

Tailing the Tales of Love: Reading Rendition as an Extension of Imagery in the Select Compositions of S.D. Burman

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Humanity is universal and brings people together, more than religion ever did. It is needed to sustain and nurture people through the permutations of life. It becomes essential to address the ebb and flow of life and never allows the stench of stagnant ideologies to gain any degree of importance. The select songs through their lyrics and inherent melody present humanity as the ultimate design of love. Ranging from affection to passion, from the spontaneous expression of embedded emotions to the pain of a yearning heart, each song has a journey of its own. Enjoying the sombreness, splendour and textual grace, compositions of S.D. Burman are infused with joy and sorrow as elements of a composite whole.

The alliance of the two cultural surges of his parental origin, combined with the hues of the mysticism of folk songs, rural and *bhatiyali*, nurtured by the indulgent setting and environment of East Bengal and Tripura, aided Burman's cultural growth and musical exploration. In the restful night, when the flickering birds were lulled beside the stunted trees, knotted in their slumber, there was a sense of tranquillity in people's mind which made them look for not resources or relief but for silence and truth, or the flute they had heard before in the meadows nearby, as the lonely farmer aligned himself with a tree, having earned his day's labour, the song comforting his wearied self. It is music, rhythmic like the pulsating loom, like his heart entwining the chords with his wisdom that would foretell his prospect on a journey to attain his God in music.

Young Sachin, later celebrated as the genius Burman Da, sitting alone at night would smile at this moment of epiphany and let all music present around him, the chatter of birds, glistening waves of Durgabari, the unfurling ragas in his structured nursing of classical music, and his defying chase in the mud spattered lanes after the Baul singers nurture his soul, for it was an expedition to absorb generously what his surroundings had to offer in the form of music. The natives of rural Bengal had in their own way sown the seeds of happiness and suffering into the rustic tunes of the mystical colloquialism. With the newly formed understanding of music, attuned with the ideals of Indian customs, classical music with a fine blend of rusticity of folk tunes from the muddy lanes

by the Durgabari shore, the artistic quality and aesthetic susceptibility of S. D. Burman's music then received wide attention and unchained him from the confines of the structured practice of classical music of his royal lineage.

Life's longing for itself — that is what a fine piece of music reflects through its harmony. Hindu mythology offers the divine concept of *Darshan* which is not just seeing a particular person or visiting a religious place but experiencing of the reality of an idea, something higher and beyond, defined by its aspects of eternity, sublimity, infinity, and absoluteness; the substantial and the internal in absolute connect— that is *Darshan*. Man will not find God if he touches a specific stone, but he has the ability to connect with something or nothing, sizable or ordinary, rare or every day, connecting with every inch of space and reverting. Even a breeze blowing — what does it do to the person feeling it and the entire space around, that is what is so magical about human life and human spirit — a slight bump, faith, an acknowledgment of humanity and being, time and its constant change, that is the path towards a divine cosmic reality, a harmonious totality that leads to *Darshan*.

Composing all of his tunes through humming and murmuring of melody and lyrics to himself, he would respond to his music with the emotional inspiration of the moment when alone. Enriched by the sacredness of these melodies, these excerpts from the narrative of his life stated above, trace the historicity of the institution that S. D. Burman was. The paper is an attempt at tailing the tales of love in its variant forms through the study of selective compositions and renditions of the legend S. D. Burman, where his rendition becomes the extension of imagery in the songs.

Music, when played using an instrument, creates its own energy, a continuous motion, which does not stop in an instance when the harmony moves back to bass. So to balance the harmony of the entire piece *coda* is used. An Italian word with its literal translation as 'tail', *coda* means an end piece of something. For musical purposes, *coda* is required to reflect on the major portion of the movement in some new way, like insightful commentaries, dramatic reverse, or for acquiring a more harmonious ending.

S. D. Burman's rendition of his selective songs such as “*Sun Mere Bandhu Re*” from *Sujata* (1959) or “*O Re Manjhi*” from *Bandini* (1963) or “*Wahan Kaun Hai Tera*” from *Guide* (1965) and “*Safal Hogi Teri Aradhana*” from *Aradhana* (1969) majorly deals with the female protagonists and their varied emotions. These songs are like the *coda* in the narrative of the respective films where the rendition itself becomes important, elevating the entire composition, and also balancing the storyline of the film. It mitigates the tangent, thus altering the curvature of the story. With an autonomous standing of their

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own, these selective numbers would act as a fulcrum and change the entire story of the film or steer it in a new direction like in *Sujata* and *Aradhana* or act as a climactic backdrop in *Bandini* or foretelling the fate of man in the film *guide*.

