

AMJAD ALI KHAN

Gouri R.

Tiruvaiyaru village in Tamil Nadu. Crowds of devout listeners pack the thatched *pandal* beside the Cauvery and spill into the street beyond. Carnatic musicians have flocked to pay their homage to the saint-composer Tyagaraja at the annual festival in his name.

Today the dais presents an unusual picture. A debonair, kurta-clad ustad greets us with a strange melody. Why, it is a song of Tyagaraja, framed in the Carnatic raga Sriranjani!

That was the first time a Hindustani musician bridged a cultural divide of sorts with a pilgrimage to offer his tribute to a south Indian master. For Ustad Amjad Ali Khan national integration is not a catchword. It is a practical ideal. 'Music can do what political treaties and socio-economic agreements cannot do. It can unite people.' He was a noted participant in the Maharashtra state sponsored programme 'National Integration through Music' (1986). After the demolition of the Babri Masjid he brought together Hindu and Muslim artists to present a concert in Ayodhya for communal harmony. The Trust he has founded in his father's name gives awards to Hindustani, Carnatic and Western musicians.

His critics see such acts as calculated self-promotion. They object to his claims of having discovered new ragas—Vibhavari, Lalitadhvani, Kiranranjini, even Subhalakshmi (named after his wife)—what are they but old wine in new bottles? Raga Priyadarshini, Jawahar Manjari and Kamalshree—named after Indira Gandhi, Pandit Nehru and Rajiv Gandhi are denounced as media savvy gimmicks.

But no other artist of Amjad Ali Khan's stature has done as much to spread interest in classical music, especially among the young, or worked as much with children. 'Ekta se Shanti' (Peace through Unity) to be played by school children was orchestrated by him. The prayer to be sung by disabled children on World Disabled Day was his composition. Who else has recorded a music album as sweet as 'Amjad's Sarod Sings With Children'?

In fact Amjad Ali Khan is one of those rare practitioners of a traditional art in this country, who react to the currents buffeting our world today. He does not retreat into his art but uses it to draw attention to issues which concern him.

Though the ustad at fifty says he wishes he had been born two centuries ago, into a climate more receptive to his music, he has not stopped trying to create such an ambience in his own time. He knows how to keep any audience glued to their seats—young or old, Indian or foreign, connoisseur or layperson. He is especially good at building a rapport with the young, the future patrons of art. He dares to break into 'We shall overcome' between two 'respectable' ragas at a university festival. What is more, he invites his listeners to sing with his strings!

Does Amjad play to the gallery?

'Oh no. My concerts vary from place to place depending on my own mood and aim. I refuse to be stereotyped,' he shrugs. 'Not everybody likes what I do. But when you take risks, you must be prepared for controversy.'

This confidence is the source of his strength and inspiration. He knows his worth, the value of the tradition he has inherited, and the power of the phenomenal skills of his fingertips.

It is not obstinacy but conviction which steels his resolve to innovate, to experiment. He may go off the beaten track sometimes, but never beyond the territory bequeathed to him by five generations of musician ancestors. Their experiments with craft and content have helped to shape the sarod as we know it today. Amjad Ali Khan's own contribution to its range and resonance have been highly significant. He remains humble, because he knows that he is not just himself—but the representative of a line of maestros in a rich gharana.

It must be remembered that he was born and brought up in the princely state of Gwalior, which is still haunted by the legendary Tansen. Close to his own ancestral home stands that tamarind tree, whose leaves are believed to have magical properties that sweeten the voice.

Gwalior was the capital of the Scindia dynasty which has patronized generations of musicians. And it was here that Amjad's great grandfather Ghulam Ali Khan practised the sarod and made it as versatile as the veena and the sitar. His son Nanne Khan followed the older classical style of the dhrupad, more exacting and rigid in grammar than the then nascent khyal mode of romantic expressionism. Amjad's father Hafiz Ali Khan studied the *beenkar* tradition under the venerable Wazir Khan of Rampur, and dhrupad from the descendants of Swami Haridas in Mathura. He was exceptionally skilled in handling the wistful melodies of the *thumri*, having studied it with Bhayya Saheb Ganapat Raoji of Gwalior. All the streams flowed into Amjad Ali, producing a style so personal and original, that it was impossible to identify the original separate sources.

