

Professor D.T. Joshi (Dhruva Tara Joshi) 1912-1993

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From January to the end of March 1993 I resided in Burdwan, a small town three hours train ride West of Calcutta. There, I lived with and studied *sitar* from the late Professor D.T. Joshi. Though largely unknown to the present-day public, D.T. Joshi was a highly esteemed and important musical figure of the twentieth century. This paper therefore seeks to convey a few aspects of D.T. Joshi's musical career. I will begin by outlining his musical background and then will explain how he was regarded in the musical world. Lastly, I will try to evoke the aspect of D.T. Joshi's personality that I believe most aptly describes how he perceived himself within the milieu of Indian Classical music; that is, I will try to describe how D.T. Joshi lived as a lifelong student and servant of Indian classical music, even during his later years when he was regarded as a doyen by other artists and connoisseurs.

Selected moments from D.T. Joshi's life and training

D.T. Joshi was a disciple of the legendary *sitarist* Ustad Enayat Khan, the father of the equally luminous Ustad Vilayat Khan¹. Enayat Khan was an outstanding *sitar* maestro who came from an important lineage of *sitarists* known as the Etawah *gharana*² [family-based musical tradition]. Indeed, in the field of *sitar* performance from the second half of the nineteenth century to the present day the Etawah tradition has been the most influential. Each member of the lineage, from Shahabdad Khan to his great-great grandson Vilayat Khan, has made key innovations to both musical style and the construction of the *sitar*. Many of these innovations have become standard in *sitar* performance during this century.

At Enayat Khan's suggestion, D.T. Joshi listened to and developed relationships with the other great *ustads* [maestros], among them the legendary vocalist of the Agra *gharana*, Ustad Faiyaz Khan. After Enayat Khan's premature death in 1938, D.T. Joshi became a *shagird* [disciple] of Faiyaz Khan. Part of the role of a disciple is to continue to honor and represent one's *ustad* even after death. As such, becoming a disciple of two *ustads* is highly unusual and is sometimes considered sacrilegious. However, Enayat Khan and Faiyaz Khan were great friends who jointly felt that D.T. Joshi would benefit considerably by learning vocal music. Enayat Khan even requested Faiyaz Khan to take D.T. Joshi as a disciple through the *ganda bandhan* ceremony³, saying "Gana sikhna ho to kisi gawaiye se sikhna" [If you want to learn to sing, then learn from a real vocalist] (see *D.T. Joshi's Unfinished Memoirs* in this issue for a full account of what took place).

This unusual apprenticeship was to save D.T. Joshi's musical career as sometime in the 1950s he contracted a severe case of arthritis in his right hand while practicing vigorously for a National Programme broadcast for All India Radio. His hand was left incapacitated, and devastated though he was he turned his attention to vocal music.

D.T. Joshi's own reputation arose from his status as a brilliant musician, an erudite musicologist, and an important teacher. Many esteemed connoisseurs and musicians, including Pandit Ravi Shankar, claimed that his *alap* [melodic introduction] was unsurpassed (Shankar 1994). D.T. Joshi's knowledge of both musical and academic matters was so vast that the great *ustads*, old and young, held him in high esteem. He once told me a story where Ustad Allaudin Khan brought his son, Ali Akbar Khan, then a boy, to D.T. Joshi's residence in Lucknow to gain the latter's blessing. D.T. Joshi was flabbergasted that this famed *ustad* would come to him, and dutifully arranged a *mehfil* [private gathering]. This story is noteworthy because it expresses both the high regard others (even from other traditions) had for him, and the great humility D.T. Joshi felt before the *ustads*. D.T. Joshi's reputation also stems from the fact that he was one of the few remaining artists with a direct tie to the legendary figures of the past, and in turn to an Indian classical music that lived at the turn of the century when musicians performed before their patrons in courts.

