



Peacock and Bow: The Story Behind the Origins of Taus, Dilruba and Esraj



Fenilkumar Soni

Temp. Assistant Professor in Violin,
Department of Indian Classical Music
Instrumental (Sitar & Violin), Faculty of Performing Arts,
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara



Dr. Vishwas Vijaykumar Sant

Assistant Professor, Deptt. of Indian Classical Music,
(Sitar & Violin), Faculty of Performing Arts,
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda,
Vadodara

Abstract

Nor popular nor extinct, India's unique bowed instruments, such as Taus, Dilruba, and Esraj, have a different place in the field of Indian classical music. In the history of Indian Music, we rarely find these types of bowed instruments. 'Ravanhattha' is considered to be the most ancient bowed instrument in India, and then we find references to 'Pinaki Veena' in the 13th century, which was also played with a bow. Then, 'Sarangi' came to the Indian music scenario and took a different place in Indian music. Then, around the 19th century, we find the references of Taus, Dilruba, and Esraj, which are very similar in design and playing technique. 'Taus,' also known as 'Mayuri Veena' and 'Dilruba', is mainly popular in the Punjab region, whereas 'Esraj' is mainly popular in Bengal and Assam regions. This article delves into the origins of Taus, Dilruba, and Esraj, their contribution to Indian music, and their historical development.

Key Words: Taus, Esraj, Dilruba, Mayuri Veena, Bowed Instruments

Research Paper

Introduction

Instruments play a very important role in Indian classical music. The main attraction of Indian Music is its variety of Instruments. We see a bunch of bowed instruments which are popular in different parts of India. The most popular bowed instruments of Indian classical music are the Sarangi and the Violin. The Violin is a Western instrument adopted in North Indian and South Indian music. The Sarangi is used as an accompaniment and solo instrument in Indian Music. However, Taus, Esraj and Dilruba belong to India and are unique in this category. The quality of these instruments is that they represent a particular culture. We can see Taus and Dilruba's connection with Sikh devotional music and Esraj's with Rabindra Sangeet as an accompaniment. However, many artists have worked to make these instruments as solo classical instruments. This study on the origins of these instruments will reflect India's deep culture and diversity.

Historical Development of Taus

Taus generally has specific connections with the Punjab, particularly with the Sikhs. The word 'Taus' came from the Persian language, which means peacock (Mayur), This is why it is also known as 'Mayuri Veena' (Mahadik 167). There are many theories on the origin of the Taus. The exact time when Taus originated is not yet known. According to Bhai Baldeep Singh, "the Taus was invented by the 6th Sikh Guru, Guru Har Gobind ji (1595 - 1644)" (Saxena 37). It's first known description appears in Mahumad Karam Imam Khan's 'Madan-ul Mausiqi' in 1856 (Mahadik, p. 166). The instrument is documented in several significant works, including S.M. Tagore's 'Yantra Kosh' (1875) (Tagore 75).

Structure and Sound of Taus

Taus's body is shaped like a peacock, making it unique. Taus is a bowed stringed instrument which is played with a bow. The main part of this instrument is its sound box (resonator), which is in the shape of a peacock and made

of wood, which is hollow from the inside. Its body is made of a thin animal skin stretched over the mahogany wood and is played with the neck of the instrument on the bow. Taus even has the peacock's characteristic feathers, which are considered sacred. Taus has four main strings and thirteen to sixteen sympathetic strings. It has twenty metal frets, which we generally don't see in a bowed instrument except for Dilruba and Esraj. Before these instruments were created, all bowed instruments of Indian Music were fretless, like Sarangi, Ravanhattha, Kamaycha, Saranda and Violin. The sound of this instrument is very resonant and deep, especially in lower octave. The sound is impressively similar to the peacock's cry.



