

## SAROD A MYSTIC INSTRUMENTS

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### THE STRUCTURE OF THE SAROD:

The Sarod is an age old instrument whose history is rich and long as the instruments has travelled from one place to the other from time to time crossing different periods of historical timeline. However there are many debates regarding the transformation of Sarod from an early medieval folk instrument to a full-fledged classical instrument which has travelled across the world. Now the Sarod is such an instrument which has been available in different forms in different time periods in different shapes and sizes. Some scholars believe that the term Sarod is of Persian origin, the word actually is 'Sarud' or 'Sarood' according to Persian pronunciation which literally means 'melodies' or 'sweet melodies', this word can be found very often in Persian traditional language or 'Mausiqui' as pronounce it as the 'Persi' or 'Farsi' language. Sarod has been referred as the Bass-Rabab by many wellknown musical scholars.

Again some scholars opine that the Sarod is an instrument of indigenous origin as many historians discovered and accounted that the a similar instrument called the chitra veena and was played during the Gupta period, as they found coins from excavations of the Gupta kingdom which depicted the engraved pictures of the Gupta King Samudra Gupta who is playing the Chitra veena, as we know this time period was many centuries before the mediaeval era began, hence some scholars opine and suggest that the Sarod is a tradition instruments whose roots of origin are laid onto the soil of the sub-continent and has resemblance with the Sur Sringar; some also suggest that the Sarod is an amalgamation of the Chitra Veena (another indigenous instrument played Again some chroniclers of music say and account that Sarod has a resemblance with an instrument played by Narada Veena- mentioned in the Puranas. This instrument has a animal skin attached on the back drum and a long wooden fingerboard where the strings are attached which were usually made up silk and cotton fibers. Some chroniclers also suggest that a similar instrument named Swarbaat which is category of Veena is still played in south India and has quite a resemblance with Sarod. Hence a section of scholars and chroniclers opine that the Sarod has its roots of origin in onto the Indian subcontinent.

However most of the Scholars believe that the Sarod is of Afghan origin whose ancestor is the Rabab, however the shapes and sizes of Rabab also varied, for instance the Rabab which was brought by Ghulam Bandeghi Khan Bangash chieftain of the Bangash Tribe straight from Afghanistan was rather small in size and was of different shape as compared to the senia Rabab which was played by Miya Tansen himself and was believed that the instrument was his creation as it was his brain child. The ancient Afghan Rabab which came to India in medieval period was much more folk type in nature in terms of musical implementation but the Senia Rabab was more of veenkar instrument having very much resemblance with the Chitra Veena with much more deeper and bolder sound, as Miya Tansen was a virtuoso in the Veenkar style of Dhrupad singing and a master in playing various instruments including the Senia Rabab, Chitra Veena and the Rudra Veena. Later on it was Tansen's successors and Gulam Ali (Ghulam Bandeghi Khan Bangash's successor) whose combined effort lead to the

transformation of the Rabab slowly which gave birth to the new instrument named Sarod, as Ghulam Ali junior was very much inclined towards the family of Miya Tansen and his successors and was overwhelmed by their musical excellence. Henceforth Ghulam Ali and Tansen's successors played an important role, some chroniclers also believe that Tansen's family and old chieftain Ghulam Bandeghi Khan Bangash's successors were later on attached with the marital kinship and became the part of the same family.

Thereafter the joint and combined effort and skills both Ghulam Ali (junior) and Tansen's successor lead to the transformation of the Rabab into a completely new instrument called Sarod which was literally rebuilt as today's Sarod or the modern category of Sarod has least resemblance with its ancestral father; the Rabab. Hence some sections of the scholars believe and argue that the Sarod not only is the transformation of the Rabab itself but some other instruments also especially the Chitra Veena, which has been depicted on the engraved coins of the Gupta imperial period.

### **THE OLD RABAB:**

Similarly in case of the Rababs prominently two different types of Rababs could be found in the medieval era in the Indian sub-continent, but it is an unknown fact to the chroniclers that Sarod has been transformed from which kind of Rabab exactly, whether the Senia Rabab or the old Afghan Rabab. However the main course of the discussion of this chapter would contain the structural difference between the Sarod of Senia Maihar and other Senia gharanas.

