CHAPTER : VI

“SITAR IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC”

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6.1 Sitar in Indian Classical Music

Though 19th century has given us many artists who devoted their whole life for the promotion of classical music, but even after so many efforts, the classical music could not reach the expected height of music.

After independence, the Indian classical music has not yet been able to regain its status in the Indian society, as it had in the past. Still it is not as common and adorable as the light or folk music. For this situation, the changing attitudes and atmosphere of the new generation and the lack of devotional teachers in the field of classical music is responsible.

If we consider the period from Tansen to Sadarang i.e. almost two hundred years we conclude that the Dhrupad shaily was prevalents, so sitar had also adopted the same technique. Alaap was prominent. Further considering the period from Sadaring to Fayyaz Khan i.e. almost 200 years, though Dhrupad was the main vaadan shaily in sitar, but on the other side simultaneously Tappa and Thumri made the classical music slightly easy to learn. Light music started gaining popularity.

The first and the foremost reason for the downfall of the classical music was the lack of practice or ‘Sadhna’ and devotion of the teacher towards classical music. The artists performed just for money and fame.

Pt. Vishnu Digamber Pulaskar made best efforts to eradicate all the defects in music system and to some extent he was successful too. This work of Pulaskar was taken over by Pt. Vishnu Narayan Bhatkhande,
who took great pains to make improvements in music system. The greatest thing he did was the invention of a new system named “Notation System”. He made collections of all the old gats after meeting the ustaads of that period and wrote down the notations of all the bandishes’ and ‘cheesen’ of olden times. It made the Indian music easy, because even in the absence of the ‘Guru’ the shishya could practise the raga by reading and studying the “Swar Lipi” of any raga, or Khayal etc. The period after Bhatkhande, can be referred to as the worst effected period or dark period for Indian classical music.

6.2 Popularization of Sitar

There was a sudden change in the interests of the people for classical music, as a result, light music took the place of classical music. Due to the struggle for independence and, disturbances, political imbalance in the country, all the great artists had a set back. Film music attracted more people when Bhatkhande notation system came into existence, it was easy to teach and there were so many books published which included all the ragas or khayals sung or played by different ustaads. The classical music was limited only upto vocalists. There was lack of instrumentalists, though there were a few sarod and veena ‘vaadaks’. Sitar started to take place in performance. The gurus started giving lessons in sitar playing to some of the selected shishyas.

All India Radio gave opportunity to the sitarists for their performances. It started paying them a good amount for the performance. The government started giving economic help to the artists
so that they could flourish their art and talent easily and to their own
taste and for the common public. The audience started taking interest
in classical instrumental music. Sangeet Natak academy did great efforts
for the promotion of classical instrumental music. It has produced a
great number of artists in instrumental as well as vocal music. The artists
from Gwaliar Gharana and Senia Gharana have done a lot for the
promotion of this unique art. i.e. sitar in Indian classical music.

Akaashvaani relays the regular programmes of Indian classical
instrumental music. The schools and colleges organize the competitions
for classical instrumental music which promote the love for music
amongst the students.

6.3 Appreciation of Sitar

Sitar is the most popular and sophisticated instrument which has
acquired a great place in the Indian classical music. It is played in almost
every song, bhazan, ghazal, solo performance, orchestra and in folk
tunes, play back music is done with sitar which includes classical ragas.

The artists like Pt. Ravi Shankar Ji, Ustaad Alaudin Khan, Ustaad
Vilayat Khan, Shujaat Hussain Khan, Nishaat Hussain Khan, Kartik
Kumar, Shahid Parvez, Shameem Ahmad, Late Nikhil Benerjee, Debu
Chaudhary, Mani Lal Naag etc. have played a vital role in the promotion
and development of sitar in Indian classical music.

Now sitar has a great name in Indian classicl music, Hardly any
function is seen without its presence. It has the capacity to produce
nine rasas prevalent in Indian culture and can play western tunes as well. The westerns are learning this ‘saaz’ with devotion. It has individuality in group performances. It is played in light music, orchestra, devotional songs with a classical tinge.

Sitar can produce the flat notes which no other instrument has been able to do. The classical sitar vaadan has the spiritual effect upon human mind. The resonant sounds which the strings of sitar produce can heal the old diseases in few minutes if produced rightly and properly.

Sitar in Indian classical music shows its perfection on ‘Alaap’. It can be played on sitar for hours and hours. The classical ragas include the following pieces which are one above the other in beauty, rhythm and aesthetic:

1. Alaap
2. Jor - alaap
3. Jhala (small)
4. Vilambit Gat
5. Toraas
6. Raja Khani Gat
7. Toraas

The vibrations of sitar make us forget every tension and we are lost in a world of peace and happiness.
The great artists of India have settled in other countries and the others also prefer to go abroad, as they feel, the Indian govt. is not rewarding them well. It is a pity that we are deprived of the treasures of the big ustaads of our country, when they leave their own country and settle abroad.

Sitar has received appreciation in western countries in classical programmes where Pt. Ravi Shankar Ji gave performances with Yehudi Menuhin, (an Indian settled abroad), a great musician.

