CHAPTER IV

THE CONTRIBUTION OF PT. RAVI SHANKAR AND
USTD. VILAYAT KHAN IN SITAR MUSIC
AND IT’S GLOBALISATION
THE CONTRIBUTION OF PT. RAVI SHANKAR AND USTD. VILAYAT KHAN IN SITAR MUSIC AND ITS GLOBALISATION:

In the more advanced stage of sitar playing two names are being focused – ‘Ravi Shankar Style’ and ‘Vilayatkhani Style’. These two personae have uplifted the stylistic development of sitar so much that a study of these two great masters can well be the subject of research.

According to Pt. Arvind Parikh, contribution of these two maestros can be explained with two terms – ‘Horizontal Expansion’ and ‘Vertical Expansion’. Pt. Ravi Shankar’s style is horizontally expanded as he has experimented with new new Ragas, in new Taals, playing with world musicians like Yehudi Menuhin, Orchestra compositions, direction, fusion music composition, film music etc. All these elaborate the circumference of the circle. Or it might be called variety of creations.

Ustad. Vilayat Khan’s style of playing is an extension of not the circumference, but in the depth, which can be called the vertical expansion. His gharana is famous for playing selected ragas with variety in the unfoldment. Imdad Khan was famous for playing Yaman or Puriya. The hymn ‘ek sadhe to sab sadhe....’ Is very much true for Vilayat Khan Sahab’s playing also. All India Radio has once organized 4 programmes on 4 consecutive Saturdays for Ustad. He played Raag Pilu in each of these 4 days – but all of them were different in flavour from each other. It can well be called a vertical approach of playing a raga.

Pt. Ravi Shankar’s playing is creative work and is based on Dhrupad style – and Vilayat Khan’s style is substantially based on Khayal. Though both of them are well versed in all the ‘angs’. If one listens to a particular Raga played by both the artists – the point will be clear. From the very beginning the alap is played in dhrupad ang and long meends are used to sustain notes. Also the uses of Kharaj- Pancham strings are part of the traditional Dhrupad style.

Ustad Vilayat Khan on the other hand used to establish the Khayal ang from the very first note. Alap was also played in Gayaki ang – which he considered as the basis of the playing style of his gharana. To cope up with the details of Gayaki ang – Vilayat Khan has re-shaped the string arrangement of his sitar and made it ‘Gandhar-Pancham’. This expresses the ‘sambad’ of a particular raga which creates the mood.
The next point comes on the content and the expression. Content is the feeling and thinking of an artist and expression is the style in which the content is expressed or produced before the audience. In this point not only as two Gharanas differ – but two artists of the same gharana also differ from each other. This is the quality which gives an artist his individual identity.

Imdadkhani Gharana keeps stress on Riyaz. It is said Imdad Khan used to light one candle and continued his riyaz till it was totally burnt. Vilayat Khan’s riyaz timing was 12-14 hours, to make the technical balance of sitar strong. According to Vilayat Khan, one should have the controle of expression on the breath – then only he is a good artist. Until then the content does not get its shape or formation. So these content and expression are both inter-dependent.

In this point Pt. Ravi Shankar has enriched his style of playing with content of variety and expressing them in a new and finer form. Along with his dhrupad base he has also added Karnatak and Western music in his content part and inter-mingled them so aesthetically that his performances are always designed with some new effect.

Not only in their way of playing but also in the context of Globalisation, had these two maestros kept their footage as pioneer. A number of prominent musicians from India created a major impact and recognition in the west, amongst were the sitar players - Pt. Ravi Shankar and Ustad Vilayat Khan. Pt. Ravi Shankar created an immense body of work for an unprecedented international audience for his raga-based repertoire via landmark concerts and collaborations with the likes of violinist Yehudi Menuhin, floutist Jean Pierre Ramphal, minimalist composer Phillip Glass, saxophonist Bud Shank, and conductors Zubin Mehta and Andre Previn. Ustd. Vilayat Khan on the other hand traveled across the world with his treasure of ‘Raagdari’ in ‘Gayaki ang’ played in sitar.

In the late fifties and early sixties, Yehudi Menuhin, the world famous violine virtuoso introduced Ustad Ali Akbar Khan and Pt. Ravi Shankar to Western audiences. This was the beginning of a new era for Hindusthani Classical Music. George Harrison’s association with Pt. Ravi Shankar, and his efforts to incorporate the sounds of sitar in some of his music, generated much interest with younger Americans. Perfomences by Pt. Ravi Shankar in
the Monterey Pop Festival [1967], Woodstock Festival [1969], Concert for Bangladesh [1971], U.N.'s Human Rights Day Concert etc. brought wider attention to the Hindustani Classical Music. Thus the Western World gradually became captivated by the sounds of the sitar. Gradually it spread in other parts of the world by other sitarists also like Ustd. Vilayat Khan, Pt. Nikhil Banerjee, Pt. Debu Chowdhury, Ustd. Abdul Halim Jaffar Khan etc.