

MUSICAL DISTINCTIVENESS OF SAROD MAESTRO - PANDIT BRIJ NARAYAN

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ABSTRACT

Pt. Brij Narayan's, a great Sarod player was the disciple of Legendry Sarangi Maestro – Pt. Ram Narayan. Pandit Brij Narayan's stylistic peculiarities involves various aspects starting right from his tutelage from his father having tremendous influence of Sarangi in his playing style of Sarod, method of holding plectrum and Instrument, technique of shifting of strings, resonating tone of Sarod, pure systematic elaboration of Raga, influence of Ustad Ali Akbar Khan on his music, exploring the third octave and most importantly amalgamation of properties of Sarangi and Sarod are some of the aspects which makes him the Maestro with inimitable style.

INTRODUCTION

Pt. Brij Narayan's name is synonymous with the Sarod, which fascinated him since a very tender age. His Guru is his illustrious father- Legendry Sarangi Maestro – Pt. Ram Narayan.

Pt. Brij Narayan started his Sarod concerts at very young age. Over the decades he has been performing at various National and International Music festivals. Apart from being a concert artist Pt. Brij Narayan has also been engaged in teaching and propagating Indian Classical Music through participating in teaching programmes run by various Universities and colleges in India, the U.S and Europe.

“Noteworthy are his teaching programs for the Jeunesses Musicales de France (JMF) to conduct lectures and performances in the school system in France. Some other prominent universities where he has taught and lectured at are the Pittsburgh Univ., Cornell Univ., Pennsylvania Univ., Univ. of Oklahoma, Chicago etc. Pt. Brij Narayan has recorded several CDs and LPs all of which have been very well appreciated by musicians and connoisseurs alike.”¹

Two other great personalities who have significantly influenced Pt. Brij Narayan's music are Sarod Legend -Ustad Ali Akbar Khan and his illustrious Uncle Pt. Chatur Lal who taught him the science of rhythm. However, his true Guru is obviously, his father, Pt. Ram Narayan, from whom he has inherited his fiercely independent outlook,

and groomed his music into intricacies of musicianship.¹

METHODOLOGY

Following inputs were utilized for exploring stylistic peculiarities of Pt. Brij Narayan.

- Audio Records
- Personal Communication/Interview
- Biodata
- Website of Pandit Brij Narayan
- Media reviews

Exploring his various records and Cd's such as Pyramid- Raga Marva and Des, Nimbus records- Raga Lalit and Bairagi Bhairav, Scintillating Sarod- Raga Jog and Multani, Decca-Moods of the day- Raga Ahirbhairav and Madhuvanti, Zigzag-Raga Shankara and Raga Bhatiyar, Rich Heritage Legendary legacy –Marva and Piloo₂, the first experience is this Sarod playing style is different with deep resonating sound of sarod with a blend of Sarangi flavour.

Amrita Bazar Patrika (Kolkata) in the review stated –“Pt. Brij Narayan has a unique technique of blending the Sarod and Sarangi styles in Scintillating compositions.”⁸ The influence of Sarangi is seen in two aspects of his Sarod playing.

1 TECHNIQUE

2 MUSICAL ASPECTS

“Deep admiration for his father's music was one of the prime reasons why he was able to adapt with

great skill Pt. Ram Narayan's own special technique of holding a bow to a plectrum instrument"¹. On observation it is noticed that his technique of holding plectrum is little different with thumb and index finger holding plectrum are at an angle of 90°. His Sarod is also slanted upwards which gives a player more visibility at the Nickel Chrome plate (Fingerboard).

Sarangi is an Instrument closest to vocal music in which continuity of swaras is successfully adapted by the Sarangi players. It requires special skill to adapt this technique into a plectrum instrument. The adaptation of playing style of Sarangi with respect to Shifting of strings without breaking the tonality and continuity of the phrase is one of the peculiarity of Pt. Brij Narayan's playing technique of Sarod. An outstanding outcome of this experience enabled Brij Narayan to incorporate a bow-like quality to his plectrum. The influence of his father's Sarangi style is evident in his playing. Regarding musical aspect in adaptation of Sarangi –the influence of Sarangi can be seen in his tonality, phrases and Todas in fast tempo with the adaptation of technique of Sarangi in shifting the fingers from one string to another gives him a crescendo of continuous tonality which leans towards gayaki similar to Sarangi with a blend of tantrakari with right hand bols by the plectrum. This peculiarity upholds to a great extent and is a distinguishing factor in Pt. Brij Narayan's Sarod Playing and Music. In an interview to the Hindu taken by Mrs. Manjiri Sinha Pt. Brij Narayan said "I employed the Sarangi technique taught by my Father, for playing Sarod to enhance the depth of music and flow."⁵

