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Tradition Of Sitar: A Theoretical Review

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ABSTRACT

At the outset of Chapter IV it was noted that, due to similarities in performance technique employed on the sitar and surbahar, it is not uncommon for performers of the former instrument to also play the latter. In the Imdad Khani Sitar and Surbahar Gharana, artists have traditionally performed on both instruments, though recently the star has become the more popular of the two. This chapter begins with a look at the history of this gharana including the lives of its khandan and other leading exponents. This is followed by a discussion of the teaching method employed and an examination of the baj and chal of this tradition's sitar music.

KEY WORDS: Sitar, Music, Gharana, Tradition, Instruments, Performance.

As in the case of the Gulam Ali Khan Sarod Gharana, the history of Imdad Khani Sitar and Surbahar Gharana invariably centres around the lives of the khandan of the tradition. The earliest stages of the history of this gharana are obscure, closer to myth than to history. For instance, consider the following tale related by the musician and musicologist Jitendra Mohan Sen Gupta:

It is said that a Rajput named Saheb Singh lived in Gwalior about 150 years ago. At that time in the court of Gwalior there were two famous brothers who were both musicians. One named Haddu Khan sang dhrupad while the other named Nassu [Hassu) was a kheyaliya. They would practice at night in a closed room so as not to be heard. Saheb Singh after being refused discipleship under these two masters made arrangements with a lady or maid servant of the household whereby he was able to hide in a bird cage in an adjacent room and eavesdrop on the nocturnal practice sessions. This he did for seven years. Then one day, Haddu and Nassu [Hassu), while walking in the streets of Gwalior hear someone practicing the music of their talking in They entered the house of their supposed student only to find Saheb Singh. Haddu was furious and wanted to kill Saheb but Nassu [Hassu) interve and seeing his devoted attitude accepted him as a student. Due to the close relationship that developed between Saheb Singh and the Khans, he was ostracized by the Hindu Community. Late in life, at the age of sixty, for social reasons, Saheb Singh became a Muslim and adopted the name Sahabdad Khan (Sen Gupta 1959:51-2). Note the similarity between this tale and that of how Asis Baksh came to learn the music of Asgar Ali of the Gulam Ali Khan Sarod Gharana (mentioned in Chapter IV). Due to a scarcity of written records it is most often this type of popular history which forms the basis of ideas on the origin of particular gharanas.

Roy Choudhury believes that Sahabdad Khan was the maternal nephew of Haddu Khan who was brought up in the latter's household where he learned kheyal and played sitar (Roy Choudhury 1965:15). It is also thought that Sahabdad Khan may have studied under the Seniya musician Nirmal Shah (Roy Choudhury:170). Sen Gupta writes that Sahabdad Khan sang dhrupad and kheyal and also played surbahar and jaltarang. He lived in Etawa (near Agra) and was a court musician of the Naugaon Darbar. Sahabdad Khan married and had two sons, the elder being Imdad Khan (b. 1858) and the younger was Karimdad Khan. In Naugaon, Sahabdad taught his sons music for a period of twelve years. Sahabdad passed away when he was in his early to mid-seventies (Sen Gupta 1959:52-3).

Imdad Khan (1848? 18582-1920)

Imdad Khan was born in Etawa. In his youth he learned singing from his father but later in life he took to practicing the sitar (Roy Choudhury 1965:15). He had music training from Bande Ali Khan (founder of Indore Binkar Gharana), Amrit Sen (of Jaipur Sitar Gharana) and possibly also from Sajjad Md (son of Gulam Md the surbahar player) who was at that time attached to the musical court of Maharaja Jotindra Mohan Tagore in Calcutta (Mukherjee 1977:139-41). Sen Gupta writes that it was Jotindra Mohan Tagore who first brought Imdad Khan to Calcutta, where he later came to be employed in the musical court of the Lucknow Nawab, Wasid Ali Khan (who was then living in Metiyaburuj). Imdad Khan lived in Calcutta for a total of twenty to twenty-five years, staying for ten to fifteen years at the house of Tara Prasanna Ghosh, on Bidon Street in North Calcutta (Sen Gupta 1959:53).

Imdad Khan spent long hours in rewaj (practice) and is said to have had little concern for worldly things. Due to his fondness for travel, he did not settle down in any musical darbar but journeyed from court to court where he ensured that plished Inayet and darbar but fromly in vocal music) under many accomplished artists. However in the water in of his life, he did become a court musician of the Maharaj of Indore Steuer-7) where he remained until his death in 1920.

Inayet Khan (18947-1938)

Inayet Khan (see Figure 2-33 in Chapter II) was the eldest son in a family of four girls and two boys (see genealogical chart 5-1). Within his short lifespan of about forty-five years he rose to the position of the top ranking sitariya in India and did much of the initial work in the popularization of sitar music throughout North India.

