

Ustad Amir Khan (1912-1974)

Born on August 15, 1912 at Akole, in Maharashtra, Ustad Amir Khan passed away on February 13, 1974 at Calcutta in a strange and tragic car accident. In the life span of over sixty years, he spent almost forty years in Hindustani classical music. He developed a unique style of singing that is now known as 'Indore Gharana'.

Although born in Maharashtra, Khansaheb spent his childhood at Indore in Madhya Pradesh. This place was inhabited by his ancestors and several generations had migrated from 'Kalanaur' in Haryana and settled here under the patronage of Indore state. Naturally his father Shah Amir (Shahmir) shifted to Indore when Ameer ali was barely two years old. Ustad Shahmir was an accomplished 'Been' and 'Sarangi' player. Amir ali loved his father so much that later on he built a house in 'Bambai Bazaar' area in lane number three and named it as 'Shahmir Manzil'. Every year he used to spend few months in this house.

Amir ali's mother passed away when he was nine years old and Shahmir Khan had to take the responsibility of the entire family. He had to play the role of both the mother and the father. By then he had begun to teach music – vocal and sarangi - to both Amir ali and his younger brother Bashir. He used to take them to various musicians from their baradari. On one such occasion, as soon as they entered the house of a relative, talim to pupils was stopped suddenly and the notebooks were closed promptly. Out of curiosity, Shahmir opened one notebook and found notations of 'Merukhand' gayaki. Someone snatched away the notebook and shouted, " This is not for the sarangi players, so what is the use of reading it?" Shahmir khan left the house with children and decided to reply by training one of his sons in 'Merukhand' gayaki. This was not easy since this gayaki was very difficult. What was this gayaki and how was it sung?

Merukhand Gayaki

This gayaki is also known as Merkhand, Khandmeru, Sumerkhand or Meerkhand. This is a composite word – Meru + Khand. Word 'Meru' has many meanings in the dictionary. Merumani (name of a precious stone), Meruparvat (name of a mountain), Merudand are well known words. 'Meru' means 'sthir', 'achal', non-moving, fixed or steady and 'Khand' means section. In the present context, 'Meru' means fixed swars (notes) in a given raga. Now these notes can be arranged in many different ways using the theory of permutations and combinations. If there are only two swar e.g. Sa and Re in a given raga, then only two combinations SaRe and ReSa are possible. If there are three, then six different combinations are obtained. Proceeding thus, for seven notes in a raga like in Bhairvi, 5024 combinations [7!–factorial seven] could be written down mathematically. Musician aspiring to learn this 'Merukhand'-gayaki is trained to remember all these combinations by heart and study these structures deeply and constantly. He/she is also trained to select few combinations during the performance and make a beautiful design of the composition within the framework of the chosen raga. This method is extremely difficult and Amir ali's father began to teach him after the above mentioned insulting incidence. Considering the tender age, in the beginning this talim lasted for less than one

hour a day before he could go out and play. Later on when young Amir ali began to like it, the talim continued for longer durations. Soon he could remember ‘Merukhand’ designs of three/four swaras. For over five/six years, he learnt only ‘sargam’, ‘alankar’ and ‘palte’ to get familiar with swar (‘swar-pehchan’). Then he was introduced to ‘Khayal’ style of singing. When his voice was about to distort, his father reduced talim for vocal music and began to teach sarangi more. After ‘Jummeki Namaz’, on every Friday, there used to be a music concert in his house where many stalwarts would sing/play. These include Ustad Rajab Ali Khan, Ustad Nasiruddin Dagar, Beenkar Ustad Wahid Khan, Ustad Allah Bande, Ustad Jaffruddin Khan, Beenkar Ustad Murad Khan, Sarangi Nawaz Ustad Bundu Khan.

Thus, Amir ali learnt much more through these concerts and also tried to assimilate ‘Merukhand’ gayaki. He came to Bombay around 1934 at the age of twenty-two years. He gave few private concerts and also cut five/six records with the ‘Gramophone Company’. These records were issued under plum label with his name ‘Amir Ali, Indore’. December 1934 catalogue of the gramophone company carries a special page on his records with a photograph. In this photograph, he is seen wearing a white turban and has ‘talwar’ cut moustache. Later on both the turban and moustache disappeared as seen in the well-known photographs. One does not know when this change occurred and whether it occurred naturally or deliberately.

This catalogue praises him and his gayaki as:

‘Professor Amir Khan Saheb’s name is associated with the classical music. He has earned many titles such as ‘Sangeet Shiromani’, ‘Sangeet Sudhakar’ and ‘Sangeet Ratna’. Music lovers from various regions in India are competing with each other in awarding these titles to Amir ali. One must listen to his music to get cent percent experience of celestial joy and happiness of Indian classical music. He has sung raga ‘Shyam Kalyan’ with ‘sthayi’ on one side and ‘jalad phirat’ on the other side of the record. In short, khan saheb’s record is a musical feast’.

