



The Role of Tabla in Indian Reality Television After 2000 and Its Positive Impacts

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Abstract

This study examines the positive impact of the Tabla, in Indian reality programs produced after the year 2000. The focus is on the featured/solo performances of Tabla as well as the performances in which Tabla is as accompaniment instrument in musical orchestra of the selected episodes. The main objective is identifying the impact of Tabla on the Indian reality TV programs after year 2000 in relation to cultural heritage, method of teaching and responses on the audience. By using purposive sampling, the study identifies and analyzes certain episodes of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, Indian Idol and India's Got Talent in which the performances on Tabla were featured. These featured performances on Tabla were either solo/individual performances or part of the whole musical orchestra of the show. The study has been carried out by means of thematic and discourse analysis and it discusses the cultural symbolism, the pedagogical narratives and the reactions of the audience. The study reveals that the tabla is not only an instrument but also a cultural symbol and by linking up Hindustani classical music with today's audiences. The study finds that the tabla regenerates interest for the heritage as well as for the much traditional guru-shishya parampara which is brought to life by the reality shows. These reality TV shows not only help in discovering talent but also support in the career of a musician. The tabla player on these reality TV shows functions as cultural ambassadors. They defend classical heritage, promote music and present Indian classical music on a global platform.

Key words: Audience reception, Cultural heritage, Indian reality programmes, Musical fusion, Tabla

1. Introduction

Reality TV was introduced in the Indian market around early 2000s. The phenomenon soon changed popular culture and brought in a wide array of reality shows with mix of human emotions and music. The shows like Sa Re Ga Ma Pa (Zee TV, 1995), Indian Idol (Sony TV, 2004) and India's Got Talent (Colors TV, 2009) introduced variety of music on Indian television while connecting to the masses. These shows were not just restricted to one genre of music; they also served as a platform to various artists to display their talents.

According to Choudhury (2020), reality shows gained immense popularity by blending Indian classical and folk music with other entertainment formats. Tabla within the Hindustani classical music tradition has a very defined role to play in

terms of the artistic and educational value of performance of the instrument on television. Most of the time the Tabla is highlighted as a solo instrument or is used as background support to the sound of the program. Because of this, Tabla is often associated with such programs and becomes a part of the overall sound.

The paper explores positive utilization of tabla on Indian reality TV after the year 2000. The objectives of the paper are: (1) Description of how tabla is used on reality TV shows and its impact on content and characters of shows; (2) Description of impact of reality TV that utilizes tabla on schools and rest of traditional culture; (3) Audiences' perceptions towards classical music in the given context; (4) How media houses frame and validate classical art; and (5) Utilization of digital platforms for promotion of traditional/classical music.

There are three interconnected gaps that this research seeks to address. Firstly, within ethnomusicology there is no in-depth study of the tabla in different situations outside of the concert or studio environment, specifically within Indian reality television programs of the post-2000 era. Secondly, whilst there has been a great deal of media studies research into cultures' negotiation of and representation within reality TV formats within the Indian context, there is a lack of in-depth research specifically into the role of the tabla in these programs (Roy, 2015; Shrivastava, 2012). Finally, the existing literature lacks a study of the audience reception of the tabla on television. While the studies by Chatterjee (2020) and Singh (2021) investigate the representation of the tabla in various media formats, a key variable to investigate is that of the difference in how the instrument is perceived by the viewer when it is presented as a solo instrument as opposed to when it is being used as part of the regular musical accompaniment of a particular genre.

The current study attempts to address this gap in the literature by using the above mentioned distinction as an analytical variable and by providing data on the perceptions of the instrument as presented in these various formats. In doing so, the study here makes three contributions to the knowledge of the media: (1) Evidence of the continued cultural relevance of the classical Hindustani instrument of the tabla in the commercial entertainment medium of television; (2) A detailed account of a media-to-pedagogy feedback loop whereby exposure to a particular genre on television prompts viewers to enroll in classical music classes; (3) A novel analytical framework—the featured as opposed to the accompanying performance of the tabla—using this particular instrument as a case study that can be applied to the study of other classical instruments and their representation in a variety of popular media formats.

2. Literature Review

The review attempts to summarize existing research within five disciplines of ethnomusicology, media studies, cultural symbolism, pedagogy and audience reception, and also highlights the gaps in research that the present study tries to fill.

