



WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION IN HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TABLA PLAYING

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Abstract

The origin of Indian classical music lies in the 'Samaveda' and is therefore secular, which is not influenced by the gender and religious constraints existing in the subcontinent. But the Indian percussion instruments tabla, which is considered a male-dominated instrument, has fewer women participation than men. The playing of percussion instruments Tabla in Indian classical music has been particularly considered powerful and laborious. This is why male artists have a monopoly on playing percussion instruments Tabla for a long time. It was a difficult task for the ladies to step into this field of music. There were so many reasons that women did not get the opportunity to learn and perform Tabla. Even those women who did learn from their parents could not perform in public. It is only in the last 30-40 years that this prejudice has changed. Now women learn music and perform in public, but the ratio is still heavily favouring the males. In the nineteenth century, many women, including Anuradha Pal, Jogamaya Shubkla, Dr. Aban Mistry, Sunayana Ghosh, and Rimpa Siva, stepped into this field and disproved the myth that women could not play the Tabla and cannot be as good as men in tabla playing. Therefore, the contribution of women in its development is also noteworthy. The paper aims to analyze women's participation in North Indian classical tabla. Several questions are addressed in this paper. Amongst the top Indian classical musicians, you'll generally find that women are greatly less numbered than males. There are many reasons for this, mostly historical. That is why this research paper will also help light the life and contributions of women tabla players.

KEYWORDS: Percussion Instruments, Samaveda, Tabla, Male-dominated.

INTRODUCTION

It is difficult to generalize about women's social position in Indian culture. There are several reasons for this, but the most important is that India is a large and diverse country with many languages, several major religions, and a sociopolitical history that has affected religion somewhat differently. Cultural changes during the last one hundred years have greatly altered the position of women within Indian society.

For hundreds of years, classical music has been a male-dominated profession in India (Koskoff Ellen 1989). In historical literature in which music is discussed, men have been identified as great as a great masters of music. Women's role in classical music throughout history, if recorded at all, appears to have been subordinate. Women musicians seldom received the individual recognition that men did.



The status of women in India has been subjected to great changes over the past years. The status of women social, economic, political, and general- in India today is much higher than in ancient and medieval periods

Although Indian music is ancient in its origin, in a country where men pull strings in all walks of life, gaining centre stage in music has been an uphill task for women, at least in the area of Percussion instrument tabla. During the last one hundred years, Women musicians have made an important place in Hindustani music. In the music world, women set such records in other subjects, which will always be unforgettable. In the ancient texts also, there is a description of musical art with women. In that period, wherever there is musical art, women are also said to be engaged in singing, playing, and dancing. But when we discuss the contribution of women in the field of percussion instruments, especially the Tabla, we find that men have dominated the instrument since the prehistoric period. Women are considered to be weaker than men for playing percussion instruments. But in the twentieth and early twentieth centuries, many female tabla players disproved that women were as adept at playing Percussion instruments as men at the same professional level. Though the status of women has been raised in the eyes of the law, they are still much far from equality with males. Theoretically, the condition of modern women was high; however, practically, it was low. Women are still exploited and humiliated in modern Indian society.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This research paper aims to discover the problem and solution of women's participation in North Indian classical tabla playing. For the current study, the following objectives have been identified:

- To study the status of women's participation in the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern period
- To study the contribution of women tabla players
- Present changes and expected role of women in society

To collect the materials on the subject, books, articles, and recordings related to women's tabla players were consulted. There is a huge lack of literature on this subject. The challenge was to collect, collate and classify them to reach conclusions based on the objectives identified for the research. The data collected was analyzed by a qualitative method. The data collected from various sources related to women tabla players has enabled us to arrive at the conclusions at the end of this paper.



REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Women have always been considered secondary in our male-dominated society. But during the Vedic period, women had all the power of decision making, selecting their life partner, cultivating various art forms, and freedom of education. There are references to a respected and self-empowered woman in Patanjali, Katyayana, and some Rig Vedic verses. During the Ramayana period, women enjoyed the freedom of learning and cultivating music, be it dance, playing instruments, or the rendition of ritualistic hymns.

