

**DOWN THE MEMORY LANE ...A JOURNEY INTO THE REPERTOIRE
OF THE LIVING LEGEND : USTAD ASLAM HUSSAIN KHAN SAHEB
“KHUSHRANG”**

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Ustad Aslam Hussain Khan is one of the top and most senior musicians, who indeed is a living legend. Ustad Aslam Khan happens to be the descendant of the illustrious musicians Shaadi Khan and Murad Khan (Father –Son duo) of the Hapur Gharana (Meerut U.P.), who were the court musicians of Maharaja of Datia and later were invited to perform in the red fort by the Mughal Emperor Bahadur Shah Zafar. The Emperor became so impressed by their illustrious Gayaki and repertoire, that they were presented 2500 gold coins and were later commissioned to join as the court musicians in Delhi.

Born on 14th April 1940 to Firoza Begum and Ustad Faqrudin Khan in Hapur Uttar Pradesh. His initially training began under the tutelage of his father Ustad Faqriddin Khan in Hapur for the span of 7 years. Young Aslam Khan was a child prodigy, who gave his first stage performance at the age of twelve years. He then was initiated in musical training under his maternal uncle Haji Ustad Altaf Hussain Khan of Khurja Gharana and has had the privilege to learn from his brother-in-law in relation Gayan Samrat Ustad Azmat Hussain Khan from Atrauli Jaipur Gharana, who not only became his guru but also his mentor, as he came under his wings in 1950 making Bombay his abode for his musical journey. As the years passed young Aslam Khan could not ask any better in life than to have come across a golden opportunity of learning music under the great Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan of Agra Gharana and Ustad Khadim Hussain Khan, who added immensely to his musical repertoire.

Ustad Aslam Khan Saheb has completed 50 illustrious years being the representative of 6 Schools (Gharana's) of Hindustani Classical Music, that have existed over a span of over 500 years namely, the prestigious Hapur Gharana, Khurja Gharana, Atrauli- Jaipur Gharana, Agra Gharana, Sikandara and Delhi Tanras Khan Gharana, wherein each institution has contributed to a galaxy of stalwarts like the Haji Ustad Altaf Hussain Khan, Gayan Samrat Ustad Azmat Hussain Khan, Sangeet Samrat Ustad Allahdiya Khan, Aaftab-e-Mausiqui Ustad Fayyaz Khan, Gayan Acharya Ustad Vilayat Hussain Khan and Ustad Tanras Khan and many more. With his inborn genius Ustad Aslam Khan has created a blend of each Gharana, so as to amalgamate their diverse specialties into his individual style, which bestows tremendous artistry and an appeal that has been enthralling his audiences worldwide, that has come to him seena – bassena (heart to heart learning) in the Gguru Shishya Parampara.

Known amongst the very few ‘Chaumukha Gayaks’ of today, a term used for someone who can render all genres of music Dhrupad ,Khyal, Tarana, Chaturang, Tappa, Kajri, Thumri,Chaiti,Tivat, Classical Bhajan ,Ghazal and Sufi (Qawl, Kalbana, Naqshgul, Hawa and Baseet) with equal proficiency. His elaborate repertoire of Badhath in the "Vilambit" laya khyal(slow tempo) is accompanied by Madhyalaya ‘Matta taans’(barabar ki taan), ‘Dugun ki taan’ and then scintillating ‘Chaugun in Taan’ in the “Drut" laya i.e fast tempo renditions that are embellished by a spectacular variation of Layakari, Bol-bants (interwoven permutations between the Laya(tempo) showcasing the delicate elements of Soot, Meend, Gamak , Ghaseet and behlawa being the characteristic features of his gayaki. He has composed several classical compositions and Ragas under the pen name "Khushrang" as he believes in experimenting with the traditional ragas imbibing the art of composition following the footsteps of his mentor Ustad Azmat Hussain Khan.

Aslam Khan Saheb happens to be an expert on the music of Hazrat Amir Khusro, the reverend saint, musician and a poet, who was one of the most creative poets of his age who lived in India. Being a Turk by origin but born on the Indian Soil, Amir Khusro served India as his motherland with his exquisite poetry, musical compositions in some most exotic ragas and varied forms of music, that he created after amalgamating the Indian and Persian music. Ustad Aslam Khan is one of the few musicians who renders some of the rarest Persian Ragas and Authentic Compositions that Amir Khusro created.

Ustad Aslam Khan Saheb’s Khayal and semi classical renditions (Thumri,Dadra, Chaiti, Kajri) bestows an aesthetic flair embellished with subtle nuances that are rarely heard. While his Gazals and Bhajans renditions are the purest in its form with minimum instrumentation, which has carved an enviable niche audience. He is an excellent composer and has enthralled his Ghazal connoisseurs with over one thousand self- composed Ghazals, as his innovative mind always seeks to explore new avenues as he has composed the ghazals of many stalwart poets like Ghalib, Zauk, Meer, Josh, Daag to name a few.