As we know that predominantly there is a structural difference between the Sarod of Maihar and other Senia Gharanas. The old Senia Sarod though still in use is rather different from the Maihar sarod which was fabricated by Ut-Alauddin Khan. The original Senia Sarod was rather smaller in size before early twentieth century, the structural features also was very similar to that of the medieval Rabab it was much more sleek and smaller in size. The Senia Rabab especially was much more bigger than the original original Afghan Rabab, the Senia Rabab was predominantly played by Miya Tansen thereafter the instrument got its name Senia Rabab, in the early days the transformation of Sarod from the Rabab lead to the creation of an instrument which had prominent similarities with the Rabab itself. The Rabab which was used in the medieval century was comprised of a sleek fingerboard made of wood from inside and outside, but in case Sarod the front side of the fingerboard was made of metal from the early stage though its shape and size changed with the change of time, the fingerboard or also coined as fretboard in case of string instrument.

On the other hand the back drum of the instrument that is the Sarod went through a quite noticeable change as the back drum of the Rabab was rather geometrical rather pentagonal or sometimes hexagonal in shape with a rather narrow opening which created a timid sound which later on was changed in case of Sarod into a round bowl shape back drum which in turn gave the Sarod an intense and bold sound with deeper tone which overall gave the Sarod a depth in the tonality and sound of the Sarod.

However as time passed by this instrument went through many changes and the process continues even today with the course of experiments that has been done by the artists of previous generation and the experiments are being continued by the musician of today's generation, mostly using the electronics in through gadgets and metallic tones of the instruments, though these aspects of the changes in Sarod had been criticized by scholars and musical exponents, still the experiment goes on, some artists have also experimented on changing the tuning pegs or keys of the Sarod by replacing with the tuning pegs of the guitar and the head (of Sarod) therefore has changed with the guitar (Spanish) head to match the tuning pegs. Hence the proverb which has been always used by many musical exponents that music never ends is quite justified.

## JAVA- THE PLECTRUM OF SAROD:

However some features of the Sarod still remains the same as it used to be in the medieval era, that is the “Java”. The Java is the sticker with which the strings are plugged and struck, just like in guitar the sticker is called “Plectrum”, in case of Sitar it is called “Mizrab”. The Java is made up of coconut shell by cutting it into a triangular and sometimes oval shaped, it is usually dipped in coconut oil for a few months after it is cut into shape from the coconut shell, as the surface of the coconut shell is rough in nature in order to smoothen up the surface of the Java it is dipped and polished with coconut oil later on it is by filed up into the correct shape and size with sand paper and iron files.

However the size of the Java may vary from one artist to another according to the comfort zone of the artiste. Sometimes it might vary from one gharana to other, for instance in Senia-Bangash style which is followed by Ustad Amjad Ali Khan and his sons Aman and Ayan Ali Khan, the Java which they use is rather oval in shape as compared to the other Senia Gharana(Shajahanpur) and Maihar(Senia) gharana. In the other Gharanas the like Senia Shajahnpur and Maihar the shape of the Java is rather triangular in shape unlike in Bangash gharana, though the size may vary as mentioned earlier. And the Java also decreases in size gradually with its use, or can be said in this that as often as the Java is used it loses its proper shape and size gradually and hence the artist or the Sarod player has to replace the old Java with a new one and then use it to play the instrument.

Coming to the point of strings, the Sarod usually comprises of four to five main strings depending on the different styles of gharanas. The five main strings or melodic strings comprises of (starting from lower octave) Pa(fifth), Sa(Tonic), Pa(fifth), Sa(tonic middle octave), Ma(fourth middle octave), two Tonic notes that is Sa on the open string, one in the lower octave and the other in the middle octave. In the tonic Sa of the lower octave the string material which is used is copper and the gauge or thickness of the string is much more dense as compared to the other strings. Unlike the lower tonic Sa, the Sa or tonic of the middle octave is considered as the base note of the instrument and much more emphasis is given to this string. This middle octave tonic Sa is usually made up of still string with a comparatively thinner gauge or thickness than the lower octave Sa and Pa which another copper string holding the fifth note of the lower octave relating to the lower octave tonic Sa.

The other three strings or (in case of different Gharana it might be two) the fifth note of the lower octave that is- Pa is tuned in relevance with the lower octave Sa. This string (Pa) is also made up of copper in case of Maihar Gharana, in Senia Shajhanpur sometimes copper string is used and sometimes still depending on the choice of the artist what kind tone does he or she wants, the still string has deeper tone whereas the copper has lighter tone.

However in Senia Bnghash Gharana which is the old senia gharana, flagged by Ut.Amjad Ali Khan and his sons, usually still string is used by them on the fifth note of lower octave or Pa, however the most renowned Sarod exponent of Mihari Ustad Ali Akbar Khan used the copper string for this note, creating a different sound and tonality.

