

DID YOU KNOW The origin of Tanpura

The instrument commonly known as the tanpura was originally called the tambura or tanpuri. Over time, as the instrument evolved, the name tanpura became widely adopted. The tanpura has ancient origins, with references in Indian texts dating back over 2,000 years. The evolution of the tanpura in India can be traced back to early stick-zithers. Sculptures from the 6th and 7th centuries depict musicians playing long lutes, though it is challenging to identify the exact type of instrument shown.



PHOTOS: ORCHID CHAKMA

Delving into the rich world of learning classical music

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Bangladesh boasts a rich musical heritage, where classical music holds a special place. Shaped by centuries of tradition, the practice of classical music has evolved over generations. Classical music has influenced South Asian contemporary music, with a large number of songs borrowing their melodies and structures from classical compositions. For young people growing up in a rapidly developing society, learning classical music presents both opportunities and challenges.

Learning classical music requires discipline, patience, and dedication. For many young learners, pursuing this art form means appreciating the technical and aesthetic aspects of music, developing a strong musical foundation, and immersing oneself in a world of endless learning.

“Classical music has taught me discipline, which is a crucial aspect of the art form. It has also helped shape my musical taste and personality. As a young musician, I now find that my training in classical music enables me to learn other genres with relative ease,” says Ryem Nabi Anwar, a young high school student.

Several avenues are available to learn classical music in Bangladesh, including music schools and institutions, online platforms and tutorials, as well as both offline and online private tutors.

Chhayanaaut Sangeet Bidayatan, one of the country’s leading musical institutions, has a dedicated *Shuddho Sangeet* programme where anyone above the age of ten can learn vocal and instrumental classical music. In addition, Bengal Parampara Sangeetalay, Shurer Dhara, and Bulbul Academy of Fine Arts (BAFA) are institutions that have excellent classical music programmes. Many learners also opt for private lessons from experienced teachers.

“As someone who is a slow learner of classical music, I feel private lessons are better for me, as the lessons are tailored to my pace and style of learning,” says Arunava Saha, a sixth-grade student who pursues classical music. Additionally, a wealth of online resources are available in the form of YouTube tutorial videos, websites with extensive music theory texts, and online courses by renowned teachers.

Sahiba Tasnia Tanushree, who moved to Sydney last year for her undergraduate studies, says that online resources have greatly helped her practice. “The availability of the tanpura online has helped me a lot, because I don’t really have access to a physical one here. Although it feels a bit different from the real thing, it’s pretty close.”

For many young classical music learners, the joy of learning was a highlight. “It is challenging, but it also comes with the satisfaction and feeling of accomplishment every time I successfully learn a new composition. To think that there will always be new things to learn gives me something to look forward to,” says Mrithika Das, a ninth-grade student who learns classical music.

Ryem also shares his love for the art, “The unpredictability of *Ragas* and the peace of mind that classical compositions provided made me fall in love with classical music.”

Similarly, teaching classical music can also be a very fulfilling experience. “Knowing that I am helping my students become better musicians is a very rewarding feeling. Seeing them overcome difficulties with extremely detailed and intricate compositions gives me immense joy,” says Sanjibon Sanyal, a classical music teacher who has been teaching students for over a decade.

However, the question remains, in a world where classical music is no longer mainstream, what motivates these young learners to continue learning?

For students, the challenge of balancing music with academics is significant, requiring parental support and careful scheduling. “Without my mother’s support, I would not be able to pursue classical music while simultaneously dealing with the workload that comes with O level examinations drawing near. However, despite the mounting academic pressure, music helps me relax and unwind,” Mrithika adds.

Ryem also emphasises the importance of support from family members. “My friends and family really appreciate that I pursue classical music, especially my family, who encourage me to practice daily,” he adds.

“Most of my peers at school don’t really know what it is I am investing so much of my time in, and it makes me quite sad really. I do it because I like to, and my parents support me. However, I do wish more people my age would understand and appreciate classical music,” says Arunava.

Sahiba thinks that most classical musicians, herself included, devote themselves to it not for external validation but because of their love for the craft. “My motivation to pursue classical music has

always been myself and my family, which I am sure is the case for most classical musicians by virtue of it being such a meditative and personal form of art,” she says.

Sanjibon says a lot of his students start learning classical music to improve other aspects of their singing but eventually start enjoying the challenges and processes involved with the discipline. “A lot of young singers come to me to improve their pitch or other technical aspects of their singing. However, they continue learning classical music because they start enjoying the meditative process even after their initial goals have been achieved.”

Classical music remains a niche genre for most people, but young classical musicians believe that both contemporary and classical music could benefit if elements of the latter were incorporated into the former. Contemporary pop and rock can diversify their sound, and classical music could gain more recognition.

“Mainstream media is beginning to use basic music theory, which often results in a lot of modern music sounding virtually the same,” Ryem voices his concerns over the lack of implementation of classical elements in contemporary media.

As there are very few people who learn classical music, the number of people teaching it is also limited. There are also a handful of platforms to perform in as the target demographic is relatively smaller compared to other genres. Such factors demotivate young classical musicians.

As Bangladesh continues to develop, preserving classical music traditions is imperative. Moreover, it will require both effort and innovation. More government and private initiatives, such as subsidised music programmes and scholarships, could help make classical music more accessible to children from diverse backgrounds. All of this is to say that learning classical music is more than just an extracurricular activity – it’s a journey into discipline, artistry, and cultural heritage. With dedicated teachers, supportive parents, and enthusiasm from young learners, classical music in Bangladesh has a promising future.

Bipra Prasun Das is a student and admirer of classical music. Send him your favourite songs at bipraprasun22@gmail.com



Places where you can learn classical music in Bangladesh

CHHAYANAUT SANGEET BIDYAYATAN

Chhayanaut offers a variety of short and long music courses for anyone above the age of seven. A lot of the courses are year-long programmes, but there are also courses that are three, four, and even six years long. Chhayanaut’s entry-level programmes are perfect for anyone interested in giving classical music a shot.

SHURER DHARA

Shurer Dhara, a renowned music school located in Lalmatia, Dhaka, was established in 1992 by Rezwana Chowdhury Bannya – a distinguished alumna of Visva-Bharati and a music professor at Dhaka University. Apart from its junior and general sections, Shurer Dhara also offers music courses to pre-schoolers.

BENGAL PARAMPARA SANGEETALAY

Bengal Parampara Sangeetalay (BPS), a programme of the Bengal Foundation, was established in 2014 with an aim to revive classical music in Bangladesh. BPS welcomes pupils from ages 6 to 24 and offers training across various genres including khayal, dhrupad, etc.