Until I went to Burdwan I had only known D.T. Joshi as the subject of many fascinating stories. Indeed a great part of learning Indian music is being told countless tales of legendary musicians. These stories describe musicians who practiced day and night, whose performances brought the rains, whose characters were so great and devotion to music so deep that they would physically beat kings for making musical mistakes. What was so special for those who encountered D.T. Joshi was that those mythological legends, the pantheon of Hindustani music, came alive. Famed musicians like Bundu Khan (see cover), Faiyaz Khan, Enayat Khan, Abdul Karim Khan were D.T. Joshi's contemporaries; they were his teachers, the musicians he listened to, was influenced by, and with whom he interacted. Therefore, when he told tales of a brilliant performance by Faiyaz Khan, or Vilayat Khan as a child running about like a "naughty boy" to avoid practice, these were not just anecdotes but rather experiences that were an actual part of his life. It is a disorienting experience to hear stories about the legendary Bundu Khan, eternally etched in my mind carrying his *sarangi* everywhere and practicing at any opportunity, as a guest in D.T. Joshi's house talking to him about train reservations; or about Vilayat Khan, to me a living legend, as a young boy asking for candy before letting D.T. Joshi enter Enayat Khan's residence.

As the late Ustad Mustaq Ali Khan pointed out, D.T. Joshi's home was rich with musical personalities. "Once Bundu Khan, who was eternally immersed in music, was living at Joshiji's house in Lucknow and saw me reading a newspaper. He asked me what news was

there. I told him there was news of Jinnah. And when he asked me who this Jinnah was, I said “Qaid-e Azam”. To this he said, “I understand that, but which *gharana* did he belong to, *dhrupad* or *khayal*? This was the atmosphere throughout Joshiji’s house!” (Khan 1976).

D.T. Joshi’s significance in the history of Indian classical music stems from the fact that he was the primary benefactor of Enayat Khan’s teaching at the time of the latter’s death. This fact is important for three reasons. First, it is not customary in the hereditary system of Indian music for someone outside the *khandan* [family] to be a principal benefactor of the tradition. Typically, knowledge of music was jealously guarded by family members of a *gharana*. Non-hereditary individuals often became disciples of an *ustad* but complete training was usually withheld from them. Second, Vilayat Khan was in line to be the main benefactor but was too young to have absorbed the entire repertoire of the *gharana* when his father died. The fact that Vilayat Khan attained legendary status early in his career despite losing his father when he was very young raised a somewhat controversial aspect of D.T. Joshi’s stature, that of his role in Ustad Vilayat Khan’s training. Third, because Vilayat Khan broke completely new ground in *sitar* performance, D.T. Joshi was left as the primary



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D.T. Joshi giving sitar instruction to the author.

authority of the performance repertoire of Enayat Khan. Many 78 rpm recordings exist of Enayat Khan, his younger brother Wahid Khan (who died in 1961), and their father, Imdad Khan. These well-known three-minute sketches, though considered brilliant cameos of the *rags* performed, hardly elucidate the entire repertoire of the *gharana*. D.T. Joshi's knowledge on this subject was therefore invaluable.