VE 1002 Aaj So Bana – Bhag 1 & 2 – Shyam Kalyan

**Aaj So Bana Ban Aayori, Lad Ladavan De,
Banreke Shir Sahera Motiya Biraje, Banarike Mana Bihave.**

The record catalogues of this period are full of praise and exaggeration. This was used for the publicity and as a marketing strategy. This of course helped company in sale and promotion of the records. Amir ali also recorded following records in the same session:

Multani (Dhola To Janam), Tarana in raga Todi, Hansadhwani (bhajan-Bhaj Mana Nit Harike Naam), Suha Sugrai (Charan Paran), Kafi (Lalan Aaye), Patdeep (Yeri Meri Aan), and Adana (Mohammad Shah Rangile). It is not clear whether these records were best sellers. It is also not known if they were reviewed/advertised in magazines and newspapers. However, so far, Gramophone Company has not re-issued them in last 60/70 years. These are lying in the safe hands of die-hard record collectors scattered in India.

Recently Pandit Tejpal Singh (elder one of famous Singh brothers), senior disciple of Ustad Amir Khan has written a book in Hindi. He has reviewed these records in one chapter. [Ref. “ Sangeetke Daideepyaman Surya: Ustad Amir Khan – Jeevan Aevam Rachanaen “ Kanishka Publishers, New Delhi, 2005. Pages 300, price - Rs.600]. He writes, “ Music in these records is quite different and has a clear influence of the gayaki of Aman Ali Khan of Indore. He has sung in ‘safed teen’ scale. ‘Sthayi’ and ‘Antara’ are sung twice and in the beginning of each record. Taans are fast and resemble those of Rajab Ali Khan ”.

Around 1935, ‘HMV’, ‘The Twin’, ‘Odeon’, ‘Jay Bharat’, ‘Broadcast’ and ‘Young India’ companies recorded music of great stalwarts of Hindustani classical and light classical music. These include Professor Abdul Karim Khan, Pandit Omkarnath Thakur, Prof. Narayanrao Vyas, Prof. Shankar Rao Vyas, Prof. Aman Ali of Indore, Prof. Mallikarjun Mansoor, Sau. Heerabai Barodekar, Bai Sunderabai of Poona, Miss Susheela Tembe, Surshree Smt. Kesarbai Kerkar and Smt. Moghubai Kurdikar. These records were best sellers. Mr. Keshavrao Bhole reviewed some of them critically (with pen name ‘Shuddha Sarang’) in Marathi periodicals and magazines. However, there was no review, no reference or even a mention of the records of Professor Aman Ali of Indore. What could be the reason behind this?

Making of Ustad Amir Khan

Probably this ‘Merukhand’ gayaki was too academic for the common listener and the concerts and the records were not very well received in Bombay. Amir ali returned to Indore. After the death of his father in 1937, he had to shape his career to support the family. He decided to change his singing style keeping ‘Merukhand’ gayaki at the center. Usually a classical music concert is divided in three parts: ‘Vilambit’ (slow) or ‘ativilambit’ singing followed by singing in ‘Madhyalaya’ and the raga is concluded in ‘drut’ composition using fast taans. Amir ali decided to find three gurus for these three sections. During search, he found them in reverse order.

Ustad Rajab Ali Khan (1874-1959) of Indore knew Amir ali since his childhood. He used to call him by ‘Beta Amir’. Rajab Ali learnt initially from his father Mughal Khan, then he learnt Been from Bande Ali Khan and finally took lessons of Jaipur gayaki from Ustad Alladiya Khan, Thus, his gayaki became rich with these influences. Listeners would say ‘Ustad Rajab, Gate Gajab!’. Amir ali learnt this ‘drut’ singing and very fast taans from Rajab Ali Khan and soon commanded a mastery over this style. Ustad Rajab Ali Khan admired him by saying that if you want to listen to my music of young age, please listen to Amir Khan.

Ustad Aman Ali Khan (1884-1953) of ‘Bhendi Bazaar’ gharana was known for madhyalaya ‘Merukhand’ gayaki. Although he belonged to Indore, he used to live in Bombay near ‘Bhendi Bazaar’ area. During British Raj, British officers and the residents used to live in spacious houses near J. J. Hospital. This place was behind the open market (bazaar) and hence the commonly known address was ‘Behind the Bazaar’ that became

‘Bhendi Bazaar’!. Many musicians were living in this area. Thus the name ‘Bhendi Bazaar’ was associated to their style of singing and gharana.

Ustad Aman Ali Khan never sang ‘ativilambit’ or ‘drut’ gayaki. He had a mastery over short taans with sargam in madhyalaya. He was also fond of Karnatic music and raga Hansadhwani was his most favorite one. He taught Amir ali for number of years. Later on, Ustad Amir Khan used to sing Raga Hansadhwani in his concerts in memory of Ustad Aman Ali Khan. He has recorded ‘Jai Mate Vilamb Tajde’ on LP record. In Karnatic music the composition ‘Vatapi Ganpatim Bhajeham’ is very popular. He also recorded tarana in this raga – ‘Ittihadesta Miyan Ne Mano To’ [You (Allah) and me are one and the same]. This Pharsi verse contains a spiritual message of one-ness between God and the devotee. This composition took Amir Khan to international levels of name and fame.