Amjad was born when his father was sixty-five years old. This meant that his father was at his mellowest peak as a musician while on the wane as a man. The teaching and the learning had a sense of urgency, a desperation even, which drove Amjad to great levels of intensity. He had to sacrifice his childhood and mature quickly in order to meet the demands his father made of him. Both were aware of the sands trickling rapidly down in the hour glass, especially as the father had been disappointed musically in his older sons and nephew.

Amjad AH Khan was not overwhelmed by the rigour and discipline. It made him a contemplative performer even in adolescence. Amjad Ah carries the hallmark of the old school still—in the timbre and tonal clarity of his strokes, in slow and medium, as well as in the hurricane speeds he revels in.

His critics and fans will both agree that Ustad Amjad Ali Khan, son and disciple of the legendary Hafiz Ali Khan, is touched by greatness, not only as a brilliant exponent of a demanding instrument, but as the conscientious torch-bearer of a tradition to be passed on to posterity.

SPEAKING STRINGS

When a man is fifty years old as I am now— with all the responsibilities that grown-ups have to face everyday, at home, at work, in bringing up their own children—it is very nice to think about the days of childhood.

Was my childhood so joyful? So carefree? So full of contentment? Perhaps not. But it gave me something invaluable—a splendid heritage in music, and a father’s love.

There were two brothers and two sisters before me. I was the youngest child in our family and extremely pampered. But not spoiled. You will soon see why.

First of all, I was born into a family of musicians. My ancestors came from Kabul in Afghanistan and settled in the kingdom of Gwalior. For four generations they were honoured musicians in the court of the maharajas of the Scindia dynasty.

In the past Gwalior had been rich in music. It was the birthplace of Tansen, the illustrious singer. He was one of the jewels of Emperor Akbar’s Mughal *darbar* (court). It is said that when Tansen sang Raga Todi, the deer came leaping out of the forests. If he sang Raga Deepak, there was a burst of fire. If he sang Malhar, the black clouds brought rain. He left such a stamp upon some raags that we still call them by his name. We say Mian ki Todi, or Mian Ki Malhar. No, we don’t say Tansen ki Malhar or Tansen ki Todi. That would not be respectful.

Even today Tansen’s *samadhi* (tomb) in Gwalior remains a holy place for musicians. They consider it a privilege to participate in the annual music festival held in his honour.

Is it surprising that the earliest sounds I remember should be those of music? My father Hafiz Ali Khan was a great musician. He played the sarod. He also sang in a voice both sweet and powerful. Those were the vibrations which surrounded me as a child.

Another factor which made a difference in my upbringing was that my father was old enough to be my grandfather. He was sixty years old. This meant I could not jump on his shoulder or ride on his back. I could not play any games with him. He was also my guru, my teacher. I had to be very respectful; I could not take liberties with him as other children could with their fathers. Of course, sometimes my father hugged me and petted me. This was only when *he* felt like it. I could not dream of giving him a bear hug or a sudden kiss. I was awed by his age and his greatness as a musician. My mother Begum Raahat Jahaan was good and kind. But she did not know how to demonstrate her love except by giving me the best food in the house. She was always busy. She had a large household to run.

The real loss was something I came to feel much later. My father was one of the foremost Hindustani musicians of his time. But I never heard him at his peak. There were very few albums of his music. He was afraid to record it because he thought the music may be used for entertainment. What if it blared through loudspeakers at parties, weddings and tea-shops? Anyway, we could not afford a gramophone then. Why, I still remember the day a Philips radio, worth 150 rupees, came to our house! It was a big event for us. But father was worried. He thought his children would listen to film songs and go astray. It is true that my sisters had a craze for film songs which they tried to hide from father. But what can you expect? In our *khandaani* Muslim families, girls were not allowed to learn or to perform music. Naturally they turned to film songs. I suspect it was my father’s interest in ‘Khabren Hindustan’ (as the news programme was called then) which made him risk the dangers of the radio at last!

