

# AIR'S SEMINAR ON THE HARMONIUM

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*Recently A.I.R. held a Seminar to review the decision banning the Harmonium in music broadcasts over the National network. For over three decades the Harmonium has suffered a total ban. This move had been initiated by Poet Rabindranath Tagore and had had the approval of several eminent musicians. Since A.I.R. is the largest single employer of musicians in the country its decision had far-reaching effects both in the teaching and practice of music. Students of music were not permitted to use the instrument as accompaniment during examinations in several recognised institutions, even if they may have used it during classes and practice. But the Harmonium has proved an ubiquitous instrument. Despite its lowly status it has been persistently present on the concert stage, in the class-room and in theatre and film-music. This has led A.I.R. to seriously review the question of its use in broadcasts of classical and light music. Several leading musicians and teachers of Hindustani and Karnatak music presented papers which are here reproduced. Each paper was followed by a discussion. Pertinent points raised are briefly given following each paper. The Chairman of the Seminar was Dr. Kapila Vatsyayan.*

## HARMONIUM AND KARNATAK CLASSICAL MUSIC

*Prof. P. Sambamoorthy*

India has as many as 500 Musical Instruments. These instruments are representative of the Chordophonic, Aerophonic Membranophonic, and Idiophonic varieties. Amongst Stringed and Wind Instruments, only those, on which one could play Classical Indian Music have developed. The *Yazh* (Harp) which was once a live Concert Instrument in South India, has become obsolete, though it survives in Burma under the name of *Sawn*. The *Yazh* was played on open strings and it had no provision for playing the subtle *srutis* and the delicate graces. The famous episode relating to *Yazhmuri Pan* may be recalled in this connection. When the fretted *Veena* with its immense possibilities for playing quarter-tones and *gamakas* emerged, the *Yazh* naturally receded into the background. Instruments with a keyboard like the Piano and Organ, did not develop in India because with such

instruments, only straight notes could be played and not grace notes. Further these instruments had no provision for playing quarter-tones. Instruments like the Panpipes and Chinese Mouth-Organ did not develop in India for the same reason.

Even the *Santur* or the *Sata Tantri Veena* wherein music is produced by striking the strings with two thin sticks has lost popularity. It survives now in Kashmir and Persia. The *Swaramandali* is also in the same position.

Indian Wind Instruments like the Flute and *Nagaswaram* have no keys, whereas the Western Flutes and Oboes have keys. The presence of keys will be an impediment to playing *Janta swaras* (double notes), *Kampita Swaras* and delicate *srutis* and nuances. The fingers have got to be in direct contact with the finger-holes to produce all the delicacies and niceties of *ragas*.

The Harmonium did not develop in India, even though instruments with bellows have been used as drones. It is a foreign instrument. It is not used even in Western countries for playing serious music. When the Harmonium came to India early in the 20th century, it became popular with a number of people. It readily found a place as a theatrical accompaniment. Even novices were able to play upon it without much practice. The reeds were there, readily tuned for being played upon. The drone coupling and the facilities available for playing simultaneously in two octaves also contributed to the popularity of the instrument. It was ere long recognized that it was not possible to play certain types of Classical South Indian Music upon it. It was found that:

1. The delicate *srutis* characteristic of *ragas* like *Gaula*, *Saveri*, *Begada*, *Neelambari* and *Kuranji* could not be played upon it;
  2. Graces like *Kampita gamaka*, characteristic of *ragas* like *Dhanyasi*, *Ananda Bhairavi*, and *Atana* could not be played upon it. Graces like *Ullasita*, *Vali*, and *Leena* also could not be played;
  3. In some *ragas* the same note was rendered with a slightly augmented pitch in the *Arohana* and with a slightly diminished pitch in the *Avarohana*;
- (a) *Gandhara* in *Todi*, (b) *Dhaivata* in *Kambhoji* and *Sourashtra* and (c) *Nishada* in *Surati* may be cited as examples.

On the Harmonium, there was only one key for playing a note.

There were skilled performers on the Harmonium in South India like Harmonium Kandaswamy Mudaliyar, and Pondicherry T. S. Rama Iyer, who by resorting to clusters of *Anuswaras* around the concerned notes, managed to give the impression, approximating to graced utterances of those notes. In their concerts, they avoided compositions with intricate *gamakas* and played *Kritis* in *madhyama Kalas* in *ragas* which were mostly derivatives of *Kharaharapriya*, *Harikambhoji* and *Sankarabharana melas*.

Certain types of folk songs can however be played on the Harmonium and without loss of effect.

The *Sruti* Box with the Harmonium reeds for the tonic note, 5th and octave note has come to stay as an easily portable instrument in *Bhajan*s, *Kalakshepas* and Dance recitals.

It may be pointed out in this connection, that the Paris reeds, Kasriel reeds and Esteve reeds of the past, gave a pleasant tone. They also had a long life. The recent present-day reeds manufactured in India should come up to that level of excellence, if the Harmonium is to be used as a concert instrument on the platform, to a limited extent.

*After Prof. Sambamoorthy had read his paper, there followed a discussion in which Dr. Raman enquired,*

*"I would like to know whether there is any possibility of improving the construction of the Harmonium so that you can introduce reeds in such a way as to cover up as many notes as possible in the musical renderings of Karnatic Music. If that could be done to a certain extent, the Harmonium can satisfy, I mean though not fully, near fully, or something like that — to render some of the Classical Music in an improved way. I would like to know whether such improvements could be done on the Harmonium."*

## THE HARMONIUM IN LIGHT AND SEMI-CLASSICAL MUSIC

*P. V. Subramaniam*

Even for a country so inured to borrowing from abroad — money, technology and forms of expertise—it must be something of a shock to be told that at least a few of its latest fads and prejudices are in fact imported. The Harmonium, it is true, has been adapted to our music from the West. So is the Violin. The latter at any rate is Western in origin although other forms of stringed and bowed instruments were in vogue in ancient India. But the European Harmonium, perfected by Alexander Debain in Paris 130 years ago, was itself a modification of the ancient Chinese *Sheng*. Thus the free-reed instrument travelled westward first before returning to the East to find much favour in India.

This brief defence of the much maligned key-board instrument is not to sing its praises but to bury a prejudice. All I seek to stress is that: it has established itself as a popular instrument; has helped the initiation of laymen into the tonal mysteries and outlines of classical music and has been a faithful aid for ailing voices. All I ask is that it be reckoned as one of the many varieties of our musical instruments and not treated as an outcaste. I plead for an immediate ban on this form of untouchability.

The Harmonium has been in exile from the infamously chaste precincts of All India Radio for over three decades. An eccentric former Controller of Broadcasting was instrumental in pushing this instrument the Harmonium out of vogue? No. On the contrary it is ubiquitous. And the street singer, long before the days of K. L. Sehgal, has been lugging this bulky ornament strung round his neck.

Yet prejudices die hard. Even an invitation to discuss its merit as a producer of musical notes is couched in hesitant and condescending phraseology. I have been asked to consider the claim of the Harmonium to be a poor relation of other hallowed musical instruments.

But I would be doing injustice to my views if I dwelt exclusively on the place of Harmonium in light and semi-classical music. I have enlarged the context and shall consider the status of the Harmonium in our music as a whole. I shall not be a party to the artificial fragmentation of our music and its subjection to a hierarchical caste system.

Let us first consider the attitudes of some of the purists of classical music: Bade Ghulam Ali Khan, Amir Khan, Begum Akhtar and Lakshmi Shankar. Why do they favour the Harmonium as an accompaniment? Does not the richness, range and tonal variety of their voices find a counterpart in the notes of the Harmonium?

If one divests oneself of prejudice the answers are apparent. The maestros prefer the Harmonium because its notes are flawless, unsagging and constant. Amir Khan is so allergic to the *sarangi*, especially to its unmusical behaviour in fast tempo, that he does not allow it in his concerts. The Harmonium not only provides a sound base but it also helps muffle minor blemishes of tone of the vocalists.

One reason for the bias against the Harmonium is that whenever it is mentioned the detractors have in mind only the primitive instrument of three or four decades ago. It is not realised that as in the case of other aids to music the Harmonium has undergone great refinement. Today's version of the Harmonium is capable of providing a whole range of tonal excellence unavailable in other musical instruments. This point needs further driving-home. A first-class Harmonium has four sets of reeds, each covering 34 octaves, encompassing, sub-bass, bass, medium and female. The instrument is larger and has built-in gadgets to filter the air through two compartments. The merit of this arrangement is that when air is blown in it does not strike the reeds aggressively. From the air-tight compartment wind emerges softly through the reeds when the key is pressed.

