



*First*  
*Radhika Mohan Maitreya*  
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**BALLYGUNGE MAITREYEE MUSIC CIRCLE**

# The Story of Ustad Mohammed Ameer Khan Shahib

## The great Sarode-Newaj of Shajahanpur

### By Radhika Mohan Maitra

When the request came to me from the organisers of this function to write an authentic account of my revered Ustad, I had several reservations in my mind. In the first place, according to the high ideals of Indian tradition, a disciple is not supposed to utter anything but praises for his Guru or Master, because of the very simple reason that a Guru is always a Guru, alive or dead, and as such is beyond all critical study. And secondly, if one has to tell the truth, his remarks may stir-up unnecessary commotion amongst the supporters of other eminent musicians and adherents to different schools of musical traditions. Our society, especially the musical society, is yet ready to face the truth or accept any observation with a rational outlook. In most cases, we are guided by emotions and not by reasons.

But in spite of all these considerations, sometimes one has to succumb to outside pressure, particularly if that pressure comes from near and dear ones. So I decided to write this story about my Ustad in a very simple and matter-of-fact way, because my Ustad Ameer Khan Shahib was really a very simple man with rare qualities of head and heart.

Ustad Ameer Khan Shahib had a very detached view about life and worldly needs. He did have really two attachments for his earthly existence, (1) Music, which was almost his very life & breath and (2) Opium, which he used to take more as an aid to his 'SHADHANA' for aesthetic and artistic realisations than as an ordinary intoxicating element to satisfy his mundane requirements. He was also suffering from acute asthma towards the end of his life and it might have been also one of the reasons for his addiction to opium in the hope that it would lessen his physical sufferings. About food or clothes, he was utterly indifferent and for minting money he did not have any particular desire. He was immensely satisfied with what he had and did not care for anything more. He did not make any distinction between his rich and poor students and he treated them all alike, even if some of them could not afford to pay him any fees at all. Money to him was no attraction. He wanted to give what he had and was not really interested to get anything in return. This, in short, is the image of my Ustad as I knew him.

Now I will give an idea of his musical heritage and the distinguishing features of the Charana or School to which he belonged. Ustad Ghulam Ali Khan, the celebrated Rabab player who is also supposed to be the first musician to have effected the modification of Sarode from Rabab, was a court musician of the last independent King of Oudh, Wazid Ali Shah. Ustad Ghulam Ali Khan had three sons of whom Ustad Murad Ali Khan was the second. But Ustad Murad Ali Khan was childless, so he adopted a boy named Abdulla Khan, who belonged to the family of a hereditary Vocal musician of Shajahanpur. So by adoption Abdulla Khan was the legal son of Ustad Murad Ali Khan to all intents and purposes. And this Abdulla Khan was the father of my Ustad Ameer Khan and his brother Wazir Khan, who had settled in Lucknow and died sometime between 1940 and 47. I have given a genealogical table at the end of my article for the convenience of my readers.

I was told by my Ustad the late Ameer Khan Shahib, when I was a boy of say 10 years that Ustad Murad Ali Khan Shahib had some domestic difference with the other members of his family and he finally left them with a vow that he would put some one in the way to efficiency by instructions and practice and cure out of him a Sarode player of such a great calibre who would, in time, be a terror to all other Sarode players of Hindusthan. And he kept his vow and Ustad Abdulla Khan Shahib, the father of my Ustad, was the Sarode player, whom he trained with all the devotion and care, which he had at his

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By Rashika Mohan Mehta

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Ustad Mohammed Amir Khan

Ustad Muzd Ali Khan was the first to introduce the sarod to the family of a hereditary vocal musician of Shirsanganur. So by adoption Abdullah Khan was the legal son of Ustad Muzd Ali Khan to all intents and purposes. And this Abdullah Khan was the father of my Ustad Ameer Khan and his brother Wazir Khan, who had settled in Lucknow and died sometime between 1940 and 47. I have given a genealogical table at the end of my article for the convenience of my readers.

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command. I am a person than the listen to a recitation of Ustad Abdulla Khan himself. Then he and my son Abdullah Khan were so proud that Ustad Ali & Abdulla Khan

But my Ustad Murad Ali Khan Gharana special medium and me smart jumps from least three cycles different identities

Let us now Ustad first came visited our ancestors he was in his teens was literally teen permanently here Ashadulla Khan Lachmi Prasad Khan (Tabla), Par Ustad Imdad Khan Shahib in Sitar & Ustad Alauddin and though both of the

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I am very happy to say that I did receive personal corroboration of this fact from no less a person than the Late Khalifa Badal Khan Shahib. The rumour goes that whenever anybody wanted to listen to a recital or Alap of any Raga from Ustad Murad Ali Khan, he would invariably direct him to go to Ustad Abdulla Khan because he himself considered Abdulla Khan to be a much better Alap player than himself. Then he would say, "if you want to listen to some recitals of Gat-toda come to me. And myself and my son Abdulla will play the gat together." Ustad Murad Ali Khan Shahib even used to say with great pride that Ustad Abdulla Khan, his son, had excelled him as a Sarode player. Both these Ustads, Murad Ali & Abdulla Khan were Court Musicians of Darbhanga Raj.

