

THE CONTRIBUTION OF WOMEN AS A STRING INSTRUMENTALIST IN THE PRESENT ERA

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Abstract

Today's, the role and contribution of women in the whole world is very important. Our society is seemed to me empty and meaningless without their contributions. Indian classical music's instrumental sphere has been lacking in woman torch bearers, however this generation is changing the fabric. We bring a numbers of stories for these seven women (Annapurna Devi, Anoushka Shankar's, Dr. Smt. Padhambhushana N Rajam (Violin), Nandini and Ragini Shankar (Violin), Anupama Bhagwat (Sitar), Mita Nag (Sitar), Jayanthi Kumaresh (Veena)) instrumentalists who are going to bring a sudden mind blowing change or the winds of change in this traditional space. It's 2022 and women are breaking ground old and new in India. When it comes to the music business, there couldn't have been a better time to join the dynamic industry, where women are increasingly leading the way, whether from the frontline or behind the scenes. There's a shift in how women are represented in the music industry as they continue to champion many wins to be celebrated. While the list of women artists in Bollywood that they might discover on streaming platforms is expanding steadily, there's a growing breed of leaders in the fields of business, production, management and legal that are making their presence felt. Last year saw Indian-American rapper Raja Kumari judged India's first hip-hop reality show and playback artist Neha Kakkar is officially TikTok India's most popular creator. But recent statistics from across the ocean — in absence of our own — call for action on the way ahead. A report by the USC Annenberg Inclusion Initiative (based on 800 popular songs from 2013 and 2022) revealed that only two percent of charting songs were produced by women while 12 percent of songwriters on the charts were women. It also found that 25 percent of women often find that they're the only woman in the recording studio. In, the present paper, researcher is going to focus on the life, work and contribution such eminent and scholastics classical string instrumentalist women in the stream of Indian classical string instrumental music in the present era.

Keywords: Women, Classical String Instrumental Music (CSIM), Violin, Sitar, Veena.

Introduction

There are countless greats in Hindustani classical tradition; when you think of the top instrumentalists, whose names come to mind? Ustad Vilayat Khan, Pandit Ravi Shankar, Ustad Shahid Parvez; as you may or may not have realized, there is a noticeable lack in female names. The entire instrumental sphere of music, particularly percussion, has typically remained untouched by female artists. This is due to many reasons including misinformation, religious beliefs, conservative mindsets, and the general patriarchal path that the instrumental tradition holds. However, this generation is changing the fabric, though it may still take some time for these artists to come to the forefront of the music scene and become household names. Here are a few of the upcoming generation's talented and knowledgeable female instrumentalists that you should know. In this paper, researcher is going to focus on the following lists of String instrumentalist's women like

1. Annapurna Devi
2. Anoushka Shankar
3. Dr. Smt. Padambhushana N. Rajam (Violin)
4. Nandini and Ragini Shankar (Violin)
5. Anupama Bhagwat (Sitar)
6. Mita Nag (Sitar)
7. Jayanthi Kumaresh (Veena)

1. Annapurna Devi



Annapurna Devi was an Indian surbahar (bass sitar) player of Hindustani classical music. She was given the name 'Annapurna' by former Maharaja Brijnath Singh of the former Maihar Estate (M.P.), and it was by this name that she was popularly known. She was the daughter and disciple of Allauddin Khan, the founder of Maihar gharana, and Madina Bibi and the first wife of the sitar player Ravi Shankar. After her separation from Ravi Shankar, she moved to Bombay and never performed again in public. She remained a private person, yet continued to teach music for free. Her students include many notable disciples including Hariprasad Chaurasia, Nityanand Haldipur and Nikhil Banerjee.¹ Annapurna Devi became a very accomplished surbahar (bass sitar) player of the Maihar gharana (school)