Let us look at the reed-board. In the old days the instrument was equipped with a single piece reed-board. This made the sound it produced strident and harsh. Present-day Harmoniums have three-reed-boards joined together with provision for air-release in a zig-zag fashion ensuring softness of tone and melody. A good Harmonium today costs as much as a thousand rupees.

There is another feature. Two octaves of the scale can be operated at a time without any effort, by merely pulling a stopper. There has been a new invention, of late. A small spring sticking out of the left-hand side of the bellows can be operated to make the second or third octave sound simultaneously, while one is using the first one. Thus an orchestral effect can be added to the playing, something which few other instruments allow. This is possible to an extent with the *veena* if two strings can be harnessed simultaneously. But it is something of a feat to be attempted only sparingly because of the effort involved.

The recurring burden of complaint against the Harmonium is that it cannot yield *gamakas* which are so essential for classical music. But do

other instruments more favoured yield *gamakas*? Does the xylophone, allowed in the A.I.R., yield *gamakas*. Can Jain Kumar Jain, who plays the *jalatharangam* in A.I.R. programmes produce a single *gamaka*?

Let us turn to light and semi-classical music, the genre assigned to me. The Mandolin is often heard in light music programmes of All India Radio. I fail to understand the *gamakas* the Mandolin is capable of producing.

In the far South, before the days of cant and dilettantism, Perur Subramanya Dikshitar, the Harmonium Wizard, used to accompany the great classical vocalists. A stolid and respectable body like the Sangeetha Nataka Sangam of Madras honoured him two years ago. Dikshitar played on a highly sophisticated Harmonium. There are many gramophone records testifying to his instrumental excellence while accompanying a maestro of the calibre of Palladam Sanjivi Rao. These records have also been broadcast over the Radio. The heavens have not fallen. They are still in one piece.

The late S. G. Kittappa, for many years the lone star of the Tamil stage, had for an accompaniment his brother, Shri S. G. Kasi Iyer, on the Harmonium. His rich, sonorous and pliable voice could be matched by notes which could be coaxed only out of the Harmonium. All other instruments were unequal to the vocal challenge. To dismiss Kittappa as a mere stage singer would be doing injustice both to his music and to his artistic genius. It is said that the great composer Gayaka-sikamani Muthia Bagavathar used to test his own competence with Kittappa's vocal chords. The flashes of musical variations with which Kittappa illuminated Karnatak music compositions, classical, semi-classical and light, attracted admiration and emulation by great stalwarts like Violin Govindaswamy Pillai, Nadaswaram Rajaratnam Pillai and Ariyakudi Ramanuja Iyengar. These maestros were regular first-nighters at his stage shows.

All Music Directors of the Indian films are harmonists. The precision of the Harmonium key-board offers a sound and ready-made musical base for the composer. He is able to conceive of the notes more easily by an instant, involuntary reflect action. The Harmonium was an indispensable aid to teaching of notes of the scale. Two of the maestros of Karnatak music — Maharajapuram Viswanatha Iyer and Alathur Sivasubramanya Iyer — had great Harmonists as their *guru*. Maharajapuram learnt his art from Palani Rangappa Iyer, Alathur from Venkatesa Iyer, also of Alathur.

One can go on piling evidence in favour of the Harmonium but it will only be to labour a point which should have no difficulty in going home. The unmistakable internal evidence is that in classical music the Harmonium has been used with striking success. The maestros of yester-year did not quarrel with its tone or with its supposed cheapness. The external evidence is that it is immensely popular. To dismiss both in order to cling to a prejudice is to argue against the overwhelming testimony of classical as well as the so-called light and semi-classical music.

And when I plead for the restoration of lost status for this prodigal instrument please let me make it clear that I have in mind only its refined, soundly tested and standardised form. I do not know if the Indian Standards Institution is concerned in this but I feel it should be. It should scientifi-

cally test the frequency of the Harmonium notes, take voice (or is it tonal?) prints of the tones of the Harmonium and certify its quality. Put through this scientific process or test, I am sure, the Harmonium will come out creditably. I wonder how many of the others on which we have conferred high-caste status can yield precise notes on which I.S.I. can put its stamp.

*Dr. Deva, who participated in the discussion following Shri Subramaniam's paper, remarked:*

*"I would like to combine what Prof. Sambamoorthy and Mr. Subramaniam have said; and the question is how far you can go with this instrument. So long as you cannot produce gamakas, so long as you cannot produce that which is beautiful in good Indian Classical Music, you can better throw it out. And the second point that I would like to make is that Gulam Ali Khan or Amir Khan or so and so using the Harmonium does not make it the standard instrument of any use. Vivekananda's smoking does not make it a healthy habit."*

*And this is what Kun. Mregendra Singh said during the course of the discussion:*

*"The first two papers have brought out a comparison between Veena and Harmonium. The point is that are we using a Harmonium as an accompanying instrument? If so, with which type of music? Just now we mentioned Bade Gulam Ali and others — they had a Harmonium. Now if you really have an accompanist as a Sarangee Player with a vocalist, is he given the opportunity to follow the vocalist to the tee? If he is, then Harmonium cannot do that because you are using shrutis, gamakas and the rest. But if it is supposed just to give you a certain background etc. then to what type of music can the AIR adapt this instrument?"*

*Intervening in the discussion, Smt. Kapila Vatsayan summing up the points raised so far, said:*

*"It is quite clear from the two papers that were presented before you and the discussion that followed that the concern of this audience, as also of both practising musicians and scholars, is with the nature of this instrument; and how far the construction of the instrument itself is suitable for what might be termed as the essentials or the fundamental nature of Indian Music, and whether it has inherent limitations which therefore make it unsuitable for what we know as Classical Indian Music today. That is a pertinent question which has been asked; and to my mind both the papers, in spite of their seeming opposing viewpoints made it quite clear that the instrument had a kind of limitation which meant that it could not produce two main things — the gamakas and the meend. This, I think, everybody has been agreed upon, and there has been no difference of opinion on that. The question of the tones, the quarter tones and the shrutis was raised. The fact that this can be, as the construction of the instrument goes, improved upon physically through physics and through science was obvious: but whether it would be commensurate with the effort that has been put in along with the other instruments that already exist was another point which was raised. Finally, I think that the point which was raised repeatedly in discussion as also by the speakers was whether as concert accompaniment it fulfilled its functions. And in that once again these limitations which had been pointed out were brought up.*

## HARMONIUM AND INDIAN MUSIC

S. N. Ratanjanker

Let me at the outset express my surprise at this priority-interest evinced by our music lovers in the Harmonium. "Does the instrument, after all deserve such attention to drive us to hold a Seminar on it at a cost equal, almost, to the cost of a dozen or more Harmoniums?" I ask myself. Well, these are days of democracy and accordingly the voice of the man in the street must reach the people, reach also the ears of the gods. A lost voice like mine, whispers in my ears, saying: "Do not the genuine Indian musical instruments of the old age-long tradition, like the *Beena* and *Mridanga*, which have the capacity to express genuine Indian thought and imagination, but which, unfortunately, are passing out of vogue simply because they demand a concentrated study and practice, deserve our attention?" In these days of the quick tempo of human life, pat comes the answer, "who would devote hour after hour to the practice of the arts of *Beena Vadan* and *Mridanga Vadan*;" *Sarangi* is again, an Instrument of old tradition as a supporter of classical, light classical and light vocal music. It is confined to a few professionals. Practice of *Sarangi*-playing is also as exacting as the *Beena* and *Mridanga*, demanding hard practice and study. The back part of the fingers of the left hand behind the nails gets painfully hurt on account of their constant rubbing on the strings of the instrument, in the first stages of practice. They get gradually hardened and then the fingers can rub the strings up and down without any further damage to the fingers. But the scratches on the fingers and the consequent pain in the initial stages deters many students from practising on this instrument, and specialising in it. The *Sarangi*-players that be, are lucky that men of education and culture are not learning to play on *Sarangi*. Excepting a few cases that can be counted on the fingers, of people who, not belonging to the professional families of *Sarangi*-players, have practised the art and have made remarkable progress in it, this 2nd voice has been left alone, and the professional *Sarangi*-players have still a good market for their art. Most of the *Sarangi*-players have been now absorbed in the services of All India Radio. It is not easy, now-a-days, to get *Sarangi* accompanists for a vocal recital in a private music gathering. It is therefore more necessary that some of us, outside the professional cadre should start practising the art of *Sarangi*-playing and specialising in it. Violin is coming to the front now, there is every likelihood of the *Sarangi* also passing out of vogue like the *Beena* and *Mridanga*.