But my Ustad Ameer Khan Shahib had received his musical training more from his grand-father Murad Ali Khan Shahib than his father Abdulla Khan Shahib. The particular Baaj in which this great Charana specialised is known as Ferozkehani style. The Ferozkehani Gats are generally played in medium and medium-fast tempo rather than in fast tempo like Razakhani Gats. It is also marked by smart jumps from one octave to the other with a surprise movement and is generally composed of at least three cycles of a Tala movement. Sometimes the Sthayee and the Antara portions do not have different identities, but are coalesced into one unified entity.

Let us now have a look at the musical scene of the then united Bengal about the time when my Ustad first came to Calcutta at the age of hardly twenty years, sometime in 1906 or 1907. He perhaps visited our ancestral home at Rajshahi, now in Bangla Desh, in the same year, as my Father says, that he was in his teens when Ustad Ameer Khan Shahib came to our house. At that time this great metropolis was literally teeming with great Maestros in almost every field of music. Amongst those who used to live permanently here in Calcutta, names might be mentioned of Ustad Keramatulla Khan (Sarod), Ustad Ashadulla Khan (Kaukuv Khan in Sarod & Banjo) Khalifa Badal Khan (Vocal Music & Sarengi), Pandit Lachmi Prasad Misra (Veena, Vocal music & Tabla), Khalifa Abid Hussain Khan & Ustad Masidulla Khan (Tabla), Pandit Shiv Shevak & Pashupati Misra (Vocal Music & Sitar), Ustad Ramzan Khan (Tappa), Ustad Imdad Khan (Surbahar & Sitar) and a host of other eminent musicians. Ustad Enayat Khan Shahib in Sitar & Surbahar and Ustad Chotey Khan Shahib in Sarengi joined them at a later stage. Ustad Alauddin and Ustad Hatiz Ali Khan Shahib used to live permanently in Malhar & Gwalior respectively, though both of them used to pay occasional visits to Bengal.

As I have already told before that Ustad Alauddin Khan Shahib & Ustad Hatiz Ali Khan Shahib did not make Calcutta their permanent home, but used to pay occasional visits from time to time. Therefore, the duty of imparting lessons in Sarode to musical aspirants in those days naturally fell on Ustad Keramatulla Khan Shahib, Ustad Ashadulla Khan Shahib and Ustad Ameer Khan Shahib. But unfortunately Ashadulla Khan Shahib, who is better known as Kaukuv Khan Shahib died a premature death in the year 1915. So the young learners of Sarode had to choose between Ustad Keramatulla Khan Shahib and Ustad Ameer Khan Shahib, and both of them shared the responsibilities with an open heart and almost with equal number of students. There is hardly any doubt about the fact that what Bengal has

own field and by his own right. As I have already told before that Ustad Alauddin Khan Shahib & Ustad Hatiz Ali Khan Shahib did not make Calcutta their permanent home, but used to pay occasional visits from time to time. Therefore, the duty of imparting lessons in Sarode to musical aspirants in those days naturally fell on Ustad Keramatulla Khan Shahib, Ustad Ashadulla Khan Shahib and Ustad Ameer Khan Shahib. But unfortunately Ashadulla Khan Shahib, who is better known as Kaukuv Khan Shahib died a premature death in the year 1915. So the young learners of Sarode had to choose between Ustad Keramatulla Khan Shahib and Ustad Ameer Khan Shahib, and both of them shared the responsibilities with an open heart and almost with equal number of students. There is hardly any doubt about the fact that what Bengal has

achieved today in the field of Sarode, is mainly due to those two great Maestros, through their blessings, painstaking efforts and wonderful method of teaching.

Before I finish this article, I feel it is one of my solemn duties to point out to the readers, the change of attitude noticeable amongst the musicians of today towards music. The old masters believed passionately that excellences in musical performance lay in strict conformity to the traditional concept and orthodox forms of Raga-Sangeet. A Raga, to them, was a symbol of eternal beauty, realised and realisable. Music being the vehicle of a Raga, there was hardly any room for self-expression in the name of creative inspiration. By creation they really meant a sort of ritualistic invocation to their favourite Music. According to them, therefore, the presentation of music must be as systematic and thorough as possible and appropriate techniques should be applied to that extent only, which was essential for the creation of purest form of music. Their approach to music was more of a Devotee than a Creator, and they sacrificed their individuality to the sacred altar of Raga-Sangeet. It is in this self surrender and not in super-imposition of their personalities that they found their highest fulfilment in Art.