2.1 Ethnomusicological Perspectives on the Tabla

Ethnomusicologists studying the classical music of North India, known as Hindustani music, have been analyzing the tabla over several decades. Some of these studies, like Jairazbhoy (1995) and Wade (1984), offer a historical account of the instrument and present various styles of performance embedded within different gharanas of Indian classical music. The focus of these studies is however different: Jairazbhoy focuses on the role of the tabla as a medium of oral transmission. Within this frame the various rhythmic cycles (talas) and syllables (bols) used on the instrument are part of a shared pool of knowledge which is being transmitted orally from one generation of players and listeners to the next. In contrast Wade looks at the instrument within the larger frame of the socio-cultural structure of performance of Indian classical music.

There is much research that has determined the role of the tabla to be greater than that of a timekeeper, thus laying down pedagogical and cultural memory for this very important classical Indian percussion instrument. Neuman (2010) discusses the use of the tabla in fusion and popular music and states that the tabla functions as a mediator of traditional sound and modern sound, unlike the other classical Indian percussion instruments. Each of the above referenced arguments will be applied to the current study of reality television. In exploring the very hybrid nature of much of the music found on these programs, the use of the tabla in various contexts is acknowledged. The use of the tabla, however, has been studied by all three scholars within the parameters of concert, performance, or studio-based settings. This study, on the other hand, is attempting to explore the use of the tabla on television within the parameters of entertainment.

2.2 Media Studies and Reality Television in India

With the increasing popularity of Reality TV in India and how it can impact the audience's perception of art; Shrivastava (2012) and Roy (2015) discussed how Reality TV functions as a medium through which culture is democratized. Within this framework of cultural negotiations of the traditional and contemporary and democratic practices of culture, Reality TV provides a platform for a variety of different music forms and associated identities of different regions. For Shrivastava (2012) the framework of an 'Indian' frame of reference would be applicable in this context. This study therefore looks at how Reality TV could be a platform to portray the different forms of the tabla, a classical Hindustani percussion instrument typically associated with individualistic performance practice, within different viewer contexts.

This paper examines two different media perspectives. Those of Shrivastava and Roy who describe media in terms of institutions (media) and the audience as performers. This perspective will be very relevant to an analysis of how the tabla is presented on television. The viewpoints of the two scholars will be able to be analyzed in relation to the roles of the television program producers. The viewpoint of the musicians themselves, who present the tabla on television, will also be analyzed in great depth, and both perspectives will be supported with examples from the study.

This study focuses upon the ways in which entertainment programs which feature music serve to popularize classical music, while also ensuring that the pedagogic content of the music is not lost. In order to explore the major role of the tabla in these emerging forms of entertainment for the mass audience, the study also attempts to explore and understand the audience's perceptions of the instrument and its special place in Indian culture. Unlike Mehta (2013) the focus of this study is upon the percussion instruments in general and the tabla in particular.

2.3 Cultural Symbolism and Identity

The tabla has more meaning than just symbolizing. Using theories of cultural identity by Hall (1997) and Bhabha (1994) it can be examined how media portray cultural identity. In the context of reality TV, the signifier of the tabla is given a meaning through the cultural exchange of the show. In this context the tabla has a dual coding of being 'authentically Indian' and of being entertaining.

This study also explores the potential of Bhabha's (1994) cultural hybridity approach by focusing on the ambivalence of popular culture that incorporates 'classical' cultural practices into popular entertainment. Hence, the use of the tabla on reality TV is not merely 'traditional' music, or is it 'commercial' music? In fact, it is situated in a 'third space' where new meanings are generated. While the use of the tabla on reality TV provides a more 'positive' account of the 'cultural' in popular culture than an approach such as Hall's (which is discussed in more detail below), it more adequately accounts for the tension between the judges'/producers' representations of the music and the audiences' perceptions of it. This study found that there existed considerable tensions between the 'purists' and the 'younger' generation of viewers of reality TV. Thus, Bhabha's approach to hybridity is more productive for this study than that of Hall.

Here, both Banerjee (2016) and Mukherjee (2018) are talking of same subject, i.e., of how the tabla is returning to the center stage of national television. This scenario is part of the postcolonial cultural reclamation wherein indigenous art forms are being retrieved and projected in the globalized flows of media. While Banerjee (2016) focused on the visibility of the tabla on TV and its consequent impacts upon the audiences at home and how they feel about national pride through the screened tabla, Mukherjee (2018) in her work concentrated on how Indian classical music (through the example of tabla) is negotiating through global media and challenging the perceived superiority of Western music, and the graded values of same that are distributed through global media.

