Q1. Guru Ji, What is your view about the changes in instrumental music due to Experimentation?

Ans. Performing art is a creative art. It will be alive and flourish by welcoming new ideas in all directions. According to some great scholars, ‘Nothing new is possible in the perspective of Classical music’, but I am totally against this opinion. Changes cannot be stopped, because our present day music is very much changed from the time of Bharata and Sharangdeva. Even after Tansen period, a lot of developments and experimentation have been done by scholars, whether it is in the context of dhrupad or in the reference of development of Khayal. Experiments have been done by scholars from time to time. Therefore in the world which is developing all the time, we have to appreciate experimentation and also understand that if there is lack of creativity and experimentation, the beauty of our music will become stale. According to me, music is like a water fountain which keeps on flowing, thus it is always clean, but water in a pond which is static, cannot remain clean and one can see sediments at bottom. Fountain water flows continuously and mixes into the river. We also have to welcome creativity which always flows and helps the art to grow further. Experimentation or creativity should be accepted in all branches of music including Vocal music. Creativity can be shown in all spheres of a performance including Bandish or Composition and also its development. If we compare the modern and earlier compositions, it can be seen that even today the great masters give examples of famous Bandish while teaching to any student so the modern generation also has informed students of music who can create and contribute in the growth of experimentation. Experimentation is not limited to anything.

The concept of development of a raga has changed in modern times. During earlier years, one raga could be performed by our Gurus for several days that too without any repetition, which shows that how knowledgeable the great artists were and how much creativity they had to present a single raga for such a long duration. What is the creativity? Creation is to add something new. It is a matter of pity that today if you tell an artist to play any Raga for example evens a basic Raga like Yaman for three days many of them may be out of stock after three
hours. Whatever we have, all is given by our Gurus and we cannot forget and deny this fact. We cannot go ahead without the reference of yesterday, because whatever we have today, it is of the foundation made yesterday. We must remember that foundation (or Buniyaad) is the main aspect of our music. If the foundation is strong you can create, but we must remember that we cannot think extensively musically without any foundation. We must respect our traditional base and foundation. What is tradition? Tradition teaches us the background of our music and then we must always have a regard for the same. Even today all great masters always prefer traditional references from the raga and compositions. Traditional and great maestros from the past used to emphasize each and every note while improvising. They could do it with knowledge as they had a deep insight. Our tradition teaches us that we must not forget our past and go ahead making a foundation on a solid platform. One cannot build a home without a solid foundation, while one can build hundred floors on a solid foundation. So our performing art is always on a move and never static.

It is essential to accept new experiments in every field. Similarly, in today’s music, a lot of experiments are going on. According to me experimentation is not wrong, as it is essential part for the development of music. The acceptance of every experiment depends on time. In other words, it can be said that time decides whether the experiment was successful or not. For example, in Indian Classical Music – fusion and Orchestration are also forms of musical experimentation which are going on presently. Only time can decide about the successful approach of these experiments. How many of these experiments have maintained the discipline and dignity of Classical music depends on present needs and requirements. There is no harm to do good experiments in music. In olden times our Gurus believed to play or sing accompanied by original acoustic instruments. On the other hand, in the present times, instead of them, we are using electronic equipments. Likewise, due to availability of several medium of advertisement an artist is able to perform his/her expertise art, more than earlier times.

If we talk about Sitar, in future it will be available easily due to extraordinary development. It will strengthen our cultural aspect. Today the sociological and cultural background of Sitar is becoming stronger as today, the artists as well as audience both are trying to overcome the gap or void between them, both are more open and don’t stick too much with the traditions. Today, the artist is not showing off only chamatkar of Laya and Tana, but
combination and co-ordination of Swaras and Laya can be seen. Today a Sitarist is concentrating on abstract way of playing including aesthetical approach. It should be noticed that Sitar has always welcome experiments and rebound social and cultural background of our society.

**About Mohan Veena**

In 1953 Prof. Radhika Mohan Maitra has invented Mohan Veena. He has performed first National programme on the same. He composed some new ragas, the most noticeable being Chandra Malhar, Dipa kalian and Alaknanda. He also invented three new musical instruments namely Mohan Veena, DilBahar and NabaDeepa.