Pt. Brij Narayan's approach in Music can be explained in an interview given to leading newspaper – "For me music is everything and not marketing. The Purist can really understand my music. To me Sarod is God and riyaz is my worship." The Sunday Times of Srilanka in a concert review wrote – "He ran the gamut of emotions from brooding introversion through violent outbursts of pain to extended passages of

spiritual ecstasy. He passed through the many mood of a man reaching out to perfection to bliss, to God."⁸ Review in Times of Chandigarh writes – "One of the finest exponents of the Sarod Pt. Brij Narayan takes us on a journey that truly experiences inner soul."⁸ In an interview – Pandit Brij Narayan the maestro, who took up music following in the footsteps of his father and grandfather, shares notes from his journey, which he calls bhakti.⁷

On exploring various audio records² it is observed that the deep resonating tone of Pt. Brij Narayan's Sarod enhances the beauty of the Raga with systematic elaboration of Raga in Alap, Jod and Jhala. Sarangi like fast phrases and bols of Sarod blends superbly and thus makes him different. Vilambit and Drut compositions and their Vistar are marked with complexities of laykaries with strong influence of Ustad Ali Akbar Khan. A pure systematic vistar of Raga in Alap and Jod are the most important characteristics of his Sarod evolved through tutelage of his father, practice and his contemplations on music.

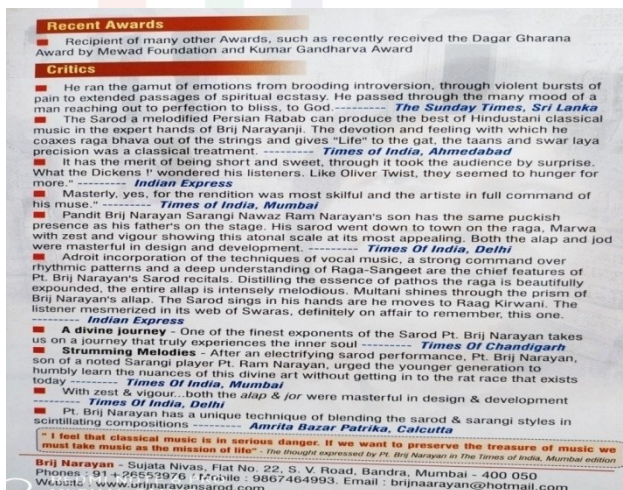
"Another feature of his father's training is the method of 'Raag vistar' or development of a raag. Pt. Ram Narayan's extensive experience with accompanying some of the greatest vocalists of the time provided him with a deep insight into the theory of traditional performance methods."¹ "Pandit Ram Narayan employed the finer nuances of these music schools and has successfully developed a system of performance that is unique. Brij Narayan has fully embraced the traditional system and is able to express his music with the confidence and mastery that comes from sound training."¹

The other peculiarity which is revealed through various audio records² and observation is his masterly work in all the three octaves. Playing Sarod in the third octave is relatively difficult as compared to the first two octaves. The third octave (Tar Saptak) is explored magnificently by Pandit Brij Narayan in both slow and fast phrases with sarangi like movements of the swaras in both

ascending and descending with relative ease and precision is something phenomenal.

On exploring audio records, it is also observed that the influence of Sarangi is seen in his masterly execution of Sapat, Gamak and Ladidaar patterns of fast phrases along with the bol patterns of plectrum to execute Todas to create a magnificent amalgamation of properties of Sarangi and Sarod, is one of the prominent peculiarity of Pt. Brij Narayan's style.

"Brij Narayan also acknowledges the tremendous influence of Ustad Ali Akbar Khan, Pandit Chaturlal, his uncle who gave initial introduction to the science of rhythm, remains one of the strongest elements of his style of playing. He has inherited his father's fiercely independent outlook and has succeeded in carving a unique niche for himself among instrumentalists in India. His playing is a remarkable fusion of a variety of components including a commanding tonality, constant imagination in the melodic structure and rhythmic improvisation."¹



Back page of Pt. Brij Narayan's Biodata (Hard Copy)

CONCLUSION

Thus Pandit Brij Narayan's stylistic peculiarities involves various aspects starting right from his tutelage from his father having tremendous influence of Sarangi in his playing style of Sarod, method of holding plectrum and Instrument, technique of shifting of strings, resonating tone of Sarod, pure systematic elaboration of Raga, influence of Ustad Ali Akbar Khan on his music,

exploring the third octave and most importantly amalgamation of properties of Sarangi and Sarod are some of the aspects which makes him the Maestro with inimitable style and can be summarized by the article which states-

"If Brij Narayan has carved the niche for himself, it is because of his sheer dedication, strict training and hard work, and a style with an identity of his own that he has evolved."⁶

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