Present Status of Taus

"One narrative is that the jewels of the Mughal Emperor of the 17th century found so many precious stones and made a 'Takht – E – Taus' (peacock-shaped throne). In counter, Guru Har Gobind ji invented the 'Taus' to practice the songs to worship God and to popularize Sikh devotional music to the society" (Singh). Others argue that "the 10th Sikh Guru, Gobind Singh (1666-1708), invented the Taus. Guru Gobind Singh Ji was a master and poet of the Persian language; this might be a reason for giving a Persian name to an instrument he invented" (Singh) Taus was very popular in the Punjab during the 17th and 18th Centuries. The disciples of Guru Gobind Singh used Taus as the accompaniment for the religious songs. Then, it was replaced by Dilruba and Esraj because of its large size and complex structure. However, now, Sikh musicians are playing it to accompany Sikh devotional music (Gurbani Sangeet). Many Sikh musicians are also performing Indian Classical Music on Taus. We find many artists

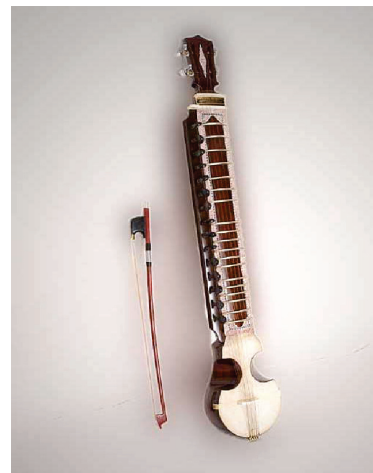
performing Gurbani Sangeet and Indian Classical Music on Taus on various digital platforms. Sikh musicians, cultural organizations and music institutes are working to preserve it. Nowadays, Sikh young musicians are attracted to learning the Taus and incorporating it into their music, reestablishing its relevance and importance.

Historical Development of Esraj

Esraj is a relatively recent addition, which is very popular in accompanying Rabindra Sangeet. S. M. Tagore believed the Esraj is a mixture of the Sarangi and the Sitar. Shri O. Goswami believed the Esraj was a modified version of the Sarangi. In his book 'The Story of Indian Music,' he stated, "In the Mughal period, when women used to practice music in 'Haram,' they could not get the Sarangi players as mostly men played it. Moreover, they found it very difficult to master the Sarangi. Therefore, they extended the upper part of Sarangi and made the Esraj"(Goswami 305). According to Shri Vimalkant Raychaudhuri, "the Esraj is a mixture of the Sitar and the Saranda"(Raychaudhuri 120). Esraj is considered the Bengal's Sarangi. Rabindranath Tagore's contribution to preserving the Esraj is remarkable. He made it compulsory for all the students of Rabindra Sangeet in 'Santiniketan' to practice the Esraj as an accompanying instrument. Esraj's first description appears in S. M. Tagore's work 'Yantra Kosh' (1875) (Tagore 75).

Structure and Sound of Esraj

The structure of the Esraj suggests that it might be a mixture of the Sitar and the Saranda because the Saranda's sound box is very similar to the Esraj's sound box.



Esraj is played with a bow, like other bowed instruments. Esraj has four main strings and fifteen to twenty

sympathetic strings. It has sixteen to nineteen frets. The pegs used in this instrument are different from the Taus and the Dilruba. In terms of design, it is very similar to the Dilruba. The main difference between the Esraj and the Dilruba is the shape of the sound box. Otherwise, the holding position and playing technique are the same. Esraj has a very soft tone compared to the Dilruba.

Present Status of Esraj

Esraj is widely accepted in the Rabindra Sangeet as an accompaniment instrument. Abir Singh Khangura, an eminent Esraj player, stated, "In a book named 'Esraj' the origin is traced to mid-19th century when Maharaja Shri Ishwari Prasad Narayan Singh Bahadur of Benares created the modern Esraj as we see it now" (Khangura). According to another narrative, "this instrument was created by a Bengali craftsman in the court of Wajid Ali Shah of Lucknow. Later, the famous Rabab player of Senia Gharana, Basant Khan, brought this to Gayadham and taught the local students, making it popular in Bihar" (Scano). Pt. Asheshchandra Bandyopadhyay and his disciple Pt. Randhir Roy played a big role in making Esraj a solo instrument, apart from accompaniment, like the other instruments of Indian classical music. Esraj is in the syllabus of Rabindra Bharti University as a classical instrument, and there is a centre for Esraj in Kolkata, established in 2013 to offer courses in Esraj. Esraj is also popular in Bihar, Assam, and Orissa. It is also used to accompany the Gurbani Sangeet of the Punjab. We can see the Esraj being played in Rabindra Sangeet, Gurbani Sangeet, and Indian Classical Music, giving unique status to the society.