Very few people knew about this historical fact. Although Pt. Vishwamohan Bhatta has also invented Mohan Veena lately, co-incidentally it was more popular and known to the musical society. It is piteous that even music critics have not mentioned this fact largely. In Kolkata, Radhika Mohan and Mohan Veena are synonyms of each other. The technical difference in both inventions was: Radhikaji’s Mohan Veena was based on Sarod and Pt. Vishwa Mohan Ji’s Mohan Veena was based on guitar.

**Q.2. What is the impact of new genres like Orchestration or Fusion music in instrumental music?**

**Ans.** Vadya Vrinda, Vrinda Vadan and Symphony are synonyms of Orchestra. Vadya Vrinda is Indian name and Orchestra word has originated in West. Though Orchestra is a western word, now days, in music it is used frequently. Indian Musicians also prefer to use the word ‘Orchestra’. According to Pt. Lal Mani Mishra Ji, “Indian musicians like independence and freedom” while performing and they feel awkward to repeat set patterns, other than the “Sthai and Antara”. Sometimes even the Sthai and Antara can be different while improvising. On the other hand in Vrinda-Vadan or Orchestra each line and every note has to be memorized. In Vrinda-Vadan credit never goes to individual artist separately, while Indian artist is used to get credited individually. But Orchestra is not one man show. The other thing, Orchestra cannot be formed in lack of “Ghana Vadya”. For a perfect Orchestra we need good instrument players. The spirit and flavour of Indian Music should come out in Orchestra. Our aim should focus in formation of Orchestra. The restrictions and disciplines of Indian music should be followed as far as possible. The flavour of Indian Music should come out in Orchestra’s combined sound.
We have to inspire big or small musicians to work in the direction of Orchestra. We need to introduce the qualities and use of Orchestration to the audience. When a student starts learning Orchestra, he/she develops a practice to sit for long duration. He should focus on the composition, so that he can memorise it. In notation pattern he has to be careful with the Swaras.

Other than Orchestra, the Fusion music also has made impact on instrumental music. Now a day Sitar is most popular instrument used for fusion music. Dr. Prateek Chaudhuri has accomplished various fusions in this way.
Q.1 What are your views about the experimentation in Indian Music in the perspective of Indian Instrumental Music?

Ans. I am not against fusion music but I do not like haphazard pattern of fusion music. Music was introduced and described through literature (shastras) and we cannot compromise in literature. It is difficult to maintain purity of Raga, Tala and all the basic components of classical music in fusion music. Fusion music affects the strict and disciplined nature of classical music. Fusion music is a flavour of music. For fusion music minimum two kinds of instruments should be used. Suppose there may be two kinds of percussion instruments used together, which then may create a cycle by following a pattern, which is very important. This is because a cycle or pattern is the base. We can use a Drum with Tabla or Pakhawaj or even Mridangam, which may also come altogether into a musical form or concept which can be termed as fusion.

When we talk about fusion music in terms of Indian Classical Music, there has to be at least a base of a scale in a particular raga. The second important thing is the Bandish, the kind of ‘Mukhra’ we are using, as well other factors like Swara, depth (aesthetics in music) and also the idea of presentation which is very important. When two musicians work together with dedication and exchange their ideas one can also create very good fusion music. But chaos occurs, when musicians starts performing without any pre concept and discussions. Sometimes they play solo, followed by a jam session and it ends up without any aesthetical approach and they call it fusion. I do not like this type of fusion.

Q.2 Pandit Vishwamohan Bhatt has made Mohan Veena, Niladri-ji is playing Electronic Sitar, do you think these kinds of modification are appropriate in classical music and is it affecting our music?

Ans. I am in favor of these kinds of experiments. It should be done, for an example Tanpura is not very ancient instrument (around 500 years old). Earlier, there was no reference seen about
Tanpura. Likewise Tabla also came into existence since last 300 years. If the purpose of making new instruments is concerned with Indian Classical Music, it will be appreciated ever. When Tarab was introduced in Sitar, the sound quality “Aas” of instrument increased. Niladri also introduced ‘Zitar’ mixture of sitar and guitar. When we play a new instrument it has to follow quality parameter of Indian Classical Music to maintain the purity of Classical music. It should also satisfy aesthetics. So I can conclude that changes are necessary for the betterment of quality of music and thus we cannot stop experimentation.
Q.1 What is your opinion regarding changes due to Experimentation in instrumental music?