There was a big age gap between me and my brothers. They could not be my playmates. My elder brothers and I shared some lessons in vocal music. Father taught us at first. Later he appointed Master Gune for more formal training. My father had decided that I was to be a sarod player like him. But he believed that knowing vocal music was essential for me to become a better instrumentalist. He also engaged a tabla teacher for me. This was Pandit Raghuvar Dayal. I grew so fond of the tabla that my father became anxious. What if I became a drummer? I had to carry on the family tradition. I had to become a sarod player.

Let me tell you a little about our family instrument now. My ancestor Mohammed

Hashmi Khan Bangash was a Pathan horse trader in Afghanistan. When he came to live in central India he brought with him an ancient Persian instrument called the rabab. It had strings to be plucked for playing or accompanying folk tunes. It had a staccato sound. That means it could play only with lots of breaks, more like rhythm beats.

His son Ghulam Bandegi Khan wanted to play Indian classical music on the rabab. But the rabab could not hold a note long enough to play a raga. So he made changes in the instrument. He gave it a metal chest and metal strings. The rabab became the sarod. The word comes from 'sarood' which in Persian, means 'melody'. Grandson Ghulam Ali Khan polished the methods of playing Indian raags on the sarod. He became a famous artist. He was honoured by Maharaja Vishwanath Singh of Rewa and Nawab Wajid Ali Shah of Lucknow. The Maharaja of Gwalior made him his court musician and rewarded him with many gifts and a house in Gwalior.

Such were the ancestors of my grandfather Nanne Khan who trained many disciples in the family instrument. Soon the sarod became as popular as the sitar or the shehnai. Though it continued to have some drawbacks, my father said that a great sarodist has no limitations. He could make it sing and cry and laugh and love. And do you know, when I heard my father play, I found that what he said was true.

Most children only know their fathers and grandfathers. But I know musicians of five generations in my family, not just as names, but as living presences. They had developed our school of music called the Senia gharana. Whenever I play, those masters are with me, setting standards, insisting on quality.

I must have been a difficult child. When father asked me to study other musicians for their special qualities I came up with innumerable comments. I would ask endless questions. 'Tell me, how is it that the same *taan* (a kind of musical phrase) sounds different on sitar and sarod? How do you play a song on the sarod? Can the sarod imitate the human voice? Why is it that so much cannot be done on the sarod?' Sometimes my father used to get annoyed. 'Arey, you fire questions all the time. You cross-examine me! Are you a lawyer? A barrister?' But he would explain many things. I kept experimenting on the strings. I kept trying. Once in a while I would burst out in frustration, 'The sarod is all incomplete instrument.' Then father would smile lovingly and say, 'No, *beta*, it is a difficult instrument. If you have patience and courage, you can do wonders with it.'

If you listen to my old records you will see how my style has changed over the years. All the changes I made began in my childhood.

A lot has been done: improvements have been made by me and other sarod players. My mind is still full of new ideas. But sometimes I feel that the atmosphere in our

country is not very helpful to a classical musician. If only I had been born twenty years ago! How many people understand what I am doing on the sarod now? Even my fellow musicians don't appreciate and encourage my efforts. It is very painful.

In the past, artists were not like that. I remember how my father went up to the stage and took the microphone to praise young Vilayat Khan who was giving a sitar concert. My father said: 'This boy's father died when he was just nine years old. But he has achieved so much on his own. I am proud of him.' Tell me, are musicians so generous to each other now?

Just as I lose heart like this I get a shot in the arm. After a concert in Bangalore, film star Dilip Kumar came to me and said, 'You have changed the entire style of this instrument. Wonderful!' A comment like this makes me so happy. Appreciating the work of others makes life pleasant for all of us.