There is nothing in the Indian system that would prevent a natural development in that direction, provided that the impulses spring not from intellectual curiosity but from inner necessity. Now the musicians of modern period have developed this art so much with their ingenuity and imagination in composing the ragas that sitar has got wonderful results in enriching Indian classical music. New techniques are being developed in Indian classical music. Sitar has a high hold in every function, and it always starts with sitar’s classical tone. This instrument has created taste and interest in Indian classical music. Now the people feel an artistic sense in this instrument, when classical ragas are performed on sitar. The music minded appreciate its vaadan and the common man enjoys the classical music on sitar, because the classical swaras of sitar work as medicine for the sick and are powerful curers.

The sitar was used as an accompanying instrument in the initial period, but as veena became an independent solo instrument, sitar naturally followed similar development. Sitar was used just as a pause
filler to maintain ‘Nayas’ notes on which the vocalist made a pause. This instrument has its own potentialities as a solo instrument. It has the sweet melody. The crystalization of sitar gats has won the hearts of people.

The sitar has a very high place in Indian classical music. During the 20th century, the stylistic evolution of sitar has reached greater heights and it is hoped that it will open vast fields for its popularity in Indian classical music. The 20th century period can be said to be the golden period for its rise and success. The Indian classical music on sitar has achieved completely new dimensions. The changes are fairly radical. The sitar vaadan has become intellectual and imaginative. It is such an instrument which expresses the feelings and emotions of one’s heart. The composite improvisation of classical vaadan of sitar has reached the zenith during the present period.

Now the enriched gat style of sitar with melodic and rhythmic development has reached its heights. The alaap form has achieved greatest relative importance. The whole vaadan is done as ‘Alaap’. Previously the ‘Gat’ was the heart beat but now ‘Alaap’ is the heart beat in sitar performances. so the garland of Indian classical music has become more beautiful with this instrument. During Pt. Ji’s extensive tours of western countries, sitar concerts in Raga Darbari Kanhra, Marwa and Bageshwari with Dhrupad styles were accepted by the audience with great enthusiasm. Dedicated experiments and consistent researches have brought new influences in traditional style of Indian classical music.
According to Pt. Ji, the pure artist must be free to chose his style of playing. Yahudi Menuhin said in an interview (in T.V.) at Delhi that Indian classical music is innocent which binds the audience and the performer alika and Pt. Ji's sitar has that power of doing this miracle.

The young artists are doing their best to make sitar in classical music much popular.

Indian music has unlimited potential for development. Music with it's notes forms, emotions, expressions and highly developed science conveys deeper meaning of human struggle, happiness, joy and a variety of moods. Given the proper scope, understanding and opportunities for development, with active support from private as well as public sectors, it can blossom into an extraordinary medium of expression with its infinite scope for variety and progress based on materials accumulating through the centuries. With the classical aspect, and folk music the sitar has woven into our compositions a world of human emotions, mental and spiritual experience.
6.4 RENOWNED AND UPCOMING PRESENT FLOURISHING SITARISTS

The view points of some of the sitarists interviewed

1. Pandit Uma Shankar Mishra’s Sitar Recital (Kamni Auditorium Delhi
March 7, 1993, International Festival of Music held at Delhi) :-
He mobilised a marvellous Alaap strech, developing the raga, note
by note. He played Rag Pooriya. He uses ‘meend’ perfectly, and
has full control upon his saaz and rhythm. He is a disciple of Pt.
Ravi Shankar Ji. Another noted sitarist who gave performance was
Ustaad Imrat Khan. he has no match for his Jor-Jhala. He plays
gayaki ang in his performances. The culture of the gharana
through his Imdad Khani touches was never for to see.

2. Shujaat Hussain Khan, Rose garden - Kala Bhawan Sector 16,
Chandigarh, Dated February 93.
He plays Gayaki-ang. Meend work is perfect. He can produce
severn swaras in one stroke of mizraab which is a rare distinction.
In his performance he played Rag Charu (Karnataka Rag) Keshi
(Khula Rag) according to him. He sang when he was playing on
sitar a bendish of Ustaad Ameer Khan, Laj Rakho Tum Mori
qusanyian Rag Khamaj was also playe and sung simultaneously
by him as :-

‘Man Lago Mera Yaar Faqiri Mein’. According to him, Sitar was
invented by Ameer Khusro and basically it was based on Tri tantri
veena. He believes in his own style, not in any gharana, though
he belongs to Imdad khani gharana.
3. Budhaditya Mukerjee, 27-10-95, Bhartiya Vidya Bhawan Sector 27, Chandigarh :- When asked about his style of sitar playing, the answer was quick and to the point i.e. “gayaki aur Tantarkaari Ka Sahi Smavesh Hai”. He is from Imdad Khani Gharana. He has depth of feeling and emotion, an outstanding technique which he expresses through his music. He is a disciple of his father Pandit Bimlendu Mukharjee, a great sitarist of Imdad Khani Gharana. His meend work and jor jhala are superb. He plays gats after presenting enthralling pieces of alaap, jor and jhala. The soothing notes flow the strings of the sitar like water falls, which makes one spell bound. Meend work is so beautiful that he is perfect in producing five notes through meend in the Sitar.