Lets us now turn to our subject proper.

Harmonium is a wind-instrument. But it is not a wind-instrument of the type of *Shehnai*, *Bansuri* or *Algojah*. In these it is the long short lengths of the air-column which is blown through the tubes of these instruments and which, accordingly govern the degrees of pitch while in the Harmonium every note is produced by the air blown by the bellows through separate free reeds which are thin plates of metal tuned to each individual note. Every note has its own reed inside the box of the Harmonium. This makes all the difference between a harmonium and the other wind-instruments. The minutest and most delicate shades of pitch and graces of music can be reproduced on a *Shehnai* as has been amply demonstrated by our leading *Shehnai*-players of today. Harmonium is a key-board instrument

on which the twelve semi-tones of the scale are fixed once for all in all the three octaves—*Mandra*, *Madhya* and *Tara*. There is no possibility of a slur linking up a note with another following it by slides. Of course it is possible to maintain the continuity of the music by a skilful handling of the bellows and the finger pressure on the keys. But it is nothing like the continuity of the human voice. The continuity of the flow of music can be maintained on the Harmonium by pressing the key of a required note before quite lifting up the finger from the key of the note immediately preceding the required note. It is not known who introduced this instrument for the first time. Alexander Debain is however supposed to have improved upon the attempts, in this direction, of some people prior to him in its construction and secured a patent thereof in Paris in 1840 A.D. As it is, the instrument is not known to have been much employed in Europe for any serious type of music. It is said that it is being used mostly by street mendicants.

In India, the Harmonium appears to have been introduced in the latter part of the last century, as a curiosity and a mere toy for the amusement of some Indian Chief. It is, no doubt, a very handy instrument. Once its reeds have been tuned in the twelve equal semitones of the tempered scale of Western music in the successive three Octaves at the Workshop, it requires no further fresh tuning at the time of the actual performance on it.

Although roughly the Indian Scale of Music of the twelve semitones is nearly the same as that of Western music, there are certain vital and perceptible differences between the two. For instance, the *shuddha dhaivata*, the 6th Major Tone of the Indian scale, is a Major Tone, while its corresponding note 'A' of the Western Scale, is a minor tone. The *komal rishabha*, the *teevra madhyama* and the *komal dhaivata* are other instances in point, these being slightly lower or higher than the corresponding notes of the Western scale. In the Harmoniums that are imported or manufactured in India proper attention to these differences and the tuning of the reeds, accordingly, of the twelve degrees of pitch of the Indian music scale is absolutely essential. The first requisite therefore for a Harmonium being correctly in tune is that the manufacturer of the instrument must be himself a man whose ears are trained and experienced in musical intervals so that he is able to distinguish degrees of pitch at the smallest intervals. At least these manufacturers should have well trained musicians in their service to supervise the tuning of the reeds. It is not known how far the manufacturers of the Harmonium that be in India fulfil this primary condition. Otherwise ordinarily the Harmoniums manufactured in India are tuned to the degrees of pitch of the Western tempered scale of Music. In fact, some of the dealers in Harmonium are known to be ordering the ready tuned reeds from Paris and then fitting them up here in their Harmoniums without retouching them, and putting them on the market.

The twelve semitones of the Indian music scale are like pivot points on which the *swaras* of a *raga* either stand, move up to a slightly higher degree of pitch or down to a slightly lower pitch, according to the needs of the correct expression of the *raga* concerned. In fact some notes move up and/or down in one and the same *Raga* to suit the correct expression of a particular passage of the *raga*. For instance:—



In the *rāga* *Darbāri kanhada* the *komal gandhara* (printed italic) is at its lowest pitch (*Ati Komal*) in the passage “RE....<sup>sa</sup>RE, RE....<sup>sa</sup>RE, GA....<sup>re</sup>GA, GA....<sup>re</sup>GA....GA....<sup>re</sup>GA, RE SA, RE....<sup>ga</sup>SA),” while in the passage “MA, PA, MA PA<sup>ma</sup> GA, <sup>ma</sup>GA, <sup>ma</sup>GA, MA PA, <sup>ma</sup>GA, MA,...<sup>sa</sup>RE”, this very *Komal Gandhara* is distinctly at a higher degree of pitch. Similarly, in *Lalit* the *teevra madhyama* occurring between two *shudha madhyamas* is the lowest, for instance, “GA, RE, SA <sup>sa</sup>NI RE GA GA MA, MA, MA, MA, MA MA MA (MA), GA,” followed by the concluding passage, “MA GA, RE, SA and in the passages up the scale

such as “MA, <sup>ni</sup>DHA, MA, DHA SA” etc. in which the *Teevra Madhyama* is distinctly at a higher degree of pitch. In *Bheema Palasi* again, the *Komala Nishada* is always sung with a touch of the *Tara Shadja* and stands consequently at a higher degree of pitch above the proper *Komal Nishada*, being neither *Komal NI* nor *Shuddha NI* and being at a pitch between them. E.g., MA, PA <sup>ma</sup>GA, <sup>ma</sup>GA, MA PA <sup>sa</sup>NI <sup>sa</sup>NI, PA, <sup>sa</sup>NI SA; followed by the passage “<sup>pa</sup>SA, SA-NI DHA, PA” in which the *Komal NI* is at its proper pitch. In *ragas* such as *Bihaga*, *Shankara*, *Sohanai*, *Multani*, the *shuddha nishada* is slightly higher than the proper *shuddha nishada* in the *Arohas*. There are no keys on the Harmonium for these lights and shades of the *ragas*. I have given only a few instances of the variability of notes of the *ragas*. Hindu-stani music is full of such cases.

The distinguishing characteristic of Indian music, and perhaps, of all Oriental music, is its fluidity. I would like to draw attention to the famous *shloka* of the *grantha* — on the topic of the natures of *shrutis*.’

यथाप्सु चरतां मायामीनानाम् नोपलक्ष्यते ।  
आकाशे वा विहंगानाम् तदुत्स्वरगता श्रुति ॥

As it is, this *shloka* applies to the nature of *shrutis*, but it also hints at the general character of Indian music. Indian music refuses to adjust itself to water-tight compartments. Every *swara*, in the practical rendering of a *rāga*, is linked up, one way or the other, by a grace-note, by a *meend*, by a *soonth*, by a *khatka*, or a sense of a natural sequence, with the note preceding it as well as the note following it.

Supposing keys for all the degrees of pitch intervening between the twelve semitones of the scale are fitted on the Harmonium, and a *shruti* Harmonium is manufactured, who will play on it? Just as a ‘*shruti Veena*’ is useful only as an instrument of reference (as a dictionary) the ‘*shruti* Harmonium’ will be an instrument of reference only. It will hardly be practical to play on it. *Sruti* Harmoniums have been manufactured in the recent past. But they have never served the purpose either of accompaniment or independent performance. They have remained as Museum Exhibits only.

Harmonium is a cheap instrument and is likely to bring music down to its own level of cheapness. It is incapable of bringing out the correct expression of Indian music. The following example of a passage of music, on the one hand, from the human voice or on string or wind instrument, and, on the other, on the Harmonium will perhaps bear out the veracity of these observations:

On Harmonium it will sound thus: SA NI DHA PA MA GA RE  
SA RE GA MA A —————  
HA HA HA HA.

As it is, the so-called accompaniment of Vocal Music on a musical instrument, on *Sarangi*, Violin, *Dilruba* or Harmonium, is no accompaniment in the correct sense of the word. May be, even at one moment's interval of time, at the best, it is a chase, a following, a pursuit only, and not accompaniment as such. Our ears, by the habit of so many years, have, unfortunately, become used to such so-called accompaniment, and it is tolerated.

