

## Contribution of Muslims to the Classical Music of the subcontinent

The classical music of the Indo-Pak subcontinent sings in praise of Muslim contribution to its heritage. Before the music which was confined to *Saman* chants, a few wind and string instruments, the unwieldy drums, and only a few elementary *taals*.

When music and dance formed part of worship, the fervour and intensity of devotion should have exuded on the all-pervasive atmosphere of creativity. But the Hindus probably took their music for granted and used it merely as an instrument for fulfilling their pious duty to the deity; music as an end in itself, a thing worth seeking for its own, an ideal worth striving for on its inherent merit, remained a concept alien to the Hindu temperament. Music as a form of expression, as a means of communication, or as an instrument for the release of pent-up energies amounts to looking at art for art's sake or for life's sake, but surely not for worship's sake alone. The psychological need for music as well as the motivation for it has source in the awareness of the basic propensities of man.

The recognition of this fine distinction in the subcontinent was to be the realm of Muslim musicians. There is definitely more to music than the eulogising of gods in the severe rigours of the atmosphere of the temple. How would you account for the joys and even

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the frivolities of romance and the surge of emotions that comprise life? It is only in a free, open uninhibited atmosphere that art can thrive and sustain itself. It was in this vein that the Muslims, without a suffocating note and stifling atmosphere, contributed to the notes, the scale, the forms the *raags*, the *taals*, the instruments and the notation of India.

It is well-known that Indian music before the advent of Muslims comprised *phand*, *perband*, *geet*, *doha*, *ashlok*, *dhoru* and *pad*, most of which are now extinct, as they related to worship rather than as an art form. It is said that temple music was confined to three notes. Later, another note was added, followed by yet another, bringing the total number of notes to five. The scale became heptatonic much later. Even today *keertans* and *bhajjans* follow the original pattern and are mostly cyclic.

When Muhammad b. Qasim landed in Sind, the Arabs brought in their wake the multi-faceted *bhairvin* comprising twelve notes. Even today *raag bhairvin* is one of the richest and sophisticated innovations of man's musical knowledge. One can safely compare North Indian music with South Indian or Karnataki music to illustrate differences as the South Indian music has retained the modes almost in their original form.

Raja Maan Singh of Gwalior (1470), one of Akbar's ministers, amalgamated *dhoru* and *pad* to *dhurpad* the form which still exists in our musical repertoire. Even for this rigorous form, its greatest exponents have almost always been Muslims. To name only a few one can mention Mian Tansen, Bilas Khan, Chand Khan, Ismail Khan, Aurangzeb Khan, and today—the Dagar family.

The solemn *dhurpad* gave way to the graces and the ornamentations of *khayal*. As is evident from the name itself, and historically proved beyond the shadow of a doubt, that *khayal* owes its origin to

the Muslim musicians saints and *kings*. There is some dispute whether it was Amir Khusrau or Sultan Hussain Sharqi Jaunpuri who first introduced *khayal* to our music. Be that as it may the fact remains that *dhurpad* succumbed to the lively and dramatic eloquence of the *khayal*.

*Khayal* was developed extensively by Sadarang and patronised by the Mughal Emperor Muhammad Shah. In fact all the Mughal Emperors except Aurangzeb were great patrons of music. The musicians prominent in the propagation of *khayal* are Pir Bakhsh, Hadu Hasu, Nizamuddin, Madhu Naik, and Achpal Khan, and others. Even today greatest names are those of Muslims : Abdul Karim Khan, Fayyaz Khan, Roshan Ara Begum, Salamat Ali Khan and Fateh Ali Khan.

Thereafter *thumri* and *dadra* were developed, the forms which were patronised by Muhammad Shah and Wajid Ali Shah. With their light embellishments these forms brought classical music close to the heart of a populace which thrived in an atmosphere of gay festivity.

*Qavvali*, now synonymous with group singing mostly mystical or devotional in nature and purely Islamic in character, was first introduced by Amir Khusrau to please his *murshid* Hadrat Nizamuddin Auliya to comfort and soothe him while he was sick in bed. *Qavvali* emerged from *qaul*, sayings of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him).

Thus the Muslims did not base their innovations on the foundations of Indian or Hindu music but the very foundation underwent a metamorphosis emerging into a completely new system of novelty and imagination.

*Tarana* which generally follows a *khayal* is, according to some authorities, recitation of syllables of the table, e.g. Ta Na Na, Dar

Dheem, etc., and according to others it is yet another contribution of Amir Khusrau, and the syllables, reading "yalali" really stand for "ua Allah," "Ya Ali."

*Marsiya* which narrates events of the battle of Karbala in which the Prophet's grandson Husain and his companions were martyred.

