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Classical music: Who picks up the tab?

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The courts of the erstwhile maharajas had been where the arts—painting, dance, classical music — found a nurturing ground and blossomed under royal patronage. "After that time, there was a kind of lull in performances and artists were floundering without the earlier structure of patronage," said author and moderator Namita Devidayal as the session titled 'Who Will Replace The Maharajas?' at the Times Litfest kicked off.

Aneesh Pradhan launched his book, 'Hindustani Music in Colonial Bombay', which wove together a picture of the city's classical music traditions, the institutions where it flourished, the performers and the listeners.

The panel, comprising former secretary at the Ministry of Culture and present CEO at Prasar Bharati Jawhar Sircar, music programme organizer Shashi Vyas, and Pradhan talked about what the modern-day substitute to the maharajas' patronage could or should be. Challenges and opportunities Hindustani classical music presented today were also discussed.

"After 1857, there was a sharp decline in patronage for the arts from royals," said Sircar. "Musicians from northern India moved to the colonial cities of Bombay and Delhi to find new patrons."

There is this idea among several today that they shouldn't expect to pay anything for classical music events, said Vyas, because that is what the case had been for a long time. Musicians too are often short-changed. Vyas cited the example of Hindustani music legend, Vishnu Paluskar who would insist on getting adequately paid for performances. "It was about dignity

and self-respect," Vyas said. "And then later, when tribute concerts for Paluskar were organized, the irony was that the the musicians were expected to play for free!"