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The Streaming Turn: Democratization, Disruption, and the Economics of Attention

For generations, access to Indian Classical Music depended largely on geography.

Listeners attended mehfiles, baithaks, or ticketed concerts. Broadcast platforms such as All India Radio later expanded this reach, allowing performances to travel beyond physical spaces. Yet even then, listening remained tied to scheduled broadcasts, recordings, or curated concert circuits.

The arrival of streaming platforms has fundamentally altered this landscape.

Today, a listener sitting in a small town can instantly access recordings of legendary performances, rare archival material, and contemporary artists from across the world. Platforms such as YouTube and Spotify have dramatically expanded accessibility. In this sense, streaming has democratized listening.

However, accessibility does not automatically translate into sustainability.

Streaming platforms operate on an economic structure built around frequency and scale. Revenue is typically generated through per-stream payouts, where earnings accumulate through millions of plays. This model aligns well with short-format music that encourages repeated listening.

Indian Classical Music, by contrast, follows a different aesthetic logic.

A raga unfolds gradually. The vilambit alap, the slow development of melodic ideas, and the eventual rhythmic expansion require time and patience. A traditional presentation often extends beyond forty minutes. Such long-form musical architecture does not easily fit into an ecosystem designed around quick discovery and rapid consumption.

This creates an important paradox.

Classical music today is more accessible than ever before. Yet the economic value generated through streaming alone often remains limited for many artists.

Another shift concerns visibility.

In earlier ecosystems, opportunity was shaped by patrons, institutions, or concert organizers. In the streaming era, discovery is mediated by algorithms. Listener behaviour, engagement metrics, watch time, and platform recommendation systems influence how widely a recording travels.

This does not diminish the value of streaming. On the contrary, it has opened unprecedented pathways for global listening and cultural exchange. But it also requires musicians and institutions to rethink how streaming fits within the larger digital landscape.

Streaming, therefore, should not be viewed as a complete ecosystem in itself.

It is better understood as one important layer within a broader **Digital Ecosystem** that may include live performances, teaching platforms, curated archives, community-supported patronage, and new digital engagement models.

The real opportunity lies in integrating these layers thoughtfully.

Access is an important beginning.

But sustainability will depend on how intelligently the ecosystem around that access is designed.

In the next article, we will explore how classical musicians can move beyond mere digital visibility and begin building sustainable artistic identities within this evolving Digital Ecosystem.