Here both the issues are relevant for the present study; first, the perceptions of the audience with regard to different issues are being studied and presented in chapter 4, Section 4.3 of the present study, and the study of digital platforms through Section 4.5 of the same. The root of the issue, however, lies in the fact that how reality TV programs can bring about such an impact in the first place. The current study therefore shall attempt to fill up this research gap through an empirical study.

2.4 Pedagogical Implications

The impact of reality television on pedagogy of music education was studied by Raghavan (2017) and Deshpande (2019). The authors analyzed the performances by contestants as well as their mentorship and how that affected the audience's perception of music education. In particular, the study focused on appearances by tabla players on reality TV and the subsequent impact on music education within the traditional framework of the guru-shishya parampara.

This phenomenon of a feedback loop of how classical music pedagogy can be sustained in contemporary times through a study of music academies where a significant group of students have taken up classical music, including through influence of reality TV, was the focus of study by Deshpande (2019). However, the way students from these music academies perceive different instruments of classical music and how the tabla is perceived in that context was not the focus area of that study. The present study attempts to address these research questions.

2.5 Audience Reception and Social Impact

Chatterjee (2020) and Singh (2021) studied the performances of tabla on reality shows. Chatterjee's study however differed from Singh's study in approach. Chatterjee's study found that audiences read instrumental mastery in terms of artistic and cultural value and thus there was inter-generational empathy among viewers. Singh's study on the other hand found inter-generational differences among younger and urban audiences who preferred the fusion performances by the contestants and the older generation who preferred the traditional performances by the judges. Neither of the two studies, however isolated the featured-versus-accompanying variable studied here. However, both the studies found that compared to other instruments, the attention that audiences gave to the performances increased exponentially with the increase in the rhythmic intricacy of the instrument, specifically the tabla in this case.

Existing studies on reality TV have noted the medium's ability to connect to audiences in urban and rural locations across India. However, these studies have also noted the huge variety that exists in terms of formats, styles and stories as told by participants from all over India. The two studies, however, do not explore the audience's reception to the use of the tabla as the main melodic line as opposed to the accompaniment that it commonly is in most musical forms, which is the focus of this study.

2.6 Gaps in the Literature

There are many studies conducted on the topic of this research and it is great to use the findings of those studies for this research. However, more specific focus is needed on how the tabla affects reality TV in India after the year 2000. There is no in-depth study of the media, the pedagogy, the cultural identity and the audiences that the tabla represents. The intention of this study is to complete a synthesising analysis of the subject by using both theoretical and empirical methods.

In her article titled *Influencing Popular Culture: The Reality TV* (Choudhury, 2020), the author dealt with the impact of reality TV on the Indian popular culture. However, it seems that none of the research attempts have been made to study the role of the tabla in current TV programs. While ICMA Scholarship Program (2023) in its article 'Transmission of Indian Classical Music' enumerated the ways of transmission of the Indian classical music through the author discussed the ways of transmission of the Indian classical music through the traditional guru-shishya parampara as well as through various institutions and music schools which impart training in the said genre of music. However, it is observed that none of the said research attempts have been made to study the programs of reality TV in which classical music is made available to the masses. It is also observed that there is a dearth of research that how the audiences perceive issues of authenticity and innovation in relation to the performances of the tabla that are shown on the TV.

Though there may be studies on how reality programs affect Indian popular culture and the way of disseminating classical traditions to a wider audience (Choudhury, 2020), there is an absolute lack of studies specifically focusing on the role of tabla in reality TV shows. There is also a need for an audience study on perception of performances of tabla on TV between authenticity and innovation.

3. Methodology and Materials

3.1 Research Design

This study looks at the ways in which classical tabla features in Indian reality TV after the year 2000 through an in-depth study of the various influences the classical instrument has on reality TV in India. Qualitative studies are generally conducted in order to analyze cultural, media representations and pedagogical aspects that affect the viewer. This study thus conducts systematic media content analysis followed by thematic and discourse analysis to analyze the various roles the tabla plays on reality TV.

3.2 Data Collection

The data was collected from various sources which are made public. The primary data for this study consists of number of video recordings. The selected video recordings were from the selected episodes of three major Indian reality shows – Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, Indian Idol and India's Got Talent, aired between years 2000 and 2024.

