Contribution of a Guru in the field of Indian Classical Music: in special context with Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen

Arupriya Seen

Research Scholar (Ph.D.), Punjabi University, Patiala (India)

ARTICLE DETAILS

Article History
Published Online: 20 Oct 2018

Keywords
UstadLachhman, Tabla, Guru

ABSTRACT

UstadLachhman is one of the most renowned artists of Punjab Gharana of Tabla playing. His contribution in the field of classical music is inexplicable. He is such a persona who has imbibed each and every style of music in himself. The life of an artist always inspire others to achieve the goals of their lives. In today’s society, morals of a Guru, a teacher are diminishing gradually. He is an artist of such excellence who has equally proved himself a great performer, a composer, a Guru and a maestro in Tabla playing as well as in Sitar playing and vocal music. His knowledge regarding the music and its literature is undefined. The guru-shishyaparamparaais one of the appropriate and prominent way for the promotion and proliferation of classical music because this tradition of music is only the way to get the education of music perfectly. UstadLachhman Singh Seen has always taught his disciples in a very scientific and successful way. He always gave detailed knowledge of the specific thing to the students so that they could easily and quickly grasp that thing. Today, he has a long list of disciples in India and abroad too, who are contributing in the promotion of Punjab gharana. Apart from the Tabla disciples, he has also prepared and groomed many students in Sitar playing and vocal music who are now working at higher posts in established institutions. UstadLachhman Singh Seen has given performances in many reputed concerts in India and abroad. He has also accompanied many great artists of his time like: Ustad Amir Khan, Pt. RajanSajan Mishra, Pt. Omkarnath Thakur, Pt. Ravi Shankar, Pt. Nikhil Banerji and many more. This documentation and evaluation shall definitely prove beneficial for the coming generations and for tracing the history of music of Punjab. To have a study about the contribution of an artist by highlighting his different aspects in the field of music and presentation of the same through research work is definitely needed.

Introduction

Indian Classical Musicians have played a vital role in popularizing Indian Music all across the world. They have enriched the world of music and enthralled the audiences with their masterful artistry. Their soulful rendition has brought solace to many arts. Indian Classical Musicians have achieved success and made history with their practice and hard work. They have dedicated their entire life with full devotion for the development and promotion of Indian Classical Music and their own specific gharana. Talking about the Punjab Gharana of Tabla playing, “in the present times, this gharana has proven itself as having provided the best Tabla accompaniment and Tablasolo.” The guru-shishyaparamparais the most prominent way of getting the education of music. The guru-shishyaparamparadenotes a succession of teachers and disciples in traditional Indian culture and religions such as a Hinduism, Jainism, Sikhism and Buddhism. It is the tradition of spiritual relationship and mentoring where teachings are transmitted from a guru “teacher” to a shishya “disciple”. Such knowledge whether it be Vedic, agamic, architecture, musical or spiritual is imparted through developing relationship between the guru and the disciple. Guru-Shishyai.e., teacher-disciple relationship is one of the most divine and sovereign relationship, as it reflects the wide realm of knowledge, sanskaarand belongingness. Classical music struggles to hold on to the ‘guru-shishyaparampara’. As we talk about the contribution of Punjab in the field of music, it has not only given birth to excellent vocalists but also innumerable instrumentalists. Our ancestral legendary land of five rivers has always been known as ‘Cradle of Human Civilization.’ Although this gateway of the Indian sub-continent was repeatedly looted, plundered, partitioned and fragmented through the ages but its spirit of human dignity never vanished. Punjab is considered as the land where great personalities are born. It is the land of unrivalled gems. Contribution of Punjab in the field of music is inexplicable. It has not. The partition of 1947 not only effected the social and political conditions of India but also made a major leverage on the musical environment. After the partition, many topmost artists of classical music migrated from India, especially the Muslim musicians. It was not only the geographical division but cultural division also took place and a vacuum was created. At that time, there was a big responsibility on the artists of that generation to keep the tradition and culture of music alive. Many personalities like Panna Lal Madan, Pt. Balwant Rai Jaswal, Prof. Tara Singh, Bihari Lal, Atam Prakash, Suraj Prakash, UstadLachhman Singh Seen etc. tired to uplift music at that time in Punjab. Among these musicians, the name of UstadLachhman Singh Seen is taken with great pride and respect. These were the people who started teaching music either by giving private coaching or working in institutions and initiated propagating music once again. These were neither materialistic nor money-minded people. UstadLachhman Singh Seen is one of those artists of his time who not only motivated girls towards the
education of music but also taught them selflessly. It was his tremendous contribution by working at the grassroots level and inspiring people by residing among them. He promoted music at that time when it was considered unpleasant. It was his tireless efforts to promote music to such a high level that today classical music is alive in Punjab. It is his contribution that we are breathing in such a healthy environment of music in Punjab now a days. Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen belongs to the Punjab Gharana of Tabla playing. His contribution in the field of classical music is inexplicable. The life of an artist always inspire others to achieve the goals of their lives. In today’s society, morals of a Guru, a teacher are diminishing gradually. He is an artist of such excellence who has equally proved himself a great performer, a composer, a Guru and a maestro in Tabla playing as well as in Sitar playing and vocal music. His knowledge regarding the music and its literature is undefined. Till date, he is the senior most and respected exponent of Punjab school of Tabla whose contribution to music has not stopped. He is an artist of such excellence who is equally loved and renowned not only in India but in the whole world. “He is the ‘pillar’ of Punjab. The way Ustad Allah Rakha Khan made a different place in the field of Tabla playing in India, in the same way Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen is a great and distinguished Tabla artist especially in Northern India.” He is the source of inspiration for many persons. Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen got the direct proximity of those Ustads who were the topmost yogis and seeker of that time. “The name of Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen, his touch gives the oxygen of music to everyone.”