within a few years of starting to take music lessons from her father Alauddin Khan. She started guiding many of her father's disciples, including Nikhil Banerjee and Bahadur Khan, in classical music as well as in the techniques and intricacies of instrumental performances. In 1941, age 14, she married one of her father's talented students, Ravi Shankar. She converted to Hinduism upon marriage.² In the 1950s, Ravi Shankar and Annapurna Devi performed duets in Delhi and Calcutta, principally at the college of her brother, Ali Akbar Khan. But later, Shankar she decided not to reduce and finally stop performing in public. Her student Vinay Ram says that she was uncomfortable accepting payment for concerts, as it was her belief that it was akin to selling Saraswati (the Goddess of learning).³ Devi and Shankar's son, Shubhendra Shankar, (or "Subho", as he was popularly known) received rigorous training in sitar under her tutelage, until his father chose to interrupt his musical talim or training and took him to the United States. Shubhendra died at an early age, after a marriage and the birth of three children. Shubhendra did not have a solo career in classical music, but did for a period accompany his illustrious father Ravi Shankar in concerts in the USA and abroad. As per one of her students Vinay Ram, a conflict regarding the upbringing and musical teaching of Subho was the main reason for Devi and Shankar's separation, though they continued to remain in touch on amicable terms till the end.⁴ Annapurna Devi was an acclaimed instructor and one of the first women gurus of note in modern times. Her pupils were not restricted solely to sitar or surbahar players and encompassed various fields in Hindustani classical music. They included the sitarists Debi Prasad Chatterji, Bahadur Khan (a cousin), Hiren Roy, Indranil Bhattacharya, Kartik Kumar and Nikhil Banerji, the sarodists, Dhyanesha Khan and Ashis Khan (sons of Ali Akbar), Basant Kabra, Pradeep Barot and Suresh Vyas, the bansuri players, Hariprasad Chaurasia and Nityanand Haldipur, the dilruba artist Dakshina Mohan Tagore and the violinist Satyadev Pawar.⁵ She was also the key figure of Acharya Alauddin Music Circle (an association in the memory of the late Alauddin Khan for promoting Indian classical music), in Mumbai.

2. Anoushka Shankar



Anoushka Shankar a British-Indian-American sitar player, producer, film composer and activist. She was the youngest and first woman to receive a British House of Commons Shield she has had 7 Grammy Awards nominations and was the first Indian musician to perform live and to serve as presenter at the ceremony. She performs across multiple genres and styles - classical and contemporary, acoustic and electronic.⁶ Anoushka has always continued to tour and perform as a classical sitarist, both within purely Indian classical ensemble but also as a soloist championing her father's compositions with the world's leading orchestras including the London Symphony Orchestra, New York Philharmonic, Berliner Philharmoniker, MDR Sinfonieorchester, Metropole Orkest and Lucerne Symphony.⁷ Shankar is the sole performer of Ravi Shankar's 1st and 2nd Concertos for Sitar and Orchestra, performing multiple times under the leadership of esteemed conductors such as legendary Zubin Mehta, Jules Buckley, Kristjan Järvi and Jakob Hrusa. In January 2009 she was the sitar soloist alongside the Orpheus Chamber Orchestra premiering her father's 3rd Concert for Sitar and Orchestra and in July 2010 she premiered Ravi Shankar's first symphony for sitar and orchestra with the London Philharmonic Orchestra at London's Royal Festival Hall.⁸ She has also performed in duets with artists such as violinist Joshua Bell, in a sitar-cello duet with Mstislav Rostropovich and with flautist Jean-Pierre Rampal, playing both sitar and piano. Shankar has also ventured into acting (*Dance like a Man*, 2004) and writing. She wrote a biography of her father, *Bapi: The Love of My Life*, in 2002 and has contributed to various books. As a columnist she wrote monthly columns for India's First City Magazine for three years and spent one year as a weekly columnist for India's second largest newspaper, the Hindustan Times. She narrated *Stolen Innocence: India's Untold Story of Human Trafficking*, a 2017 documentary by filmmakers Chris Davis, Casey Allred and Lindsay Daniels, telling the true stories of young women who escaped from sex slavery in India and Nepal.⁹

3. Dr. Smt. Padhambhushana N Rajam (Violin)



N. Rajam (born 1938) is an Indian violinist who performs Hindustani classical music. She remained professor of Music at Banaras Hindu University, eventually became head of the department and the dean of the Faculty of Performing Arts of the University. She was awarded the 2012 Sangeet Natak Akademi Fellowship, the highest honour in the performing arts conferred by the Sangeet Natak Akademi, India's National Academy for Music, Dance and Drama. N. Rajam was born in Chennai in 1938 in a musical family. Her father, Vidwan A. Narayana Iyer was a well-known exponent of Carnatic music.¹⁰ Starting her musical career as a child prodigy; Dr. Smt. Rajam has attained a status of a legend in the field of music during her 50 years' reign as a brilliant solo violinist. Ever since she ascended the stage as Hindustani violinist at the age of 15, a revolution took place in the North Indian music arena, particularly in the field of violin. She achieved at that young age what was thought to be almost impossible, even by the eminent musicians and musicologists, viz., tempering the western instrument for Hindustani vocal style of music. She introduced 'Gayaki Ang', to be specific, 'Khayal Gayaki Ang' on the violin with such consummate artistry that most musicians, particularly violinists were stunned at the results. Her contributions, to violin technique are considered to be on par with what Late Shri Pannalal Ghosh had done to flute, late Shri Bundu Khan had done to Sarangi, Ustad Bismillah Khan to Sahnai. It was on account of this excellent technique and rendition that the doyen of vocal music, Late Pt. Omkarnath Thakur and made him accept her as his disciple. Teenaged Rajam's violin renditions were so captivating that many violinists dropped their 'gat kari' style and changed over to the Gayaki Ang. This style is one that was so perfected by a lifetime of discipline, hard work and arduous research that, today, 'Gayaki Ang' and Violinist Rajam as synonyms in the world of music. She has earned herself the distinction of being the pioneer in this respect.