The analysis follows a per-episode format. There are two scenarios in which the tabla figures: One in which it is the solo / featured instrument for a special episode of the show and is highlighted – performed and commented upon by the judges; and a second in which it is an element of the large orchestral accompaniment to a musician or other group of artistes, in which case it is not a particularly individual component of the music, but its presence is readily identifiable in the overall sound.

This list includes reviews of tabla performances in various programs, interviews with the artists who performed in these programs, analyses and comments by others who have watched them. Here are also secondary sources of data such as social media platforms and online fan communities of Indian classical music and secondary data from academic sources like studies on Indian classical music and publications on music pedagogy.

3.3 Sampling Strategy

For selecting the performances and episodes from which to sample Tabla playing, research employed a purposive approach. Tabla played either as the main instrument or as part of a total musical ensemble featured as the central instrument in the selected performances and episodes. A variety of gharanas, players/contestants, and programs were selected in order to provide comparisons within different contexts.

3.4 Analytical Framework

This study employs two analytical frameworks: (1) thematic analysis of programs about the tabla as cultural symbol, pedagogical stories of its study, and audience reception of programs featuring the tabla; and (2) discourse analysis of the ways in which the tabla is constructed and framed by the on-screen dialogue of programs, the evaluations of the judges in these programs, and the personal stories of the contestants in them. The study reveals many of the hidden cultural assumptions about self and others that inspire programs about the tabla.

3.5 Materials

Materials used in this research include:

- Video recordings from selected reality TV shows (some of the episodes where tabla is featured alone and some of the episodes where tabla is used as accompaniment in performances by contestants).
- Transcripts of judges' commentary and contestants' interviews
- Online comments on social media platforms in relation to video clips of episodes of Reality TV in which tabla has been featured.
- Academic articles and books on teaching tabla and Indian classical music.
- Published articles by music journalists and other scholars and commentators (including those who write about music and culture more generally).

3.6 Ethical Considerations

We respect the intellectual property rights of other media and only use publicly available data that we have referenced and cited accordingly. Where data from social media has been used, participants have been kept anonymous where possible. We

adhere to the full ethical guidelines for qualitative media studies and treat all artists and audiences with the respect that they deserve. They will be represented fairly and accurately.

3.7 Limitations

Due to the nature of the qualitative research above a complete and detailed representation of the Reality TV audience and production has not been obtained. The use of purposive sampling within the research means that there are limitations in relation to statistical generalization. Future research into Reality TV would benefit from being a quantitative research study, consisting of an audience survey on a large scale as well as a media analysis on a large scale.

4. Results

The results of our systematic content analysis of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, Indian Idol and India's Got Talent between the years 2000 and 2024 are outlined below. The results of the five research questions of the introduction will be presented in the following sections, followed by a critical reflection of the results in discussion.

4.1 Tabla's Role in Shaping Reality Show Content

This study attempts to explore the ways in which performances featuring tabla have been represented by the producers and judges of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, Indian Idol and India's Got Talent. The study uses selected episodes of the three programs to analyze the representations of performances of tabla and examines how musicality has been showcased in them and how the performances have been evaluated in terms of technical ability. The study finds that performances of tabla have been presented in two different ways. Firstly, they have been presented as featured/solo pieces of tabla performance that have been extensively commented upon by the judges of the respective shows and have been the focus of the audience's votes in respective shows. Secondly, the performances of tabla have been presented as accompaniment to other performances which have, in turn, enhanced the artistic value of the respective performances.

There is a visible pattern that prevails in the judgments of performances rendered by the participants. In the performances where the cycle of the musical form has been precisely executed by incorporating the use of tabla, the performers have been accorded immense appreciation in their judgments. For instance, in the performance of the ensemble Raaga Fusion, in India's Got Talent Season 10 (2023), the group consisted of a fusion ensemble and performed a Hindustani music based fusion act for their performance. The performance was of great appreciation amongst the audience and the judges as well. The center of attraction of the performance was a solo performance on the tabla by Jayant Patnaik, who is a university alumnus, and the other members of the group too are from University. In the performance of the contestants in Sa Re Ga Ma Pa (2017), the use of tabla was confined to the accompaniment of the performances of bandish and ghazals by the contestants. The lay (tempo) and taal (rhythmic cycle) of the performances of the contestants were

commended by the judges as the background of Roopak Taal and Dadra Taal were created by the tabla.