We have reviewed the Vedic period to have a comprehensive understanding of the status of women and the consequent reasons that led to the change in their status. The study materials of the life and position of women in the Rig-Vedic age are very scanty; any observation is bound to be based more on indirect evidence like literary allusions than on direct and systematic data' (Altekar, A.S 1987). In time immemorial, all the Yadav clan women were involved in singing, playing, dancing, and female musicians like Subhadra, Satyabhama, etc. Apart from these, Apsaras like Rabha, Tilottama, Urvashi, Mishrakeshi, Menaka etc., of heaven also get the reference to participate in that festivals (Kumar Goswami Prabhat -1995).

Indian history has a tremendous treasure of musicians who have contributed towered enriching our cultural heritage. But most of the litterateurs have only taken notice of men artists in their scriptures. However, the contribution of some legendry women of the 14th century cannot be ignored. To name a few are the daughter of Tansen, Saraswati, an astonishing Veena player, and Saint Meerabai, the icon of the Bhakti cult who composed various splendid poetries devoted to Lord Krishna.

During the medieval period, the position of women in society deteriorated. Practices like Sati, child marriage, the Parda system, the practice of Devdasi were at their peak and made women's lives miserable. The women artist had no other option than to take patronage in the courts of Kings and emperors. In this period, women did not get individual recognition as established artists as men did. Despite adverse conditions, some women excelled in various fields, be it political, literary, or social. Razia Sultan, Noor Jahan, Rani Durgavati were some of them.

During the 19th century, certain men took the cause of women in India. Social reformers like Raja Ram Mohan Rai, Swami Vivekanand, have helped women gain a strong standing in society. In Indian classical music, Pt., V. N. Bhatkhande and Pt. V. D. Paluskar did revolutionary upliftment in music. It was because of these personalities that Indian classical music was within reach of commoners. They have



to their credit huge music festivals and conferences where men and women artists were treated equally.

In the 20th century, the arrival of female vocalists terminated male dominance to a great extent. It was during this period that professional musicians had begun to be freed from their social structure.

MUSICAL STATUS OF WOMEN DURING THE PRE-INDEPENDENCE ERA

In the Vedic period, of course, the woman had a respected place, and there was a good system for her education. Still, since then, learning music for women has proved to be a difficult austerity, whether she is a woman of slave India or independent India.

The history of the world is full of tales of women's sacrifice, sacrifice, excellent knowledge, and the pride of love. Music was closely associated with the "Gandharva Kinnars and Apsaras" in the Vedic period and the Puranic era. The Gandharva caste women, men and infant girls were proficient in music. Women used to participate more like men in singing, playing, dancing. There is a description of women singing in the Rigveda.

In the cave of Ajanta, there are also pictures of women performing songs, instruments, and dance, in which three women are dancing. Two are holding long musical instruments in the shape of a shehnai or nadaswaram, and the other women are clapping and presenting hot music with music. Both men and women used to participate in plays during the period of Natyashastra in Bharata. The noun "natkiya" was used for a woman acting in a play. "The title of the heroine was given to a woman who, along with other female qualities, had a blood kinship and rhythm. During the Mauryan period, during the reign of King Ashoka, many women were proficient in dancing, singing, and playing. There were many hostesses in the Ashoka palace whose knowledge of music was of a high order. The Gupta period has been called the Golden Age in the history of Indian music. Literature, music and other fine arts flourished in this period. A picture of Amaravati depicts the scene of "Aparadhesgeant", under which three women are playing the veena. Four women are playing Dholak, and the other three women are playing Vanshi. In the Gupta period, a painting from Ajanta depicts three women singing a song with bronze and playing the Dholak as an instrument.

In a concert, a female percussionist represents a female percussionist doing the work of giving rhythm sitting in the background. Tabla notation is very ancient in Indian art. It is very clear from the paintings presented in the caves located in Maharashtra



that the women of that period also used to play a non-verbal instrument like the Tabla. In Indian music, the playing of invaded instruments is particularly powerful and laborious. This is why for a long time, male players have had a monopoly in playing percussion instruments. In addition to men in ancient paintings, stone crafts, pictures of female instrumentalists are also found in sculptures. The use of Dholak in percussion instruments is seen in women's folk songs and folk dances.