Amir Khusrau is also the progenitor of a number of other forms which unfortunately do not enjoy the popularity of the ones mentioned earlier. These are *qal*, *qalbana*, *naqsh*, *gul hawa*, *baset*, *sohala*, *tirvat*, *mundha* and *nigar*.

*Ghazal*, the recitation of poetry in music, has been and is the concern of Muslims, especially those of Iranian descent. This is a mode which is peculiar only to Persian and Urdu poetry and enjoys immeasurable acceptance, for this is something which everybody understands and appreciates unhesitatingly

*Tappa* has been described by Popley as the "typical Mohammadan song". It was introduced by Mian Shori of Lucknow in the time of Muhammad Shah (1719). *Tappa* provides an opportunity to exhibit all the graces and nuances which is the landmark of our music. It has a marked rhythm. It emerged from the songs of the camel-drivers and the tingling of bells of camels on their journeys into the desert

*Geet* has existed since times immemorial but the artistic garb it wears today and the aesthetic mould it enjoys today have all been given by the Muslims.

*Kafi*, another very popular form especially in Sind and the Punjab, has always been the mode of expression of Sufis like Shah Husain and Bullhe Shah and Khawaja Ghulam Farid.

All our *raags* today belong to one of the ten *thaths* evolved by Muhammad Rida, a noble man of Patna out of a total of seventy-two or more unclassified *thaths*. He realised that the ancient system of describing *raags* as *raags*, *raagnis* and *putars* had atrophied and created more problems than it solved. Thus he developed and systematised all existing *raags* as having been derived from ten basic *thaths*. In his book *Naghamat-i Asaphi* (1813) Muhammad Rida took the *bilawal thath*, a scale similar to the European major scale, as its *shudh* scale, i.e. in which all *shudh* notes are employed. This was no mean achievement because from then on the scale is where he left it.

The charismatic spark of genius of Amir Khusrau found expression, not only in the forms of musical compositions of the subcontinent, but it also displayed his creative magnetism in almost each and every sphere of our music. History is replete with the names of Muslim kings, and saints, mystics, scholars and technicians, but none can compare with the achievements of Amir Khusrau who, besides being a musician of such repute, was a soldier, a statesman, and a poet. He also served as a minister to two Sultans. He has been credited with inventing twenty-two *raags* some of which also came into being under Iranian influences by putting together a local tune with an Iranian one. *Aiman/yaman*, a very popular *raag* today is composed of Hindu and a Persian melody *mokan*. Some of the *raags* invented by Amir Khusrau are *bahar*, *Malkaus ki bahar*, *Hamin ki bahar*, *Shudh bahar*, *Mujeeb*, *Munim*, *Maufiq*, *Ghanam*, *Zangola*, *Sazgiri*, *Ushaq*, *zelaf*, *Farghana*, *Sarparda*, *Baghzar*, *Ghara*, *Farodast*, *Sanam*, *Nigar*, *Sohana Hejaz*, *Shelia* and *Tori Barari*.

The next great name in the realm of *raags* is that of Sultan Husain Sharqi Jaunpuri. He evolved Husaini Kanra from *megh raag* and *raisa* from *sindhra kafi*. *Sham kalyan* derivatives were *Gor sham*, *Bhopal sham*, *Ghamber sham*, *Ho Ho sham*, *Poorbi sham*, *Ram sham*,

*Basant sham, Barari sham, Kibrai sham, and Gondh sham.* He has also been ascribed with *Jaunpuri todi, Rasoli todi, Bahmali* and *shudh bhairvīn*.

Tansen of the court of Akbar experimented afresh and to please the great king, whose favourite *raag* was *kanra* or *karnatki*, he developed *darbari*. Similarly, *karahi* changed to *sughrāi* and *suhana* to *shahana* in his hands *Raag Mian ki tadi* was invented to bring back, under challenge, the deer with a necklace around his neck. There are numerous other legends also revolving around the name of Tansen, but there is no doubt that *Mian ki malhar* and *Mian ki sarang* were his inventions.

Sayyid Nizamuddin Madhu Naik has been credited with *madraki kanra, bhairvin barani* and *sarang madhu mat*.

In order to get the true sense of duration or time in music we have to get rid of stress (as in the West) following the pattern of the language. Ours is quantitative or dealing with long and short rather than qualitative, dealing with stressed and unstressed syllables. Thus we have the most intricate and the most developed sense of rhythm or *taal* and *lai* or time-measure in our wake. The subcontinent can boast of no less than three hundred basic rhythm and innumerable cross-rhythms. Since the basic structure of our music is melodic, repetition, unless accompanied by *taal*, would become insipid and monotonous. Thus it is *lai* which furnishes the third dimension to our music and, therefore, it is no surprise that the so-called difficult rhythms of the West are the simple rhythms of the subcontinent. Out of these most of the *taals* such as *dadra, farodast, dhima taal* or *adi taal* were introduced by Muslims as acknowledged by all the historians. Amir Khusrau's pervasive genius introduced seventeen *taals*, These are *Pashtu, Zubehr, Farodast, qavvali, sawari, zanuni sawari, sool fakhta, pehlwan, khamsah, mastaan, jat, jhoomra, ara chautala, jai titala, pat taal, qaid* and *chapak*.