A melody that breaks the barriers of the mundane and moves towards harmony of the uncertain to grapple with the randomness of the concept of love, the paper also traces the flow of this traveller; addressing the question of what makes S. D. Burman's rendition, a medium of interpretation with an expression of the idea of love in its varied forms that is comprehensive yet generic shall be the core attempt of this work. Studying the selected songs, their narratives, composition and rendition, where nature was a constant presence to inspire yet be a listener and to communicate through its various elements. A poetic landscape offers itself most willingly to an interpretation as a symbolising facet of man's inner being, where these stars and the river and the moon are but the agents of the divine force of nature that is ever-present as a companion for this unquenched soul as he wanders through the exotic landscape where love is ever-present.

Starting with the fundamental concept of love and analytically exploring the three stages of evolution of the concept of love through the human contours as variables, participants and evolving entities, the analysis in terms of its hypothesis moves from concrete to abstract, i.e., from being in love, the trajectory of love and the experimental abstractions as, an evolving concept of love. A rebel is one who's randomly dissociated with the norms and the normative love, as a human manifest is redundant semiology of defined relationships and thus, normative. On the other hand, experimental love is random and thus, abstract.

Various forms of love and the evolving idea of the lover-beloved surface when dealing with the selected songs and their context in the respective films. *Sujata* is the wild, fleeting soul whose path is hindered by the obstacles of social ill such as inequality yet, in contrast to this hierarchy, in her expression of love through the song, we hear a sense of equality of emotional intimacy in the relationship of man and woman where the lover is not just a saintly figure but a friend (*bandhu*), a soul mate (*mitwa*), who is also a constant companion in this journey of life (*saathi*).

When a composer and a musician of his stature experiments with the attained knowledge of music and gives it an expression of thought and musicality, it is on the level of ideological elevation that the maestro traverses through the depths of knowledgeable oceans, thus finding the most precious of pearls. The dilemma that comes along her *birha* finds its root in the displeasure and restlessness that surface due to the distance:

*Mann ki kitaab se tum, mera naam hi mita dena
Gun to na tha koi bhi, avgun mere bhula dena
Mujhe aj ki bida ka, marke bhi rehta intezaar.* (Tiwari 31)

Philosophy and poetry, as understood, are not opposed to each other, as Keats establishes about beauty being truth (philosophy) and truth resembling beauty in its varied facets (poetry). The conceptual whole that is formed with no dualities in a synoptic idea that is formed which brings together all terms and relations is a ground for spiritual vision. There is a constant struggle to reach from the finite to the infinite, aiming at the spiritual core of beauty on earth that strives for the beauty of the divine. Moving towards individualised reality or common reality from personal angles, philosophy aims to resolve and concretise, while poetry aims to infuse and strive for abstraction.

Music and poetry attune our soul to the world. Aside from these native influences on his music, there was an individualised philosophy and personal interiority in Burman Da's music that blended many kinds and shades of love, and revealed their harmonic interplay, as of light and shadow, or of shifting colours. These diverse expressions of devotion, versified or deciphered through music, often overlap in these songs, but the moments of creative inspiration are often recognised as a site for aesthetic offering to the divine or a dialogue with it, though more often it was a motivational striving for the journey to achieve a purpose beyond the personal.

In profundity of the entailed emotion and sincerity of expression, they are matchless when Shailendra combines in his lyrical verses the fiery imagination and poetic intensity of the romantic sense of beauty. Yet in their rhythmic lyrical flights, they never fail to remember the world and its needs. His songs sing of love, chanting tranquillity and serenity, calmness and mystical solace.

Sensual and devotional forms when combined in the unified state of love, the songs that celebrated this love grew as much in subtleness, as they grew in complexity. In these poignant tales of love, one could trace the desire to give oneself and the anguish of not being able to give oneself like in *Bandini*, "*Mere saajan hai us paar, mein mann maar hun iss paar...*" or shades of separation and sublimation of that pain when we hear wistfulness about love lost through death or estrangement; we get a sense of love's deathlessness in one's own memory-filled mind as in *Aradhana*, "*Safal hogi teri aradhana, kaahe ko roye...*"; or of unspoken words being expressed through singing (or flute-playing as a metaphor for music and grace) like in the classic film *Sujata*, "*Hota tu peepal mein hoti amarlata teri...*"; and we hear of unrequited love and of past or love lost like in the film guide, "*Beet gaye din, pyaar ke palchin, sapna bani wo raatein...*". The songs witness the tales of love and longing

that resound the yearning and parting but more importantly their beauty in the journey of love with the silences of those memories in this travel that accompany the beloved, the *Aradhana* continues.

