

MUSIC EDUCATION RESOURCES FOR GANDHI JAYANTI

Music of South Asia in Multicultural Perspectives in Music Education, Volume 3.

The video of Gandhi Jayanti below along with conversations between Dr. Kristin Rao, an ethnomusicologist and music educator, and several of the singers at Gandhi Jayanti are included as part of a curriculum on “Music of South Asia” created for Volume 3 of the landmark book *Multicultural Perspectives in Music Education*, 3rd edition. Published by MENC, the National Association for Music Education, in collaboration with Rowman-Littlefield Publishers, this book is a practical text for music educators designed to introduce American students to the diverse ways people in cultures around the world create and enjoy music.

Every year the Gandhi Memorial Center celebrates Gandhi Jayanti, the birth anniversary of Mahatma Gandhi, on the evening of October 2nd. During this occasion the Center, in collaboration with the Embassy of India, presents a very special program in the Golden Lotus Temple with remarks by the Director of the Center and the Ambassador of India, classical dancing, and devotional singing. The video below presents a choral offering of “Ram Dhun” performed at the end of the 2008 program. A small chorus of singers and instrumental accompanists is sitting on the front stage leading the singing of “Ram Dhun,” a song traditionally offered at Gandhi’s prayer meetings in praise of the oneness of God, despite the variety of names and forms in the different religions of the world. Behind them center stage hangs Gandhi’s picture, flanked on either side with religious symbols including the (what is this, Carrie?), the Buddhist wheel, the aum of Hinduism, the Christian cross, the Chinese yin-yang, and the Jewish star of David.

What is it like to sing “Ram Dhun” (Raghoopati Raaghava”) at Gandhi Jayanti? Read the conversations between Dr. Kristin Rao and three different singers from Gandhi Memorial Center. What do their conversations reveal about the multiple meanings of singing with others in this particular situation? What themes emerge? What is unique about each singer’s perspective?

ABBREVIATED VERSION 2 OF CONVERSATIONS ON SINGING "RAGHOOPATI RAAGHAVA"

CONVERSATION 1: Manideep Dey & Kristin Rao - Gandhi Memorial Center on February 7, 2009

KR : Can you tell me what it's like to sing "Raghoopati Raaghava" at Gandhi Jayanti?

MD: . . . Singing . . . with others at this particular prayer meeting . . . invokes different feelings of my surroundings--of the particular institution, the people, and the circumstances. And along with that is the feeling of its history . . . because I've sung it . . . over the years since . . . I first came to this institute in 1985. So each time . . . it brings out memories of the past occasions. . . .
. . . "Raam Dhoon" is a song . . . to God that I sing. . . . There's only one God, one Truth, and that's what Gandhiji taught. . . . God is One and honored by different names. . . . I don't pray to God as a Hindu, or a Jew, or a Muslim. I pray to God as a human being. . . . Gandhi Jayanti is . . . the most important and biggest occasion of the year for me. . . . [Singing the song] brings back memories of everything in this institution which is really the Self-Revelation Church of the Gandhi Memorial Center. . . . So it's been a great connection that I've had with this place and also my daughter went to the Sunday school here since she was five years old and she came here every Sunday. And so she became very close to a lot of the people here When I sing that song at Gandhi Jayanti I'm singing with my family. It's a family occasion. Kamalaji always says this is, you know, family. And so singing the song with others in the Chorus, but everyone in the audience also sings it That's how it was in [Gandhiji's'] prayer meetings. . . . I've sung it on *stage* for many, many years. And of course I know the song very well so if I'm not on stage I still sing it from, you know, the audience or from the door if I'm assigned the door duty. . . . It invokes memories, a lot of memories, of my daughter's childhood, of my family here, my connection here

KR: What kind of musical background do you have?

MD: I don't really have much of a musical background other than what I've learnt here. I did take Jeff's classes in Tagore music. And I participated in quite a few choirs. And that's pretty much it And when I was a kid I used to play guitar, but I never read music. . . . In "Raam Dhoon" . . . we sing . . . songs basically just by ear because I don't read music.

ABBREVIATED VERSION OF CONVERSATIONS ON SINGING "RAGHOOPATI RAAGHAVA"

CONVERSATION 2: Jackie Rockwell & Kristin Rao - Gandhi Memorial Center on February 7, 2009

KR: What is it like to sing "Raghoopati Raaghava" at Gandhi Jayanti?