It was quite a difficult task for women to step into music. Very few women came out as artists. Many reasons for this were our narrow attitude towards music, lack of proper conditions, family environment, and tolerance towards women.

In the modern period, after the British system, there was a re-awakening among women. After removing the elements of enjoyment, luxury, etc., women would again get an opportunity to participate in the arts in the social system. Gradually the power of women was exposed, and they would get rights before men. From Lakshmibai to Sarojini Naidu, Amrit Kaur, Baigam Aijaz Rasool, Vijayalakshmi, Mother Teresa, and Indira Gandhi took an important part in social, political work.

In the field of music, women again started getting respect in society due to their art skills. Women started taking music lessons from high-class masters. Among them Kesarbai Kerkar, Modhubai Kurdikar, Dargubai Kulkarni of Jaipur Gharana. Hirabai Baddaikar of Kirana Gharana, Gangubai Hangal, Rasoolan Bai, Mrs. Anmpurna Dave of Maihar Gharana, Sharanrani Baktiwal. Some women have set such records in the music world, which will always be unforgettable.

The Tabla might have made its presence felt in Hindustani classical music around the early eighteenth century during Mohammad Shah Rangeele. Sudhar Khan was stationed in Delhi. Most tabla players credit Sudhar Khan or Sidhar Khan Dhadi of Delhi with Tabla and give him credit for introducing the Tabla to classical music and starting a new chapter of percussion instruments in Indian Music. In the twentieth century, women artists like Anuradha Pal, Jogamaya Shubkla, Dr Aban Mistry, Sunayana Ghosh, and Rimpa Siva stepped into this field. They disproved the myth that women could not play the Tabla. They have contributed a lot to the development of north India classical tabla, and their contributions can't be ignored.

CONTRIBUTION OF PROFESSIONAL WOMEN TABLA PLAYER

DR YOGMAYA SHUKLA

The name of Dr Yogmaya Shukla is particularly noteworthy among the distinguished and talented artists in Hindustani music. Dr Yogmaya Shukla worked very hard for



his art practice and made a special contribution in making Tabla very wide in Indian music by unwavering passion. Dr Yogmaya Shukla is an excellent tabla player.

Family background: Dr Yogmaya Shukla was born on 14 November 1933 in Silchar in Assam. She was the second daughter of Late Narasimha Bhattacharya. She had an interest in playing the Tabla since childhood. Father Shri Narsingh Bhattacharya was very fond of music, and it was through that she got the inspiration for music from her father.

Early life: Dr Yogmaya Shukla got her initial inspiration for music from your father, Shri Narsingh Bhattacharya. The education of singing and playing the Tabla of the girl child Yogamaya Shukla started by her father, Late U. Alauddin Khan, started with grandson Ustad Fuljhadi-Khan. After four years of education in singing and playing the Tabla, Mrs Yogmaya Shukla was given a scholarship by the Government of Assam. Daker sent Bhatkhande Sangeet Vidyapeeth to Lucknow for higher education in these subjects, where Mrs Shukla got the opportunity to learn Tabla from India's famous Mridangachaya Late Pandit Sakharam.

Music education: At the age of just four, she started receiving her education in singing and playing the Tabla. Firstly, she started the tabla education from Pandit Sakharam. Meanwhile, in connection with the annual examinations, Alauddin Khan arrived in Lucknow. The paternal village of Ustad Khan Saheb is situated close to Bawada Bungalow. Due to this relation and being the disciple of Khan Saheb's grandson, Khan Sahib used to love Yogmaya Shukla very much. Seeing Shukla interest in playing the Tabla, he got him the blessings of Ustad Munne Khan Sahib, the famous tabla player of Farrukhabad Gharana. Mrs Yogmaya Shukla took training from Ustad Munne Khan Sahab for a long time and made her special place in the field of Tabla playing with her passion and means.

Academic qualifications: Along with Tabla, Mrs Yogmaya Shukla did music master in singing, B.A. in Tabla. Mayjoo, "Sangeet Alankar" M. Mayju, received a PhD from Delhi University on "The Origin, Development and Playing Styles of Tabla".