A great piece of artwork more often or not hints at the fact that there is something, in the vicinity or at a distance, in the form of imperceptible and inexpressible ‘other’, which is of much more significance than what is available for our sensual perception. In our apprehension and delight of this, we almost overlook the particulars of a definite work of art and move beyond them into a state of silence for it addresses not the ear but the spirit. In his stimulated moment of creation, he sought after giving expression in music and words to that other indefinite and yet dominant music which exists as it is.

With all recognition that filmmaker earns and deserves, here in the selected films (*Sujata*, *Bandini*, *guide* and *Aradhana*), it is also the soulful melody and rustic unearthing of those deeply embedded emotions of a woman’s heart that S.D. Burman, as a musician, tackles with his composition and rendition. The aroma of rural Bengal in Burman Da’s voice is so lingering that one is reminded of the pathos as it reverberates in *Padma Nadir Manjhi* and the romance of the lilting waves, the sewing boats, the dancing oars, and the throbbing heart of the beloved. These river narratives are co-terminus with these songs that a contextual reading is not only desirable but rather imperative. It should be candidly submitted that at this juncture direct references to these texts as it provides depth and rigour; it may introduce unique dimensions which may not fall in the ambit of the present study.

The *manjhi* songs are a contemplative journey of a wandering conscience, which flow and march ahead like a lover who is a rebel, the one that never arrives at any particular destination as they are in a state of continual departure. But every man has his own path to travel and as he wrestles with the idea of the journey of his soul through his harmonic piece of music, he must catch the decisive yet peculiar point in his pilgrimage that would alter his entire journey. A life-work of serious aim is naturally developed from the first choice of things that matter to the individuals, like a certain subject or theory or ideology as a means of a statement. A fabric is provided, upon the resolution of which, all changes of mood and occasion and artistic adventure may ultimately rest. The divergent narratives of his life converged in his music.

Burman’s rendition of these songs about journey adds to the destination hues of otherwise subtly inserted songs in a narrative that acts like an equivocation to the entire narration of the film. In Vijay Anand’s *guide*, the song “*Wahan Kaun Hai Tera*” starts the journey of a film from the end of a long journey undertaken by a man who would travel through numerous lives in

the course of a few hours on screen. Allah Megh De Paani De, based on a classic Bengali folk song, in the composer's voice with a chorus line joining in, brings the entire work of film to completion, musically as well as through the narrative. In many ways, *guide* was the encapsulation of an entire life.

“Here lies One Whose Name was writ in Water” (23), John Keats in his epitaph would weave the warps of truth with the wefts of transient nature of life and its echoes, are heard in the journey of Raju guide:

Kehte hain gyani, duniya hai faani
Paani pe likhi likhaayi
Hai sabki dekhi, hai sabki jaani
Haath kisi ke na aayi
Kuchh tera naa mera, musafir jayega kahan. (Tiwari 52)

Embedded in the folk tradition, the song fluently transmits the mood of someone wandering in search of one's own self. Sachin Da renders the word *musafir* in multitudinal style, knitting a magical web of music around. The repeated emphasis on the fundamental question of existence, the song evokes multiple debates about the philosophy of life and afterwards that encapsulates it all. A journey of transformation is witnessed in the character of Raju on the grounds of identity and spiritual alterations.

Like these rebellious poets, the matured sensibility of acclaimed Burman Da was an amalgamation of romantic, spiritual philosophy of life and journey beyond and the innocent lover who would communicate the experiences of love and loss through his music, turning to a broader canvas of human life, a higher reality.

Derrida would put forth the idea that closure was not only not desirable, but also not possible, and with this idea in mind the river becomes the perfect symbol, for it never ends; rather it flows into other rivers and eventually into the sea. Just like a river, bound by its straining banks, eventually finds its freedom merging into the sea, the curious life in the otherworld, i.e., *us paar* is believed to give one his/her own ingenious liberty with a growing sense of destiny that is materialised in the movement of the river to the sea.

With an attempt at versifying the intensity of love that is engrained in Sujata, Majrooh Sultanpuri pens down this poetry of passion. It is in the embodiment of her desires in love that most intimate and personal associations surface with the juxtaposition between the exhilaration of youthful desires and woe of despair, the passionate expressions of body with the symbolic touch of nature, “*Hota tu peepal, main hoti amar lata teri, tere gale maala ban ke, padi muskaati re*” (Burman 124). Songs of a broken heart have many hues,

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but a heart that yearns for its lover is like a blank canvas with probabilities infinite. It becomes the site for all creations in abstraction. When a beloved yearns for her lover, it is a twin philosophy of a beloved and a devotee longing to be united with her lover or the Ultimate One; that yearning is Vandana's Aradhana.

