

Evolution of sitting postures of Esraj from Bishnupur era to the arrival of Ashesh Chandra Bandyopadhyay



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Abstract

A Hundred years ago Esraj was a prestigious instrument in Bishnupur of Bengal. It was popular as an accompaniment instrument among the music scholars in Bishnupur. The evolution period of the sitting posture for playing Esraj began from this era. And also it has been evaluated after the arrival of Ashesh Chandra Bandyopadhyay in Santiniketan. In my presentation, I am going to fill up the research gap by reviewing the facts of the interview which I made, with a huge pillar in Esraj, Prof. Buddhadev Das to present the findings through my research paper entitled with *The Evolution of sitting postures of Esraj from the Bishnupur era to the Arrival of Ashesh Chandra Bandyopadhyay in Santiniketan.*

Key Words: Sitting postures, Esraj , Santiniketan Gharana, Bishnupur Gharana. Aeshsh Chandra Bandyopadhyay.

Research Paper

Bishnupur Gharana is very well known to all of us for a long time. Once upon a time this Gharana was well versed with Draupad, khyal Thumri and also various classical instruments used to be cultured in Hindusthani Classical Music. Among them Sitar, Sarod, Surbahar, Esraj were in the common Instruments. At that time everyone used to play Esraj as a conventional accompaniment instrument with vocals. Among the well-established musicians of Bishnupur Gharana Surendra Nath Bandyopadhyay used to bring forward the instrument esraj while he was very talented in Playing Sitar and Surbahar. According to the traces and sources he is the first person who used to play and perform solos in Hindustani classical music and the way he used to perform, was the original sitting posture and its style.

Sitting Postures

At the beginning, the sitting posture of playing Esraj was by resting the upper portion (Dandi) of the instrument on shoulder and the lower portion (Tumba)

should be kept on between the space of the behind of the right leg hill and in front of the left leg. (See picutre 1 & 1a)

picutre 1



picutre 1a



And used to play by using only one finger which is index finger (Tarjani) and sometimes to be used the second finger in old days. (See picture 2 & 2a)

picture 2



picture 2a



picture 4



picture 4a



This information has been collected from an interview session with Professor Buddhadev Das, whose father Gopal Chandra Das Was a student of Surendra Nath Bandopadhyay and Gopeshwar Bandopadhyay. Therefore the authenticity of this information is undoubtable.

Apart from this sitting style there was one more style of sitting posture for playing Esraj at the early time. It was by keeping the lower portion(Tumba) of the instrument on the floor between the space of two feet and resting the upper portion in front of the knee of the player. (See picture 3)

picture 3



Apart from these two styles of sitting postures there can be found more two styles which are coming from Northern India. Among them the following picture shows the playing style of Esraj in Panjab. (See picture 4 & 4a) Even though the instrument which is in the picture is Tarshahnai, the only difference between the Esraj and Tarshahnai is the mechanical horn. And Punjab musicians use the same sitting posture to play the other bowing instruments such as Taus, Mayur, and Dilruba. The player keeps the lower part of the instrument(Tumba) on a ring which is made with cloth.^[1]

The fourth style is originating from Lucknow, The sitting posture in the picture (See picture 5) which is quite user friendly than the last one. Because the instrument has to be placed in between the thighs of two legs. Basically the musicians of Lucknow follow this sitting posture to play Dilruba, Tarshanai, Esraj and Sarangi ^[2]

Initiation of the sitting posture of Santiniketan Gharana

Surendranath Bandyopadhyay once met with an

accident and felt uncomfortable walking and sitting. Therefore he wasn't able to sit in the ordinary way of playing Esraj. So he invented a new sitting posture for playing Esraj. The main techniques of the new posture can be seen in picture 5

picutre 5



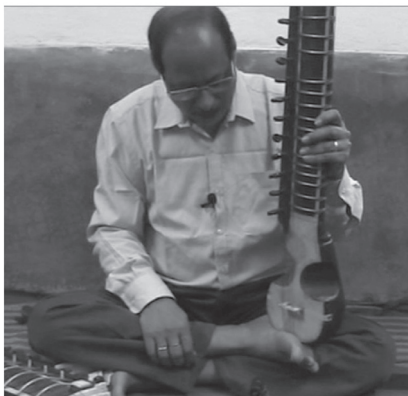
1. Sitting on the floor by laying the right leg on the laid left leg (See picutre 6)

picutre 6



2. Placing the lower part(Tumba) of the Esraj vertically on the right foot. (See picutre 6a)

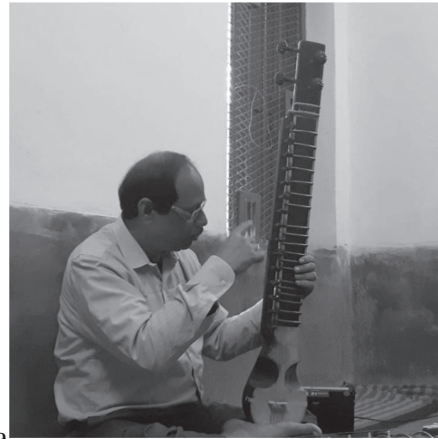
picutre 6a



After this implication the player has been able to play the Esraj without the help of Shoulder. And it has been

more convenient to play the instrument than before because it was not easy to play the lower octave notes as it was used to resting on the shoulder. Because of that reason the player should had to bend the neck to watch over the fretboard. After introducing this method the player could see over the frets through the side keys (See picutre 7) by keeping the body straight and the neck perpendicular to the floor.

picutre 7



Surendra

Nath Bandyopadhyay has introduced this style of playing Esraj to his Nephew Ashesh Chandra Bandyopadhyay and another student Nirmal Chandra Nandi.

After the arrival of Ashesh Chandra Bandyopadhyaya to Santiniketan, he began to teach the instrument at Sangit Bhavana by continuing the same style which had been taught by his uncle. This is the turning point of the beginning of Santinketan gharana.

Over there he has furtherly developed the sitting posture of playing Esraj.

Ashish Chandra Bandopadhyay



By comparing an old sitting posture with a newly introduced one, it can be seen that there are so many benefits to the player to perform the instrument. So that new method is more advance than the older one. And he has done a successful experiment to make the instrument scale changing instrument according to the demand of the musical scale.

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