As a scholar: Dr Yogmaya Shukla received a PhD degree from the University of Delhi on the thesis titled "The Origin of Tabla and Playing Styles". This research is related to the historical aspect of the origin, development and playing styles of the Tabla. Research and analysis have been presented on this research mainly from a historical point of view. The gharanas of tabla players and the characteristics of their hawks have also been described, especially in the historical context. In tabla playing, he was bestowed with the title of 'Taal Mani' by the Sursingar Parliament of Bombay.



As an art campaigner: The excellence of tabla solos in major cities like Delhi, Bombay, Calcutta, Varanasi, Mysore, Jaipur, Guwahati, Nanded, Kanpur, Lucknow, Moradabad, Dehradun, Meerut, Agra, Silchar, etc. with the support of my family and husband Dr Shatrughan Shukla, exhibited. Along with his performance in tabla playing, Dr Yogmaya Shukla has also presented papers and lectures related to tabla subject by participating in many musical discussions, seminars.

DR ABAN MISTRY

The name of Tabla player Dr Aban Mistry is particularly noteworthy among the eminent artists of Hindustani music. They are demolishing the traditional beliefs, Dr Smt. Aban Mistry of Bombay set new paradigms in this area three decades ago. Dr Aban is considered a master artist of difficult rhythmicity in the world of music. The name of Aban is taken prominently among the selected thirds of the tenor.

Family background: Mrs Aban Mistry was born in 1940 in a music-loving family, from which she received music as her inheritance. Mother, Mrs Kharshed Mistry Dilruba and Mr S Shah were proficient in playing the violin.

The beginning of art: The early education of singing started at home from her aunt Mehru Waking Boxwala. At the young age of four years and getting higher education in singing from Lakshmanrao Bodas of Vocal Provocateur Mandal, her dance training also continued. But due to abdominal surgery, the doctors advised her not to stop dancing, which shocked him. When the Kathak artist's dream was broken, Guru Pandit Keki Jijina encouraged the girl child and said, "the level you could reach in dance, I will reach you in tabla playing." Incidentally, once famous tabla player U Amir Hussain Khan heard the tabla playing of Aban in a program and was very impressed. Aban ji had the privilege of receiving training from a scholar like Tabla Nawaz Ustad Amir Hussain Khan. Then after some time, you received the education of all the four gharanas from him (Delhi, Ajrada, Farukhabad, and Banaras). Later he refined his art by practising under the guidance of Shri Bhimrao Kanakdhar of Solapur.

Academic qualifications: Mrs Aban Mistry had received the degrees of Music Master in Sitar and Music Master and Sangeetalankar in Singing from All India Gandharva Mandal Bombay. Along with this, she did M.A. in Hindi and Sanskrit. She also received Sahitya Ratna by Hindi Sahitya Sammelan Prayag. After this, she got her PhD in Music.

As a scholar: Pakhawaj, under the direction of Shri V.R.Athawale in "The Gharana of Tabla; She got a doctorate on the topic named Emergence, Development and Diverse Traditions.



As a founder: Dr Aban Mistry was also the founder and patron of Bombay's music organization 'Swar Sadhana Samiti'. Through the 'Swar Sadhana Samiti' established by Dr. Aban Mistry in the year 1961, all Indian vocal concerts are organized every year for the wide publicity of music. Along with this, singers, instrumentalists, dancers, scholars, musicians, critics, etc., are honoured, and arrangements are made for free education for poor students. From the platform of this committee, artists from every corner of the country perform their art every month. This institution aims to reach Indian art in the country and abroad by officially promoting and spreading classical music.

As an art campaigner: At the age of just 16, she had become the country's eminent tabla player. Since then, she has performed on hundreds of solo concerts across the country. In the year 1983-84, Dr Aban had enchanted thousands of foreign music lovers in England, France, Germany, Netherlands, Rome, Switzerland with the beats of his Tabla. In 1988, she also went to many places to give programs connected with the Festival of India.

