of *Kashi* (**Goswami 35**). Nagendranath learnt *Tappa* from her. Ramjan Khan, her son and Nagendranath were both her disciples and

popularized *Tappa* in Bengal. In this context, the name of Mahesh Chandra Mukhopadhyay (Mahesh Ustad) is relevant. Both Mahesh and Ramjan sang various traditional *Tappas*. Umanath Bhattacharya (1829-1894 A.D.), Nagendrannath's father, learnt *Tappa* from Ambika Charan, a disciple of Kali Mirza or Kalidas Chattopadhyay (1750-1820 A.D. approximately). Kali Mirza and Imam Bandi both belonged to the same tradition of learning. The source of this tradition is Ustad Shade Khan of Kashi (Banaras) *Gharana*. In the same way, Mahesh Ustad learnt *Tappa* from Ramkumar Mishra of *Manohar-Prasaddu Gharana*. This *Gharana* followed the tradition of Hamdun, a disciple of Shori Miyan. So, the following diagram may be illustrated for better understanding of this tradition of *Tappa*, once performed in Bengal (**Mukhopadhyay 45**) & (**Mukhopadhyay 4**).



Now, the contemporary Performers with Nagendranath Bhattacharya may be discussed. **Aghore Chandra Chakraborty** was born approximately in 1951/1952 A.D. He received immense *Taleem* of *Dhrupad* from Ustad Ali Baksh, a descendant of Miyan Tansen. He also learnt *Dhrupad* from Ustad Murad Ali and Ustad Daulat Khan. Besides, Aghore Chandra learnt *Tappa* and *Bhajan* from Srijan Bai and Bholanath Das respectively. He earned fame by his performances and produced a good number of disciples. Amarnath Bhattacharya, Gopal Chandra Bandyopadhyay, Nikunja Bihari Dutta, Pran Krishna Chottopadhyay, Sachindranath Mitra etc. became famous among them (**Das Sharma 148-149**). In this context **Gopal Chandra Chakraborty**, another name, may also be drawn. He had expertise over both *Dhrupad* and *Khyal*. He learnt *Dhrupad* from Gopal Prasad Mishra, the famous *Dhrupadiya* of Varanasi (Banaras). Gopal Chandra was the only *Bengalee* who gathered the lessons of *Khyal* from Ustad Haddu Khan and Ustad Hassu Khan of Gwalior *Gharana*. Gopal Chandra taught many a great Performers such as Alauddin Khan, Satkadi Malakar, Lalchand Badal, Radhika Prasad Goswami, Ramprasanna Bandyopadhyay, Ramtaran SSanyal, Harinarayan Mukhopadhyay etc. (**Das Sharma 131-132**). Last but not

the least is the name of **Lakshminarayan Babaji**. He was mainly a *Dhrupadiya*. Apart from the learning of *Dhrupad* he was a *Khyaliya* (performer of *Khyal*) and had expertise over *Thumri*, *Tappa* as well as several musical instruments such as *Veena*, *Sitar*, *Esraj*, *Tabla* and *Pakhawaj*. He basically learnt *Dhrupad* and *Pakhawaj* from Thadidas. Besides, he learnt from Ramkumar Mishra, Guruprasad Mishra, Haider Khan, Ramjan Khan, Srijan Bai etc. His disciples, so to speak, were Nagendranath Bhattacharya, Rajendranath Ghosh, Satkadi Malakar, Saratchandra Mitra, Jogendranath Roy, Lalmohan Basu, Braja Jiban Mukhopadhyay etc. (**Das Sharma 128-129**).

Conclusion: Ramshankar Bhattacharya (1761-1853 A.D. approximately), Vishnu Chandra Chakraborty (1804-1900 A.D.), Kalipada Chattopadhyay or Kali Mirza (1750-1820 A.D. approximately) and Ramnidhi Gupta or Nidhu Babu (1741-1839 A.D.) ---- all left their valuable marks in the minds of the *Bengalees* during their times. Although they learnt *Hindustani* classical music but they worked on the music, mostly composed in Bengali either in the form of *Dhrupad* or *Tappa* or some other forms. Of course, the *Bengalees* during the times of those Performers tried to assess the essence of the forms under *Hindustani* classical music, already mentioned. It took a few decades to realize the musical forms as well as to materialize the same into performance. Patronage to *Hindustani* classical musical forms as well as training under Maestros of the same enabled the *Bengalees* during the second phase of nineteenth century A.D. to excel in their respective fields. Nagendranath Bhattacharya and a very few personalities were blessed with the erudition in several segments in *Hindustani* classical music and for this the trend of the standard of music continued far reaching through their disciples.

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