Kalyani believes herself married to an anarchist stranger who is rebellious in his nationalistic outlook, but it is Kalyani who is truly a rebel in love, where she chooses to devote her life for this love. She has this faith that it is only in the domain of love that she will attain any form of untainted joy and when at the helm of life *preet* would steer her boat to send her off to her lover. This world is but an illusion to her, but in this effort to find a perfect universe she does not shun away the actuality in order to seek an escape to a different world, a world where dreams create perfection, where faith is real, and no pretence prevails. Rather while idealizing the other world, she encapsulates through her character, varied experiences of life, and does not shy away from feeling and expressing all shades of human life and emotions creating an emotive spectrum that is ever-evolving.

*Mere saajan hain us paar,
Main mann maar hoon is paar
O mere manjhi abki baar,
Le chal paar. (Tiwari 107)*

The journey of love weaves within the textures of un-fulfilment, inevitable tragedy, to the extent that it ultimately becomes a celebration of the loss. The love, as one comprehends is unattainable; it becomes synonymous to an eternal longing that inspires a poet to celebrate the sadness in love. But the true journey of love as devotion and suffering is of Vandana in Shakti Samanta's *Aradhana* (1965), where when in love she rejoices like a free bird that is unburdened in this brittle world with the newfound wings of passion and happiness in the form of love. But she truly embarks on her journey when she loses her lover Arun who, after a brief episode of romance, dies in a plane crash and Vandana is all alone, heartbroken and pregnant out of wedlock. His family rejects her too, but it is with her father's death that she truly is all alone, in want and vulnerable. Having given birth to her son, she puts him up for adoption for a childless couple to accept him.

*Diyaa tute to hai maati, Jale to ye jyoti bane
Bahe aansu to hai Paani, Ruke to ye moti bane
Ye moti aankho ki, Punji hai ye na khoye
Safal hogi teri aradhana, Kaahe ko roye. (Burman 43)*

Resolute to be an important aspect of his life and watch him grow, she accepts

the job of becoming his nanny. A vow to raise their son with all shades of virtue and textures of morality, a vow to keep a dead man's honour, it's a story of a 'vow' made in love. It's a journey of that 'vow' which is a process of transience that does not limit itself to any arrival point. It appears to be what soul is to the human body, where the body acts as a mere catalyst for the eternal journey of the soul, and the phenomenon continues to fuse time into a state of perpetuation, a *sanatan parampara*.

In aesthetically portraying 'invisible potential' of a certain character or idea or a song or a division of the narrative, from the selected films with strong female protagonists, a powerful vision is employed that unfolds the hidden emotional, sociological, artistic, fictional as well as factual portion of the reality. Sometimes, these songs present in the films not only serve the purpose of entertainment, but also accent the curbed voices, or challenge the injustice being done or very tactfully, express a certain character's heartfelt emotions of joy or sorrow, grief or merriment.

Meticulously embroidering the song, one traces in the complex human emotions the textures of sadness with unalloyed innocence and hope for life. With intentions to move away from dimensions of this world of common sense and practicality, these songs stand out in a form of *dua* or prayer to safeguard humanity and man's unblemished innocence. Efficiently contributing to the thematic potential of the films, these songs also add to the aesthetic frame of the entire narrative, where Burman Da had the tragic capacity to align with the emotional vibrancy of the narrative through his rendition.

Imagine the idea where everything is ever-changing form, ever-evolving, ever interacting with its surroundings by means of some delicate link like rustling leaves, flowing water, a beating heart, a young girl lost in the spell of her dance—this all becomes the core of the musical sound. Each movement, every act of man or nature is a part being played for the unity of multiple illusions in this world to form a cosmic whole yet a different path chosen by each entity. What is required is in some way to nurture the continual advancement to this state, to be recurrently in a state of approaching it, to be moved towards a sustained approach.

Burman Da's perfect idea of the surroundings was not a mere structure of thoughtful constructs but a powerful source of sublimity and cosmic energy beyond the comprehensible limits of our senses, and therefore quiet and calm, but more genuine and real than many of our sensory experiences. The soil had something to do with it, the sound of water, and the rain as it speckled on the earth hardened by the blazing sun. The moving breeze must have whispered to

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him too, as he strolled through the streets, the rising and falling voices of the components of this universal whole met or watched from afar.