As an artist: Whenever she beat Tabla, it did not appear that any woman was playing the Tabla. The clear exposition of the words, the mathematic and unmatched of the left, was no less than a male tabla player. It is her speciality to present independent Tabla playing for two hours each in obsolete talas. It's not a problem to play so long in obsolete rhythms. Along with Tabla, she also had learned singing and sitar playing. Mrs Aban Mistry was the leading female tabla player of the country, and she was probably the first female artist to have a gramophone record ready. In 1974, his gramophone record "Taal Trital" was published.

ANURADHA PAL

The name of tabla player Anuradha Pal is particularly noteworthy among the eminent artists of Hindustani music. Anuradha Pal is the disciple of the famous tabla players of India Allarkha Khan and Zakir Hasun Ji.

Family background: World-famous rhythm player Anuradha Pal was born in Mumbai. His father's name is Davind, and his mother's name is Ila Pal. Her parents and her husband Shyam Sharma had special cooperation in taking forward her tabla playing.

Beginning of art life: He received the education of Tabla playing from world-famous U. Allarkha Khan and Zakir Hussain. In today's time, Anuradha Pal is representing women as a world-famous female tabla player.



Achievements: In August 2008, the world-famous "Woodstock Festival" performed her solo in Europe at Anuradha Pal presented her fusion band Shtmbintham. About four lakh listeners participated in this festival. "Recharge fusion band", produced by Anuradha Pal, was the only band to represent India in this Woodstock festival. In 1999, the annual World Famous Festival 'WOMAD' U.K was held in Kjnán. Anuradha Pal was the only Indian female musician to present her program at a young age to about 1.5 lakh visitors at the festival. Influenced by Anuradha's musical art, she was honoured by Queen Elizabeth of England, Prime Minister of India. He was honoured by the 'Cultural Award' by the State of Maharashtra (2006). Anuradha Pal was honoured with the "Zee Astitva Award".

A film based on women's education and achievements, which UNICEF broadcasted, was posted as Brand Ambassador. He represented India at the 'Asian Performers Summit' in Japan, and Common Wealth games festival U.K. It is clear from her achievements that she was a versatile tabla player.

As the founder: Anuradha Pal produced a fusion band called Street Shakti in which all women (vocalists and percussionist) artists of Asia were included. She also started the World Music fusion group called Recharge, based on Indian, African, Latin and Jazz music. Anuradha Pal played the Tabla in M.F. Hussain film Gajagamini, which was highly appreciated at Banddamme Film Festival. She has consistently demonstrated her art in films, theatre, music albums, and documentary films.

Major International Performance: She participated in many musical programs. Few lists of her program are mentioned here:

- In the U.K., WOMAD (World of Music and Dance Festival)
- World Premiere of the commonwealth games (Manchester)
- Bath International Music Festival and the city of London festival at the prestigious Barbican.
- Rhythm Sticks (Queen Elizabeth Hall) and BBC Music live festival (Scotland) Greenwich and Docklands Festival, Cardiff Jazz festival,
- Asian Music festival amongst several other venues in the U.K. on tour with prominent artists.
- In USA-Masters of Indian Music festival, Young Music wizards of India, Ali Akbar Khan Festival, Basant Bahar festival (SFO), Asia Society (N.Y and SFO), MITHAS, Berkeley school of music, learn quest music festival (Boston).



Awards: Anuradha Pal was awarded the 'Sanskrit Award' by the Government of Maharashtra in March 2006. She was awarded Pandit Jasraj Award 'Excellence in Music-Best Musicians of the Year' in 1999. She was awarded 'Tal Ratan' by Bhatkhande Lalit Shiksha Samiti in Raipur (1997 by the Maharashtra government).

SUNAINYA GHOSH

Sunainya Ghosh had come under the shelter of music since childhood. She had come to know a deep understanding of the world at an early age. She was recognized as a prodigy in the Tabla by the age of 6, while this instrument (Tabla) usually represents a male bastion. All these thoughts have been the source of her uniqueness; since then, her fingers have been fluttering on the Tabla.

