

## SIGNIFICANT RESEARCH DONE IN THE FIELD OF TABLA IN THE 20<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

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### Abstract

This article is based on a revolutionary lady who not only made her own identity but did so in a field where women had never stepped in. The tradition of Gharanas in the field of gayan, vadan and nritya came into existence in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and was invariably established in the 19<sup>th</sup> century leading to the emergence of various gharanedar artists and gurus. When we talk about research work in the field of Tabla, it started around the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and gained dominance in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There were quite a few writers, after independence, including Dr. Aban Mistry who contributed in the field of music through their books. Dr. Aban stood out from the rest because along with penning books she also did research work on various subjects of Tabla and Pakhawaj. Her detailed research work brought to light many unknown brilliant artists and gurus about whom the Tabla fraternity did not know. The research also enlightened everyone about unknown facts like apart from the 6 main Gharanas of Tabla there are many smaller Gharanas, or disciple who learnt from more than one guru, all these facts were brought to knowledge only by the research work done by Dr. Aban. Her research also led to the discovery of a 2200 year old motif in the Bhaja caves of a woman playing an instrument similar to Tabla. After studying it thoroughly, she concluded that Tabla is of Indian origin, dismissing all other and myths regarding its origin. This article is a small attempt to highlight her contributions in the field of research in brief.

**Keywords:** Gharana, Gharanedar, Tabla, Pakhawaj. Gayan, Vaadan, Nritya.

### INTRODUCTION

In order to think and understand about the different cultures and traditions, it is imperative to understand the work that has been carried out through different time periods. It is only after studying these cultural, social and religious traditions through different time periods that we can come close to a conclusion. Along with the dawn of human civilization, new research work was carried out depending on the requirements of that particular time period, and this cycle will continue in the same manner. Human beings are such creatures within whom new thought processes and practical application of things can be found going on in a continuous manner. Based on his needs and requirements, man has conducted new research work in various areas like technology, history, arts, science, math, languages, chemistry, architecture etc. and has made use of the research in his own lifestyle. The researcher belongs to the field of Music and has specialized in the percussion instrument -Tabla.

The tradition of Tabla has been going on for about more than 300-350 years, and there are many new dimensions attached to it. Research work on various topics of Tabla like development of percussion instruments, origin of Tabla, Gharana tradition of Tabla, Rasa Shastra in bandishes, Laya-Layakarish etc. started around the later part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and in the 20<sup>th</sup> century research work gained success and many questions were resolved. This attitude towards research became dominant after independence and many treatises were written on Tabla, wherein major misconceptions relating to the field of Tabla were resolved. Such research works are being carried out in the 21<sup>st</sup> century as well.

Along with the establishment of the Gharanas of gayan, vadan and nritya, in the latter half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, their traditions were also being carried forward in a theoretical way. Many prominent and gharanedaar artists came in existence in these traditions. Then in the 19<sup>th</sup> century the tradition of Gharanas was permanently established and there was a lot of talk about these Gharanas in different corners of the country during this century. To be a gharanedaar artist was considered to be a thing of great honor at that time, and many gandaband disciples turned out to be great artistes in this Gharana tradition. If we look at the field of Tabla, many prominent artists have emerged from different Gharanas in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For example Ut. Haji Vilayat Khan, Ut. Munir Khan, Ut. Mehabub Khan Mirajkar, Ut. Chudiyawale Imam Baksh Khan from Farukhabad Gharana; Khalifa Abid Hussain Khan, Ut. Aladiya Khan Amravatiwale, Ut. Jahangir Khan, Ut. Modu Khan and Ut. Bakshu Khan from Lucknow Gharana; Ut. Kallu Khan, Ut. Meeru Khan, Ut. Hassu Khan and Ut. Chand Khan from Ajrada Gharana; Pt. Sharda Sahay, Pt. Bacha Mishra, Pt. Biru Mishra, Pt. Bhairav Sahay, Pt. Baldev Sahay, Pt. Kanthe Maharajji from Banaras Gharana; Ut. Kadir Baksh, Ut. Firoz Khan, Ut. Allahraka from Punjab Gharana. All these great artists were born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and they took Tabla and Tabla playing to greater heights through their Gharanas. These great maestros have a great disciple lineage as well, who took training from these great gurus and pandits and established Tabla playing as a solo and independent art which led to Tabla having an independent identity of its own.