The effect of the spasms of the bellows of the Harmonium on the mind and voice is that it develops the habit of singing in spasms, like a patient of asthma. Of course an expert Harmonium-player practices due control of the bellows so that there are no spasms. But it often happens, especially in the cases of learners of music. That they, not having practised the opening and closing of the bellows properly so that there are no audible spasms, this habit becomes uncontrollable. As an Examiner in Practical Music I have been able to detect the habit of a good many candidates for the Examinations the use of Harmonium in their practice of music, although according to the rules of the examinations the use of Harmonium in the Examination Hall for accompaniment is strictly prohibited. The candidates were found to be at much disadvantage on account of the absence of the Harmonium.

For all the reasons pointed out just now, I do not find myself able to recommend the use of the Harmonium as an instrument of accompaniment in the broadcast of vocal music over All India Radio.

As an independent instrument, however, I do not think there should be any objection to the programmes of Harmonium on the All India Radio.

*Dr. S. N. Rattanankar's paper was followed by a discussion in which Shri Dilipchander Vedi said that it is true that the Harmonium cannot produce some nuances but it is equally true that it has some advantages. Speaking in Hindi he cited the example of Ustad Fyaz Khan who occasionally used the Harmonium for accompaniment:*

हारमोनियम में बहुत कुछ नहीं। मैंने हारमोनियम बजा के वाह वाह भी ली है मगर मैं कभी नहीं कहूंगा सारंगी और बीना का मुकाबला करता है, यह नहीं कहूंगा। आज क्या कोई कह सकता है? उनकी दरबारी तो अलाबन्दे खां जैसे धुपदिये इतराज नहीं कर सके। हारमोनियम तो उन्होंने यूँ 'यूज' नहीं किया कि हारमोनियम वाला 'पीस' बजा दें खाँसाहब बाद में चले। वह तो 'सा' 'पा' 'सा' 'मा' छेड़ दिया पीछे 'बैकग्राउन्ड' में और जिन रागों में बोल बज सकता है बोल बजा लिये। अब अगर हारमोनियम गलत है तो माफ कीजिये कोई टप्पानबाज को बुलाइये और मेरे हाथ में दीजिये हारमोनियम और उधर से लाइये सारंगीवाज को, 'रेकार्ड' करते जाइये कि किस राग में सही स्वर निकलते हैं। एक गवैया आरोही में जिस गंधार को कायम करता है हर वक्त अवरोही में उस गंधार को — उस आन्दोलित गंधार को — कायम नहीं कर सकता। अगर है तो कोई गवैया—हिन्दुस्तान का नहीं बल्कि सारे 'वर्ल्ड' का — सौ दफा दरबारी का वह गंधार लगाये और फिर सुने कि सौ दफा वो ही ह। इस कूड़ "इन्सट्रुमेंट" को जिसे कूड़ कहते हैं कम से कम वो सुर तो कायम रखता है कहीं। यह तो हमें बताता है कि हम तुमसे कह अल है और तुम हमसे कहां अलग हो।"

## HARMONIUM AS ACCOMPANIMENT FOR HINDUSTANI CLASSICAL MUSIC

*V. H. Deshpande*

I must indeed congratulate the Broadcasting Directorate on arranging this Symposium at which they have taken care to see that all shades of opinion are represented. Further, it is also very creditable on their part to have conceived the symposium to embrace all the various aspects of the subject. What is most praiseworthy is that they have designed the symposium so as to treat the subject separately with reference to the Hindustani and Karnatak styles.

Let me assure you that in Maharashtra this has been a burning subject on which there have been several meetings, symposiums and seminars and almost every one of the performers is agreed that the ban on the Harmonium should be lifted forthwith.

When I say that the issue is controversial, I mean controversial in a very limited sense. It is controversial only in the four corners of the Broadcasting stations in the country and in a small coterie of orthodox academicians, who refuse to listen to the counsel of reason and logic on behalf of the performers. Besides, this is only an artificially created controversy in the sense that the Harmonium has been a uniformly accepted instrument for accompaniment since the time it first came into use and it was only at the initiative of the Department (and not of the musicians) that its use was banned.

Ours is indeed a musically backward country where academicians tend to remain cut off from the practising performers and the performers, who only sing and please cannot or do not think or speak. They simply avoid the company of the academicians! It is in these peculiar circumstances that I have made bold myself to come here and put forward their point of view which is incidentally also my own view on the subject.

Let me at the outset raise a fundamental question viz. what is the function of an accompanying instrument? I submit it is to create a musical atmosphere, and inspire the artiste by bringing him into his best singing mood. Further, the accompanying instrument must keep the continuity of singing to heighten the musicality of the performance and make it more attractive, more entertaining and in effect more pleasing. This it is expected to do by following the main artiste closely with or without a little time-lag and also at times being played independently in the interludes, which is generally calculated to excite and inspire the principal to do better than before. I dare say that the Harmonium by its powerful, constant and sustained notes not only abundantly satisfies all these requirements but satisfies them in a far greater degree than any of the stringed instruments like *Sarangi*, Violin, *Dilruba*, etc. The sound of the Harmonium is so overwhelmingly powerful and pleasing, both to the performers and to the audience, that it gives it a decisive advantage over all other accompanying instruments. The advantage is so great that it alone is enough to overcome all its defects, whether imaginary or real.

This is the paramount reason why the musicians, the most outstanding or mediocre, seniors or juniors, or good, bad, or indifferent, have all been uniformly using the Harmonium as an accompanying instrument for Hindustani music. Even the worst enemies of the Harmonium and the most vocal advocates of its ban have been using it in their own concerts! (Then probably they cease to be its critics and become performers; and rightly so!). During all the fifty years of my musical life in Bombay, Poona and elsewhere in Maharashtra, I have not seen a single exception, except one, solitary one, by the late Alladiya Khan!

One important thing that is said against the Harmonium is that it drowns the defects of the artiste. If this observation is correct, it is a very curious charge. If the defects are serious why was the artiste at all called by the A.I.R. to broadcast? and again, why this insistence that the defect must not be masked, but must be made evident and glaring to the audience?

Also, what is meant by drowning? Is it masking of the singer's sound by a more powerful sound? In such a case, the harmonium-player ought to have common sense enough to regulate his bellows to suit the amplitude of the actual singing.

Another important point on behalf of the artistes. The artiste has spent years after years in cultivating his art and is entitled to be trusted to know what is good for himself. Why should he not be given the freedom to choose what is good for himself? I submit this is an important question, viz., the Freedom of the Artiste. He is certainly anxious to earn the appreciation of his listeners and his stake in the success of his programme is personal as against the impersonal interest of the AIR staff. I for one feel, that the Broadcasting authorities should go all out to tell the artiste "Choose whatever accompanying instrument you like, but give us your very best performance". It is a great pity that the authorities deny him this most obvious facility to enable him to give a well-dressed performance.

The objections to the Harmonium are more imaginary than real in the sense that there is a satisfactory answer to every one of them. It is, of course, true that generally the Harmonium is based on a tempered scale and yet it is now more than thirty/forty years since the *Shruti*-Harmonium giving a 'just' scale of all the twenty-two *Shrutis* has been available against a simple order. Besides, every musician can tune it to his own particular pitch. Even an ordinary 'Tempered' Harmonium can also be so tuned. It is similarly true that the Harmonium employs fixed notes and that it falls short when the principal is singing the oscillatory *komal rishabh/dhaivat* of *Bhairav* or *komal gandhar/dhaivat* of *Darbari Kanada* and the like; and yet a seasoned player can easily catch the spirit of these by his deft control of the bellows or subtle, slight touch of the adjoining notes. (If an amateurish player does not feel equal to the job, he can just give the drone of the *shadja-pancham* notes and that will more than compensate for his not being upto the mark). It is true that the Harmonium ought not to be used at the time of practising lest the artiste might blur his sharp sense of tonal accuracy; and yet there has not been a single instance to my knowledge that even one of them has used it for this purpose! At the same time, there has also not been a single instance where he has not used it in *mehfils*. Even the best of them and respected throughout the country for their extra-sharp sense of intonation and use of subtle tonal nuances like late Khansaheb Abdul

Karim Khan and late Narayanrao Balgandharva have never been seen even once without the Harmonium accompaniment. And the Harmonium they used was not even the *Shruti*-Harmonium with a 'just' scale, but only the ordinary Harmonium with a 'tempered' scale. The truth of the matter seems to be that nobody has become *besur* by using the Harmonium and nobody who was already a *besur* has become *surel* by discarding it (otherwise we would not have come across so many out-of-tune artistes on the Radio) and even assuming for the sake of argument that the rejection of the Harmonium may improve his tonal accuracy. I venture to suggest that singing at the most half a dozen times during the whole year at the Radio is not going to do him any good.