For vilambit/ati-vilambit or slow singing Amir ali chose Ustad Abdul Wahid Khan (1882-1949) of Kirana gharana. Wahid Khan was the cousin of Ustad Abdul karim khan and guru of Smt. Heerabai Barodekar. He was also known as ‘bahire’ Wahid Khan due to his hearing deficiency. He was an accomplished Beenkar too. His style of ornamentation and rendering raga with a careful and delicate treatment of each swar was unique one. Although Amir ali rarely met Ustad Abdul Wahid Khan, he learnt indirectly through the radio programs of Wahid Khan and tried to assimilate his gayaki. Ustad Abdul Wahid Khan used to sing in Jhoomra Taal [‘Jhoom Raha’ – means the rhythm that makes you swing] and Amir ali also began to sing in this wonderful taal. He had an opportunity to sing in a private mehfil in which Ustad Abdul Wahid Khan was also present and he appreciated his music.

Thus, with rigorous practice and deep thinking, Ustad Amir Khan Saheb began to emerge through Prof. Amir ali of Indore. He got rid of turban and moustache and began to appear on concert stage with uncovered head. This was quite a revolutionary step. If we recall the photographs of old musicians, we find the male musicians either wearing a cap or a turban and female musicians would cover their heads with ‘padar/pehlu’ of their saree or dupatta. Soon, many musicians picked up this style, Ravi Shankar, Ali Akbar Khan, Bhimsen Joshi and many others. Today, hardly any one covers head.

If one describes Ustad Amir Khan’s gayaki in today’s language, then it is a re-mix or fusion gayaki. It was accepted and appreciated by music lovers since it gave a bouquet of music consisting of fragrance of ‘Jaipur’, ‘Kirana’ and ‘Bhendi Bazaar’ gharana residing in the palace of ‘Merukhand’ gayaki. During the concerts, lovers of different gharana could get something that they loved most and hence this mixture/new experiment became quite successful. Thus, a new ‘Indore’ gharana emerged and it was originated by Ustad Amir Khan. This was an example of a successful re-mix. Later Smt. Prabha Atre has written, “ Although Sureshbabu Mane and Sau. Heerabai Barodekar taught music to me, I have always considered Ustad Amir Khan as my one of the gurus”. Incidentally, later on Pandit Bhimsen Joshi followed the same pattern. He brought in Jaipur element of ‘swar-lagao’ and ‘taan kriya’ of Amir Khan, thus creating another re-mix within the framework of ‘Kirana’ gharana.

What were the specialties of the gayaki of Ustad Amir Khan?

Here is a list of some of them: ‘shantiprad swarlagao’, ‘dhairyapurna gayan’, ‘sudh mudra’ and ‘sudh bani’, ativilambit laya, meaningful pauses during singing, difficult but artful sargam, fast, ‘gamakyukta’, surel and danedaar taan ranging in all the three octaves, khayal and tarana compositions consisting of Pharsi ‘sher’, verses and lyrics. He used six stringed taanpura. He never had a ‘kusti’ or ‘akhadebaji’ with tabliya. He used to sing ‘sthayi’ twice. He was six foot tall, well built and would sit on the stage like a ‘sadhu’ or ‘yogi’ purush. In a concert, he used to sing with eyes closed or half closed. His bandishes were chosen very carefully and had spiritual lyrics. His bandish in raga lalat – ‘Johiya More Ghar Aaye’ is an excellent example and describes a sage/sadhu. It is interesting to note that when Hindu singers were singing ‘Karim Tero Naam’ (Malhar) and ‘Alla Jane Alla Jane’ (Todi), Amir Khan was recording compositions on Shiva, Hari and Rama viz. ‘Bhaj Man Harike Naam’ (Hansadhwani), and ‘Jinke Mana Ram Birajae’ (Malkauns). He also set up a trend of continuous/uninterrupted singing in concerts. In this style, he would begin the concert with a raga and would not pause or stop after it is over. He would immediately begin the next composition. This would give a sense of continuation in his presentation.

Ustad Amir Khan witnessed the ‘Royal patronage’ to music and also performed in the period when private concerts, music festivals, radio, cinema and gramophone records became the media of public outreach. Each medium demanded different skill but he learnt and mastered it and left his mark in all these new media. As mentioned earlier, he never sang thumri or gazal in his concerts. He also did not sing/record raga ‘Bhairvi’. He used to say jokingly, ‘Do you think that my musical career is over? If not, then how can I sing Bhairvi?’. He did not like Bhairvi thumri or even Bhairvi bhajan. He would say that Bhairvi is a ‘Sampoorna’ (complete) raga and must be treated like any other raga and sung accordingly. He used to sing this raga very rarely in the company of close friends. However, no recording of Bhairvi is available.