4. Shahid Parvez, Tagore theatre 19-3-93 Chandigarh :- The All India Bhaskar Rao Nritya and Sangeet Sameelan presented this great artist in Tagore Theatre in Chandigarh 19-3-93. He makes soft & delicate notes on the sitar, has mastery over the saaz. He can play four to five swaras meend in on stroke. One gets the feeling of gayaki ang or we can say that he plays sitar gats just as shadows of Chhota Khayal. He plays the tihais with powerful mizraab strokes which show his grip over rhythm.
5. Mohsin Ali Khan, Panjab Kala Bhawan Sector 16, Chandigarh May 27, 1993 :
He belongs to Bhendi Bazaar Gharana known as Moradabadi Gharana also. At present, he told was learning from Partho Das. He played vilambit gat in Bageshwari in Ektaal and drut in Teentaal was marked by an extensive use of ‘meend’, which added on extremely pleasing ‘goonj’ to the instrument. He plays an intricate alaap. He explored high octave more than the lower ones. He shows the virtuosity with the jhala on the instrument. His playing is soft and pleasing notes are good to the ear marked by the highs & lows which prevents his recital from becoming repetitive.

He played Rag Bhairavi and deviated into other ragas by shifting the ‘Key note’ and created the atmosphere of rag Khamaj, Tilang, Peelu, Jai Jaiwanti, Nand and then again returned to Bhairavi. The changing of raga was done with such a subtle smoothness that it seemed comparable to the smooth changing of lines by a train where not a slight bump is felt. He plays alaap, then vilambit and then drut with taans, lastely jhala. He handles and explores the sitar making it sing. He has the command and dexterity of the fingers that each stroke is powerful yet fine tuned and controlled. His Jhala seems like a bunch of waves coming towards you. He is the one who added a new dimension to the sitar by introducing the gayaki ang. It was the natural out come to one, who was taught surbahar, sitar and vocal music all at the same time. He follows the purest form of classical music.
7. Debu Prasad Chakarvarti, Tagore Theater Chandigarh, April 7, 1994 :: (Organised by Pracheen Kala Kendra)

He has learnt this art from Ajay Sinha Roy of the Senia gharana. He played Rag Yaman Kalyaan, starting with alaap, fod to a composition in madhya lay before going to a wonderful drut gat. The complete mastery of the structure & the enlivening laykari are the qualities he has preserved. During the fast gat, the taan patterns were rapid even then the sitar and tabla playing were perfectly balanced. The co-ordination was absolutely natural without the display of acrobatics. During the fast gat, the ‘taan’ patterns were rapid and the tabla and sitar playing were perfectly balanced. He used the technique of mizraab playing in the Jhala through heavy and light strokes bringing out perfect clarity of notes.

8. Dr. Mrs. Saroj Ghosh :

She is a disciple of Ustaad Amjad Ali Khan Sahib and plays her sitar mixed with sarod techniques.
9. **Mr. Piare Lal (78 years old)**:- Ektara player (4756, Maloya Colony, U.T. Chandigarh, 11-11-92).

A Kabir panthi by religion, he belongs to Haryana. He is a musician in himself. He told me that the Ektara is the base of all stringed instruments. He played 3 bhajans and classical ghajal tunes & film songs (with some music also) on only one string. He has great control over the swaras. He makes it himself, only “Piyali or little gourd is ordered to the pot maker. Then the bambo stick, baint& gaj are needed. It is played with a bow.

10. **Pt. Gopal Krishan, Veena player, P.U. Chandigarh (English Auditorium).**

He believes that Veena techniques has been adopted by sitar and some of the techniques of sitar have been adopted by veena. He has perfection in Alaap.

A disciple of Pt. Ravi Shankar ji. He is at his best when he plays the fast gats. He played Raga Bhipalasi with alap for, hala, and then Drut gat followed by Vilambit gat. He played a pleasantly tune in raga Mishra Khamaj, which had the beauty of gayaki ang. He makes full use of all the strings of the instrument while playing.


Shri Arvind Parikh learnt sitar from Ustaad Vilayat Khan. Arvind Ji plays devotional songs and tunes on sitar. Ustaad Vilayat Khan taught him all his own as well as Ustaad Inayat Khan’s sitar vadan style with full devotion.

Arvind Parikh was born on Oct 19th, 1927 in Ahemdabad. His mother was a talented lady with whose inspiration Arvind got the hights of sitar playing. His father Sh. Govardhan-das was also a great musician and sitar player. Arvind ji learnt sitar vaadan from Shri Makrand Badshah and then from Ustaad Vilayat Khan. His vaadan shally had gayaki-ang which has been adopted by the present artists like Shujat Hussain Khan. Arvind Parikh’s vaadan shally had the sweetness of sound and clearance of swaras.
Illustrations
Pt. Ravi Shankar ji in a 'Relaxed Mood'

Plate - 1
ALLAUDDIN KHAN (1862-1972)
HINDUSTANI INSTRUMENTALIST

PLATE - 2.
SALIL SHANKAR

PLATE-3.

BUDHADITYA MUKHERJEE

Deba Prasad Chakaraborty