D.T. Joshi's role as disciple

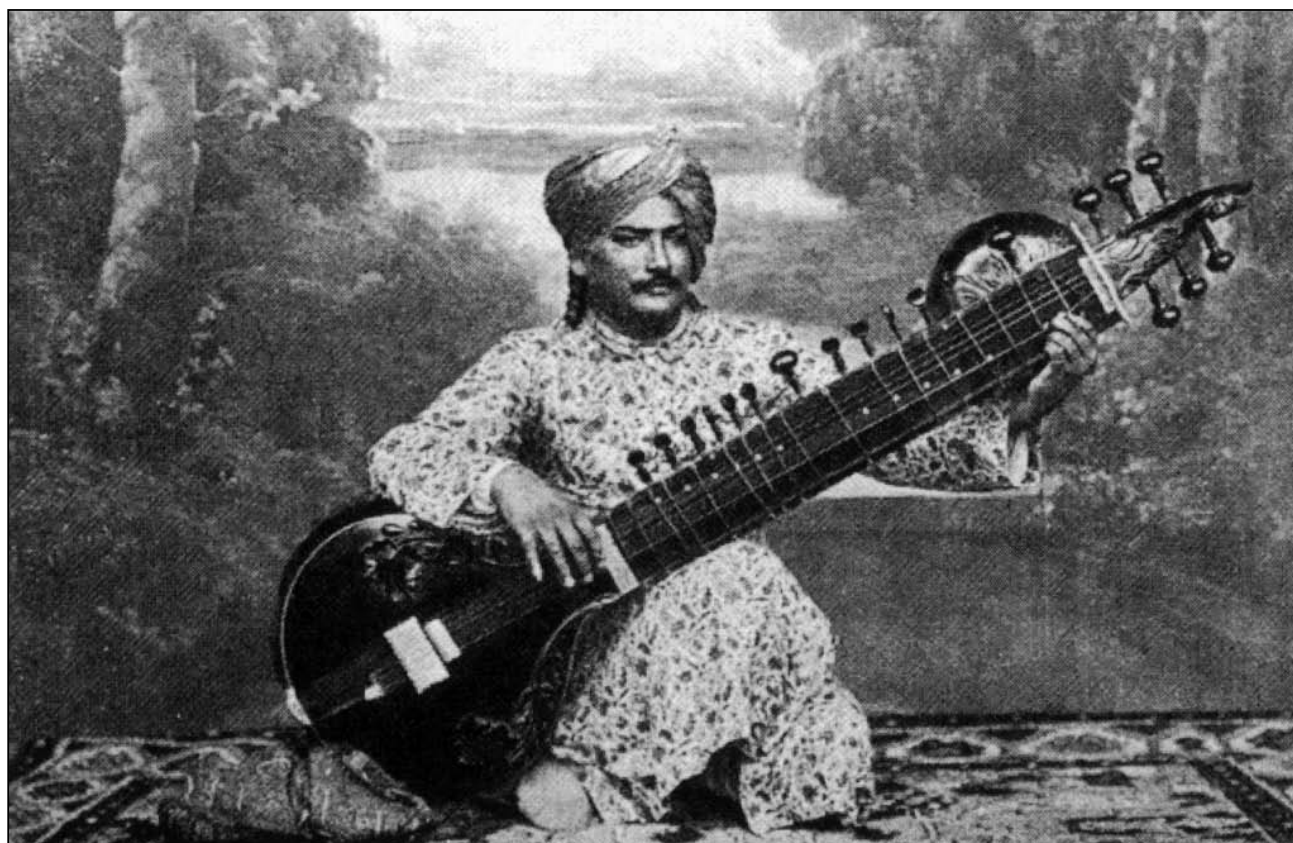
Although musical knowledge is guarded as a family secret, non-hereditary individuals can become apprentices to musicians. Since the immeasurable gift of a *guru* is his family's secret knowledge, the debt of the disciple is great. The student demonstrates this indebtedness through complete obedience and devotion to his *guru* and his *guru's* family.⁴ D.T. Joshi once told me a tale about a man who was placed before his *guru* and the god Govinda. He had to select one over the other, and so chose his *guru* because it was his *guru* who could show him the path to God. Despite being thought of as a *guru* by many, D.T. Joshi saw his life as that of a disciple entirely devoted to the service of Indian music and musicians. Though not wealthy he housed, fed, looked after, gave money, and arranged performances for needy and established musicians alike. In particular he felt a profound sense of servitude to his *ustad's* family. He used to say, "Main to ustadon ke ghar ka kutta hun" [I am the dog in my *ustad's* house].

D.T. Joshi's perception of discipleship may best be viewed through a description of his relationship to Vilayat Khan. When D.T. Joshi first started learning *sitar* from Enayat Khan, Vilayat Khan was still a little boy and, as D.T. Joshi said, would "practice in his own peculiar way. Sometimes he used to hold a stick or a piece of wood like a *sitar* and used to utter *sitar bol*, *vani*, and *gat* [strokes, style, and compositions]. Such was my Chote Khan's *riaz* [practice]". After Vilayat Khan's *ganda-bandhan* ceremony, he had become a "full-fledged *shagird*... [and he] stopped his childish pranks with *sitar*; and thus began his *gharana talim* [instruction, knowledge]". Hereafter, Vilayat Khan and D.T. Joshi would practice together; it was D.T. Joshi's task to monitor Vilayat Khan's practice, but also to buffer the boy from his father's strict surveillance if he faltered. As D.T. Joshi said, "A lot of responsibility rested on me for Vilayat's education and *riaz*." (See *D.T. Joshi's Unfinished Memoirs*.)