Gramophone singer Amir Khan

Around 1945-50, Amir Khan was one of the topmost and most sought after vocalist in North India. He was invited in almost all important music conferences. Naturally, both the gramophone company and the music directors in Hindi/Bengali film industry approached him. With the bitter experience of the 78-rpm records made in 1935, Amir Khan was rather reluctant with this medium. G. N. Joshi of HMV, was a great fan of Ameer Khan’s gayaki and would attend his concerts frequently. He tried to persuade Amir Khan for cutting new records for the Gramophone Company. In his book ‘Down Melody Lane’ (published by Orient Longman), G. N. Joshi writes,

“ To obtain Amir Khan's agreement for the recording, I had to meet him, and therefore it was incumbent on me to visit his residence. I was greatly put off when I learnt about the locality where he stayed. I was afraid of what people would say if they observed me entering a house of ill repute. Any outsider would naturally draw his own conclusions, not knowing that an eminent singer was living in that building. If I had, out of fear or

social stigma, refrained from going to visit Amir Khan, his great artistry would have gone unrecorded. The idea of securing his consent for recording together with a keen sense of duty prompted me to enter the building, eyes downcast, not looking about me till I entered Amir Khan's room on the third floor. Once in his room, I cheered up, and I talked to him for an hour or two. After that I visited him often. We exchanged views on music and gharanas, and such visits gave me opportunities to study his likes and dislikes. These visits also gave him confidence in me. After a couple of months and few such visits, he agreed to come for a recording. Some more time was lost in persuading him to agree to the terms of payment. Finally, this hurdle too was crossed. Yet Amir Khan went on canceling dates, giving fresh ones and then again postponing the recording on some flimsy grounds. I got fed up with his dilly-dallying and, in spite of my great regard and respect for him, I justifiably felt very annoyed. Ultimately one day I plucked up my courage and said to him, 'If I had approached 'God almighty' as many times as I have come to you, he would have blessed me, but all I can get from you is the promise of a future date.' Seeing my exasperation he became thoughtful, smiled a little and replied, 'Please do not disbelieve me. Name any day of this week and I will keep the appointment.'

True to his word he came on the day I named, and I got from him his first long-playing disc. His favorite ragas were Marwa, Darbari Kanada and Malkauns. It is indeed rare these days to hear Raga Marwa as presented by Bade Gulam Ali and Amir Khan. His first LP was received with tremendous enthusiasm by the record buying public. This delighted Amir Khan, and he was more than ready for another recording. In spite of this I had to put in a lot of effort and time to bring him to the studio again. This time he made an LP containing ragas Lalit and Megh and this was all that could be obtained from him before he was lost to the world “.

This was year 1960! LP record cover of raga 'Marwa' and 'Darbari' has a black and white photograph enclosed in a oval shape frame. He is wearing a coat and rimless glasses and his portrait is quite pleasant. Marwa raga has vimambit bandish 'Piya mohe anant das' and drut composition 'Gurubina gyan kaise paun'. His singing takes the listener in a different spiritual world. In 1968, he recorded second LP containing raga Lalit (Kahan jage raat, Jogiya more ghar) and Megh (Barkha ritu aai and tarana). Its cover has a color photograph with Khansaheb wearing a blue suit and is seen in a squatting position. In 1980, he recorded third LP with his most favorite ragas – Hansdhwani (Jai mate vilamb tajde) and Malkauns (Jinke mana ram biraje). Photograph on this LP record jacket shows Khansaheb wearing a white kurta and tuning his six string taanpura with eyes closed.

These LP records are collector's items today. Around 1960, he also cut one 78-rpm record on HMV label (N 88319) and contains raga Shahana – 'Sunder angana baithi' - on one side and tarana in raga Chandrakauns on the flip side. Today, the 'Google' search with key words 'Ustad Amir Khan' yields over 55,000 hits. Discography of his available records/recordings is available at:

<http://courses.nus.edu.sg/course/ellpatke/Miscellany/amir%20khan.htm> and

http://www.pathcom.com/~ericp/ak_discography.html

Playback singer Amir Khan

In 1952, at the age of forty years, Ustad Amir Khan began to sing for films. His first film was in Bengali - 'Kshudhit Pashan' or 'Bhuka Patthar' [A hungry stone]. Ustad Ali Akbar Khan had set tunes as the music director and Amir Khan sang following songs:

- 1] 'Kaise Kate Rajani' - a bandish in raga Bageshree,
- 2] 'Piyake Awanki' – Thumri in raga Khamaj [with Protima Banerjee]

Pt. Debu Choudhury, famous Sitar player witnessed the recording of this 'Khamaj thumri' at the recording studio of 'New Theater', Calcutta and it lasted from 11.00 p.m. at night till 5.00 a.m. next morning.

