

CHAPTER 1

A FEW WORDS BEFORE THE DEEP DIVE

An auditorium full of audience - sitting tight and spellbound - realize after sometime that they never knew when the concert was over and the musicians had left the stage who was the maestro? Can't say, may be Ustd. Abdul Karim Khan, may be Pt Nikhil Banerjee may be somebody else, some great musician in one of his best of moods---

That day I saw a man in a crowded Calcutta bus - doing funny hand gestures - gestures resembling the gestures of a vocalist on stage --- was he mad? May be no. May be he was in bliss. May be he attended last night's fantastic concert of Kishori Amonkar or Bhimsen Joshi or may be somebody else's whose rendering became music and self combined--- This is the great spell bringing in total happiness and bliss to the listeners. When you share this height of music you just forget time concept; you and music become one, you clearly feel the ONENESS--- may be you nearly feel the CREATOR. When the music hits your system then you go on listening to the music long after it had stopped; the music haunts, you dream music when you sleep, you bathe in music when you are awake.

The great joy of swaying and floating in Indian Music is a marvelous experience. Millions all over the world are moved with the unfathomable depth and vista of this art. *Sitar* is the instrument which worked as a very successful catalyst in portraying and presenting this great music. It is now the most popular Indian musical instrument both inside the country and throughout the globe. For the last fifty years or so the instrument has passed through quite a few remarkable improvements in terms of structure and playing styles to prove itself the best vehicle for the expressions of our age old musical treasure. It is a welcome co-incidence that a number of our greatest musical brains chose 'sitar' as their medium for musical expressions. As a result, the *sitar* as an instrument got enriched and, many latent qualities of our music received louder expressions.

Now I shall try to plunge into the subject in an attempt to find out the process through which *sitar* has reached its present height. I shall also try to suggest some age old prescriptions those are not in vogue today. If these are revived and added appropriately can serve well towards adding more dimensions and color to our present performance styles.

Those who have listened to our present maestro at their best may wonder what more can be done on the sitar! I remember a *sitar* concert of Ustd.. Vilayet Khan Sahab in late sixties. *Ustadji* chose the raga '*Puriya*'. The whole evening was for him. I remember him playing two and a three quarter hours of *alap* followed by a middle tempo *gat* in 16 beat *Tintala* for barely 15 minutes. All the frequent concert-goers and music lovers know that, generally speaking, this time-split was not a balanced one. But in this case, on the contrary, the audience was totally enthralled with the music. The very special Indian style of listening is, as you all know, listening and at the same time appreciating at right places with '*aha*', '*kaya-bat*' etc. I vividly remember, the number of appreciation crossed two digits. Amongst these, quite a few were mass appreciation, I mean, a roll of vocal appreciation originating at the same time from the major part of the audience. The music was so much enchanting the delineation received

appreciation in almost all the phrases. There are many anecdotes like this on music and musicians, but I fear I shall quit from anecdotes, at least for the present.

HARD TRUTH AND THE JOURNEY

Even a couple of decades back -- the knowledge of practical aspects of music making and instrument handling were kept as closely guarded secret amongst the family members of the then musicians. Now the knot is somewhat loosened, still there seems to be enough scope for thoughts. In the next few pages I shall try to give the feeling of vastness of the subject for all possible major points. Secondly, I shall try to direct the serious readers towards the magic wand - the tips, the knowledge, that will help in actually sailing on the ocean of music - towards a feeling of oneness with the creator; when music and musician become one. The journey will be -- for some points gross to subtle, and for some points -- micro to macro.

It is any student's wish to become able to create effective music -- music of some really good heights. The on going pages may be of immense help to these seekers. It will be interesting to find out the process through which the *sitar* sings to its full color.