The secret of Dr. Rajam's genius lies in the fact that a strong foundation was well-laid by her father Vidwan Late Sri A. Narayana Iyer, an excellent teacher of music and man of great foresight. He invented a special violin technique for Gayaki Ang based on veena and vocal technique. Her tutelage under the doyen amongst musicians, Pandit Omkarnath Thakur, was a great boon to her. His powerful and emotion packed style, gave a further fillip to research into an hitherto unexplored area of violin playing and emerge out with a masterly and brilliant technique best suited to the delineation of different forms of Hindustani music. Be it the majestic aalap of Dhrupad, the lyrical Khayal, the romantic Thumri, lilting and soulful Bhajan, vivacious Natyasangeet, tricky Tappa, nothing poses a challenge to her masterly and magical bowing and fingering technique. Solemnity is the keynote of Dr. Rajam's concerts. Hon'ble Justice Shri. B.N. Srikrishna put it aptly in the

following words; “Rajam is the link between divine music and reality in life. Some big power is motivating her and she and her music, in turn, motivate us. Listening to Rajam’s violin, one feels like having taken a step forward in the region of Brahmananda”. Her total involvement with the music and relentless pursuit of perfection, impeccable adherence to classical purity and precision of notes make her concerts stand out as unique in the festivals she participates. Her tuneful renditions as well as her charming manners and harmonious involvement with the accompanists have captivated and endeared her music lovers from all over the world. The violin jugalbandi is with eminent musicians including Ustad Bismillah Khan, Pt. Ramnarain, Pt. Hariprasad Chaurasia, Prof. T.N.Krishnan, Dr. N. Ramani and others were all noted for their serenity and sublimity. Despite being considered a musician’s musician she wears her deep knowledge with all humility and a passerby would not even suspect that is a repository of 4 rich traditions, viz., her own technique of violin, the erudite and emotional gayaki of Pt. Omkarnathji, the Thumri tradition of Banaras from Late Pt. Mahadev Mishra, and the Carnatic tradition from the purist Late Musiri Subramaniam Iyer.

Dr. Rajam is not only an exponent ‘par excellence’ of violin playing, but is also a brilliant academician. M.A. is Sanskrit; Ph.D. in Music and recipient of innumerable awards, gold medals for university first positions, Dr. Rajam is a noted scholar and had been serving the cause of music education at the Banaras Hindu University for four decades. The University has conferred on her the title “Emeritus Professor” in recognition of her outstanding talents and service to music. She is also the recipient of the Malaviya Award from BHU. Dr. Rajam has played an active role in promoting and popularizing classical music in Varanasi through Pandit Omkarnath Music Foundation, of which she is the founder Chairman. She has served the UCG and the Government of India in various capacities including that of the Chairperson of the U.P. Sangit Natak Academy. Dr. Rajam is a recipient of the coveted Padmabhushan, Sangit Natak Academy Awards from Central and State Governments. Today, Dr. Rajam’s technique draws no parallel in the world. Considering the position and the popularity of violin as an instrument in the world of music and the normal technique that is used, her technique is extraordinary which envy is for one and all. Many professional violinists from foreign countries regularly seek her guidance to improve their capabilities. Her achievements that are a dream-come-true for women’s lib enthusiasts have enabled her to hold on to her top position through out her career in the male dominated educational and musical field. Despite her busy career involving extensive travelling to distant countries viz., USA, Canada, Czechoslovakia, Russia, France, Italy, Germany, Holland, Switzerland, New Zealand, Australia, and so on, she took sufficient care to groom her daughter

Sangeeta (now Smt. Sangeeta Shankar). Sangeeta, like her mother is not only one of the finest violinists but is also a gold medallist in her educational career, and has acquired Ph.D. in Music.

Along with all her achievements, Dr. N. Rajam has also successfully passed on the musical legacy and tradition to her daughter, the well established violinist Dr. Sangeeta Shankar and also to her grand-daughters, Ragini and Nandini who are pursuing music along with their studies. Her brother, T. N. Krishnan, was a prominent violinist of the Carnatic style. Rajam started her initial training in Carnatic music under her father. She also trained under Musiri Subramania Iyer and learned raga development from vocalist Omkarnath Thakur. Rajam received the prestigious titles of Padma Shri and Padma Bhushan from the Government of India. Under the guidance of her father, A. Narayana Iyer, Rajam developed the Gayaki Ang (vocal style). Rajam has performed across the globe and in numerous places throughout India. Rajam was a professor of Music at Banaras Hindu University (BHU) in the Faculty of Performing Arts for nearly 40 years. She has been the chair of the department and the dean of the college at BHU.