Song text of the only recorded 'thumri' of Amir Khan Saheb is:

“ Piyake awanki main suniri khabariya, aang aang men umang uthat hai “

This film is occasionally telecast on Indian TV channels and one can listen to Amir Khan's music in the background score. If VCD/DVD of this film is released, then one can listen to his music completely. However, above two songs are available on 78-rpm records and are in the safe hands of record collectors in India.

In the same year 1952, another film – 'Baiju Bawara' - was released and Ustad Amir Khan contributed substantially as a consultant to the music director Mr. Naushad Ali. Prakash Pictures 'Baiju Bawara' film was set on a 'Mughal' period and is based on two great singers, 'Tansen' and 'Baiju'. Hindustani classical music was at the focus of this film. It was unanimously decided that Amir Khan's voice would be suitable for Mian Tansen. However, it was not clear who should sing for Baiju in the climax song at the singing competition. Many names including Puja Pandit Omkarnath Thakurji were under consideration. However, Amir Khan suggested the name of Pandit D. V. Paluskar due to his 'Prasadi' (serene and devotional) voice. Pt. Paluskarji had by then cut several 78-rpm discs and had learnt the art of recording a raga in just three minutes. As a result, Ustad Amir Khan and Pt. D. V. Paluskarji recorded a six minute jugalbandi in raga Desi 'Aaj gavat mana mero jhumke' and a great recording was created. Paluskarji wrote down the notation of his part in a diary and this has been published in a Marathi book 'Parimal' written by his disciple Smt. Kamal Ketkar. Other Baiju songs viz. 'Tu gangaki mauj', 'Mana tarpat hari darshanko aaj' are sung by Mohammad Rafi. No one notices the use of two different voices for the same character 'Baiju' played by Bharat Bhushan. Today, no one even remembers who played the part of Mian Tansen in this film. However, songs of Tansen in the voice of Ustad Amir Khan are well remembered by music lovers as well as cine-goers. Title song of this film is a bandish in raga 'Puriya Dhanashree' sung by Amir Khan. He had sung aalap in raga 'Darbari' and also recorded 'Ghanan ghanan ghan garjo re' in raga Megh. This Megh composition was not included in the film. However, all these three songs were released on 78-rpm records. Later on he also recorded a composition 'Daya karo re he giridhar gopal' for film 'Shabab' and again in the music direction of Mr. Naushad Ali. He did not receive the payment for this recording and this

has been mentioned in Pt. Tejpal Singh's book. Today, VCD/DVD of these films are available and one can listen to Amir Khan's music from the 'Original sound tracks'.

In 1955, music director Mr. Vasant Desai invited khansaheb to record 'lalat' composition 'Jogiya mere ghar aaye' for a Marathi film 'Ye re majhya maglya' and a 78-rpm record was cut. Music director O. P. Naiyaar recorded same composition for the title song of Hindi film 'Ragini'. Khansaheb has narrated, 'I was called for the recording. The recording was over in just two minutes and was accepted. It was little over one and half minute, time taken to tune the taanpura was much more. If they had recorded little more, they would have obtained a three minute 78-rpm record'. This is an example of how some of the renowned music directors had strange attitude towards classical music.

Khansaheb gave recordings for some films produced by his disciples. Mr. Mukund Goswami of Bombay produced two religious films. Amir Khan sang ' Ae mori aali, jabse bhanak pari' – a composition in raga Darbari for the film 'Jai Shree Krishna'. In another film 'Radha Priya Pyari' he sang same composition 'Ae mori aali' in jhaptaal. His another disciple Pt. Amarnath produced a documentary film on Mirza Ghalib. Khansaheb sang famous Ghalib gazal 'Rahiye aab aaisi jagah chalkar jahan koi na ho'. One does not know if these films (and the documentary) are available today!

Amir Khan is best known for his playback singing in two films: 'Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje' (1955) and 'Goonj Uthi Shahanai' (1959). Mr. Vasant Desai composed music for both the films. In 'Goonj Uthi Shahanai', he has sung raga Bhatiyar (Nisa dina barasat) in a duet with shahanai played by Ustad Bismillah Khan. In ragamalika duet, both of them have sung/played eight ragas (Ramkali, Desi, Shuddha Sarang, Multani, Yaman Kalyan, Sur Malhar, Bageshree and Chandrakauns) in just six minutes. HMV had released 78-rpm records of Amir Khan and Bismillah Khan from this film.

Title song of 'Jhanak Jhanak Payal Baje' in Raga 'Adana' made him famous throughout India and abroad. This was the high point of the film. During the recording of this song producer Mr. V. Shantaram was quite restless since it was taking long time to synchronize the chorus with Khansaheb's singing. Mr. Vasant Desai could calm him down and the song made a history. During golden jubilee celebration at Liberty cinema in Bombay, Khansaheb was invited to sing this composition in the ceremony and he sang it for longer duration. VCD's/DVD's of both these films are now available.