If we talk about the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after independence, there were many great writers in India who contributed in their own way in the field of music through their books, some of these writers include Prof. Girishchandra Shrivastav, Dr. Lala Mani Mishra, Dr. Yogmaya Shukla, Arun Kumar Sen, Dr. Aban Mistry etc. out of all these great scholars, Dr. Aban Mistry stands out because she not only wrote a book on Tabla but she also did research work on the origin of Tabla, moreover she also did an in depth study on the different Gharana traditions of Pakhawaj and Tabla, originator of all Gharanas and the disciple lineage of all Gharanas. Her research work is commendable and unforgettable and has proved to be very beneficial to the whole music fraternity.

The researcher is doing research on Dr. Aban Mistry, and it has come to his knowledge that Abanji has done great work and contributed immensely as an academician in the field of music through her research work. Her contribution in the field of music is exceptional and her work is respected and recognized by contemporary musicologists. Today, those researchers who are doing research on Tabla cannot complete their research without referring to the books written by Abanji. The researcher has humbly tried to present the research work carried out by Dr. Aban Mistry.

From a very young age Abanji set foot in the field of music. Along with being a great Tabla player she was also a researcher. Her research work based on Gharanas and traditions of Tabla and Pakhawaj was later on published in the form of a book. Apart from that a book

called 'Tabley kibandishey' has been published in Hindi and the books 'The Parsis and Indian Classical Music: An unsung contribution', 'Pakhawaj and Tabla: History, Schools and Tradition' have been published in English. Abanji's book on 'Pakhawaj Aur Tabla Ke Gharane evum Paramparaye' in Hindi has two editions. In order to promote and propagate Tabla in foreign countries the above mentioned book was published in English as well. This fact is the identity of her research work.

Dr. Aban Mistry, after an in depth study, has researched on the origin, development and important types of Gharanas of music. After that, on the basis of different facts, she researched on the origin, development and types of Mrudang. Her major research work was based on the topic of the Gharanas of Pakhawaj and Tabla. She travelled all over India and met with different artists of all Gharanas and collected detailed information about the gurus and disciple lineage of all the Gharanas. At the time she started her work, only a few artists of various Gharanas were prominent and well known to the Tabla fraternity. There were many anonymous artists who were great Tabla players, accomplished gurus and brilliant artists but very few people knew about them. Abanji searched for these unknown artists, found out about their gurus, disciples, their work and then prepared a chart of the tradition of their Gharanas, listing all their names in the chart. This work sounds easy on paper but in reality it is a very difficult task which Abanji managed to do and brought all the artists belonging to the same Gharana tradition in one place through her book. It took her more than eight years to accomplish this task.<sup>(1)</sup>

On interviewing different scholars regarding the thesis on Dr. Aban Mistry, it brought to the knowledge of the researcher that the Tabla scholars of present are of the opinion that Abanji has not left out any guru in her work; she has tried her best to research and cover the names of all the gurus and disciples in her book. There are many things that the Tabla fraternity was not aware of prior to the research work of Abanji, for example, many prominent artists took the training of Tabla from more than one guru, and this fact became known to the Tabla world through Abanji's work. Before her research work, the Tabla fraternity had a very brief knowledge, of only six Gharanas of Tabla but over and above these six main Gharanas, there are other tradition of Tabla like Vishnupur, Shri Becharam Chatopadhyay, Shri Ram Prasann Bandopadhyay of Bengal; Ata Hussain Khan, Chuttan Khan, Miyan Khan, Suppan Khan, Sadhu Charan Agartala of Dhaka; Babu Khan of Kolkata. Abanji has precisely presented the tradition of all this gharanas in the form of charts.<sup>(2)</sup>

Abanji has also written in detail about the Darbari Tabla tradition which includes Rampur, Madhya Pradesh, Raigarh, Indore, Gwalior, Dandiya, Reeva, Chari from Mauhar state, Mulmula, Kinkarda, Hyderabad; traditions of Rajasthan include Jaipur, Nathdwara, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Bikaner; traditions of Gujarat and Saurashtra include Vadodara Kalawant Karkhana, Bhavnagar, Jamnagar; Bihar traditions include Darbhanga, Aara, Panchgachhiya, Muzzafarpur; tradition of Maharashtra include Shivaji Peshwai, Satara, Kolhapur,