Musical education: Sunainya was trained in Tabla under the supervision of the capable and virtuous Samar Mishra. As her career progressed, she received his discipleship under the tutelage of Guna Shankar Ghosh of the famous Farukhabad Gharana and Pt. Shankar Ghosh. She is also the father-in-law of Indian Tabla and Bikram Ghosh. Sunainya took her music inspiration from her mother, Rita Ghosh, who was an artist in Kolkata.

Academy education: She secured the first position in Publications Department from Bachelor of Arts (Honors) Ravindra Bharati University. She completed his education in 2001 (First position) from Rabindra Bharati University with the highest marks and then got second education in M.A. Tabla.

Evaluation of Sunainya Ghosh's achievements: Sunainya Ghosh has also made her mark in Indore Kathak and singing style. But she has a lot of passion for Tabla, and she has also won many accolades in Tabla playing.

RIMPA SHIVA

Like many famous artists of the country, Shampa Devi had the privilege of learning traditional music education from her own family. Rimpa Shiva is also known as the 'Princess of tabla' in the music world.

Family background: She was born on 14 January 1986 in a musical family. At the age of 3, she started showing her interest in playing the Tabla. From her childhood, she started the education of Tabla playing from her father and guru Pran Swapna Shiva, a disciple of the late Ustad Faramatullah Khan of Farukhabad Gharana.

Musical education: The journey of Rimpa Shiva's musical life started with her own family. Rimpa's father did not take her desire to learn Tabla seriously at first, but



when Rimpa was only three years old, she used to be mesmerized by the sound of the drum, then. At the age of 9, her father recognized her this talent. Rimpa had a special quality of understanding the rhythm visible in any child at the age of 16-17 years. Rimpa was particularly influenced in her life by her father (guru) Praswpan Shiva. When her father used to teach her disciples to play the Tabla, Rimpa used to concentrate on her teachings. As Rimpa Shiva grew older, so did his interest in playing the Tabla. Rimpa was inclined towards rhythm since childhood.

As an artist: Rimpa Shiva performed her art in more than 500 music concerts. Very few musicians will be found who have performed their art in less time, of which Rimpa Shiva is one. Those who have seen Rimpa Shiva playing the Tabla directly could not remain without being impressed by his playing art. At the age of 14, he performed his art accompaniment in various music conferences with great masters like Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia and Pt. Ajay Chakraborty. At a young age, she took up soli Tabla playing as a challenge and represented women in the world.

As an art campaigner: Rimpa exhibited her art not only in India but also in foreign countries. She presented tabla playing in countries like America, Japan, England etc.

PRESENT STAUTS OF WOMEN PARTICIPATION

Even today the participation of women in the field of music is much less than that of men. In the field of tabla playing, the participation of women is negligible even today. There are many reasons for this. Even today in a country like India, male artists do not perform with female percussionists. Although the participation of women in singing and playing instruments is much neglected in the past and in the future there is more expectation of participation of women in the field of tabla playing.

CONCLUSION

The 21st-century woman leads the nation. It is rightly said by Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru that, 'You can tell the condition of a nation by looking at the status of its women'. Today in the era of globalization, there is no field where women have not excelled.

There is no role in the music field that a woman cannot fill. Women like Dr Yogmaya Shukla, Dr Aban Mistry, Anuradha Pal, Sunainya Ghol, and Rimpa Shiva has changed the myth that women cannot play percussion instruments like Tabla. These artists dedicate their whole life to music, on the strength of their great practice and talent, has made North Indian music respected and popular worldwide. These women artists have played a very important role in making North Indian Tabla prosperous and popular in making it popular, facing all the problems in their personal life and obstacles in musical practice.



In today's era, many women make their debut in this field after getting attracted by the music, but after a while, being afraid of difficult sadhana or the problems that may come in the path of sadhana, turn away from music. There are many such problems of a woman which are just because she is a woman. However, increased awareness and education has inspired women to come out of the walls of the home. The modern woman has started caring for her social, emotional, cultural, religious, and economic needs. She has now become a tool for social change in India. It can be said that women have more freedom than earlier. However, not true in many respects because prejudice remains in society. Though the status of today's modern women in India is high, the overall picture of women's position in India is not satisfactory.

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