Research Method:

This topic of research is completed with the use of both theoretical and practical aspects. The help of some books, magazines, souvenir etc. were taken. But most of the research is done on the practical basis in which interviews of different artists and persons were taken to collect the data.

Birth & Taleem:

Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen was born in the village known as Jhang, Luni in Sialkot district (now in Pakistan) on 3rd Dec. 1927 in a Rajput family of a peasant. His father Thakur Mangat Singh and mother Ishwari Devi were both music lovers. Hence, Lachhman Singh got the musical atmosphere in his blood from his crib. As Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen found his interest and passion towards Tabla, he then started learning Tabla in the guru-shishyaparampara of Pt. Jagdish Dutt, a disciple of the great legend Mian Qadir Baksh. Simultaneously, he also started learning classical vocal music at the Durga Sangeet Academy in Jammu. Lachhman Singh Seen had made his own path by his riyaaz and became a past master in Tabla playing. Slowly, he started gaining perfection in playing Tabla. Gradually his Tabla started earning fame in the musical programs of Jammu. As his crave for learning music increased; with the permission of his guru, Lachhman Singh came to Lahore and became the disciple of the great scion of the Punjab Gharana, Mian Qadir Baksh. “Mian Qadir Baksh was the most famous Tabla player of that era and it was the wish of Lachhman Singh Seen to learn Tabla from him.” In the company of Mian Ji, Lachhman Singh came to experience the extra-terrestrial world of Tabla. While living in Lahore, he used to listen to the Tabla of his guru and also served him. He learned for five years continuously under the guidance of Mian Ji. Apart from Tabla playing, he also learnt sitar from Pt. Jiya Lal Basant in Lahore. But after the partition when he got settled in India, he learnt sitar from Pt. Balwant Rai Verma (Maihar Gharana) also.

Contribution as a Guru and his shishyaparampara:

The guru-shishyaparampara is one of the appropriate and prominent way for the promotion and proliferation of classical music because this tradition of music is the only way to get the education of music perfectly. In ancient India most of the knowledge was passed on from the teacher to his pupil through oral tradition, this oral tradition of passing knowledge is known as ‘guru-shishyaparampara’. Indian classical music is still largely dependent on this tradition. In this tradition, the student lives with his guru or teacher. The student learns different aspects of the music mostly through observing his guru and by following his oral instructions. Although due to emergence of institutionalized training, now in many parts of the world Indian Classical Music is being taught on the basis of a particular syllabus. But still ‘Guru-Shishya Parampara’ is the preferred method. We can’t learn the pure form of music by any other method. Under this tradition, many students were prepared by the gurus and also saved the musical tradition by promoting it. Swami Vivekananda tells about the importance of Guru that “in intellectual development we can get much help from the books, but in spiritual development, almost nothing. In studying books …………………………………………… the spirit. That is the reason why almost every one of us can speak most wonderfully on spiritual objects, but when the time of actions comes, we find ourselves so woefully deficient. It is because books cannot give us that impulse from outside. To quicken the spirit, that impulse must come from another soul. That soul from which this impulse comes is called the Guru, the teacher.”

Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen groomed his disciples by giving them the knowledge of Tabla of Punjab gharana. His dedication to this art and passionate quest to preserve the purity of Punjab baagh has brought him acclaim, many students and followers. Today, he has a long list of disciples in India and abroad too, who are contributing in the promotion of Punjab gharana. He has always taught his disciples in a very scientific and successful way. He always gave detailed knowledge of the specific thing to the students so that they could easy and quickly grasp that thing. He is a person, who has not limited his knowledge within his family or disciples rather also shared with other people without any discrepancy. Dr. Prem Sagar shares a piece of knowledge, which he received from Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen. “He got the secret of voice culture which also benefited him in his sadhana that a swar is originated from the touch of six limbs i.e. nose, throat, heart, palate, tongue and teeth. That’s why it is called ‘Shadaj’ means which is produced

\[\text{In an interview with Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen, 24th June 2018, Jalandhar}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{3}In an interview with Dr. Shobha Kosar, 3rd July 2018, Mohali}\]


from the six. Earlier, Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen worked as staff artist at AIR, firstly at Delhi station and then in Jalandhar. During this time, he came to know about teaching music at college. But at that time, he was not having any specific degree for this purpose. So, he formulated his training by studying for and obtaining various degrees and certificates in Sitar and vocal music as he himself was fond of teaching and promoting the classical music. People used to sing at that time also but a very less number was drawn towards classical music. Later in 1962, he was appointed as a lecturer in music instrument department of Hans Raj Mahila Maha Vidyalaya - a prominent institution in Jalandhar, where he served for 25 years. Here, he continues his practice of Sitar and also prepared many talented Tabla and Sitar players. While teaching there, he composed several maseetkhani and razakhani gats in different ragas like: Malkauns, Gaur Sarang, Ramkali, Patdeep, Jogiya, Malhar, MiyankiTodi etc. These gats were composed by keeping the view point that the students could easily play it and the swaroop of ragas should also be maintained. "He made it much convenient for the students to learn. He was always so concerned about the children that he focused on how more output can be carried out from the students. How students can quickly pick up the finer points of ragas!" These qualities and goodness cannot be found in every person. "Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen has never lied or hidden anything from anyone in the field of art and taught the best to everyone those who can grasp the maximum." Apart from the fact that his worthwhile teachings of Tabla were extraordinarily rich and exquisite, yet he never felt the need to confine these within him, rather, to promulgate far and wide among his students, so as to do justice to the purity of music. He equally gave everything to his disciples. "If someone asked him anything, he never kept it a secret. He always told everything with honesty." Today, there are many who, though immersed in ignorance, yet, in the pride of their hearts, fancy they know everything but he is such an open-hearted person that he always welcomed everyone with open arms. "Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen used to give classes to girl students those have great interest in music by visiting their houses. Sometimes when there were late practices then either he would accompany the girl students or send his sons to drop them safely at their homes." His teaching hours were not fixed. His prior concerns were vested in every person. "Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen has never let him touch his feet there. It was his belief that they were equal there as they both were serving as teachers in the college." Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen proved to be a peerless guru. He taught many persons selflessly. "Several people came to him for learning music but he never denied to anyone. He never took any charges. He even used to cater food to his students." In return, he never expected anything from anyone. His teaching methods were very different. "He taught with so much of patience. Normally music is taken lightly but he always taught and explained music scientifically to his students. He used to teach strictly to his students." Today many of his students have received worldwide fame. As he was a sincere and honest guru, he always taught with all truthfulness to his students. He dealt with his students as his own kids. He has given a big contribution to the world of classical music especially Punjab school of Tabla playing by giving efficient and talented artists. His disciples are not limited in India but there are many in other countries also. During his visits to different countries, he taught many students there also. Apart from the Tabla disciples, he has also prepared and groomed many students in Sitar playing and vocal music, who are now working at higher posts in established institutions. The names of some of his disciples are: Lt. Pt. Pawan Kumar Verma, Chamkaur Singh Pawar (German), Nayak Seen, Pt. Manu Seen, Talvin Singh (U.K.), Hassan Mohyeddin (Pakistan), Ustad Kale Ram, Prof. Ajit Kumar Hansda, Tirlok Singh (U.K.), Shri Omprakash Thapar, Tarsem Lal and many more. Brief description of some of the noted disciples are given below:

1. Lt. Pt. Pawan Kumar Verma – Pt. Pawan Kumar Verma got the music in legacy. He received the knowledge of music from his father Shri Jagat Ram Verma and the maestro of Punjab gharaana, Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen. Along with Tabla playing, Pt. Pawan Kumar Verma completed his Master’s Degree in Sitar from Punjab University, Chandigarh. He took the initial knowledge of Sitar from his uncle, Shri Balwant Rai Verma (disciple of Pt. Ravi Shankar). Soon, Pawan Kumar Verma got the limelight all over India because of his tireless efforts, devotion and sadhana. He was an accomplished soloist as well as a skilful accompanist in Tabla playing. He has accompanied many top class artists. He was declared the ‘A’ class artist by the All India Radio and also gave many national performances on T.V. and radio. Pt. Pawan Kumar Verma had also worked as teacher at KendriVidyalaya, Pinjore. In his disciples, the names of Shri Paramjit Singh, Varinder Kumar, Deepak Sharma, Darshan Singh, AvirbhaVerma (son), are worth mentioning. On 25th of January, 2000, this aesthetic soul left the world.

2. Pt. Manu Seen – Pt. Manu Seen has inherited his talents and abilities from his father and Guru, Ustad Lachhmann Singh Seen, renowned and legendary musician of Punjab gharaana. Even since his student age, he has been winning a score of prestigious medals and awards in contests in India. He
successfully completed a Master’s Degree in English Literature and also received a gold medal and a Master’s Degree in Music from the Guru Nanak Dev University. In 1988, he was the recipient of the second prize in sitar at All India Radio Competition at the national level. Impressed by his passion for his art, the famous sitar maestro Ustad Shahid Pravez Khan has taught Manu the subtle techniques of sitar playing of the ‘Etawa Gharana’. Pt. Manu Seen has been commended by analysts for his soulful rendering and strict adherence to purity and virtuosity of ‘Ragas’. His sitar reflects a unique blend of ‘gayakiang’ and ‘tantrakariang’. Today, Pt. Manu Seen is further carrying the tradition of guru-shishyaparampara. Some of his disciples are: Rishabh Seen, Surpriya Seen, Arupriya Seen, Dr. Monika Thakur, Vishesh Veer Singh, Dr. Laxmi Prabha, Satnam Kaur, Sunny Sharma etc.

3. Ustad Kale Ram—Today, the name of Ustad Kale Ram holds a special place in the field of Tabla playing of Punjab gharana. He took the knowledge of Tabla playing from Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen for about 20 years. He became an established Tabla artist because of his hardwork and practice. He had given many performances in India and many other countries. He has also given national programs on All India Radio.

Conclusion:

Ustad Lachhman is one of the most renowned artists of Punjab Gharana of Tabla playing. He is such a personality who has imbibed each and every style of music in himself. Today, most of the Tabla artists in Punjab are his disciples, who are further carrying their guru-shishyaparampara onwards. He is the only person left as one of the greatest gurus of his generation. Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen is one of the most efficient musician of Punjab gharana. He has contributed a lot in the field of music and particularly in the field of Tabla playing. He has provided eminence to the stage of music through his work and his disciples also. His contribution can be seen especially from two points: firstly, his contribution to the world of classical music in the form of different creations and compositions he created which he further gave to his disciples. Secondly, the aura of his personality. The person gets motivation in the way he meets someone. He is a loyal; a dedicated teacher, a great artist and a humble person. He always gained appreciation wherever he has performed. His personality shows that he is not only a person with elegant spirit but also a consecrated artist.

References

English Book:

Hindi Books:
1. Devinder Kaur (Dr.) : Sangeet Roop (Part-2), Pearls Book Pvt. Ltd., Patiala
4. Bhairvi (Dr.) : Punjab ki Vadan Sangeet Parampara, Kanishak Publishers, New Delhi

M.Phil. Dissertation:

Souvenir:
1. Virasat Foundation - # 205-2388 128th St. Surrey, British Columbia V3W2G2, Canada

Interviews:
1. Ustad Lachhman Singh Seen - 24th June 2018 Jalandhar Kunj, Jalandhar
2. Pt. Manu Seen - 12th October 2018, Nijatam Nagar, Jalandhar
3. Shri Nayak Seen - 18th Nov. 2018, Jalandhar Kunj, Jalandhar
4. Dr. Nivedita Seen - 14th Aug. 2017, Punjabi University, Patiala
7. Shri Omprakash Thapar - 21st Sept. 2018, Atwal Colony, Jalandhar