I was born in the room where my father, grandfather and great grandfather had been born. No hospitals or nursing homes in those days! This was in the *haveli* type of house the Scindia kings had gifted to my ancestors. It still stands in the old street. I have set up a Trust in my father's name so that our house can be used as a centre for the arts—for singing, dancing and art exhibitions.

My father was the head of a large family of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins and their brood of children. Some twenty to twenty-five of them lived with us in this house. They were not only housed and fed but the bills for whatever they bought in the town's shops were also paid by my father. Most of my father's students also stayed with us in the *haveli*. They came from many parts of India. One of them was Padmanabhan from south India. He became a 'devotee' of my father's voice and learnt vocal music from him. He was the brother of Rukmini Devi Arundale, the great dancer who set up Kalakshetra, an art institution in Madras. Little did I know then that I was to marry Subhalakshmi, a student of Rukmini Devi in Kalakshetra.

My father was a saint. He thought only of two things: music and God. He was a religious man in the best sense of the term, not a fanatic but a faithful believer. He did his *namaaz* five times a day. To see him praying was to be uplifted in spirit.

Next to our Gwalior home was a big, imposing mosque—so close as to make it seem as if our *haveli* was an extension of it. Hundreds of pigeons would roost and flutter around its dome. They would fly over our house in flocks and peck at the grain my mother scattered for them on the terrace. They were not afraid of my father. Whenever he came up to the terrace they would cluster around him and settle upon his head and shoulders. Then he would say, 'Are my pets hungry? Didn't they get enough to eat?'

An old *maulvi* used to say the *azaan*, which is the prayer from the mosque. Sometimes he went terribly off-key. Father could not bear it. He would stride up to the mosque and tell the *maulvi*, 'Here, let me say the *azaan* today.' He felt that Allah should not be offended by *besura* (tuneless) prayers! Father's *azaan* was beautiful, vibrant, resonant and full of rapture. Usually you don't think of *azaan* as music. But it has deep, melodious sounds. The Koran says that the Prophet chose a man with a good voice to say the *azaan*. Doesn't this show that the Prophet enjoyed music?

As I told you, my father was old when I was born, past his prime as an artist. The art world can be ruthless too. He had to face all kinds of jealousies and intrigues in his old

age. There were moments of sadness and moments of happiness for him in bringing me up. I was his only hope. I had to develop a sense of duty very early to live up to that hope. Friends and well-wishers would say to me, 'The responsibility of the family is on you now.'

Yes, I did have two elder brothers—Mubarak and Rehmat. But they disappointed everyone. The eldest had given major concerts at eighteen. He was brilliant. But, perhaps because of bad company and hobbies like hunting, he frittered his life away. Ahmed All Khan was my father's nephew who served him devotedly. My father had great hopes for him. But he never fulfilled his promise. My father thought that someone had cast a spell on his food to ruin his voice. Ahmed was also mentally affected. I had heard him play the sarod. What firm hands he had, what stamina! And what fantastic skill! How sad for my father to see it all go waste!

I remember Gwalior when I was a child. It had all the pomp and splendour of a princely state. Everybody used to wear turbans and topi's. We couldn't enter the palace unless we dressed formally in achkan and *churidar*. Sometimes I performed in the durbar before my father's recital. My tabla accompanist was Sajjan Lal, whose ancestors had been great drummers. Today he is a singer. I still remember grand visitors like Marshal Tito and Babu Rajendra Prasad. Royal receptions were given to them. I was presented to all these state guests as a child prodigy.

Until I left Gwalior at age eleven, my life was very sheltered and protected. Father did not encourage me to make friends with the neighbourhood children because they came from backgrounds very different from mine. They were sons of shopkeepers and small businessmen. He did not send me to the Scindia School. It was an excellent boarding school, but father would not allow me to stay in the hostel. And I felt like a fish out of water in the school nearby to which I was sent. I made an honest effort to study, but how could I when I felt a misfit all the time?