What was the gharana of Khansaheb's gayaki? He himself has replied, 'Gharana is not known with any person's name but is associated with a place. 'Indore' was a place where many great musicians sang/played. I have listened to many and put them in a style and named it as the 'Indore' gharana'. Musicologist Mr. Vamanrao Deshpande has mentioned this gharana in his Marathi book 'Gharandaj Gayaki'. He describes it as a 'swar-pradhan' gayaki in which musical notes and song/bandish text are important. Khansaheb was very particular about the correct and meaningful pronunciation of the words and the notes.

Disciples

Common misconception that Amir Khan had no disciples has been removed in one chapter of Pt. Tejpal Singh's Hindi book. He has given details of his 'Ganda-baddha' disciples with photographs. Some of his disciples are:

Delhi - Late Pt. Amar Nath, Tejpal and Surinder Singh (Singh brothers), Muneer Khan (sarangi player), Ajit Sinh Pental, Amarjit, R. S. Bisht, Shankar Majumdar.

Calcutta – A. T. Kanan, Late Shreekant Bakre, Smt. Purvi Mukherjee, Late Pradyumna Mukherjee, Kankana Banerjee, Sunil Banerjee.

Jalandhar – Shankarlal Mishra, Surendra Shankar Awasthi.

Simla – Bhimsen Sharma.

Indore – Narayan Rao, Devbaksha Pawar.

Rajkot – Gajendra Bakshi.

Bombay – Mukund Goswami [mentioned above as film producer of two religious films].

Mr. Mukund Goswami was the Mathadhish (chief priest) of the temple of Vallabhacharya Sampradaya (cult) in Kalbadevi area in Bombay. He was the devotee of Khansaheb's music and learnt music as a disciple. He used to play Saraswati Veena. Khansaheb used to sing in the temple on number of occasions and excellent recordings are in the collection/library of this Sampradaya.

Pt. Gokulotsav Maharaj of Indore is also mentioned as an indirect disciple. This is because he never met and learnt from Ustad Amir Khansaheb, but learnt from his radio programs and recordings. He imitates Ameer Khan gayaki very well. Bhavnagar's Pandit Rasiklal Andhariya, Mumbai based sarangi player Sultan Khan and late sitar player Pandit Nikhil Banerjee from Calcutta had an influence of Khansaheb's gayaki.

Exploring origins of 'Tarana'

Perhaps the greatest contribution of Ustad Amir Khansaheb is in his study of 'Tarana'. He was awarded a fellowship by Bihar Academy. It is not clear whether his research and findings were recorded and whether these are available with Bihar Academy in print or any other form. However, he researched thoroughly and used to sing tarana in almost every concert. Sometimes, he used to explain the 'tarana' composition and its meaning.

Tarana is believed to have origins in 13th century. Great poet, musicologist and administrator Ameer Khushro was a disciple of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia (Avalia). Ameer Khushro composed 'Tarana' for his guru. After the death of Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia, Ammer Khushro spent rest of his life at his tomb and composed number of Tarana.

He breathed his last at the tomb of his guru. Today, Hazrat Nizamuddin is a Railway station in Delhi and one express train is named after 'Hazrat Nizamuddin'.

Ameer Khushro's work consists of the poems with verses containing some specific words and these words are repeated during singing. These poems/verses are devotional in nature. In any religious song, repetition of words is necessary. These repetitions are useful to devotees in reaching towards God/Allah through 'Nama Smarana' or 'Japa', e.g. 'Ram naam japa' in Hindus. In Sufi cult, music is used invariably in singing tarana. Meaning of some of the 'Pharsi' words used in 'Tarana' are:

Dar – Bheetar, Aandar (inside)

Dara – Andar Aa (get in or come inside)

Dartan – Tanke Aandar (inside the body)

Tanandara – Tanke Aandar Aa (Come inside the body)

Tom – Main Tum Hun (I am you)

Nadirdani – Tu Sabse Adhik Janata Hai (You know more than anyone else)

Tandardani – Tanke Aandarka Jannewala (One who knows what is inside the body)

Simplest tarana composition is: "Dara dara dartan, darat dartan dartan"

This means that 'Aandar Aao, Tanke Aandar Aao'

Simple words used for addressing Allah are:

'Ya La La La Lom' means Alla, Alla repeated several times.

Ye, Yali, Yale, Yala, Yalale are all the short forms of 'Allah'.

Kumar Gandharva has sung tarana – 'Yala Ya Yala Yallari' and is available in tape/CD form. However, the inlay card does not explain the meaning of these words and the purpose of this tarana. If music companies and musicians show some concern towards uninitiated listeners, then music lovers will benefit a lot.