I do not attach much importance to the opinion expressed by the then senior musicians since their opinion of thirty and odd years ago could not have been otherwise. In their young days they were brought up in the orthodox traditional way when the Harmonium had not yet come into vogue and their obvious reluctance to take to any new innovation could have been easily understood. And yet, believe it or not, the fact is that everyone of them, who opined otherwise, never failed to use the Harmonium in his own concerts! AIR can get any number of eye-witnesses to this phenomenon. They might even consult the very ardent advocates of the ban including their own advisers for that matter.

It is said that while ascending, the vocalists' notes tend to be lower and that while descending they tend to be higher. The veracity of this statement can only be verified in a physics laboratory. If they do depart, however, from their normal value, to what extent do they do so? If it is to the extent of one full *shruti*, it can be obtained on the *Shruti*-Harmonium. If it is less than a *shruti*, why make a mountain of a molehill? And lastly, does the *sarangi* also in practice follow these micro-intervals?

*Sarangi* is extolled as the most suitable instrument for accompaniment in preference to the Harmonium. May I take the liberty to point out, that it is meant essentially for female musicians and especially for light-classical varieties such as *Thumris* and the like. It is not at all suitable for powerful manly voices of male performers. It is far too delicate and effeminate for them. Even the stalwarts like Abdul Karim Khan, Faiyaz Khan, Alladiya Khan, Nissar Husain Khan, Vilayat Husain Khan, Bhaskarbuwa Bakhale, Sawai Gandharva, Vazebuwa of the olden times, or Bhimsen Joshi, Kumar Gandharva, and all others of the present times, have hardly ever been seen using the *Sarangi* Accompaniment. In contrast, however, they have been invariably seen with the accompaniment of Harmonium. This indeed is the evidence of outright rejection of the erstwhile and much extolled *sarangi* and unqualified acceptance of the much maligned Harmonium. I do not think that anybody can get away from this by saying that these are only the vagaries of the great ones not to be followed by others.

Against the background of the departmental ban on the Harmonium this is indeed a phenomenon, the significance of which requires to be thoroughly grasped. I have already said about its tones being too tender and delicate for a male musician. But, in view of this phenomenon, it is necessary to go into some further details on the subject.

The foremost of the hurdles in the way of a *Sarangi* is its very virtue of the resonating strings, which are so many that they take annoyingly long

time for being tuned in correct intonation. And it is much more difficult to do so in an AIR studio in the few minutes just before the programme. It is again next to impossible for the *sarangi* to change over to the altered scale in between the two items, where every second wasted is a dead weight on the singer. *Sarangi* was perfectly alright in the spacious olden days of Kings and Queens and Sardars and Jagirdars, when before the select small audiences in the privacy of their chambers, there was no hurry about anything on the surface of the earth; the *sarangi* could then take as much long time as it wanted to tune itself. But *Sarangi* in modern times is really an anachronism unless some mechanical device is invented to tune it instantaneously. Most of the times it can be tuned only badly in the little time available.

It is said that *Sarangi* can reproduce the exact tonal nuances and *meends* and *gamaks*. This is alright only if the resonating strings allow it to remain in accurate intonation. But let me ask, whether exact reproduction is at all necessary for an accompanying instrument, whose role is only complementary? Besides, classical music is not all *meend* and *gamak*, which is only a part of it—may be an important part. But, the rest of the time, the *sarangi* even if it is perfectly tuned, must foist the *meend* and *gamak* even when it is not wanted and perhaps mar the performance to that extent by its unwanted, inopportune use.

Further, apart from the meaning of the word-text of the *chiz*, the words have their own independent sound-form which accentuate the contours of the *raga* and consequently of the performances; and yet the *sarangi* is inherently incapable of producing even a remote semblance of these. Besides, every one or two seconds, the bow of the *sarangi* must turn to the left or to the right and must cause some minimum disturbance to the melodic flow which has simply to be tolerated. Harmonium can avoid this disturbance altogether. Then again, while the principal is singing *alaap* in a slow, gentle, leisurely way, the *sarangi* must give the unavoidable impression of a fast movement by reason of the inevitably swift movements of its bow. And worst of all when the artiste is singing *taan-phirat*, *sarangi* invariably becomes outrageously out-of-tune. I am not at all finding fault with the veteran *Sarangi*-players. But these are the inherent limitations of the instrument itself and no amount of virtuosity can overcome them.

There is, however, one important consideration, which the authorities would like to bear in mind. I am unable to explain why, but the succession of *Sarangi*-players is somehow seen to have been seriously hampered during the post-war period and hardly any new-comers have been/are being seen taking to *sarangi*-playing as their vocation. I am afraid, during the next five or ten years, when the present generation of the *sarangi*-players go, there may be a real problem to find substitute accompanists. The ban on the Harmonium, therefore, requires to be lifted if for this reason also.

I think I have answered all the objections, levelled against the Harmonium so far. To sum up the discussion, I would say that:

(1) The Harmonium by reason of its powerful, sweet and sustained tone/drone, at once puts the artiste in a singing mood, much better than any other stringed instrument does.

(2) It is available for instantaneous use without requiring to be tuned.

(3) It heightens the entertainment value of the performance to a far greater degree than any other instrument of accompaniment.

(4) *Shruti*-Harmonium employing a 'just' scale of all the *shrutis* can be had against an order.

(5) A reasonably seasoned player can catch the spirit of the oscillating notes by control of its bellows and slight touches of the adjoining notes.

(6) It can serve as a lining for the artists' performance and can also be played independently in the interludes and rest-pauses without being out-of-tune.

(7) All the male and female artistes including the advocates of the ban, have used it in their concerts and all the male artistes have used it to the exclusion of the *sarangi*.

(8) Succession of the *sarangi*-players has been seriously hampered during the post-war period and there would be real difficulty to find substitute accompanists in the next few years.

(9) It has a decisive advantage over all the accompanying instruments, having regard to all the above considerations.

In the end, I have only to urge that it is essentially a question of the freedom of the artiste. He is entitled to be trusted to know what is best for himself. The authorities instead of imposing any particular instrument on him, should give him full latitude to choose any instrument of accompaniment he likes if only in the interests of the success of his performance.

The last and by far the most important plea I have to make is that, irrespective of whatever decision is taken with respect to Karnatak music, the freedom of the Hindustani musicians should not be curtailed in the matter of choosing whatever instrument of accompaniment they like.

After Prof. V. H. Deshpande had read his paper there was a discussion. Summing up its main points Smt. Kapila Vatsayan said:

"It was clear from both sides that no musician, really of any worth, used the Harmonium during his training days—at least this is what I gathered from both sides. And that whether it was the *Ektara* or the *Tanpura* or anything — his understanding of his tonic, his understanding and command and control of that, did not depend upon the Harmonium. This is something which I got out from this discussion. Furthermore, the second point which was raised in this context was, therefore, that having gone through the rigorous training in what would be termed as the traditional manner, was it or was it not in fact, i.e. in point of history, and whether or not it is advisable to use the Harmonium in a concert. The answers that we got from both sides were that it seems to have been a fact of history that many previous musicians did use the Harmonium as accompaniment when they performed on the concert stage. In that there were two distinctions which were made — that certain

*musicians who had used this only for a tonic, i.e. instead of the Tanpura with the 'SA' 'MA' 'PA'; and others who had used it as accompaniment. And the point that I had brought out earlier from which came up very pointedly in the discussions on Karnatik Music — that whether it could replace the Veena. And there was now the point whether a violin was a better "accompaniment than the Harmonium in following or preceding the Vocalist."*

## THE HARMONIUM AND THE TEACHING OF INDIAN MUSIC

*Dipali Nag*

The fact that the Harmonium, though not an indigenous instrument, is now an indispensable commodity in any set up of Indian Music, is a paradox which cannot be ignored. The traditional school of musicians would not advocate teaching with the aid of this instrument as they believe in direct *talim* (i.e. teaching) of the *shishya* by the *guru*. Such a system is of intrinsic value to our singing because of the absence of an adequate notation. Even the present notation of Bhatkhande which is fairly adequate and is a great boon to musicians of all classes in preserving songs of difficult structures does not cover all the nuances like the various *gamakas*, *murkees*, *shrutees* and *meends*. The *chela* has to emulate the *guru* directly and success lies in correct emulation and the subsequent use of the "graces" in his own way.