Ans. “Geetam, Vadyam Tatha Nirtyam, Traya Sangeet Murchyate”

According to the shloka mentioned above, Vadyam has been placed in between of Geetam and Nrityam. It is a wise decision by scholars and a question to think why it has been placed in between. This thought was favoured on the basis of experiences and facts of our great scholars. Musical Instruments have a lot of varieties like stringed, percussion, wind etc. The instruments which are made up of a skin are known as ‘Percussion Instruments’. Indian Musical Instruments have a significant role in world wide music. It doesn’t mean that the musical instruments of other countries are not as good as Indian, but the variety and the quality we can notice in our instruments is strange and also amazing comparably.

Now I’ll focus on my own Instrument i.e. Pakhawaj. It is a percussion instrument. The term Pakhawaj is made up of two words ‘Pakh’ and ‘Awaj’ where Pakh means ‘shoulder’ and Awaj means ‘to play’ thus movement of shoulder is very important while playing this instrument. It can be said that it is the very first percussion instrument in Hindustani Classical Instruments music. In literature, Pakhawaj has been defined as ‘Mridangam’. It was a main instrument at the time of Mughal Emperors Golden Period. It has achieved the utmost popularity. According to my study, two main streams of Indian music came into existence in the medieval period, known as North Indian Music and South Indian Music. In South Indian music Mridangam word is still used frequently for Pakhawaj. Even today the good Pakhwaj players are regarded as “Mridangacharya”. According to me, the origin and evolution of Mridangam and Pakhawaj may resemble with each other but the playing techniques of both are different.

Now, I will come to your topic Experimentation and Changes in Hindustani Music. Theory says, Change is the law of nature. Things are changing continuously due to developments and experiments. We all know that our Hindustani Musical Forms (like Dhrupad, Khayal etc) follow certain rules and regulations and it’s much disciplined. That is why it is known as
Classical music. Although Classical music has its own limitation but it is not untouched from the flow of experimentation, which is universal fact. For instance, if we study, the Forms of Hindustani music in Bharta’s Natyashastra and Shargdeva’s Sangeet Ratnakara, we will find that the present format of Hindustani Music has been modified due to experimentation by the great scholars. Likewise, in the past Geeti, Dhruga were the main forms but gradually in medieval period Dhrupad gayan became prominent. While comparing with Sangeet Rantnakara it can be seen that tremendous changes have been noticed. Today’s Music is very much inspired from middle period (Akbar’s Period) as most of the legends belong to that period, like Tansen, Surdas, etc. That period was the epitome of many Art forms related to Aesthetic Arts. In modern context so many practical things belong to that period, like Raga Kedar, Bihag etc as well as Boles of Pakhawaj are also given by the scholars of Akbar period. Many changes have also been observed but the changes always have its own limit, as we are talking about Classical music. Experiments or Changes can be done, but I am not in favour of a kind of experiment which is out of limit and neglects the literary aspect. When we play, so many things happen on stage aesthetically by itself. Scientifically I may say that everything has some kind of formula but our music is related to God. Thus sometime miracles happen with the grace of God and we feel astonished by ourselves, how they happened. Some aesthetic applications have no logic or answer. That’s why I believe everything is not bound though we do experiments within the limits of tradition. (It’s on basis of my own philosophy and experiment as I am also a learner of music). Experiments should be done, but they must obey the literary aspect. Anything done randomly may not be accepted as a proper justification of an experiment. One can get instant publicity by trying to change or modify any musical form for his or her convenience but it may not have a long life and may not be accepted by the puritians for the sake of preservations of our traditional music. We follow a tradition and I feel it is our responsibility to maintain the traditional values of our music.