Ustad Aslam Khan shared about how he learnt some of the rarest ragas of Jaipur Atrauli tradition in a lecture demonstration recently, disclosing an interesting trivia on Gayan Samrat ‘Allah Diya Khan Saheb’ saying, “During his last 10 years Ustad Allah Diya Khan, who was in his late 80s then, taught some of the Rare Ragas and Bandishes (compositions) that he created and taught them to his disciple Azmat Hussain Khan ,who was his nephew and stayed with him during those days. In-turn Azmat Hussain imparted all that knowledge to young Aslam Khan who was just 16 at that time by enriching the knowledge of his young disciple with the rarest and most authentic ragas and compositions of the Jaipur Atrauli tradition, that incidentally some of the most senior musicians of Jaipur Atrauli tradition of today don’t possess!

A musician who carries a humble demeanor, Ustad Aslam Khan happens to be an honest guru who takes not a minute to impart his traditional music to his disciples and true connoisseurs. The maestro quotes “Music runs in my blood and I look forward to carry forward this tradition in the next generation by imparting knowledge to those who deserve it.”Ustad Aslam Khan is a man of the purest ray, who is dedicated to serve music being a staunch preserver of the nearly extinct "Guru Shishya Parampara".

A great historian and an encyclopedia in himself, Ustad Aslam Khan draws interesting insights on the Historical Evolution of Gharanas especially the Dhrupad and Khayal Gayaki Styles, some of the most rare and Jod ragas (Combination ragas) like Dev Kauns, Manjari Bihag, Sawani Nat and Kaushi Kanhara and Kamodi Malhar and Malhar types, that has come to him as part of his Taleem (disciplined study) under his guru Ustad Azmat Hussain Khan.Khan Saheb

has recorded some 700 Bandishes in rare ragas in mp3 formats for the purpose of restoration that he eventually wants to impart to his deserving disciples.

Talking about the devotional genres in Amir Khusro's era (1253–1325 CE) and even 100 years before him, khansaheb says "The Muslim Mosques (Khankhas) at that time used to have a spiritual gathering called the Mehfil – e-Sama where the Sufi singers used to sing the genres 'Naat' and Hamd' praising their peers (spiritual mentors) accompanied by the Daffli and Daff instruments. This tradition still continues after 800 years at the Garib Nawaz Khwaja Moinuddin Shisti's Darga popularly known as Ajmer Shariff, where there is still the Sama khana, where the spiritual gathering takes place. There were two brothers Miyan Dargahi and Miyan Agahi who also continued this tradition. Miyan Dargahi came to Delhi and became the Disciple of the Sufi Saint Qutubuddin Bakhtayar Kaki and carried forward the tradition."

Khusro incorporated Persian, Arabic and Turkish elements into Indian Classical Music of the then era and is considered the originator of the Khayal, Qawwali, Mankabat and Tarana styles of music. Khyal was based on a repertoire of Bandishes (short compositions) based on traditional Indian ragas (modes) that Amir Khusro amalgamated with the Persian music and were sung in different local linguistics like Awadhi, Hindvi (that he created by combining Awadhi with Urdu) and Persian language.

Ustad Aslam Khan tells us the legend behind Amir Khusro making his first disciplines and the miracle behind it saying, "Hazrat Amir Khusro's Peer (Spiritual Mentor) Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia (who possessed healing powers) was once sitting in his courtyard (Angan) and saw an old man with his son (12-15 years old). He asked Khusro to teach them his music. When Khusro approached them, he found that the boy was deaf and the father was blind. He went back to his peers and told about it to him. Hazrat Nizamuddin Aulia said you must have got mistaken, go back and try to communicate with them again. To Khusro's surprise, when he spoke to the boy this time the boy could listen and so could the blind father see. Khusro made this father son- duo his first disciplines who were non- other than Hasan Samant and Hasan Sami from where the Student Disciple tradition of Khayal originated. Amir Khusro taught the father son duo the first Khyal "Man Kunto Maula" which is in Persian language in Raag Eman, which is now called Yaman and till now is sung as a Khyal and also as a Qawwali that was first introduced to his disciples called Qawwal Bacche which became a Gharana later."

There is so much to explore and one can spend hours together sitting with my guru Ustad Aslam Hussain Khan Saheb together sitting and listening to the legends of Amir Khusro, to showcase his music, artistry, Persian ragas and legends behind him or if one gets a chance to listen to his renditions of some of the most rare and Jodh ragas (complex ragas) of Jaipur Atrauli tradition or be it listening to over 1000 Ghazals that he has composed along with numerous exquisite thumris and some 120 bhajansas the list goes on, we at least need a series of write-ups to showcase this maestro's musical genius and accomplishments!

Bibliography:

1. Online Source : Website of Dilrang Academy
2. Print Source : Profile Brochure Ustad Aslam Hussain Khan
3. Interview: The article is an original article and the excerpts and quotes are generated by interviewing my Guru Ustad Aslam Hussain Khan Saheb himself.