Tarana is usually sung by Sufi saints during their prayers. They sing tarana in the trance or in 'Hal' mood. Many times they dance in the state of ecstasy. Unfortunately, due to various reasons musicians did not care to understand the meaning of these 'pharsi' sher and words. They treated these compositions to show the skill of their tongue in fast tempo singing. Today if anyone wants to know what is 'tarana', then over 400, 000 sites could be visited. Most common description of the 'Tarana' as explained in these sites is reproduced below from two representative sites:

" 1] Tarana are songs that are used to convey a mood of elation and are usually performed towards the end of a concert. They consist of a few lines of rhythmic sounds or bols set to a tune. The singer uses these few lines as a basis for very fast improvisation. It can be compared to the 'Tillana' of Carnatic music.

2] Tarana: This is a vocal composition that is usually sung in a fast tempo using syllables such as na, ta, re, da, ni, odani, tanon, yalali, yalalam, etc. Sometimes, Pakhawaj bols or Sargams are also used. The difference between the Drut Khayal and Tarana lies in the text. In the Khayal, the fast type is usually a meaningful poem while in a Tarana, there is no poem as such and the emphasis is on producing rhythmic patterns with vocables. The Tarana is set to a raga and Tal. The Tal can be Teen-tal, Ek-tal, Jhumra, Ada-chautal and so on and its tempo can range from Vilambit to Drut. Tarana singing requires specialization and skill in rhythmic manipulation. The late Amir Khan, Nissar Hussain Khan, Krishnarao Pandit and Kumar Gandharva were known for Tarana singing, as well. Among the present day singers, Ustad Rashid Khan, Veena Sahasrabuddhe, Padma Talwalkar and Malini Rajurkar include this form in their repertoire. The Tarana can have bols of Sitar, Pakhawaj and Mridang too, in addition to Sargams “.

According to Ustad Amir Khansaheb, due to the ignorance of the meaning of the words from the foreign language, many musicians added the tabla, pakhawaj and mrudangam bols to tarana (e.g. Dha Kid Tak Dhum Kid Tak etc.) and distorted the form completely to please the audience. They of course exhibited the ‘taiyyari’ of their tongue to the listeners, but defeated the purpose of tarana totally. Ustad Amir Khan was seriously concerned and he tried to enlighten the listeners by singing tarana in concerts and recordings. He has recorded following tarana but unfortunately the important information given below is missing from the inlay cards/record covers.

1] Tarana in raga Suha:

“ Sakiya Barkhej Dar Deh Jamra, Khaq Bar Sar Kun Game Aayyama “.

Meaning in Hindi: “Ae saki! tu uth ja, mujhe jam de aur duniyaki taqliphonke sarpar khaq dal “.

2] Tarana in raga Megh:

“ Abre Tar Saihane Chaman, Bulbul O Gule Phasale Bahar
Saki O Mutrib O May, Yaar Be Saihane Guljar “.

Meaning in Hindi: “ Badal bheege hain (phuhar baras rahi hai), aangan men chaman hai, wahan bulbul (bhi) hain, bahar ka mausam hai, saki hai, gayika hai, sharab hai aur chamanke aanganmen mera mehboob maujud hai “.

3] Tarana in raga Hansadhwani:

“ Ittihadista Miyane Mano To, Mano To Nista Miyan Ne Mano To “

Meaning in Hindi: “ Tere aur mere daryanmen ek aaisa talluk hai ki tere mere beech men main aur tu ka fark nahin raha gaya “. (One-ness of the mortal and immortal)

Personal life

It is a matter of debate whether one should discuss the personal life of any legendary artist or not? However, it is also believed that it helps in understanding the musician in totality, and hence it is useful to study the personal aspects that have shaped the artist. Life of Ustad Amir Khansaheb was full of struggle. The period in which he was trying to establish himself as a professional artist was a difficult one. Royal patronage was diminishing gradually. Struggle for independence was at its peak and naturally performing arts did not have sufficient backing and support in the society. During 1932 and 1942 he moved from place to place like a 'fakir'. Initially, he lived with his maternal uncle Mohammad Khan in Arab lane, Bombay. Here he met Amanat Ali Khan, nephew of Ustad Rajab Ali Khan. Soon they became fast friends. Juggan Khan, a table player introduced Amir Khan to Prof. B. R. Deodhar at his office in Dadar. He sang for him on number of occasions. Later on Prof. Deodhar wrote about him in 'Sangeet Kala Vihar' – a magazine of Gandharva Mahavidyalaya. In 1934/36, he also had some private tuition for living in Bombay.