However in case of the other two senia Gharanas that is Bangash and Shajahanpur another Pa or fifth note is attached which is lowered than the lower octave Sa or tonic. This was however the old and original format of Sarod tuning format until Ut. Alauddin Khan changed the format of tuning in the Maihar sarod which comprises of four main strings rather than five, however sometimes this extra string of Pa or fifth note is attached in Maihar style also, Alauddin himself experimented on this and attached the extra string of fifth note. However Ut. Ali Akbar Khan did not prefer to use this string which made his style of playing, tonality and sound an uniqueness in the sarod craft and today it is followed by numerous sarod players throughout India and abroad.

The second last string of the Sarod is Sa which is the main melodic string and tonic note on open string, this string very important in the instrument Sa is considered as mother of all in according to the Indian

system of music hence for all the instruments played in Raga music the tonic note Sa is very important as all other notes are played with reference of this note and also the tuning of the instruments including the percussion instruments are tuned with reference to the Sa, which might be in different scales like C, C#, D, D#, G, F etc according to the comfort zone and the instrument he or she plays, unlike in western music once the tonic note is set on any scale it is not changed throughout the performances or practice of the entire musical piece or the Raga as we all know, but in case of western music the tonic note might change a number of times within a single piece.

Therefore in case of Sarod also there is no exception as all the strings of Sarod are tuned with reference to the tonic Sa, hence it is the most important note or the base so the artist or instrumentalist tunes this string very minutely taking his/her time. Not only the other melodic string but the sympathetic known as Taraf (to be discuss later) an strings and the Chikari strings (to be discussed later), and the Jawari strings (a speciality of Maihar sarod- to be discussed later) which are important aspects of most of the strings instrument used in Raga music are today are also tuned with reference to the tonic Sa.

The last string of the Sarod is common in all gharanas which Ma or the fourth note, it is very touchy note which beholds the sentiment of the Ragas in Indian classical music as unlike in the western music where the fifth note Pa is very important after the tonic note whereas in Indian raga music the combination of Sa- Ma is very important to hold the sentimental aspects of the Ragas. This fourth note Ma is the last open string of the Sarod with thinnest gauge or thickness as compare to the other strings and is made of still string which is common for the all the Gharanas.

However excluding the melodic strings the sarod also has some other strings which enhance the overall musicality of the instrument, not only in many other string instrument used in Raga music we can find these features which provide a special charisma to the sound, tonality and improves the musicality. Most important among this is the Chikari, the chikari is a set o two open strings tuned with reference to tonic melodic during that is Sa, and is struck very often with open strike, there is codes or rule about how or when to use the chikari as such, most of the time it is used to fill up the gap of timing in between two notes and sometime also used to create rhythmic patterns like jhala and sometimes just to enhance the musicality especially during the time alap, jod, larant, and also jhala. Not only in Sarod but in many other instruments like the Sitar, Slide guitar(Indian), Mohan veena, Sur bahar, Sur sringar, these string that is the chikari is use very often to beautify the musical piece.

However it is an unknown fact that whether the use of chikari was in place from the early days, as there are no such written evidences, hence all the accounts and information which we find today from the scholar are from the musical instrument of the medieval era especially, as it is almost impossible to find any musical instrument before the mediaeval era from 1000a.d 1900a.d- century, mostly what I is found from the pre-medieval times are engraved pictures of musical instruments by musical scholar, noble and kings; sometimes on rock cut temples gates, walls, pillars and sometimes on the engraved copper, silver or gold coins popular termed as mudras by historians. However the aspect of chikri is all the same for all gharanas of sarod with no such change in it though in Rabab which we know is the ancestor of Sarod had no aspect of chikari as it was a folk instrument used accompany the vocalists singing folklores during the medieval era.

### **CHIKARI:**

- The Chikari is a very unique feature in Indian raga music as acts like a filler note which constantly supplies the sound of the tonic note Sa whenever it is struck, sometimes it is used to create rhythmic patterns like jhala or during playing the gat, tan, laykari etc, and sometimes it is used just to fill up the gap bwtween two notes to behold the beauty of the musical piece like alap, jor, vistar etc, however there is no mandatory rule in case of using the chikari; rather the artist uses it with his or her own sense of aesthetics. It is set of open string Sa, not only in case of Sarod but other string instruments used in Raga music like Sitar, Mohan Veena, Slide guitar(Indian), Sur Bahar, Rudra Veena, etc. In case Sarod usually

the gaze of the strings is similar to that of Sa of middle octave, however it might change according to the choice of the artist, it might also vary in case of other instruments.