Popley on page 8 of his famous book. *The Music of India* enumerates the following musical instruments in vogue during the Vedic times :

- Percussion instruments* : Dundubhi, Adambara, Bhumidundubhi, Vanaspati, Aghati
- String instruments* : Kanaa Vina, Karkari, Vina of 100 strings and Vina.
- Wind instruments* : Tanava, Nadi, Bakura Murali.

Out of these we are familiar today only with the *vina*, the *murali* which is associated with the Hindu god. Krishan, and the ancient Indian drums called the *mirdang* and *pakhawaj* which was supposedly invented by Brahma and which held sway over the minds of people for a long time. With the introduction of *khayal* Amir Khusrau cut the *mirdang* into two so as to make it appropriate for playing the complicated rhythms with the rendering of *khayal*, its *taans*, *paltas*, *murkis*, *zumzams*. Thus the *tabla* came into being and has since been a natural accompaniment to all rendering of vocal and instrumental music. Amir Khusrau also moulded the *pakhawaj* to evolve *dholak* an ideal accompaniment with *qavvali* singing which has its own peculiar character.

Since the music of the subcontinent revolves round *lai*, the amalgamation of *sur* and *taals*, a lot of percussion instruments now abound in variety.

Since the structure of our music is melodic, the string and the wind instruments are all played individually rather than in an orchestra. The *vina* had always occupied the most prominent place among string instruments and yet this intricately beautiful but difficult instrument was replaced by the *sitar*, again in the hands of Amir Khusrau. It consisted initially of three strings but now possesses seven with the additional thirteen *tarabs* or the resonance strings.

The *sitar* can be played by amateur and professional artists and thus enjoys universal popularity.

The *dilruba* and the *surbahar* are very much like the *sitar* and, though not very popular these days, are both inventions of the Muslim artists. This is evident from the very names of the instruments.

The *rubab*, another string instrument with no frets, is, according to Popley, another "fine mohammadan instrument". It has been ascribed as having been introduced by Tansen. A modern descendant of the *rubab* is the *sir sinhar* first made by Sayyid Kalb Ali Khan Bahadur, the Nawab of Rampur.

*Sur-mandal*, which provides drone so essential to our music, has been derived from *Qanun* of ancient Arab origin having thirty-seven strings.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhitai of Sind contributed a lot to the promotion of folk music and is credited with a fine stringed instrument the *tanbur* which is akin to the *tanpura*.

*Shehnai* or *Sinai* is traced right back to Ibn Sina, the great Muslim philosopher.

As far as wind instruments are concerned, the age old conch shell is used even today at the temple rituals. Since string instruments were inadequately equipped for outdoor performances the dire need found expression in the invention of wind instruments. The reed instruments which developed even later than the flute were found more suitable by the Muslims. Ustad Bismillah Khan is the living maestro of this superb instrument. One last instrument the *jaltarang* from water-filled cups which are struck by sticks is also credited to Amir Khusrau. although some maintain that it has a more remote origin and Amir Khusrau only popularised it.



A word about notation. From the time of Bharata the author of *Nat-Shastar* (the oldest detailed exposition of musical theory) to Sarangdev the author of *Sangit Ratnakar* the notes of the *shudh* scale *bilawal* have been represented by their initials, i.e. *kharaj*, *rikhab*, *gandhar*, *madham*, *pancham*, *dhaivat* and *niihad*, and have been abbreviated to *Sa Ray Ga Ma Pa Dha Ni*, and the different octaves *saptaks* or *mandar asthan* (the lower octave) is usually written by indicating a horizontal line at the bottom and the higher octave or *tar asthan* by a horizontal line at the top. But the subcontinent has never evolved an all-encompassing comprehensive system of notation. This is due to the fact that the creative and spontaneous nature of our music can never be done justice to on paper. As a matter of fact no system is capable of recording the intricacies of graces and ornamentations of our music accurately. Therefore our system of notation serves the basic purpose for improvisations and extemporisations. It would not be out of place to mention here that Nawab Thakar Ali Khan in his book *Maraf-un-Naghmat*, has evolved a system of notation which could be prescribed for Urdu, Persian and Arabic scripts.

Thus it is evident from the annals of the history of music of the subcontinent that music today owes much more to the Muslims than they are given credit for. Music travelled from the temples to the *darbars* of Muslim kings and saints who were great patrons of arts especially of music and thus led to vistas of possibilities previously unexplored.