In the last half century there have been some revolutionary changes in our country. The number of students interested in learning music has grown enormously. These students come from all classes of society and are not drawn from the families or near relatives of practising musicians. Inevitably, the teaching of music has to be done in the class room, in groups, large or small. In this situation Bhatkhande's notation and the Harmonium have come to the teachers' rescue. The mystery and the exclusiveness of learning Indian music preceded by a colourful *ganda*-tying ceremony is rare these days. In schools and colleges it is the Harmonium which enables the teacher to teach the entire class which consists of children of different voice range and of different merit. There is no denying that some children suffer due to this practice but the teacher being left with no alternative of teaching a group has to adopt the Harmonium. Firstly it saves time, there being a time-limit to each class, the teacher tries to put in his maximum within that period. Secondly, it is a boon to the teacher as it saves him the strain of singing the same tune repeatedly. It is a well-known fact that the easiest way to help the mind to memorise anything is repetition. One cannot think of a better instrument than the Harmonium for this specific purpose. Thirdly, a teacher with responsibility for teaching a whole group of students is often confronted with the problem of different scales. No other instrument is facile enough to accommodate the change-over from one scale to the other within moments.

Another major factor which makes the Harmonium indispensable is because of the drone. Despite the lovely tuneful *tanpuras*, today, most of the musicians find the necessity of having the *swar-peti* or the Harmonium for its steady drone. The *tanpura* covering an octave does provide one



with the background of 3 steady notes — but these strings also have the disadvantage of going out of tune if not played properly. For a student, who primarily has to get his ears used to the octave and thus the 3 steady notes of the *tanpura*, the fixed notes of the Harmonium are of immeasurable help. To start with, there is a no difference in *shruti*; he can practise as long as he likes both his control of breath and the *shuddha* and *komal swaras*. He is deprived of the presence of the teacher when he is practising. As such the Harmonium is his only guide and it saves him from being off key.

When Kratsenstein studied the Chinese mouth organ system and introduced the freely-vibrating reed system in the late nineteenth century in Europe, who would have guessed that it is the Indian student who would react violently to the idea and would not agree to the Harmonium as it cannot teach one the *shrutis*, the *gamak* and the *meend*? Their contention is justified, but it loses ground because of the simple fact that it teaches the student the weight of all the notes of the instrument correctly and it also enables him to learn simple melodies in the shortest possible time.

There is also another important point which can hardly be overlooked. Not always are the teachers themselves in tune. Age, indiscipline, overwork, irregularity in practice, all these factors often affect the teacher's voice. Very frequently, much to his horror, he discovers that from being a musician with a correct sense of pitch and tone, he has been reduced to a mere teacher, shorn of all the fine ingredients which had made him once a fine musician. These are the occasions when a well-tuned Harmonium is of tremendous help and use. For the aspirants of music, young or old, it is essential to steady themselves with the aid of the Harmonium in the beginning. It is as important as the life belt is for the swimmers.

It is true that when in the late 19th century the pedalled Harmonium from Europe was introduced in the churches in India it was with the idea of accompaniment only. Subsequently it was used by the Parsis for the theatre and thereafter it was used in other provinces — Bengal taking the lead amongst them — whether for community singing or for the village theatre, or for sophisticated singing in the drawing rooms the Harmonium easily outshone all the other instruments.

It is true that for classical music the musician rarely uses the Harmonium himself but for lighter varieties of music, like the various regional songs it has come to occupy the pride of place. In Bengal, it was used both for the *Jatra-gaan* in the villages and *Brahmana Sangeet* of Rabindranath Tagore in the drawing rooms. Yet it was Rabindranath who first raised objection against the Harmonium and had it banned from the Radio. In Maharashtra, *Bhav Sangeet* on the stage were mostly sung to the accompaniment of the Harmonium. In my opinion, there is absolutely no harm in using this instrument of fixed keys, as has been proved in the experience of other countries of South-East Asia like Java and Bali where it is largely used. Their Harmonium may not look exactly like ours but in principle it is the same. Their music too abounds in grace notes and the use of this instrument in teaching has also been recognised.

Early in 1916, Clements prepared a Harmonium with *shrutis* which proved to be an utter failure despite the fact that the intervals had been worked out with great precision. The question is: What does one do

with the number of vibrations? And above everything how many living *ustads* can really produce all the *shrutis* which have been calculated in the *Sastras*? Today the number of *shrutis* is important only as a piece of theoretical psychology. An intelligent student who knows the key-board will not find it difficult to learn directly from the *guru* the *shruti*, the *meend* and the *gamak* — the three essentials which form the background of our music.

The inadequacies of the Harmonium should be the headache of the teacher. It is his duty to make his students realize that the fixed notes of the Harmonium are not enough to produce beautiful and graceful music. The subtleties of good tuneful music lie beyond the Harmonium — they have to be learnt directly. But for laying a good foundation, Harmonium is superior to any other instrument under the circumstances today.

*In the discussion that followed Smt. Dipali Nag's paper, Shri Vinay Chander, speaking in Hindi, said that for Classical Music Tanpura is necessary but the Harmonium has its own utility in teaching large classes for beginners:—*

“हारमोनियम के संबंध में जो चर्चा कल से आज चल रही है तो उसके संबंध में यही कहना है कि इसका एक मर्योदित उपयोग्यता या इसके अन्दर जो कुछ गुण या अवगुण हैं दोनों को ही हम ध्यान में रख के विचार करें तो अच्छा हो क्योंकि कोई वाद्य उसको एकदम से आप तिरस्कार कर दें किसी भी उपयोग का नहीं है। यह भी नहीं और सब चीजें उससे प्राप्त हो सकें यह भी चीज नहीं। संगीत शिक्षा की दृष्टि से मैं समझता हूँ कि आरम्भिक शिक्षा के लिये या जहाँ चालीस चालीस विद्यार्थी इकट्ठे प्राइमरी स्कूल में वहाँ आप हारमोनियम का उपयोग करें तो कोई उसमें आपत्ति की बात नहीं। वहाँ आपको उससे लाभ ही होगा।”

## HARMONIUM AS A SOLO INSTRUMENT

*Jnan Ghosh*

The Harmonium, since its entry into our country about a hundred years ago, started and succeeded in making a cultural infiltration into our homes. More and immediate response to the attraction of this originally (Portuguese) French instrument came from Bengal, Bombay, U.P., and Punjab. The initiative started in Calcutta some time around the latter part of the last century, where Dwarkanath Ghosh remodelled this foreign instrument by changing the system of bellows, the wind-chest and some other mechanical contrivances to make manipulation easy. Along with this change in manipulation a change of tonality was also attempted. In organs the reeds are thrown into vibration by air-suction from within; in the Harmonium — the box Harmonium as it was called — vibration of the reeds was caused by blowing the wind from outside. This mechanical alteration brought a change in sound quality or tonality. The organ has a round tone; the Harmonium came to have a flat, sharp and a partially nasal tone. The start was followed by experiments galore. But whatever the result, the purpose of all endeavours was to

produce a suitable tone that could help singing particularly solo singing or learning to sing. And I think there is no scope for controversy in the simple affirmation that the journey of the Harmonium started in subservience to voice. As the Harmonium went on gaining in popularity, its field of activity started to grow wider. The street-singer, the student of music, the shop-keeper in his leisure, the house-holder, women in *pardah*, the professional *baijis*, and even the top-ranking classical singers, all were using the Harmonium differing of course in tone quality and shape according to the price paid for it. The main purpose was to utilise the service of an accompanying instrument whether or not there was a *sarangi* or any other instrument to do the same thing. A little solo playing along with the song as interludes came to establish itself as a tradition in different forms of music reaching up to the present day in the field of soirees, records, films and so on. Thus the sound of the Harmonium through the medium of solo interludes prepared the ground for solo individual performance. We know of a number of outstanding musicians who took to exclusively solo performance on Harmonium such as Ganpat Rao, Bhala Sahib, Sohani Maharaj, Govindram Tembe and a few others to follow their example, who have always been regarded as persons setting an example of solo Harmonium-playing. Later on the high standard of stringed instrumental performance together with the total ban of Harmonium by All India Radio for a very long period, came to have a deterrent effect on the growth and culture of solo Harmonium playing in our country.