#### **TARAF:**

Taraf is a very important feature of instruments in Raga music, not only Sarod but in other instruments like Sitar, Sur bahar, Sur Sringar, Mohan Veena, etc. The Taraf strings are sympathetic strings which are tuned in relevance with the Raga which is being played by the artist. The main and important notes are tuned in ascending order which is sometimes struck as a drone by the artist, but however the main feature of the Taraf strings is to support the melodic strings which is a unique feature among Indian classical instrument, it is made in such a way that whenever the particular note is struck on the melodic string the taraf string which has been tuned on the same note vibrates automatically without actually being struck by the artist at the time of playing the instrument.

Hence it is a spectacular feature which enhances the sound of the main note on melodic string and creates a depth in the sound which actually beautifies the overall musicality. In case of Sarod the number of Taraf strings which is most commonly used is thirteen, both in Mahar and Shajahanur however in Senia Bangash gharana which is headed by Amjad Ali Khan the number of taraf strings he uses is eleven. Actually in case of Sarod the number of taraf strings may vary with size of the instrument. However in a full sized instrument though thirteen strings are used but in medium size the number of strings might be between nine to eleven, again for a child artist or a beginner the smaller size Sarod may comprise of six to seven tarafs, hence the number of Sarod varies with size of the instrument (in case of Sarod).

#### **JAVARI:**

The next is the Jawari string which is very important aspect of Indian Raga music is the very important as these strings act like co-actors where the main roles are played by the melodic strings and Jawari plays the supporting role. These strings are often tuned in reference with raga, the important notes of the Ragas which are coined as Vadi and Samvadi swar are usually tuned on to the Jawari strings. The Jawari strings usually comprises of two or three strings depending on the instrument.

However in case of Sarod the only gharana which comprises of the Jawari strings is the Maihar Sarod unlike the other Gharanas, as it a special and unique feature which was added by Ustad Alauddin Khan which was never done before, later on this feature of the Sarod became so popular which all the way changed the format of the Sarod and today this format is a widely followed by sarod player throughout India and outside as it is very popular amongst the musicians, as the overall musicality and especially the tonal quality of the Sarod changed forever which never happened before.

#### **TUMBA:**

Tumba is a round bowl shaped element which is usually attached to the neck of the instrument above the fret board. It acts as a resonator of the sound that is produced by the instruments. These resonators or Tumbas has been used by musicians through centuries on the Indian subcontinent through in order to enhance the sound of the musical instruments. Starting from Rudra Veena, Chitra Veena, Mohan Veena, Shardy Veena, Sur Sringar, Sur Bahar, to Sarod and Sitar almost all the strings on the Indian sub-continent comprised of this unique feature through centuries.

In many early and medieval engravings on rock cut walls and pillars of temples, palaces, forts and metal coins or 'Mudras' of bronze, copper, silver and gold; pictures of musical instruments being played by musicians, noble men and kings have been depicted in a very dynamic way. During the Gupta era gold

coins or Swarna Mudras have been found by archeologists and historians where the scene depicts that the Gupta King Samudra Gupta is himself playing the Rudra Veena.

The tumbas were mostly made up of pumpkin shells in the early days and sometimes made of wood for some instruments but the pumpkin shell was most popular especially for the instrument where large sized tumbas were from the ancient period and is still in use, like Rudra Veena, Chitra Veena, Mohan Veena etc.

However in case of Sarod the in the early days of Sarod when it was transformed Rabab and Saradiya Venna, the tumbas were comparatively larger in size than today's tumbas of Sarod and the material that was used for making the tumbas were of pumpkin shell which common for the all the Gharanas, later on some maestros used wooden tumbas until Ut. Alauddin introduced brass metallic tumbas for his Maihar type Sarod that he fabricated by himself.

Today many musicians also use steel or iron nickel tumbas, but the use of brass tumbas is most popular amongst the Sarod players as it is easier to maintain; as in case of pumpkin and wood it is like to crack at the time of travelling from one place to the other but metal tumbas are long lasting as compared to the pumpkin and wooden tumbas. However some renowned sarod maestros like Amjad Ali Khan of Senia Bangash Gharan do not prefer to use any Tumba at all, and his sons Aman and Ayan Ali Khan also follow the same tradition like their father.