When Enayat Khan died D.T. Joshi took it as his responsibility to assist his *ustad's* wife, Bashiran Begam, and her children. He brought Vilayat Khan to his home in Lucknow and looked after his academic and musical studies. Though Vilayat Khan was still a boy he was nonetheless the eldest male successor. He was thus destined to become the *khalifa* [head]

of his *khandan*. Neuman (1990: 97) has described the *khalifa's* status as that of “the head of the *khandan*, and of the *gharana* (musical house), regarding musical matters. His is the final authority, for example, if there is a dispute about how a *rag* is to be performed in the style of that *khandan*. Other members of the *khandan* who are not patrilineal descendants are believed not to have received total musical knowledge which is said to be passed on only from father to son. With respect to the stylistic inheritance of a particular *khandan*, only direct patrilineal descendants are considered fully authoritative.”

Since Vilayat Khan's *talim* was far from complete at the time of his father's death the question arises as to how he achieved the status of *khalifa*. D.T. Joshi's role in Vilayat Khan's *talim* is significant because of his humble response to this question; for one would think it an honor to claim a role in the nurturing of one of the world's greatest musical figures. Throughout his life, however, D.T. Joshi shunned this claim and became quite offended when asked. D.T. Joshi's reply makes sense when one remembers his self-image as the eternal disciple. Vilayat Khan was the *khalifa*, and as such D.T. Joshi felt it was simply his duty to help Vilayat Khan and his family in every way: financially, educationally, and musically.



The Musicians of India, 1929

Enayat Khan (1894-1938), Joshi's ustad, playing the surbahar.

This complex and profound relationship is better evoked through his own words. The following quotation came from a letter Joshiji wrote to be published in an editorial (Joshi 1992). He gave it to me when I asked about Vilayat Khan's early *talim*. At the time it had still to be accepted for publication. I include so much of it because it is a first-hand account which reveals D.T. Joshi's emotional tie to his *ustad's* family almost sixty years after his *ustad's* death. It also shows how, at the age of eighty, he submissively placed himself as a student and servant to his *ustad's* family.

Ustad Vilayat Khan being my *ustad's* son, is a brother to me and my relationship with him is that of an elder and younger brother. But he is also my *khalifa* and so commands my esteem and adoration. Indeed, it is difficult to describe the kind of relationship that has kept us bound for so many years. It is a dichotomy of admiration and love on the one hand and awe and wonder on the other. My feeling of love and respect for Vilayat Khan is more than compensated by similar feelings for me by him... I am tempted to remind Khalifa Vilayat Khan Sahib that his exaggerated esteem for me seems to overstep the permissible limits of consideration of age, and his public utterances about me as being one of Ustad Enayat Khan's most trusted pupils causes considerable embarrassment to me and heartburn to friends who imagine that our relationship is just not what it should be between an *ustad's* son and an *ustad's* pupil, but much deeper. When some friends had the audacity to ask me point blank if I had not helped my *khalifa* in his *talim* when he was staying with me in my home town in Lucknow, after the demise of my *ustad*, I was just stunned. Nobody seemed to bother about the financial straits which the family found itself in. The interest of my *khalifa's* benefactors was largely in his *talim* and not on how my *khalifa's* mother managed to make two ends meet.

Some time ago, I got a letter from the assistant of a deceased *gurubhai* [fellow disciple] who had written quite a few books and also ran a school in South Calcutta. Imagine my surprise when I found the same enquiry about Khan Sahib's early *talim* staring me in the face. I was flabbergasted and sent him a rather curt reply. I also wrote back to say that my reply should satisfy all, and that I would entertain no further enquiries on the matter which is as nauseating to me as to Ustad Vilayat Khan.