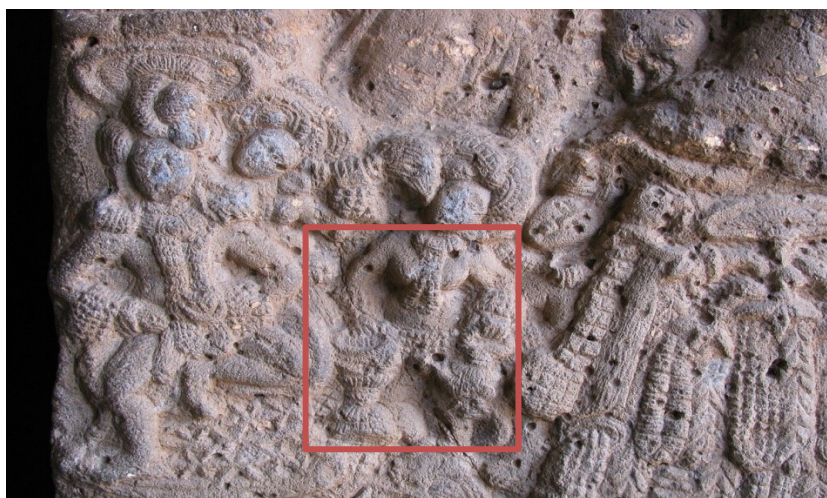
Echalkaranji etc. Abanji has done research work on all the above Darbar traditions and provided information about the Darbari artists.<sup>(3)</sup>

In addition to the above mentioned Tabla traditions, Abanji has researched on the Tabla traditions of Goa, Muradabad, Badaeya of Bihar, and Orissa. She has also researched on the Tabla tradition of Pakhawaj Gharana which include Nana Panse, Mangal Vedhedekar and the Avadhi Tabla tradition of Kudausingh.<sup>(4)</sup> Before her research the Tabla fraternity had no knowledge of the above information. This is one of the best research work that has been provided to the Tabla fraternity, which had benefitted students, teachers and researchers. Today, if anyone wants to know about the origin or root of any artist, it is impossible to do so without referring to Abanji's research work. And that is why, today it becomes imperative to provide her books in all the colleges, universities and institutes of Tabla.

Similar to the research work on Gharanas, artists and traditions of Tabla, Abanji also did a detailed research work on Pakhawaj which includes Gharanas of Jawali, Mathura, Punjab, Kudausingh, Nana Panse, Nathdwara, Bengal, Maharashtra, Raigarh, Gujarat and Rajasthan, and brought unknown aspects of the above mentioned Gharanas to light.<sup>(5)</sup>

For 300 years, there have been many myths regarding the origin of Tabla, but Dr. Aban Mistry, after doing a very precise research work, dismissed all the theories and concluded that Tabla is in fact, of Indian origin. She discovered a 2200 year old motif on the stone wall of Bhaja caves situated on the Mumbai-Pune highway which shows Lord Indra sitting on an elephant, some dancers in a dancing pose and a woman playing an instrument similar to Tabla. After discovering this motif, she did a deep study on it and established that an instrument like Tabla existed about 2200 years ago and she believes it to be the antecedent of Tabla.<sup>(6)</sup>

Below is the picture showing the motif from the Bhaja Caves, Maharashtra.



Thinking in terms of today's perspective, the researcher would like to say that, Dr. Aban Mistry's hard work gifted the music world with something that can only be achieved once in centuries. Abanji spent her entire life working towards the progress of Tabla and through her research work she contributed majorly in the field of Tabla. It seems impossible to pen her contributions in a few pages. The researcher has humbly tried to give a brief overview of her work in this research article.

### **STATEMENTS OF EMINENT ARTISTES, MUSICOLOGISTS AND ACADEMICIANS ON RESEARCH OF DR. ABAN MISTRY.**

#### **Pt. Sudhir Mainkar<sup>(7)</sup>**

(Well known Guru and thinker of Delhi and Ajarada Gharana, Disciple of Ustad Inamali Khan and Prof. Sudhirkumar Saxena)

Being a Lady whatever knowledge/information Abanji has collected while doing her research, she had documented it so well that, according to me no one in the whole Maharashtra is there who has done this kind of work. She has travelled a lot across the country to collect the information and bandishes for her book as well as thesis.