4. Anupama Bhagwat (Sitar)



Her family came from South India up to North India, bringing various music influences into her playing. She often states that her musicality is also owing to her family's musical traditions – her father's violin playing or her grandmother's veena skills, and the fact that music was always playing in her house, leading to an atmosphere of music. Reminiscing of a time speaking to her guru, Pandit Bimalendra Mukherjee, "at that point, I knew it was not something I was going and learning something and coming out of it- it was something really deep.

5. Jayanthi Kumaresh (Veena)



This musician comes from the lineage of several female musicians as it is; in fact, her mother, Smt. Lalgudi Rajalakshmi first began training her when she was just 3 years old. Her powerful strikes and musicality please listeners and musicians alike, and she has performed with a great many artists, even going so far as to form a group titled “The Indian National Orchestra” to experience music with different types of artists. Apart from being an accomplished musician, she often speaks about music and music history in her videos, spreading knowledge in many different ways. She carries on her tradition boldly and with the knowledge that she has opportunities that the women before her did not have the opportunities that she has now, citing a great deal of experiences of her aunt, Padmavathy Ananthagopalan, “at that time”, women in India were not even expected to perform publicly.

6. Mita Nag (Sitar)



Mita Nag also comes from an established musical family; her father and grandfather were both well-known masters of the sitar, exponents of the Vishnupur Gharana. Through her training, which began at the age of 4, she began to develop more of her gharana’s qualities, which features the calm and powerful notes of the dhrupad vocal style. Earning several fellowships and awards at an alarmingly young age, she not only played at many famous festivals, but also began studying the history of her gharana, which is almost 300 years old. Not afraid to share her

opinions, she remains critical of today's society that requires that artists play for popularity, instead of purity. "I believe that artists are capable of changing the society." Creativity and purity in aalaap are the trademarks of her style, as well as the dhrupad characteristics that are specific to the six generations of the Vishnupur Gharana that she descends from.

7. Nandini and Ragini Shankar (Violin)



These two young artists descend from a family of violinists, first receiving training from their grandmother, the renowned Dr N. Rajam. They both started performing around the age of 10 and have been on an upwards journey ever since, thanks to the training and guidance of their mother and grandmother. Nandini Shankar shares that "they have been encouraged since a young age to listen to have an open mind and explore all things that are beautiful in music." She is involved in many projects including Kaushiki Chakraborty led project, 'Sakhi,' an all-women ensemble of classical musicians. At such a young age, both Ragini and Nandini Shankar are extremely accomplished and are being called to several music festivals, including the Saptak Festival music, Dover Lane Festival, Sawai Gandharva Bhimsen Festival and many more. In fact, the entire family of musicians often performs together in a complete cross-generational show of the feminine firepower.

Conclusion

After studying and observing the detail description of the above eminent female string instrumentalists, researcher concluded that today's women contribution touching the height of glory in all streams like music, painting, writings of English, Punjabi and Hindi poetry, prose, novel also and even in streams of educations. In short, I concluded that today's music industries are providing food, shelters, and luxurious status to one of those women whose devotions and contribution is integral. Such women artists like Annapurna Devi, Anoushka Shanker's, Dr. Smt. Padhambhushana N Rajam (Violin), Nandini and Ragini Shankar (Violin), Anupama Bhagwat (Sitar), Mita Nag (Sitar), Jayanthi Kumaresh (Veena) and some very important women whose are in my contact like Dr. Suneera kasliwal, Dr. Saroj Ghosh, Dr.Navjot kaur kasel, Dr Davinder kaur, Dr. Shobha

mam, Dr. Ravinder Ravi, Dr. Shashi kalra, Dr. Preetinder, Dr. Lalita Jain, Kamal thakur, Dr. Bhairvi, Dr. Amla Sharma, Mrs. Vinita, Mrs Harpreet kaur, Mrs. Gurwinder Kaur, Mrs. Geeta, Mrs. Manmeet kaur, Anupama Kapoor Gagneja and presently Mrs. Shina's contributions in the stream of string instrumental "Sitar" music is too important. I pray to God to give them a lot of strength and healthy environment to work in this field of ICSIM (Indian classical string instrumental Music). Their music is as refreshing, appealing and intriguing as their personas. Their style might be new and unconventional but their musical prowess is powerful, enthralling and inimitable. Thanks with anticipation for reading this paper.

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