In Natyashastra, it is seen that with regard to the Talas, only their names have been mentioned. There is no ‘Theka system’ described by scholars. The appearance of Theka system is also a kind of an experiment. It doesn’t mean that we have broken the chain of tradition. What is the meaning of term ‘Theka’, “Theka” means ‘responsibility’. Earlier, the term Tala Vadya was in use. In Bharata’s period Tala Vadya was made up of metallic element which was used to give Tala, it was tuned in one particular Swara only. Later on with the existence of Tabla,
various playing techniques also get developed as a result, Tala had shifted to the hands and Theka system came into existence. Now a day ‘Theka’ is performing the same job which Tala Vadyas were doing earlier. Theka pattern is not ancient but elements of Tala like guru, laghu, plut still exist in our contemporary music. Theka system is more prominent in Tabla. While accompanying Khayal, a simple Theka may beautify the composition, but in Pakhawaj, we accompany Dhrupada and we also show the Tala by hand moment. We also play Theka and repeat it only once or twice, then we try to follow the same ‘Chand’ according to the mathematic calculation and variations sung or played by the vocalist or instrumentalist.

Recently, I have done an experiment and prepared an item called ‘Swara-Laya-Samvad’. In this concept, I took some vocal compositions with Sarangi. One rare instrument like Jaltarang and Pakhawaj was taken. As I have learnt vocal music too, I introduced some compositions on the Bols of Pakhawaj while playing Pakhawaj. Likewise, I fixed some of the compositions on Pakhawaj, as each composition cannot be fixed into the tones of Pakhawaj but even though I tried to choose the most suitable of all. The instruments Sarangi, Jaltarang were also accompanying me. The feeling was extraordinary and tremendous. It was a wonderful experiment.
Q.1 Have you done any experimentation in the style which you play?

Ans. No, I have not done any experimentation. Whatever, my Gurus and Ustads had taught; I am following the same pattern. But I am trying to focus on the playing style of composition. Our Gharana (Ajrada) is a Tabla-based gharana. The ‘Badhat’ or ‘Elaboration’ of ‘Kayada’ was limited in earlier days; I am trying to do some work with the elaboration of traditional compositions.

Q.2 What are the relevant manufacturing changes now a days have been noticed considering Tabla?

Ans. In earlier days the kind of leather we were using was known as ‘Desi-Chamra’. Chemicals were used for it. The kind of ‘Masala’ which was in trends was used for cleaning. Earlier the leather was comparably darkish (but now it is white, as you can see in my tabla). This is the main change, which has been noticed. Leather is almost good everywhere, but the sound quality depends on finishing of the leather. Bombay, Calcutta, U.P., Banaras and Meerut are the places known for good leather work. The craftsmen of these places are skilled and traditional; indeed they are very professional about the quality of work. Basically the sound quality depends on the leather used for manufacturing.

Q.3 What is your opinion about the new generation and their inclination towards experimentation in our Indian Music?

Ans. It’s good. The upcoming generation or even if my own generation is inclined towards experimentation. Nothing is wrong with it. But the problem arises when instead of choosing our own traditional or folk compositions; we try to blend them with other western and folk instrument. Now a days the kind of music we are experiencing, follows a co-ordination of Raga and Tala with the instruments like Tabla, Pakhawaj, this also has came into an existence because of the experimentation. If 500 to 700 years ago our grand gurus and legends have not gone
through experimentation, the music seen now days would not have been existed. Earlier, in ‘Dagga’ we used to put ‘flour’ but today the ‘Syahi’ is more popular and convenient. This is also a part of experimentation. Earlier ‘Pakka Chamra’ was used instead of ‘Kachha-Chamra’, likewise, Bayan (left hand drum) was made up of mud but now manufacturers are using copper and metal. Both manufacturer and tabla players are doing experiments and it is good for the growth otherwise new things will not come forward. Earlier the quality of microphones used was not very good but now it is improved. This is also a part of experimentation. Many instruments like Tabla, Sitar, Mohan Veena, Hawaiian Guitar etc are the outcome of experiments done by our scholars. In the same way, I appreciate, if a tabla player wants to do experiment with other instruments, we need to remember one thing only, and that experiment should go on for short span of time with the special care to sustain the purity of our traditional music. Secondly, if one can achieve something out of it then experiments should be done. Our music is so enriched and refined, even if for another 100 years we will keep working on it, it will remain fresh.