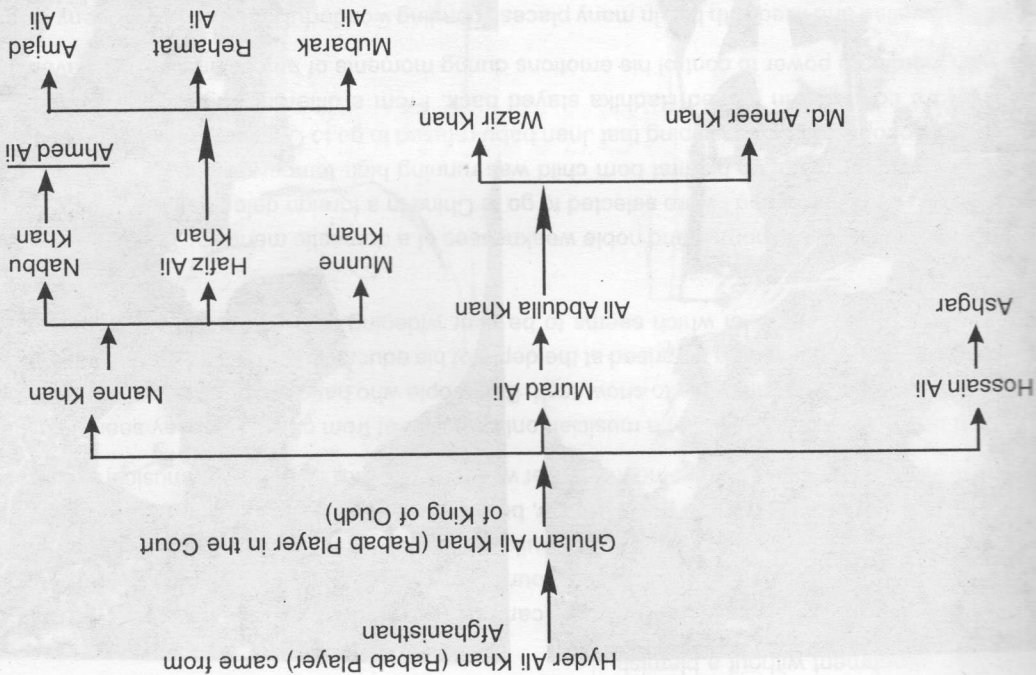
The present-day attitude, however, is quite different. Modern artists believe more in technical innovations and new art-forms than mere conformity to age-old traditions of Raga-Sangeet. Deviation from tradition, according to them, is no sin if it adds lustre to the existing forms. A Raga is not a living organism, but just an artistic symbol without any form. It is the artist who gives form and infuses life to a Raga and in so doing the artist must be allowed his unquestionable prerogative of individualism. Art in itself has no meaning, if it does not help the artist in realisation of his own personality through creation. Hedonism and not Self-negation, is the basic principle of modern Musical Art.

Thus, while the old masters concerned themselves with the realisation of pure beauty in Art, the modern artists are primarily satisfied with creating beauty through Art. To the old masters technique was just a means to an end, the end being the realisation of eternal beauty in Art, which transcends all techniques. Techniques to the modern artist is not only a means but also an end in itself, the end being the creation of beauty in Art, which is imminent with and not independent of technique.

Here ends the story of my Ustad. My respectful Pronams to him with all the humility I have at my command.



## GENEALOGICAL TABLE



San Juan Prakash Ghosh Speaks

achieved today in the field of Sangeet Natak Akademi through their blessings, painstaking efforts and wonderful support.

Before I finish this article, I would like to address the readers, the change of attitude of education in the past few decades. The masters believed that education should be a holistic one, that encompasses the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of the human being. The education should be a holistic one, that encompasses the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of the human being. The education should be a holistic one, that encompasses the intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects of the human being.



*Receiving Honour from Chinese Premier Chou En Lai during visit to China*



*Receiving the Sangeet Natak Academy Award*

I have but a few friends, those whose friend or shadow of an eye is a friend who never has and even friendship existence. It is real nurturing our attachment.

Talking of Radhu, instrumentalists, the spent the major part of his grand heritage of his music his power to a

Radhu babu is a tortoise within a hare and watch him, can all practical matters diversity.

Radhu babu in the early fifties Radhu cancelled his tour just to stop going and people his girl-friend a co-person with inordinance.

I have travelled to accompany him around him which friendly cheers. Here to dwindle, whatever and maintains this th

By courtesy : Md. A