You see, a child growing up in Bengal or Maharashtra or Tamil Nadu has culture all around him. In Gwalior, few people understood the arts or valued them as they had been in the past days of glory, I was lonely. I could not spend much, time in the games field either. There was always *riyaz* (practice) to be done, and music classes. I felt even then that music was the most important thing in my life.

My brothers had little time for my father. I felt it was therefore my duty to spend time with him. And he needed looking after. Once when a group of visitors came to see him in the middle of his class, he motioned to them to sit down. Then he began to sing a raag elaborately, in all three speeds. The poor fellows couldn't get away though they were obviously in a hurry. My father ended the *bandish* (a musical composition) and had got ready to launch into another when I whispered to him, 'Ask them why they are here.' It turned out that they had come to invite us for a family wedding!

One event stands out in my mind, vividly and powerfully.

A sadhu baba used to be a frequent visitor. He came and went as he liked, without notice or warning. He wore saffron robes. He had a handsome face with long black hair and a beard. His piercing eyes and commanding air made him a striking figure. He was passionately fond of music, and would sit listening to my father, eyes closed and body swaying. Sometimes his deep voice would blend with my father's in a devotional song:

'*Madina na dekha to kuch bhi na dekha*' ('You have seen nothing if you have not seen Madina'). Tears would stream from his eyes. My father told me that he was a Sufi mystic whose faith went beyond ordinary religion. My father presented me to the sadhu and I played for him what I had learnt that day.

He listened with rapt attention, never taking his eyes off me. When I finished he asked my father, 'What is the little one's name?'

'Masoom Ali Khan,' father answered. Yes, Masoom or 'innocent' was the name I was given by my parents.

The sadhu shook his head and said, 'I name him Amjad. From now on let him be called by this new name.'

That is how I got my present name. It means 'most glorious', an Arabic name for God. I never saw the sadhu after that.

The years of my childhood were very eventful for India. We got our independence from the British Raj and faced the horrors of communal riots when Pakistan and India were partitioned.

My father, though a staunch Muslim, was never worried about personal danger. He sent his family to safety in Bhopal and continued to stay in his home on the main street. He would sit by the window and watch the disturbances outside. The rioting Hindus would stop and say, '*Namaskar*, Khansaheb! Are you all right?' No one tried to hurt a hair of his head though other Muslims suffered badly in the riots. Such was the respect in which art and artists were held in those days.

Many top-ranking musicians were Muslims. Most of their audience was Hindu. But this difference in religion never came in the way of performance or its enjoyment.

I remember a *mehfil* (gathering) in a nobleman's house, where a well-known pandit sang my father played and there was discussion about the right way to play a particular raga. My father told the pandit point-blank, 'You sang it all wrong. This is how it should be sung,' and demonstrated the proper method. The patron was a wealthy Hindu, the listeners "were all influential Hindus of the town, the singer was a pandit. Here was a Mussalman rebuking him in public. And everyone agreed that Ustad Hafiz AH Khan was right.

My father had a high regard for these knowledgeable listeners who were alive to every note, every beat. He had great respect for the Scindia ruler of his time who knew the minutest aspects of music. Sad to say, his descendants seem to have no time for the classical music their ancestors had nourished lovingly.

My father used to broadcast on the radio sometimes. For that we would go to Delhi. Once when we attended a garden party at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, President Rajendra Prasad asked my father if he wished for anything from the state. My father replied in all seriousness, 'Yes sir, the Raga Durbari Kanada is in great danger. If you don't protect it, its purity will be forever lost to India.'

In 1957, Miss Nirmal Joshi, the first secretary of the Sangeet Natak Akademi, brought many leading artists to Delhi. Shambhu Maharaj the great kathak dancer, Thirakwa Saheb the tabla maestro, the Dagar brothers who sang dhrupad style, Siddheswari Devi the singer of thumris, Wahid Khan Saheb the sitarist, Sundarprasadji the dance guru, and my

father Hafiz AH Khan, were among those who were settled in an artists' colony called the Ferozeshah Hutments. These cottages were put up by the government.