4.2 Impact on Educational Institutions and Cultural Practices

The pedagogical value of a performance of tabla on a reality TV show were further solidified through the comments of the judges as well as the interviews of the contestants. While the contestants spoke about their own experiences of learning tabla, as well as how it had affected their artistic development, the judges in comments about the performances of the contestants' tabla explained the various rhythmic cycles and tala structures to the viewers. For many of the contestants in the analyzed episodes of reality TV the guru-shishya parampara was the root of their own education of tabla. The comments of the judges regarding the performance of the contestants' tabla validated the traditional system of pedagogy on a national TV show for audiences to see.

Rupesh Mishra from Sa Re Ga Ma Pa (2024) shared with great fondness the way his guru made him do riyaz on a daily basis, helped him to master over taal and sur and attributed his growth to guru-shishya parampara. When Rupesh performed semi-classical song accompanied by tabla and harmonium, mentors Sachet-Parampara lauded him for the stability that he maintained. Jayant Patnaik, Tabla player from the India's Got Talent, Season 10, 2023 show Raaga Fusion shared in the backstage interviews how his years of guru-shishya helped him in improvisation in his fusion act, a quality that the judges also appreciated in the act and commented that the band was able to bring in innovative ways of presenting traditional songs. Thus the shows proved to be platforms for transmission of techniques of playing tabla and the methods of classical music to a large audience.

4.3 Audience Responses

Comments on social media platforms and online fan forums for the performances of tabla were extremely emotive, particularly in regard to the musicians' ability to play the instrument and the audiences' ability to recognize the heritage of the instrument. Using thematic analysis to examine the comments of the audiences within the online forum discussions two main themes were identified. The first theme, Indian classical music, discussed the comments of the audiences in relation to the performances of tabla within the context of Indian classical music. The second theme, musical fusion, discussed the comments of the audiences in relation to the use of the tabla in other musical contexts in order to create musical fusion.

The new audiences have become far more engaged and able to connect with music that is a fusion of Hindustani classical with other genres. The YouTube link of the final performance of a group from Raaga Fusion's Season 10 (2023) of India's Got Talent has been viewed by thousands of people.

While the comments of the older viewers bring back memories of the golden days of Doordarshan — where audiences would flock to watch concerts of the traditions of Hindustani classical music being performed by great artists, being shown on the mainstream media — the comments of the younger viewers have described the

performance as 'fire' and that this is far more relatable to them and the type of music that they normally listen to.

The comments of the three judges were varied too. Kumar Sanu praised the performance stating that it was a great classical fusion. However, he was not as impressed as the other two judges, Vishal Dadlani and Kushal Punjabi. Vishal Dadlani was far more impressed than Kumar Sanu, stating that the performance was far ahead of all the contemporary Bollywood soundtracks and that it was creative.

4.4 Media Framing and Validation of Classical Expression

Tabla performances serve not only as a talent identification forum for young Tabla players but also as a means for them to build up their careers. For instance, by participating in tabla performances, young Tabla players can gain more exposure, thereby leading to more opportunities to perform, record, etc. They would also get to experience being on stage in front of live audiences. Comments by the judges as well as the mentors of the participants at these performances consistently portrayed the Tabla players in a positive light. They were seen as ambassadors of our culture and heritage. Thus, classical percussion in the form of Tabla has found acceptance and respect as a discipline and a prestigious field within the entertainment industry. The mainstream media has taken notice of classical percussionists like the Tabla players.

Yashwant Vaishnav, the young Tabla player is also a performer of classical music and was a part of India's Got Talent. Though he didn't make it to the finals, his audition and subsequent classical performances on the show garnered attention from across the country. Subsequently, he has performed at all the major classical festivals all across India including Sawai Gandharva Bhimsen Mahotsav. Vaishnav is an able accompanist to many leading exponents of Hindustani classical music. He was recently awarded the Ustad Bismillah Khan Yuva Puraskar by Sangeet Natak Academy.

4.5 Digital Platforms and Musical Diversity

In some of the hybrid performances of classical music the artist performed tabla as part of a mix of classical music and current popular music such as pop, rock and electronic music. These performances were in order to show to a broader audience how versatile the classical percussion instrument of the tabla can be as part of a rhythm section in live ensemble performances of music. These performances were shown on television as well as being put up on YouTube, on the artist's Instagram account and on other online fan-based platforms. As such the performances of tabla were promoted to a global audience through the new media channels.