As mentioned above, Inayet and Wahid received training from their father and also from many other artists including:

- 1) Sajjad Md Khan of Calcutta-taught khandani gat-tora.
- 2) Daulat Khan of Jodpur-taught dhrupad.
- 3) Jakaruddin and Ala Bande Khan of Udaipur.
- 4) Alladiya Khan of Kolapur-taught kheyal.
- 5) Abban Khan-taught dhrupad and kheyal.

Following his father's death in Indore, he stayed on as court musician for another year before moving to Bengal. In 1922, at the age of twenty-eight, he was employed as a musician in the court of Brajendra Kishore Roy Choudhury of Gouripur in Mymensing (now in Bangladesh) where he gave instruction to many students including Birendra Kishore and Bimala Kanta Roy Choudhury. It was at this time that Radhika Birendra Kishor Gulam Ali Sarod Gharana received training in sitar from Inayet Khan Mohan Ma complete list of his students see below), Inayet Khan passed away in 1938 at the age of about forty-five years (Mukherjee 1977:141-2).

The following is a list of the students of Inayet Khan as supplied by Sen Gupta (1959) and Roy Choudhury (1965).

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|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1) Birendra Kishore Roy Choudhury | 16) Dr. Prakash Chandra Sen |
| 2) Gyanadakanta Lahiri Choudhury | 17) Birendra Mitra |
| 3) Niradakanta Lahiri Choudhury | 18) Brajesvar Nandi |
| 4) Bipen Chandra Das | 19) Bolanath Malik |
| 5) Jyotish Chandra Choudhury | 20) Monoi Mohan Roy |
| 6) Bimala Kanta Roy Choudhury | 21) Hindra Mohan Das Gupta |
| 7) Monoranjan Mukherjee | (Roy Choudhury 1965:206-7). |

- 8) Shrinivas Nag
 - 9) Omiya Kanta Bhattacharya
 - 10) Renuka Saha
 - 11) Jitendra Mohan Sen Gupta (Sen Gupta 1959:59-60)
 - 12) Jon Gomes
 - 13) Dhruva Tara Jhoshi
 - 14) Shripoti Das
 - 15) Dr. Kalyani Mallik
- Vilayet Khan (1927-)

Inayet Khan married the daughter of kheyaliya Bande Hussain Khan and had five children; three daughters and two sons (see genealogical chart). His eldest son, Vilayet Khan, was born in Gouripur. Due to the untimely death of his father in 1938, Vilayet Khan was only able to receive preliminary training from him. For this reason Vilayet Khan was left to seek training elsewhere. The following is a bio from Ustad Hafiz Ali

UHAKMMF, 1973

Khan Memorial Music Festival (UHAKMMF) Souvenir brochure outlines his background in vocal music:

He took training in vocal music from the great Ustads and reproduced every nuance on his beloved instrument, the Sitar. Vilayet's maternal grandfather, the [late] Ustad Bande Hasan Khan was a singer of marvellous talent. Later, listening to Ustad Mushtaque Husain Khan of Rampur, and Ustad Amir Khan, his brother-in-law helped. But it was Ustad Abdul Karim Khan whom Vilayet had heard as a child [who] had the maximum impact on him. The Rampur and Kirana styles mingle in Vilayet's renderings. There are also traces à la Bande Hasan Khan (UHAKMMF, 1973).

Though his sitar style exhibits a strong background in kheyal and it would be wrong to conclude that following his father's death he did not receive any additional training on the sitar. On the contrary, Radhika Mohan Maitra, when introducing D.T. Joshi (the senior disciple of Inayet Khan) to the author, mentioned that the latter had been one of Vilayet Khan's sitar instructors. As a result of his superb mastery of both kheyal and the sitar Vilayet Khan has come to be considered one of the best sitariyas in India.

Benjamin Gomes (1937-1983)

Benjamin Gomes's father, Jon Gomukhi Banerjee had studied from Khan (List Benjabove) The Bengali sitariya Nikku hestiar while under list given a Jon Gomes gave his son training on the sitar before sending him to Vilayet Jon Gomes further training. Jon Gomes was not only a talented musician but also an excellent painter. The Gomes house in Taltala (Calcutta), is adorned with oil paintings depicting Bible scenes, as well as a number of landscapes. The family is Bengali Christian of Catholic faith which migrated from Dacca about forty years ago.

Benjamin Gomes was a first-rate sitariya and held the post of staff artist at All India Radio, Calcutta (see discussion of A.I.R. in Chapter I). Besides being a performing artist both at the concert hall and on the radio he was also involved with the daily business of studio recording at the station. Though he has never attained the fame of the stalwarts of this tradition, he was respected as a master of sitar technique and for his beautiful touch on the instrument. As with the khandan of this gharana he was a strict observer of a vigorous practice routine.

Benjamin Gomes died an untimely death in 1983 during a routine surgical operation. His teenage son, Melvyn Lalit Gomes, has carried on the family tradition of sitar playing and is presently studying under Ustad Imrat Khan, the younger brother of Ustad Vilayet Khan.

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