You can imagine what a wonderful gathering it was, with creative work and exchanges going on all the time between these masters. To me the experience of being in their midst was sheer magic. The great Mushtaq Husain Khan of Rarnpur taught me some songs, and Moinuddin Dagar showed me how to sing dhrupads. I sometimes had the privilege of playing the tabla for Sundar Prasadji and Shambhu Maharaj-ji. So many styles and methods! So many ways of shaping beauty!

It was not always the serious business of art. Everyone was full of fun and laughter. We shared everything, even the food. One day someone would distribute home-made *halwa*, another day somebody else would bring *pakodas* and so on.

Those musicians really loved me. I was the only child of that age in the colony, and in constant demand. 'Run and get beedis', 'Go fetch paan', 'Arey, where are the matches?' 'Bring a jug of water'. Shambhu Maharaj would tease me, 'Son, you are a stage performer. You can buy me a cigarette.' His nephew Birju Maharaj who is today our greatest Kathak dancer, was a young boy then. We became good friends. We often practiced together—he with his *ghunghroos* (ankle bells) and I with my sarod. We would race into incredibly fast rhythms and see who got tired first. Sometimes I would play the tabla while he danced. We tried to build up energy, strength and stamina by challenging each other. It was great fun. We are still very good friends but where is the time for such carefree exchanges? We have to be satisfied with meetings at festivals outside Delhi!

Some well-wishers reminded father that he ought to send me to school. I was admitted to the prestigious Modern School nearby. My sons go to the same school now. The principal, Mr M.N. Kapoor, was a remarkable man. He realized that my goal in life was music. He relaxed rules for me, gave me permission to skip evening games for my music class and practice. While my classmates ran to the playfields, I cycled home to my sarod.

I knew that school learning was important and I tried hard, but some of it was very tough. Though I could bring off the most difficult rhythms on sarod and tabla, simple sums on paper proved too much for me!

I had to make other adjustments too. I come from a family whose members are courteous even to little children. But in the Delhi school, manners were rough and ready. The blunt speech jarred on my nerves. The boys didn't understand my interests. 'Kyon *tun tun karta rehta hai tu?* ('Why are you always tinkling away?') they would tease me. To please them I played film songs on the sarod. Of course, if my father had known he would have been furious. But it was good training. Let me tell you, playing any song on the sarod is difficult. Thanks to the boys' insistence I learnt to do it quite early. In time I made friends, and became popular when I won shields and trophies for the school in music competitions, I still keep in touch with them. Friends made in school always remain special.

My children face the same kind of problems in school. Their situation is worse because there are so many more mindless distractions today: satellite television, cable, video and so on. I know they listen to pop music. I don't mind. I have given them the choice I did not have. They can take up classical music if they want to. There are no pressures on them to do so. But luckily they are serious about the sarod and learn eagerly

whenever I teach them. They have performed with me since they were little children, just as I did with my father; I think this is entirely due to the blessings of my ancestors. Yes, they do put up pictures of rock stars in their room, but also pictures of great Hindustani musicians.

Indian classical musicians will often tell you proudly, 'In my childhood I used to practise twelve to eighteen hours a day!' Such marathon efforts are not necessary. If you are in the right hands, if your guru teaches you the right methods of practice, two hours in the morning and two in the evening are enough. My father had researched practice methods and showed me how to vary and distribute exercises. I passed them on to my children who have to juggle with more activities than I had, in sports and studies. .