Video clips of the physical expression of the solo Tabla using its visible hand technique and dynamic control, are viewed by international users who have no prior knowledge of the music of Hindustani classical. This may be exemplified by two video clips. One YouTube video and one Instagram Reels video of the performance by Raaga Fusion of 'Raag Desh' (performed on India's Got Talent, Season 10, 2023-24) whereby the vocals of this Hindustani classical raga were blended with that of the

guitar and played on the solo Tabla of the Fusion by comments from users from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Nepal, as well as from users of Indian origin who are based in the United Kingdom. The comments stated that the 'authentic Indian soul' was added to the music by the solo Tabla.

Note also that some of the purely classical pieces have received cross-border exposure, for example, a video of Yashwant Vaishnav playing a solo Teentaal on tablas was viewed by people in Germany and other parts of Europe for the first time live, as classical content as well as fusion content increases visibility of the instrument outside of India.

4.6 Challenges Identified

Reality TV can present problems for the representation of the tabla. Whilst some may be appreciative of a fusion performance, many purists feel that this would dilute the nature of a very traditional classical instrument. Also, in competition format of most reality TV programs, music is generally treated more as spectacle than seriously. Comments by the judges sometimes even reveal the conflict between their expertise of classical music and the more populist nature of a TV program, which must then be negotiated between the artist's right to a true representation and his work, and the audience's need for entertainment.

A particular battle that is going on for justice to the instrument of tabla in performance is that of the tabalists in fusion performances, on a recent India's Got Talent forum. Fans of Raaga Fusion vented their disappointment at having their performances repeatedly 'drowned' out by the lead singer and reduced to background of simple beats in their 'Bollywood-ized' version of a song, while the judges were full of praise of the group for their 'originality' and 'creativity' in the performance. A similar annoyance was expressed on fan forums for the semi-classical rounds of another competition, Sa Re Ga Ma Pa (2017). While every now and then one of the judges would remark that in most cases of such fusion performances the role of the tabalists was reduced to that of a supporting 'percussive garnish' to the main vocals, in most cases they were also lauded by the judges for being the driving force of the rhythm of the performance. Comments on this from older as opposed to younger viewers tended to reveal the traditionalists' fear of dilution as opposed to modernisation of semi-classical music through the incorporation of the elements of popular music into its performance.

5. Discussion

5.1 Cultural Significance and Symbolism

For people familiar with India, the tabla is more than just a musical instrument – it is a sign in Indian culture. Therefore, on reality TV, the tabla can be used to pay respects to India's long and diverse musical heritage and bring to viewers of such program's traditional arts within the mainstream of today's media, mostly dominated by global pop culture. From the perspective of Hall's (1997) outline of cultural representation, the tabla can function as a signifier of 'authenticity' and 'heritage'.

This study examines how the senior tabla player, Yashwant Vaishnav, is framed by the judges in several different entertainment programs in which he performs. The framing of this musician by the judges within these entertainment programs signifies him to the audience, within the signifying practice as described by Hall (1997), as the 'guru' of a younger student, for example. Furthermore, through their framing of Raaga Fusion's 'fusion' songs, that feature the tabla as the primary percussion instrument, the judges of these entertainment programs are encoding the instrument within the performance of the musical in order to earn capital within the marketplace. The judges' encoding of the instrument within the performance of the musical, through their framing of the performance within the wider circuits of representation (ibid.) is read and interpreted by the audience. This reading and interpretation of the musicians' performance by the audience extends beyond the frame of the television program and is reproduced in other contexts, for example comments left on You Tube after viewing a performance by Raaga Fusion. For example a viewer of this performance wrote 'it was nice...especially the tabla gave it an authentic Indian soul to the songs'. By including the tabla in primetime reality programming, Banerjee (2016) examines the ways in which the tabla can be seen as a postcolonial site of cultural reclamation.

Not restricted to performance, the tabla as a musical instrument embodies the centuries of musical and devotional practice our country has to offer. Thus on one hand it heralds a significant cultural statement for the television space of today and on the other it brings India's rich heritage to the viewer's attention and enables him/her to participate and express in the current reality television format and indulge in India's national identity and culture and subsequently experience and express his/her cultural pride.