We are all aware today, how classical Indian music has been raised to a high pedestal of official and academic recognition. It was not so thirty or forty years ago when the last stalwarts of the first half of the present century flourished and paved the path for posterity. Strangely enough it was during this period that the Harmonium was loved most by the performers and listeners alike and musicians specialised on this instrument. Conditions have changed since then. Serious objections were raised against the Harmonium from some influential quarters as a result of which its funeral service was ceremoniously carried out by All India Radio. We need not probe the past except only to observe that there was a time when people used to listen to solo Harmonium with great interest. If we are discussing about the merits and demerits of solo Harmonium playing today, we have to — at least partially — revive in our memory the playing of master-players of bygone days, and at the same time form our own judgment on the basis of reactions obtained by listening to Harmonium playing of the present day.

About one thing there cannot be any doubt. Neither the masters of the glorious past or the aspirants of the present age ever believed that slow and melodious movements would suit the basically detached notes of the Harmonium, although a simulation could be effected with an efficient hand combined with a properly responsive instrument. There have been people in the past and in the present time who could create a sort of an illusion of a slur or a *meend* on the Harmonium. But a *gamak* cannot be produced on a Harmonium because of the lack of flexibility and prolongation in the tone — continuity of Harmonium. And it is a well-known fact that amongst the various ornaments of Indian music, vocal or instrumental, *meend* and *gamak* with their innumerable nuances, are the major constituent of any worthy performance. Thus the presence of this particular kind of grace is almost totally ruled out in Harmonium.

But, in spite of this acknowledged deficiency, a good-toned and well-tuned Harmonium has always been admired if in the hands of an efficient performer. We have seen this instrument being used almost invariably as an accompaniment by Ustad Faiyaz Khan, Ustad Abdul Karim Khan, Ustad Gulam Ali Khan, Ustad Amir Khan and many other eminent musicians throughout their lives. This act alone is enough proof that there are some qualities in Harmonium which musicians of rank recognise as conducive to music-making, they can be shortly described as these;

- 1 the Harmonium has a rich and sustaining tone quality;
- 2 bellows — manipulation can make this sound sweet or sonorous according to the need and also vary the amplitude;
- 3 the pitch of the notes have no chance to be shaken or displaced that is to get out of tune during performance.

These however are qualities of the instrument itself. But the quality of music that can be or has to be brought out from this instrument depends entirely upon the performer, his talent, education, practice and of course an extraordinary musical ability.

The *shrutis* of Indian music have always been referred to as standing in the way and baffling Harmonium music. This is undisputed in one sense, namely when *raga* delineation strictly according to the proper and delicate *shrutis* is the point of contention. The *shruti* — *alankaras* are better expressed in a slow tempo, where they can be produced and perceived within their requisite time-dimension. In medium fast or fast tempo evasion of the *shruti* is peremptory. *Tala* variations are taken full advantage of at this stage of performance. Solo Harmonium is particularly fit for this phase. But to form a true impression of this, as well as to make a comparative assessment, we have to have two experts of equivalent merit to play for us, one on the Harmonium and another on another instrument, say, the *sitar* or *sarod* or *violin* or *veena*. If the stringed instruments have their own peculiar features, the Harmonium also has its own. Limitations of the Harmonium are of course no secret and it would be wrong to institute a comparison. In fact the eligibility of the Harmonium as a solo instrument need not depend on the extent to which it can be favourably compared with the predominantly brilliant features of our stringed instruments. We have to face the subject from a different facet. Indian music did not grow in one day and all the manner of singing and playing that are known today together with the variety of musical instruments used, have not followed an identical path of development. There are different *Gayakis* and different *Bajs*. The very same kind of technique, style, treatment, embellishment and expression cannot be expected alike in every *gayaki* or *baj* or in every instrument.

Now if an attempt is made to play *raga* music on Harmonium, portions of the performance may be comparable to some particular conventional aspects of vocal or instrumental treatment. But there may be some works peculiarly suitable to the characteristics of this instrument. Indian painting is as noble and old an art as Indian music. Older and subsequent creations in this field are enfolded in the same category in spite of temporal or technical discrepancies, and are recognised as belonging to a homogenous order.

Leaving aside the question of *raga* - dominated pieces, there are other lighter varieties of playing such as *dhums* of *thumri* and *dadra* etc. which may sound extremely nice on a Harmonium, of course in the hand of an expert. A master mind can transcend the medium of expression if it has any handicaps and manifest the heights and depths of his thoughts. In Indian music and culture, thought, that underlies all human activity has been given a very high place. Much of the development of the *thumri* style is indebted to the old masters of the subject who improvised and set forth beautiful patterns of *bol* — *banav* with the accompaniment of the Harmonium and suggestions received from this instrument in action. These patterns are considered to be the foundation of the *thumri* style. They came into existence very naturally and easily. The Harmonium, they say, is a very easy instrument. Well, no instrument is easier than the voice with which every man is born. But how many in this world can make a good use of it in the field of music?

From our discussion it may be deduced that in the hands of a good Harmonium-player, who has imagination and *talim*, the Harmonium can provide very good entertainment whatever the basis of his presentation may be, *raga* or *dhun*. An attempt to compare the performance with that of other Indian instruments is not an absolute necessity and may lead to unwarranted conclusions.

*In the discussion that followed Shri Jnan Ghosh's paper, Smt. Mutatkar said:*

“Expert players of Harmonium have certainly contributed to the *gayaki* — I would like to mention the name of late Pt. Govind Rao Tembe have I have heard him a number of times. He came with his Harmonium and stayed with us, and he used to demonstrate his style of playing. But what did he say? He said he had listened and imbibed from the very important and finest *gayakis* of Hindustani Music — Aladiyakhani Sahib and Bhaskar Rao Bakle and Fyaz Khan Sahib. And he said that he was trying to emulate that *gayaki*, as far as possible, on the Harmonium. So, to an extent, I think it comes to the other way round. But, of course, to this mutual inter-change he also contributed; and then he said that he was trying to give an illusion of *meend* through these *shrutis*; but ultimately he said of course illusion is only an illusion.”

## HARMONIUM & HINDUSTANI LIGHT CLASSICAL MUSIC

Dr. Premrata Sharma

First of all, the meaning of ‘Light Classical Music’ has to be understood. This name has been coined in the context of the programmes broadcast by A.I.R. It stands for music which is based on *raga*, but which aims mainly at being graceful and charming, which takes a lighter trend as compared to serious music and which is specially delightful. This description brings forth three factors:

- (1) It is based on *raga*, but it is different from serious or sober music,

(2) It provides great scope for the play of imagination, keeping intact the unity of the *raga*. That is to say, the importance of emotional colour or flavour outweighs the rigid following of rules and regulations and thus imagination gets a free hand for novelty and fancy;

(3) The *Madhurya* and *Prasada Gunas* are found in abundance and *Ojas* have practically no place.

If one tries to look for a parallel word in the Shastraic literature, one is confronted with *Kaisiki Vritti* in which *vichitrata* (diversity) *seela* (ease and grace) and *sringara* (erotic mood) are said to be predominant. This *Vritti* is formalised in Bharata's *Prasadiki Dhruva*, which is called *Ranga-raga-prasada-janane*.

या च रसान्तरमुपगतमाक्षेपवशात् प्रसादयति ।  
रंगरागप्रसादजननी ज्ञेया प्रासादिकी तु कसा ॥

These observations should make it clear that 'light' only indicates the predominance of *Lalita* over *Gambhira*, it should not denote cheapness.

According to my understanding, the topic allotted to me implies a review of the utility or propriety of the use of Harmonium in the music of the above noted level in the light of factual history and pragmatic and idealistic considerations.

Although it is true that musicians like the late Govindarao Tambe used Harmonium for serious music, it is a well-known fact that both in solo performance and accompaniment Harmonium has been mainly concerned with *thumri* the queen of *ranga* and with her associates: *dadra*, *bhajan* and the like. When the singer feels somewhat exhausted after presenting serious music and the audience also longs for a change of taste like having *churan* or *chatni* after a sumptuous meal, the singer often likes to take the Harmonium in his own hand and sing some light pieces. This is a common scene in concerts. The use of the Harmonium by the singer himself gives him a certain amount of ease or facility in constructing light phrases, affords him rest at will and support of notes in unison, or similarity or contrast at certain points.

