

SIGNIFICANT PARSİ INVOLVEMENT IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC AND DANCE

Dr. Kersey Antia, Mar 20, 2020

I think I cannot do better on this subject than quoting Noshir Lam's review, "The Parsis and Indian Classical Music: An Unsung Contribution" (*Jam-e-Jamshed Weekly*, October 24, 2004, p. 14), since close integration not only with Indian culture and people but also with their ancient arts negate Tanya Luhrmann's research, which however, more and more looks like her own hasty opinions, however sincere or Parsi-friendly as an anthropologist from the University of Illinois told me he found them very unfair to the Parsis:

"Before you pick up and read this book, you believed that Parsis have practically given none or negligible contribution to Indian music. By the time you are half-way through it, you realise that their contribution is gigantic, if not, at least equal to that towards industry, science, politics, sports or any other field. You will then realise that your ignorance was because their contribution to music was unsung, now being ably sung by *Aban*. In the book, you will come across such gems like when you tune All India Radio first in the morning, the stations begin their day with a signature tune on violin followed by the strumming of tanpuras, which is the work of *Mehli Mehta*, father of *Zubin*, who was a living legend of Western music. Then, we have *Goomi Wadia*, the director and conductor of Paranjoti Academy Chorus, which singers are dubbed as "the singing ambassadors of India."

You will read about the mind-boggling contribution of the *Gayan Utejak Mandii*, started 150 years ago by *Kaihushru Kabraji*, as the time when the society seethed with rage against music. He expired in 1870 and during his lifetime was editor of *Raast-Goftaar*, dramatist, novelist, lecturer, and musician. The great musicologist and inventor of simple music notation *Pundit Bhatkhande* was a student of the *Mandii* and later a teacher. The legacy of *Mandii's* work was taken over by the *Swar Sadhna Samiti*, founded in 1961 by *Pt. Keki S. Jijina* and *Dr. Aban E. Ministry*. In due course, the *Samiti* has evolved to suit contemporary times, always encouraging new and budding artistes in music and dance through annual all-India competitions, awarding scholarships and honouring talented artiste and musicologists. In the book, you will come across much, much more Parsi names of musicologists and dancers, than the Parsi names in any other book on industry, sports or any other field.

In the world of Indian dance, we have *Shirin Vazifdar*, *Khurshid*

Chawda and Roshan, amongst others. Parsis have ignored no genre of Indian music. There are dozens of Parsi artistes mentioned in the book who are, like rare diamonds, multi-faceted. *Aban* has discussed each facet of these bold and beautiful Parsi gems according to the relevant chapters like Indian classical music, *shastriya* and *lok nritya sugam sangeet*, *thumri*, *tappa gee*, *ghazals*, *abhang*, *natya sangeet* in dramas and operas and several other music art forms. Not only that, but she has dealt with dramas, operas, music direction, background music in films, record companies, sound recordists, in short each and every contribution of Parsis towards musicology.