Fragrance and melody have a way of enduring. Facades of names and faces and people may be forgotten, but a tune, a taste, a specific odour and a heartfelt melody never fades away. It can remain sheltered in memory, to rise extemporaneously at the most unexpected times. It often happens that a tune not recollected in years suddenly visits us one day, moving aside all weariness of the mundane living and accompanies us for the rest of the day in slight humming.

In the renditions of Burman Da, words became the tone, emotions took on the rhythm, and desires became palpable through the magic of his voice. To him, exploring the language of music was a spiritual journey in itself. This journey took him over into a sphere where he put to the test both his response to various sounds and his beliefs. The traveller delved into the spiritual underpinnings of this territory of music. The foundation being belief and imagination, the artistic and spiritual heritage above all was the most potent binding force.

He attuned his harmony with music of nature, with the melodies coming from the murmur of rushing water, from the songs of birds, from the rustling of leaves. Nature is a constant companion to man, and all novelty and creation are inspired by its mere presence. Embarking on a journey of their own, his songs moved from affection to passion and spontaneous expression of embedded emotions and finally resided in the pain of yearning for a lost lover and afflictions of true love. The lyrics of these songs are ingrained in joy and sorrow as elements of a composite whole where each song travels along the narrative yet surrenders to the journey of its melody. Enjoying the somberness, splendour, and textual grace, Burman's music was never without the artistic liberty for changing occasional notes and merging other innovations.

Sachin, as a young musician, had the courage and passion to choose his path to travel. When being around the artistic pillars of classical music, he roamed around the lanes to find his answers in the philosophy of the Baul and the *Bhatiyali* music. Not only did he choose the path but also defined the character of his travel. His songs have an autonomous standing of their own where if heard without the visual, one can imagine, through poetic imagery and melodious scaling of this song, their own Kalyani that seems to tremble with every emotion of love, every feeling of romance, every pang of longing and every thrill of belonging.

His songs have an equal amount of sensitivity for the treatment of landscape, where he imbues his trees and their rustle, flowers blossoming with feelings of buoyancy giving another visual dimension to the narrative with sound and imagery that is very transparent in its poetic suggestion, yet add a layer of complexity with its depth. The waves of river in Comilla had infused into his singing the moods of flowing water and the glittering moonbeams playing with their reflections, but now it was the sorrow of Vandana (*Aradhana*), the yearning of Kalyani (*Bandini*) and Sujata's desire to be one with her lover (*Sujata*) that was reflected in his renditions.

Manjhi or the boatman survived as a recurrent metaphor for the guide or guardian of destiny in varied literature that engaged in the theme of Indian mysticism or spirituality. With a sense of cosmic joy, they are often addressed to be the muse and steer the boat of thought or life in the right direction. With the cosmic music resonating within one's soul, one feels like a part of the cosmic whole that's in harmony with the blissful worship of beauty, like a *manjhi* or 'the eternal traveller', whose ceaseless motion in a journey and significance of change lies at the very core of life. A worship that yearns to escape the internment, moving towards a sublime light, a sensation of reaching beyond the constraints of binaries, an energy that finds expression in his songs.

The celebration of loss and longing has to be reflected within the mind and soul of the lover where the memories of their love are engraved. The aching heart and the grieving soul shall find peace in the eternal longing of their purest form of affection and in the journey to fulfill the promises made in love. This state of unalloyed bliss of yearning for the lost lover can never be comprehended by the minds with linear understanding. When the memories of love, desire and yearning become the colours on the palette, the final work of art will be nothing less than an expression of true love itself, the journey of love from 'melody of tears' to 'tiers of melody'.

For in that momentary and intense romantic happening, there is only the outpouring of the heart, but in that poetic moment is the fulfilment of one's very being. The beauty of that moment can only be captured in such elevated poetry only to be extended exponentially in Burman Da's rendition.

These songs, though eternal in their own capacity, move away from the timeline after fulfilling their purpose as a part of the narrative where it is rooted in history, vision of a filmmaker, tune of a composer and audience's perceptibility. But their rendition was such that they kept coming back; revisiting us in our memories, unannounced, with ever-flowing melody and harmony. The musicality

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of this thought is the journey of that melody and the listener who, travelling towards each other like lost lovers meeting after ages, sit together and recall.

Kabhi rukhsat hui dhun ko wapas se sunna
Wo wahi khadi milegi gungunate hue
Choo kar uska haath, sadi ki baatein karna
Waapis usey bithana, uski taraf kadam bhadhaate huye. (Puri)
Thus sang Burman Da and his echoes stain the clear water.

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