JR: . . . It's a feeling of reverence, a feeling of devotion, and also a sense of being together with other people creating something beautiful. And it's always been moving to me to be able to come together with people from another culture and sing music with them. . . . When I first started singing . . . I found that I was really getting to know people better because I was making music with them even though . . . [the] words [were] in another language and I didn't always connect the translation in my mind. I could sing the words and share the feeling. And I also found that I [could] really . . . get into the experience of singing the way people traditionally learned the "Raam Dhoon" . . . by listening even though . . . [our choir director] would . . . write the words out for us and write out [the] . . . musical notes. . . . I found that actually listening and watching the Indian ladies and singing with them I could get more into . . . their style of singing. . . . It was really connecting with other people and sharing another culture, another language, with other people . . . [including] the people that I've almost grown up with here at the church. . . . [The] blending of sound in that experience . . . is . . . very beautiful--just to have your voice blending in with other peoples' voices. . . .

KR: What was it like to have the instruments there?

JR: . . . Very inspirational just to feel the rhythms. I found that I . . . could never just sit still being up on the stage or . . . in the audience.

KR: How many years have you been doing it?

JR: Probably about 30, not that I sang at every single one of the Gandhi Jayantis, but from the beginning of the Gandhi Center. . . . There's also a vibration [in that place.] . . . I've been attending that church for probably 45 years from the time I was quite young and was able to attend services with Swami Premananda who founded the church and just to be able to walk up onto the altar where he gave so many talks, and inspired me, and guided my life . . . [gives me] a feeling of . . . the purity of what Kamalaji is now continuing, . . . the truth of absolute monism or Advaita Vedanta.

KR: What is this absolute monism exactly?

JR: Advaita Vedanta is I believe the highest philosophy . . . from India . . . that is universal, non-sectarian, . . . the idea that Truth is One; men call it by various names.

CONVERSATION 3: Jeff Bauer & Kristin Rao - Jeff Bauer's Piano Studio on April 14, 2009

KR: What is it like to sing "Raghoopati Raaghava" at Gandhi Jayanti?

JB: I would say it's a very fulfilling experience being up there with people from different cultures, different socio-economic backgrounds but singing about the one God worshipped by all people of all times. . . . There's people from India up there, . . . an engineer, . . . somebody who puts together sports equipment for people, teachers, just a variety of people drawn together for this occasion and to sing this one particular song. I wouldn't say as a musician that it's, you know, particularly a highlight musically for me, but . . . I think it's more the idea of singing that song which was one of Gandhi's favorite *bhajans* on his birthday and especially with the audience joining in and everybody just singing from their heart. . . .

. . . I don't know the exact translation of the text but it goes through various names of God and I think that's why it was one of Gandhi's favorites, that it talked about the one God worshipped by all people. One of my favorite quotes from Gandhi is —I'm kind of paraphrasing—but he said he wanted all of the religions of the world to blow freely through his house, but he refused to be blown off his feet by any particular one. I think that was probably why Gandhi was drawn to that song, just the central idea of one God called by various names but the same God. It's also particularly nice for me to be singing it in the church. I've been attending this church in the Sunday school for all of my life which is 53 years now. I think it would have a different feeling for me if I was singing it at an auditorium somewhere but being here in this church where I'm also the organist and have just been attending for years identifying with the philosophy which is the Advaita Vedanta from India.

KR: What is that philosophy exactly?

JB: Advaita Vedanta . . . Advaita is non-dualist and Vedanta is just really a name for truth. Swami Premananda who founded the church translated that as absolute monism. And I think the song kinda captures the essence of that. One of the principles of the church comes from one of the Upanishads and translated into English it's "Truth is One; men call it by various names." So in the church we talk about Allaah and Brahma, and God and Yahweh all as being the same, just worshipped in various ways.

KR: How does it feel to sing with the other people as opposed to just singing by yourself?

JB: . . . You know as a trained musician, it's not a highlight in that way as being really refined music. It's more being with those people and you know the people out in the audience singing

along that kind of experience of all singing together a song that . . . meant a lot to Gandhi. I think that was more the experience than a real musical experience. . . . You know there's a little bit of roughness around the edges of the singing, a little out-of-tuneness and it kind of adds to it in a way.