#### **Pt. Yogesh Samsi<sup>(8)</sup>**

(Eminent Artist and Guru of Punjab Gharana and Disciple of Ustad Allahrakha Khan)

The book "Pakhawaj aur Tabla ke Gharane evum Paramparaye" which she had published as an author is not an ordinary book but it is one of the "Treatises" of music. Abanji has done such a stupendous work for which she has personally travelled from Lahore (Pakistan) to today's Indian Punjab and met with all the artists and ustadhs face to face for collecting the data of all the six gharanas. Today whatever information we are getting regarding the lineage of Gharanas of Tabla is only possible because of Abanji! And I strongly believe that the invaluable documentation done by Abanji will be helpful to the whole student and artist fraternity in future.

#### **Pt. Girishchandra Shrivastav<sup>(9)</sup>**

(Well Renowned Author and Eminent Tabla Player)

Her book carries authentic information because she never believed in any type of correspondence to collect the information for her research and therefore, she herself traveled to different places to collect firsthand information directly from the various artists across the country. She used to meet the artists and discuss about the tradition of each gharana and their characteristics in detail. She had traveled to innumerable places for her research to find out the facts, which according to me was not even possible for males during those days to do such work with such enthusiasm and hard work.



According to me it is not a book, it is “Gita of Tabla”. If someone has any doubt related to the tradition of any gharana of Tabla and Pakhawaj, then just open this book and you will get satisfactory and reliable information regarding the same. It is a unique and incredible work done by Dr. Aban Mistry in her life, no other book carries such authentic information and thus it is incomparable.

**Prof. Mukund Bhale<sup>(10)</sup>**

(Former Head, Dept. of Percussion Instrument, Indira Kala Sangit Vishwavidyalaya, Khairagadh)

Her book on “Pakhawajaur Tabla Ke Gharane Evum Parampara” is awe-inspiring, it has created a strong foundation of each gharanas of Tabla as well as Pakhawaj. Today, everyone quotes and takes references from her book especially when it comes to Gharana. She has visited various parts of the country along with her guru Pt. Keki Jijina to collect the authentic information regarding her research. To maintain the authenticity of her work she has collected the information by personally meeting each and every Artists, Gurus as well as disciples of all the gharanas, I think that during those days she would have faced many difficulties as being a lady, it would not have been easy for her to get the great Ustads and Pandits to agree to meet and talk on various technical aspects of tabla and pakhawaj as well as the tradition of their gharana. Her observance, mildness and education had really helped her to deal with all different situation and even people were impressed when they saw a lady having so much knowledge regarding this percussion instrument. I think that because of her unequalled personality hardly anyone would have refused to cooperate with her.

**Prof. Mukesh Garg<sup>(11)</sup>**

(Editor, Sangeet Monthly Magazine, Hathras and Founder of Sangeet Sankalp)

She had sent some copies of her book “Pakhawaj aur Tabla Ke Gharane evum Parampara” and asked me to distribute amongst the people who understand music and are interested and curious to know what new researches have been done in this field. This proves that she didn’t want to make money by selling copies of her book but her only motive was to spread knowledge to the society which she had documented in her book. She had faced so many difficulties and challenges while doing her research. The biggest challenge she faced was she belonged to Parsi Community and being a Parsi, to choose this field as a career was a difficult task but she accepted that challenge and proved herself. She has also written a book on “Contribution of Parsi Community in Music” in which she has done research on what is the scenario of music amongst the Parsis? Thus, she has not only focused on tabla but also on her community and she simultaneously worked on the tradition on Tabla and Pakhawaj as well as Musical situation of her community. Her Book on traditions of Tabla and Pakhawaj shows a clear picture of the traditions of each gharana of Tabla and Pakhawaj and its Disciple Lineage. According to me this type of detailed information especially regarding the different traditions is only available in her book and I think that it is a very important book from historical point of view.

## CONCLUSION

The work done by Dr. Aban Mistry in the field of research during the period when there was lack of facilities in terms of transportation, technology etc. Being a lady she did exceptional work especially in the field of Tabla when women were not socially accepted as musician in the male-dominated arena. This phenomenal efforts by her will be beneficial for the future generation to understand the origin of this ancient percussion instrument, its different gharanas and its development through years.

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