Now-a-days many vocalists have adopted the *Swaramandala* for this purpose, but it does not have the continuity of single tones which is inherent in Harmonium.

The music of the level of *thumri* and related forms has a special fancy for modulation (*shadja-chalana*), that is to say bringing forth of different *swaras* as *shadja* and thus bringing in new flavour in *ragas* like *Bhairavi*, *Khamaj*, *Pilu*, *Kafi* etc. The tempered scale of the Harmonium is very suitable for modulation, which is not possible on any stringed instrument with that ease or in the fast tempo. Stringed instruments with frets are not at all suitable for this process and bowed instruments have their own problems.

Veterans like Bhaiya Ganapatrao played the *thumri anga* on the Harmonium, because instruments like *Been* or *Sur Singara* were not suitable

for that music. His rich imagination and adept rendering used to leave the audience spell-bound and he succeeded in securing a prestige for his performance on the Harmonium in the Rampur court, which was dominated by *Been* and *Dhrupad*. Soni Babu of Bihar was also hailed as the 'Harmonium-wizard' in providing accompaniment to *thumri* and the like, the names of Gulam Rasool and Shankar Rao Kapileshwari are notable as accompanists of Faiyaz Khan and Abdul Karim Khan respectively; they also played for other forms like *Khayal* and *Dhamar*.

It is thus a fact that a few talented persons have succeeded in creating *chamatkara* on the Harmonium by exploiting the inherent potentialities of the instrument. But does this act lend support to the absolute suitability of this instrument to Indian music? This question deserves serious attention. The following points are very pertinent in this connection.

(1) The Indian concept of *svara* does not relate it to a specific pitch-point, but to a pitch-range with variegated possibilities of shades and nuances. No keyboard instrument can respond to this concept of *svara*, no matter whether it represents just intonation or tempered scale.

(2) The tempered scale was evolved in the West for fulfilling the needs of harmony and it was accepted as a necessary evil. No such exigency exists in Indian music.

The sensitive thinkers in the West have always expressed their concern for the artificial and unmusical nature of the tempered scale. Scientists like Prof. Helmholtz and writers like Alain Danielou have expressed in strong words their resentment to this scale. They say that the music based on this scale is imperfect and if it appears to us as beautiful it means that our ears have been spoiled since childhood. It may be added here that improvement on the tempered scales has not been and can never be perfect. Fixing a scale of 24 instead of 12 tones is not the solution and if at all the perfection of tuning 22 *shrutis* could ever be attained it would eliminate the facility of *shadja chalana*, which is the essence of the utility of this instrument in light classical music. It is not a historical fact that veterans like Bhaiya Ganapatrao used the *shruti* Harmonium for their performance.

Thus the utility of Harmonium has to be scientifically viewed in the light of the pristine purity of our musical heritage. The deep and imperceptible impact of this purity or otherwise of musical tones has been accepted even by Western thinkers. In our tradition the tones produced by any kind of *aghata* have been identified with the *anahata nada* in the human body. Hence we should seriously consider the advisability of making a compromise on fundamentals just for the sake of facility.

Before concluding, I cannot resist the temptation of quoting the words of *Sangita Ratnakara* on the utility of instruments in general:

रंगरागप्रसादजननी ज्ञेया प्रासादिकी तु कसा ॥  
 अभिषेके नरेन्द्रावां यात्रायामुत्सवे तथा ॥  
 मंगलेषु च सर्वेषु विवाहोपतयादिषु ।  
 उत्पाते संमन्त्रे युद्धे वीररौद्रिणि ॥  
 सर्वातोवृत्ति वायन्ते दातिचित्त्वल्पमंगले ।  
 विश्रान्तौ रंगसंस्थातां नृत्यतामपि ॥

एतान्यत्साहकारीणि वीरागसं मंगलाय चे ।  
 कुर्वन्ति हृदयस्फूर्ति दुःखं मुलूयन्ति ॥  
 गीतनृसगतन्याप्रच्छादतपटून्यपि ।  
 वाद्याति

(सं० र छ० १६-२३)

The above *shlokas* speak of five aspects of the utility of instruments: (1) being appropriate for an auspicious occasion; (2) being instrumental in inciting or heightening enthusiasm, wrath or fear; (3) affording rest to the singer or dancer; (4) bringing about exuberance of spirit; (5) covering the lapses in song and dance.

Out of these functions, Harmonium is fit for No. 3 and 5. But here also the question is whether or not Harmonium is unique in providing rest and covering lapses.

Experience has shown that artificial boundaries or demarcations of different levels of artistic creation or rendering are not very effective in actual practice. The utility of Harmonium in light classical music should not, therefore, be viewed in isolation from the complete picture of Indian music. It may be added at the end that this paper deals with Harmonium as a solo and accompanying instrument and not as a drone instrument. There should be no confusion on this point. Yesterday some observations were made regarding the use of Harmonium as a drone instrument but that is not, I believe, the issue involved.

In the discussion that followed Dr. Premlata Sharma's paper, Shri D. T. Joshi said:

"I must make it clear at the very outset that I hold no brief for the Harmonium as such. I know its limitations, as I indeed know the limitations of other instruments, but I do feel that after all the Harmonium is not such a monstrosity as it has been made out to be. Personally, I have my own ideas, my own views, on accompaniment. And I think, so far as accompaniment of light and light classical music is concerned — musical forms like thumri, dadra, gazal, qawali etc. — a support by the Harmonium will perhaps add to the success of the artist."

After the discussion on Dr. Premlata Sharma's paper, Smt. Kapila Vatsayan summed up the main conclusions of the Music Symposium. Her concluding remarks were:

"I believe that the conclusions of this Seminar might easily be divided into the following categories, merely to bring us back to earth, that in terms of the construction — I think that everybody was agreed — there were certain limitations, but no more or no less perhaps than with some of the other Indian instruments. It was also agreed that if we wanted a kind of *akhanda swara* this may be useful. However, in terms of teaching I think everyone — those who spoke against and those who spoke for — everyone subscribed to the view that this was, all said and done, an aid; and it was a stick, a stick which may or may not be used because the person who has full control may not need a Tanpura, may not need a Harmonium; but if he has been used to the Tanpura perhaps he has a slightly better control. Also that with the Harmonium, the embellishments and the various forms — namely the *gamakas* and the *meends* and the *murkis* — could not be accompanied. There was a



*great deal of controversy which we had both about what people used to do or what people did not do. Taking you back to what my primary remarks were I would like to point out that once again this is the pattern of the whole evolution of Classical Music — that while it did not change its essentials, like the sari, it kept changing its different garbs. And in that if they use the Harmonium to that limited extent, fully aware of the fact that when they go back home they are going to do something else, this is a totally different matter and something on which I did comment yesterday. In terms of very austere Classical Music I think that most people were agreed that although on the Concert platform this was used, in practice it had not been used. In Light Music, most people seem to be of the opinion that it was a good aid and it was an adornment. However, the principal speaker this afternoon gave us the reasons, and No. 3 and 5 were very telling. The use of the Harmonium as a solo instrument brought out various points including the fact that while as a musical instrument it could certainly produce music, the nature of that music was slightly different from what we might identify as high classical music. This is not to say that there are other instruments who do not do this; but it has a different character, without making qualitative assessment. Tempers could have been frayed on the question of the ban, but since I, as Chairman, took upon myself to ban that topic, I shall not comment on it.*

## POSTSCRIPT

In the wake of the Seminar and with due consideration to the findings and views of the experts, A. I. R. has issued a directive partially removing the ban on the Harmonium in the following types of programmes;

- i. Top grade and A grade artistes may use the Harmonium as an accompanying instrument in classical, light classical and light vocal music.
- ii. Approved Quawaali parties of all grades who utilise the Harmonium in public performances may also use it in broadcasts.
- iii. Approved choral groups for classical, light classical and light music may use the Harmonium with permission from the Director of the Station concerned.
- iv. Specially produced items in classical, light classical and light programmes may use the Harmonium on the advice of the Producer concerned.

The ban on the use of the Harmonium will remain in programmes of other lower grade artistes. No solo performances of the Harmonium will be broadcast. This directive will operate for a period of one year after which the position will again be reviewed.