5.2 Growing Musical Diversity

Reality TV shows in India are now focusing on a diverse variety of music when it comes to their shows. Interestingly, Tabla has been playing a huge role in adding to the variety of music. The Tabla, being a very complex rhythmic instrument and versatile at the same time, has led to creation of innovative music arrangements which incorporate Indian classical rhythms in the most contemporary form of music like pop, rock and even electronic music. The countless possibilities that are offered by the instrument are one of the reasons why reality TV has become so popular amongst both the producers and the contestants.

The Tabla player, Jayant Patnaik of Raaga Fusion, in their performance of Desh on India's Got Talent Season 10 (2023) maintained the rhythmic framework of Teentaal and hence maintained the classical aspect of performance. The Hindustani vocals along with electric guitar created a Contemporary blend of sound using other instruments like guitars and synthesizers in the song, but the role of the Tabla was that of a link to connect the genres as well as that of an anchor to hold the classical aspect of the performance. Runner Up was not the only act to receive widespread acclaim. The Act received equally impressive reviews from people of all ages from all corners of the country. The use of the tabla not only brought a new audience to The Act's diverse musical talents but also created a whole new listening community.

People who have been inspired by the tabla and are interested in learning more about it and other different cultures.

In addition to the performance of tabla in new situations, its visibility in hybrid settings of music production and composition is of particular significance. The use of tabla rhythms in popular music production has led to many examples of new compositions that incorporate classical percussion into them. These pieces are performed in mainstream entertainment events and thus further reinforce the acceptance of Indian classical music and its instruments. As in studio recordings, reality TV projects also provide a collaborative working environment for the composer and the tabla player. Thus for example, the ensemble work on Raaga Fusion, a project of various instruments playing together in Hindustani classical and contemporary music, leads to even more sophisticated musical structures that are more integrated. The resulting higher quality of music fosters more artistic interaction between the two musicians of different musical genres.

5.3 Educational Impact

Many reality TV programs from all over the world are used as platforms for informal learning of different kinds of expertise. The programs about playing the tabla within the reality genre can provide the audience with information on how to play the instrument and on the history of the instrument as well as on the different playing styles. By comments of experts and by one on one training or 'mentoring' by a teacher comments of students and audience members of all ages can find out about classical music in order to decrease the perceived inaccessibility to it of people of all ages but especially of the younger generation.

The feedback loop created by these programs makes the tabla more visible in public life, motivates people to join institutions of classical music where they can learn to play the tabla, and thus the programs can draw from a pool of performing students. The study of reality TV programs thus bears out Deshpande's (2019) findings that students of the tabla enrolled in classes because they had watched the instrument featured on reality TV programs. An important site for the study of cultural reproduction, thus, are reality TV programs.

5.4 Talent Discovery and Career Opportunities

Tabla players have found new ways of being professional as a result of the exposure they have received through reality TV. In addition to learning and mastering their musical skills through the competitions, they are exposed to a national platform of performance with other musicians and also of recording their own music and holding concerts and getting media coverage. More importantly, the judges on these programs refer to the tabla players as 'cultural ambassadors'. This categorization of the percussionist within the mainstream music industry greatly enhances their professional status and is a huge contrast to the earlier hierarchies where melodic instruments had dominated in popular entertainment.

5.5 Audience Engagement and Emotional Connection

The rhythmic cycles and patterns in the tabla can evoke the utmost of emotions, such as high levels of energy and peace. Using live tabla in reality TV performances can increase the emotions of a performer and the audience viewing their performance. With the range of the tabla, there is great depth of expression, thus the artist is able to reach relate to his or her audience on a deep level. Because of the physical aspect of playing the tabla, visible from the outside by means of the performer's hands, and the dynamic range which he is able to control, such performances are above all live performances. The connection between performer and viewer is especially intense and as a rule provokes not only great applause but also a lot of sympathy, especially if the music performed has had a strong impact.

5.6 Challenges and Criticisms

While the tabla is receiving a fair amount of exposure in a positive light on these reality TV shows, there are also many classic music performers and music critics who are concerned about the sort of compromises that will be made to the instrument's classical roots and that the nature of the competition format will overwhelm the serious nature of the performance and turn it into simple entertainment for the masses. The traditional bias of giving more importance to the vocalist and the melodic instrument over the tabla player in such a representation of reality also needs to be addressed.