I told you that I started performing on the stage as a child. In 1957 I was in Madras with my father playing at the Music Academy. It had only a thatched pandal then, but what inspiring concerts! That is where I saw Balasaraswati the Bharatanatyam dancer and Shambhu Maharaj showing each other *bhav*—or ways of expression. In 1958 I was at the Sadarang Music Conference in Calcutta. My tabla accompanist was the famous Karamatullah Khan. In 1966 the Prayag Sangeet Samiti gave me the title of Sarod Samrat, which means the emperor of sarod! I was barely fifteen.

My sons Amaan and Ayaan say they are always excited but also rather nervous before a stage performance. I used to feel the same at their age. You see, the children in a musician's family are exposed to the stage early in life. How to sit next to the guru, how to stand and bow—all this is part of their training. Many top musicians who don't get such exposure continue to suffer from stage fright all their lives. They are unable to look at members of the audience. But eye contact is essential. It makes a performance warm and personal for the listener. I was shy. But I made an effort to open my eyes, to talk, to smile ... that is also a *sadhana*. Mind you, not easy!

My father's increasing deafness had been a problem for me. In Delhi this got worse. I had to literally shout to be heard, and sing into his ear for him to be satisfied I was on the right track.

Father was invited to play at Sapru House in 1964. He was almost stone-deaf by then. He went up to the stage, and presented me as the artist of the evening. That was my trial by fire. I simply had to do well enough to please a distinguished audience who had come to hear the musical genius Hafiz Ali Khan.

I picked up courage by remembering the success of my first foreign tour a year before. It was organized by the Asia Music Society. A group of Indian artists went on a concert tour of the USA. The response was wonderful. I enjoyed it very much, especially because my childhood friend Birju Maharaj was with us. He often played tabla to my sarod. My father was terrified of air travel. He came to send me off in a state of anxiety and was there again at the airport to bless me when I returned.

I was earning money from a very young age. Father got a pension, but it was hardly enough for our large family. My earnings helped a lot. I remember some very funny incidents of those times.

Once, when I went to play at a festival in Allahabad the organizers could not spot me at the railway station. I waited and waited while they ran about searching for a white-haired, wrinkled ustad! Finally, I was identified and brought to the guest house. By that

time I was ravenous. But no food came. The caterers looked for an old man and left when they couldn't find him. Salamat and Nazakat Ali, the famous singers, were in the next room. They found me and fed me on the apples they had brought—the best I have ever tasted!

At another time I had no train reservation and managed to get into a compartment with a government cash box guarded by soldiers. They saw my sarod and asked me to play. 'Come on, show us what you can do.' I racked my brains to see how I could please them. Suddenly I remembered a popular film song of Mukesh and that's what I strummed on the sarod. 'Dam dam diga diga...' went the strings. The men began to tap their feet and clap their hands. They took good care of me on that trip.

At yet another time I reached Howrah station in Calcutta to catch the train for Delhi. I got off the taxi and found that I had only the ticket, no money! My purse had been left behind. I was fifteen years old. I borrowed money from the coolie to pay the taxi and borrowed from a fellow passenger to pay the coolie. When we reached Delhi, I borrowed from the coolie to pay the passenger, and from the taxi driver to pay the coolie. Fortunately I could pay the taxi driver with my own money when I reached home.

When I look into the past I see that my father and guru, Ustad Hafiz Ali Khan, has been the greatest influence and inspiration in my life—not just in passing on the family legacy of music, but in making me realize the importance of faith, of complete trust in God.

For I do believe, like my father did, that everything, however small or big, depends entirely on God's will. It is He who created the seven notes of music, and all the sounds and rhythms which are the basis of life—whether laughter or tears, pulse throb or heartbeat. I believe God created the seven notes to unite all the people in the world through music, to make them feel they are members of a single family.

More than anything else, I am eager that my sons should become good musicians. I wonder about the risks they may have to take, the hurdles they will have to cross. But I don't brood. I don't worry about their future. If we make too many decisions what is left for God to do? Just as God blessed me, He will bless my sons' efforts.

I tell my children to do their best. I also tell them, 'Whatever you wish to do, work hard at it. With patience, sincerity and faith. There is someone to take care of the rest.'