CHAPTER 4

Historical Aspects of the Induction of Violin to Carnatic Music Scene

Instruments using stretched strings present some of the most baffling problems in organology. The origins of chordophones to which division the violin belongs are difficult to trace. One of the many assumptions is that the hunters bow is the earliest stringed instruments such the origin of the bowed variety has been a controversial one. Various sources are attributed—India being one of them. Many scholars believe that the rabab mentioned by Al-farabi (AD 950) is the earliest one\(^\text{12}\). Kamancha of Egyptian origin is even today found in Rajasthan. The Sangita Makaranda refers to the ravanravani. But this is different from that of ravanhatta mentioned by Sargna deva. The advent of violin to India is one of the best examples of cultural absorption in music. We have bowed instruments for at least ten centuries or more now. There are sculptures showing instruments of remarkable similarity to the violin in the mallikarjuna temple (Vijayavada, tenth century and the Nataraja Temple (Chidambaram, 12\(^\text{th}\) century). It was not the concert instrument which came with the Portuguese, French and

\(^{12}\) B.C.Deva Musical Instruments of India
Figure 4.1: The Rabab-Kashmir

Figure 4.2: Jeewan Shah-Rabab
British. Undoubtedly, it is the gift from modern European musical culture to Indian concert music, particularly to Carnatic music. It is but unimaginable to have a vocal Carnatic concert without the Violin accompaniment. The stringed bowed Instruments have been around in the Indian music scene for a long time (7th Century Naradas sangeetha makaranda mentions the Ravani which is believed to be a bowed instrument.) the varieties of these kind of instruments are illustrated in the form of cave paintings in Ajanta as also in many other temple carvings almost across all part of India. The names of these are plenty as the locations they were in use. Sarangi, Ravanahatta, Banam, Khingry, Dilruba, Esraj, Kendra, Kinnari, pulluvan Veena and many others. This demonstrates we have been having the bowed Instrument in our country for a good ten centuries.

Ravanahatta

Figure 4.3 : Sarangi and Ravanahatta
Baluswami Deekshitar (1786 to 1858), the younger brother of Mutuswamy dixitar one of the immortal trinities of carnatic music is credited with the introduction of the violin into art music. Baluswamy’s father, Ramaswamy, was in the service of Venkatakrishna Mudaliyar of Manali, near Madras, as a musician. Mudaliyar was also employed in the East India Company at Madras. This gave him an opportunity to listen to Western music and along with him went the Dixitar brothers. Baluswamys proficiency on this instrument attracted the attention of the king of Ettiyapuram and he was made the Asthana Vidwan of it in 1824 on a salary of Rs. 50-00 per month. It is said that Venkatakrishan
engaged a European tutor to teach Baluswami the violin (It was known at those times as fiddle popularly). Balu dixitar soon became a very proficient player and his brother's pupil, Vadivelu also learnt to play the instrument and introduced it to the court of Travancore. Indeed Maharaja Swathi Thirunal, the then ruler of the state himself a composer of repute, presented Vadivelu with an ivory violin in recognition of his artistic achievements. From then on it has become a premier instrument in Carnatic music. In later periods many other musicians learnt the violin and became very proficient in it. Some of these Great violinists-

- Ambayiram
- Ponnu-swamy Subbarayar
- Narayanaswamy Pillai
- Mahadeva Bhagavatar
- Narayanaswamy Iyer
- Tirukkkodikavai Krishnayyar
- Govindaswamy Pillai
Dwaram Venkataswamy Naidu  
Lalgudi Vaidyanathan

Kunnakudi Vaidyanathan
Mysore Brothers- Manjunath- Nagaraj

Figure 4.5 : Violin Players

The main reason in the attraction to this instrument back in the time of Baluswamy Dixitar could have been the loudness of the sound. Other than this the violin has many other features about it which easily accepted the Carnatic musical grammar into the sounds of it. Some are

- It is handy-(As against the more bulky Veena or Gottuvadyam)
- The Harmonics which is pleasing

- The finger board is which is short and allows all the gamakas of the Carnatic music to be expressed easily.

- The long bow produces elongated tone. This will suit the Carnatic style to produce longer continuous
Tanams and the Alapana of Raga can be played almost like singing.

- The Ghana and nay effects can be brought about with ease.
- Can achieve speeds to match fast passages both while supporting a vocalist and as a soloist.

The instrument can be tuned to various pitches. The minor adjustments with strings will bring about the necessary tuning for either a male voice with a deep voice or a high pitched woman singer. More details about the violin getting into the carnatic system are available from many sources. The Tanjaore court formed and “English” band. In the summary of the Tanjore historical records, published by the Madras Government Press, has a letter dated 16th January 1800 from Mr. Torrin, to Dattajee Appah, requesting the two of the raja’s violinists be sent to General Bridges at Trichinopoly. Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries performing music was on the verge of a beautiful legacy which occurred in the form of the induction of violin into it. The

\[\text{\underline{\text{ource:}}}\]

13 Lecture delivered by C.S.Ayyar, Museum Theatre, Madras 1943
legacy was formed and carried forward by the great musicians of these times.

The versatility of Indian musicians found expression to improvise on the structure at a very early stage in the violin’s Carnatic debut. Mysore –T.Chowdiah (1894-1967) experimented with seven strings. Violin family has four main violins. Violin, Viola, Violin Cello and Contra Bass.

Among the above said varieties the viola is played by Dr. M.Balamuralikrishna. The Cello and Contra Bass are also used by some modern musicians as an accompaniment as also a kind of world music based on Carnatic music. Some of these experiments are appreciated by a section of listeners.

On the concert platforms we find the violinists who accompany many popular artists as having very distinct styles. These styles cannot be categorised as Baanis because of the modern nature of the Instrument itself. But we have two very distinct styles. Just like on a Veena when the Gamakas are minimal and straight notes are held and played (Mysore Baani) and the style where maximum alankaras are used as profusion of Gamakas with anuswaras (Tanjavur Baani) so the violinists also have these styles as the Pidi and Jaru styles. Violin also is
a polyphonic instrument. By the technique of double touch two notes can be produced simultaneously. This is another factor in violin producing a rich sound. The violin is now an inseparable part of concert music of Southern India just like its counterpart Sarangi in the Northern Music. The violin is highly respected instrument of India as it is in the western world. The violin has been a beneficial factor to Carnatic classical music. The number of learners of violin in south India is more than all the other learners of other instruments put together.\textsuperscript{14}

\textsuperscript{14} Professor S.Sambamurthy. A Dictionary of South Indian Music And Musicians.