In 1936, his father asked him to join the services of Maharaj Chakradhar Singh of Raygadh Sansthan in Madhya Pradesh. Maharaj used to sponsor musicians and send them to many music festivals and conferences. Soon he sent young Amir Khan to participate in Mirzapur Conference. There was a galaxy of musicians in this conference: Faiyaz Khansaheb, Inayat Khan Sitariye (father of Vilayat Khan), Pandit Omkarnath Thakur and Smt. Kesarbai Kerkar. Amir Khan sang in 'Merukhand' style and audience hooted him out in few minutes. Organizers appealed him to sing a thumri, but he refused and left the concert stage. Soon he left the Royal court and returned to Indore. His father died in 1937. Khansaheb lived in Bombay until 1941 and then went to Delhi to teach Munni Begum, former disciple of Ustad Abdul Wahid Khan. (Later on he married Munni Begum). In Delhi, he used to live in Sadik Building on G. B. Road. He spent some time in Calcutta and used to live in the area of dancing (nauch) girls and 'kothewalis'. He sang in Lahore conference just before partition. Soon after the independence and the partition, the atmosphere in Delhi and Calcutta was quite changed. Hence, Khansaheb came to Bombay. He used to live near Congress House on Vallabhbhai Patel road on third floor in the room next to Gangabai. This place was full of prostitutes and singing girls and the area was known as 'Pila House'. Ustad Bade Gulam Ali Khansaheb, Ustad Ahemadjan Tirakhawa, and Ustad Abdul Wahid Khansaheb had also lived here, since they would get tuitions and disciples in this area. This atmosphere never disturbed these musicians in their 'talim' and teaching. Khansaheb used to live here like a sage. Later on, he could afford to move to 'Vasant' building on Pedder Road and lived there for rest of his life.

Khansaheb's first 'Nikah' nama (marriage contract) was read with the sister of Sitar Player Vilayat Khansaheb. Her name was 'Zeenat' and he used to call her 'Sharifan'. At that time, he was struggling and the income was not much. Hence this marriage did not last long. They had one daughter 'Fahmida'-charming, fair and tall lady resembling Khansaheb. She is now a leading homeopath in Bombay. Then he married with his disciple Munni Begum of Delhi and this marriage lasted quite long. Khansaheb used to call her 'Khalifan' and the disciples would call her 'Amma'! She also loved and cared

them like a mother. He had a son from this marriage – Ikram!. He did not have any interest in music. He studied Mechanical engineering, settled in Canada and in 1969 invited Khansaheb to Canada and organized few concerts. Around 1965, Khansaheb married with Raisa Begum, daughter of thumri singer Mushtari Begum of Agra. He had expected that Munni Begum would accept her. But she could not bear the shock and left home and was never seen again. It was rumored that Munni Begum drowned herself in Prayagraj near Allahabad.

In 1966, Raisa Begum delivered a son. A grand party was thrown and a wonderful jalsa was organized in Indore. His first birthday was celebrated at Karolbaug in Delhi. He was called 'Bablu' and registered in school as 'Haider Amir'. Khansaheb passed away when he was eight years old. After B.Com degree he began to act on stage. With new name 'Shahbaz Khan' he began to appear in films and in TV serials. His role of Haider Ali in TV serial 'Tipu Sultan' was very popular. Thus, the musical heritage of Ustad Amir Khan was not carried forward by his children. His younger brother Bashir Khan was the staff artist at Indore radio station and retired as a 'Sarangi' player.

Sunset

February 13, 1974. Khansaheb was in Calcutta. After dinner at a friend's house, he was returning in a car with journalist friend Shams-U-Jaman and his disciple Smt. Purvi Mukherjee. They were discussing something on Urdu literature. In Southern Avenue area, they were traveling on 'Lanes Down Road'. All of a sudden, a car from opposite direction collided. The car hit with such a great speed that both the cars took two full round turns and bumped over once again. Khansaheb was sitting near the door. Suddenly the door opened and he was thrown out, hit on a nearby electric pole twice and was thrown away. Journalist friend and Purvi Mukherjee survived but car driver died on the spot and Khansaheb passed away one hour later in the hospital. He breathed his last near the place of his first wife Zeenat. His last rights were performed by brother in laws – Ustad Vilayat Khan and Ustad Imrat Khan. He was buried in 'Gobra Kabrasthan'. Later on his son Ikram decorated this tomb with ivory stones. Soon, Khansaheb was to leave for America with Mr. Govind Basu and Pandit Nikhil Banerjee. He was invited to visit San Francisco University and join as a visiting professor for one year. However, the destiny was different and he had to leave for services in the court of Allah.

Sudden demise of Ustad Amir Khansaheb left the world of music in deep silence and intense grief. Indore radio had a special broadcast and someone in the program said, 'Teesare saptak par thahari taan aapni jagah tham gayi' [The taan that reached third octave remained there and did not descend]. Every year his disciples celebrated his death anniversary religiously and this continued for many years!

In 1976, HMV released one LP record from the live concert recordings of Ustad Ameer Khan. In 1981, INRECO Company released a record and tape of raga 'Chandramadhu'. His disciples Singh Bandhu, Kankana Banerjee and Purvi Mukherjee recorded ragas and paid musical tributes to their guru. Many music lovers have been collecting recorded music of Ustad Ameer Khan even after thirty years of his demise. What was so great

about his music? That is what future generations shall find out and there is lot of recorded material available to them.

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