Historical Development of Dilruba

'Dilruba' is a Persian word which means 'one who captures the heart'. There are several theories on the origin of this beautiful instrument. Shri H. A. Popley suggests that "It was modified by removing the peacock-shaped sound box of the Taus and inserting the sarangi like sound box" (Popley 120). Hence, it is believed that Dilruba is a mixture of the Sitar and the Sarangi. Sikh musicians believe that it is a work of Guru Gobind Singh Ji, and the Taus directly inspired its invention to create a lightweight instrument to carry by warriors. Dilruba's first detailed description appears in Shri H. A. Popley's work 'The Music of India' (1921) (Popley 120).

Structure and Sound of Dilruba

It is shorter in size compared to the Taus and similar to the Esraj. The sound box of the Dilruba is of the Sarangi

and has the long neck of the Sitar. Dilruba is played with a bow, like the Sarangi and the Violin. Dilruba's sound box is made of wood, covered with animal skin, and hollow from the inside. It has four main strings and twenty to twenty-two sympathetic strings for resonance. Dilruba has nineteen frets, and its bridge is larger than the Esraj. The sound of the Dilruba is sweet and deep. Its ease of taking somewhere, lightweight, smaller size than the Taus, and sweet sound attract many young artists to incorporate it into their music. Its sound is deeper and more resonant than the Esraj.



Present Status of Dilruba

Dr. Lalmani Mishra believed that, "that time demanded the creation of such an instrument as the Dilruba and the Esraj because, at that time, only the Sarangi was popular and was played by a particular section of people" (Mishra 244). According to Dr. Prakash Mahadik, "People might have heard the sound of the Surbahar, the popular instrument of the end of the 19th century. And then they heard the sound of the Esraj, but it was not that deep. Therefore, to create a sound like the Surbahar, they modified the Esraj and made the Dilruba" (Mahadik 170).

Dilruba is presently popular in the Punjab and widely accepted as the accompaniment for the Sikh devotional music (Gurbani Sangeet). "The sweet and mellow sound of the Dilruba is perfectly suited to performing Indian Classical and Light Music on it" (Deva 145). Although the use of Dilruba has diminished somewhat among today's younger generation, many musicians and artists are trying to revive it. For Dilruba's revival, it is being included in special concerts, classical music programs, and Gurbani sangeet. Apart from this, many music schools and institutes teach this instrument and master

its sound. Many prominent musicians have played a role in efforts to re-recognise the sound of the Dilruba and its historical significance. Dilruba's contribution to modern music is also significant. Some prominent musicians and artists still perform it in their concerts.

Conclusion:

Looking at the present status of Taus, Esraj and Dilruba, it is clear that these instruments are reviving and becoming popular among the younger generation. 'Kirtan' and 'Gurbani Sangeet' of the Sikhs and 'Rabindra Sangeet' of the Bengal have significantly preserved these instruments as accompanying music and as a solo classical instrument. However, these instruments have a long journey to achieve the same level as the Sitar and the Sarod. These instruments fulfilled the requirement of the society when there were no other bowed instruments apart from Sarangi. These bowed instruments are easy to master compared to the Sarangi because they have frets. Taus, Esraj and Dilruba represent a particular culture with their unique sound and design. The practice of these kinds of instruments in different parts of the country has made Indian music rich. The younger generation will remain attracted towards these instruments to learn and incorporate them into their music, maintaining their status in Indian Music.

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