As already mentioned, this over-abundance of detail about Khalifa Vilayat Khan's early *talim* was not without reason. But in the process, we have lost sight of the wood among the trees. Let us revert to the question of Vilayat Khan Sahib's early *talim*. My *ustad* used to say that children of *gharanedar* [of the *gharana*] musicians do not have to run helter skelter for a *gat* [composition] here or a few *tans* [runs] there or even to learn a *rag* because even before they are able to articulate *Sa Re Ga Ma* [do, re, mi...] clearly, they attain enough maturity to perform in a small *jalsa* [private gathering]. So my *khalifa* was no exception. His maternal grandfather and maternal uncle were court musicians and were stalwarts in their own right. His uncle Ustad Wahid Khan, grandfather of Shahid Parvez, served as visiting court musician in several princely states. They all helped Vilayat Khan in his practice and *talim*.

But the person to whom my *khalifa* should remain eternally grateful, who was not only his mentor but also friend, philosopher and guide, was his own mother, Bashiran Begam, daughter of Ustad Bande Hasan Khan, court musician of a princely state in Himachal Pradesh. For years on end, she sat through the practice of her husband and father-in-law, Ustad Imdad Khan, a legend in his own lifetime, and carefully watched and studied the *riaz* technique of the Etawah-Farukhabad *gharana*. She was a strict task mistress and did not spare Vilayat Khan before he had done his homework satisfactorily. Khan Sahib was lucky enough in being born as the son of Bashiran Begam, who took upon herself the onerous task of acting not only as mother but also as father and teacher after the demise of my *ustad*. *Talim* and creating conditions for ideal *riaz* is one thing, and exchanging notes is another. I only did the latter. Perhaps, as a senior *gurubhai*, I had every right to supervise his *talim* and discuss other tricky points as we do in school or college. I also looked after his general education.

If this liberty which I enjoyed from the time of my *ustad* irks some, I cannot help it... I suppose I have been able to convince my friends that Vilayat Khan is the son of an *ustad* and also the grandson and great grandson of two stalwarts. He is also an *ustad* in his own right and, musically speaking, blue blood flows through his veins. So there can be no question of his *talim* under an *atai* [dilettante] like me. He is my *khalifa* and we are brothers. Isn't that enough?

D.T. Joshi's double-sided role as a servant and as an authority again surfaces in these extracts. Vilayat Khan was his *khalifa* and D.T. Joshi had a responsibility to provide him with what was his due birthright. From D.T. Joshi's perspective he served only as an intermediary benefactor and helped provide what would otherwise have naturally been provided had Enayat Khan lived longer. Therefore, in no way could he, a non-*gharanedar* disciple, accept any credit for his *khalifa's* legendary success. However, on the other hand, what D.T. Joshi passed on to Vilayat Khan was esoteric knowledge. Regardless of his duty he had the musical authority to partake in what is usually a very grave and familial process, that of maintaining the *gharana*. The weight of this authority is even greater here because of this particular *gharana's* prestige, and, in retrospect, because of Vilayat Khan's legendary musical status. In spite of the fact that a non-hereditary musician can never become a family member in the true sense, D.T. Joshi's humility and submission throughout his long life serve to remind us of the crucial supporting role many non-family members can play in upholding a musical tradition.

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Notes

- 1 Ter Ellingson has pointed out to me that the use of superlatives (legendary, great, outstanding) describing an artist is rare in other anthropological writing. Ellingson questions whether the adjectives are "objective descriptions (by what standard?), and/or unreflective mirroring of rhetoric habitually used within the culture?" (personal communication). My use of these terms reflects the general reputation of that artist.
- 2 This *gharana* is sometimes referred to as the Imdad Khani *gharana*, after Enayat Khan's father. This is based on the fact that Ustad Imdad Khan was the first member of the *gharana* to be recorded. Etawah refers to the ancestral home of the lineage.
- 3 *Ganda bandhan* means "thread-tying", and refers to a ceremony that symbolizes the initiation of a student as an official disciple.
- 4 The *guru-shishya parampara* [master-disciple relationship] has been discussed elsewhere (see, e.g., Neuman 1990: 43-58, and Shankar 1968: 51-8, 69-75).

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