It is up to the producers of these reality TV shows to ensure that classical percussion does not become simply a commodity to be sold to a mass audience and that the shows are well programmed to reflect all aspects of classical music, old and new, including the opportunity for contemporary creative work using these heritage instruments.

5.7 Future Prospects

In near future the role of tabla in reality TV programs would increase manifold. This is because reality TV is increasing in numbers and also more and more people are taking to watching different kinds of music on television. People can now reach out to different parts of the globe and watch different performances on digital media like YouTube and other streaming platforms. This would further increase the role of tabla in reality TV programs to reach to a larger audience. There will be programs of cross genre and cross culture where music played on tabla would be given fresh interpretations and would thus continue to remain relevant. Also, a program that runs with Reality TV could be created and taught as an educational tool. The viewers can watch and learn about a wide variety of music while watching Reality TV and be exposed to new and emerging young tabla players and their music.

6. Conclusion

The present study tries to figure out the positive effects of playing the tabla on the Indian reality TV shows that have emerged after the year 2000. A systematic study of selected episodes of three shows, i.e. Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, Indian Idol and India's Got Talent has led to the findings of the study. In the study, five major effects have been

studied. In the first place, the study found out that the player of the tabla appeared on the Indian reality TV in two different formats. In the first format, i.e. solo/ featured performance, the player received appreciation from the judges of the show praises for his performance and this Comments of the judges at length in relation to his performance got. In the second format, i.e. as part of the backing band, the player appeared in the support of other performers and in this case, the rhythmic base of the performance of other players was provided by him. The presence of the tabla in both the formats, enhanced the artistic value of a performance and it became the yardstick for the judges to determine the artistic merit of a performer.

Secondly, there is pedagogical transmission of classical music through these programs. The comments of the judges and the performances and narratives of the contestants in selected episodes reveal how classical concepts and practices are transmitted to the masses through these programs. For example, even a contestant like Rupesh Mishra who is currently a part of Sa Re Ga Ma Pa (2024) season drew upon his traditional guru-shishya parampara trained discipline and applied it while performing in the competition.

Third, we studied the audience data from various social media platforms as well as from the various fan forums. We found that there was a strong generational bias in the way audiences perceived music. The classical pieces performed with tabla as the main instrument got more appreciation from the older audiences, whereas the fusion pieces, where tabla was played with Bollywood music, rock music or electronic music, got more appreciation from the younger audiences. We could clearly see this bias in the reactions of the YouTube comments as well as the judges' reactions in India's Got Talent Season 10 (2023) finale where the performance by Raaga Fusion was showcased.

Fourth, here too the tabla player is seen as a cultural icon. His appearance on television led to some professional work viz. festival performances, recording with other musicians, etc. The two players who have gained from this impression are Jayant Patnaik and Yashwant Vaishnav. Vaishnav even got a national award.

The study's purpose has been to investigate the positive and negative impact that the presence of the tabla has had in post-2000 Indian reality TV, across the five areas of: the cultural, educational, professional and musical. Most importantly it investigates the positive creation of space for classical music within an entertainment format, and also the tensions that exist between that space and the commercial pressures brought to bear in order to dilute the authenticity of the classical music in order to reach a mass audience.

This qualitative study's findings are not statistically generalizable to audiences of reality TV programs. The study analyzed publicly available data from three reality TV programs. Future studies can use quantitative surveys to test the observed generational differences in perception by audiences of reality TV programs. The pedagogical effects reported by the contestants in the three national studies can be studied to determine if they result in classical music enrollment at the institutional level or not. It would also be useful to conduct a comparative study of reality TV programs currently on air on all the regional TV channels to find out if the observed

results are a result of the three national programs of study under consideration or if reality TV on Indian television is undergoing a change and is being used for pedagogical purposes and to create different effects on the audiences than what is observed in this study.

This study therefore provides empirical evidence to substantiate the impact that the presence of the tabla on Indian reality TV since 2000 has had for the visibility, pedagogy and profession of Hindustani classical music. The studies of all of the programs of reality TV that feature music such as Sa Re Ga Ma Pa, Indian Idol and the music of India's Got Talent demonstrate that rather than simply surviving on commercial entertainment the instrument of the tabla is utilizing reality TV in order to keep culture alive and in the public imagination and to generate new sites of career for the professional musician.

7. References

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