### **TUNING KEYS OR PEGS:**

Tuning keys or pegs are wooden sticks with knob like structures attached on the top, in most of the instruments of Indian origin the tuning pegs are made of wood, unlike some exception like in mandolin, slide (Hawaiian) guitar, where pegs are of metal; as these instruments are of western origin and became very popular in India both in south, north and eastern parts during the British period, and later it got included in Indian classical music family. However in case of Sarod the pegs or keys have remained wooden write of the times of the Rabab, but the distinctive feature is that the design of the of head or knob of the tuning pegs today denotes the difference of the Gharanas like Amjad Ali Khan and his sons use a plane ball shaped knob design, where as maestros like Ut. Ali Akbar and Pt. Buddhadev Dasguta uses lotus designs on the knobs which acts as their signature but however the features and function of the keys are all the same.

The number of tuning keys or pegs might however change in different gharanas, like in the Maihar Gharana the main melodic strings are four or sometimes five, hence the pegs or tuning keys for the main melodic strings are four (very rarely five), the jawari strings comprises of three pegs or keys, and one extra melodic Sa or tonic note apart from the chikari also holds another peg, thereafter the chikari string comprises of two pegs and sympathetic strings or taraf comprises of fifteen pegs for a full sized sarod (though the no of taraf pegs may vary with size of the Sarod), hence the total number of pegs or keys for Maihar sarod is twenty one (if the extra peg for lower octave Pa or fifth note is attached then it is twenty two).

However in case of other two gharanas the pegs of the instrument are almost same with five melodic string two jawari pegs

### **DRUM HEAD:**

It is the back head of the Sarod, where a round shaped drum receives and delivers all the beautiful sounds produced by the sarod payer, however in the medieval period the ancestor of the Saord that is Rabab had a drum head of boxy or squarish shape element which was much more smaller in size than the sarod drum head and produced much more timid sound as compared to Sarod. Whereas the Sarod has much bolder sound with a deeper tone which is much more louder than the Rabab. The Sarod drum

is made of goat skin, though in early medieval era the Rabab drum head was also made of camel skin as we know from some sources, however most of the musical scholars opine that Sarod and Rabab drum head are made of goat skin as it used to be.

However the shape the drum though remains same for all the Gharanas but it might change with size of the Sarod, but mostly remains from eleven to twelve inches, though Ustad Amjad Ali and his sons uses relatively smaller drum head but maestros of Maihar and Senia Shajahanpur gharana uses a relatively large sized drum head of more than twelve inches that is almost twelve and half inches.

### **TAIL PIECE:**

The tail piece is a bar like element attached at the end part of the drum head of the Sarod which beholds all the strings which are attached on the tuning pegs on the far side of the instrument, these type of tail pieces are also used in other string instruments like sitar, mohan veena, chitra veena, sarodiya veena, etc. The tail pieces in Sarod are made up of either steel or brass, these part of Sarod is all the way same in all the Gharanas with no such differences.

### **BONE BRIDGE:**

The strings which are attached onto a bar like element which is known as the bone bridge, this bridge holds the strings which creates the utmost tensile strength, as the strings are tightened and loosened up through the tuning pegs or by screwing or twisting it up and down. The bridge usually possesses of grooves which are made through iron files and sand paper generally and fitted in accordance with the gaps between one string with the other. These bridges are usually made up of animal bones, especially deer and are used in many other strings instruments like the mohan veena, chitra veena, tanpura, sarengi esraj etc. But however at present these bridges are not very much available as the hunting and poaching of animals are legally banned in India and outside, almost all country's government, still some poachers continue hunting illegally. However research work many scholars and musicians are going on whether the bridges of the instrument can be replaced with synthetic or plastic element, rather than the animal bone bridge.

These bridges are normally five to six inches of length and two to three inches of width, which beholds the strings upright in the right position as the grooves that are made over the bridges are positioned in such a way so that the strings does not move while the time of playing the instruments. In case of Sarod the length and breadth of the bridges are almost same for a the gharanas. With no such accountable difference between one gharana with the other gharanas.

### **NECK:**

The word literally means Gala(Hindi) /Gola(Bengali), it is the far end of the instrument (Sarod), apart from Sarod many there string instrument also comprises of this neck line portion. The neckline of the Sarod is a piece of wooden bar on which the tuning keys or tuning pegs are attached to. In case of Maihar gharana there are eight to nine tuning pegs and for the other Senia Gharanas there are six main tuning pegs. Though the basic portion of the neckline is all same for the different Gharanas but design of the tip of the neck may vary as Ut.Aluddin and Ali Akbar Khan of Maihar used a lotus design on the tip, again in other Senia Gharanas like the Shajahanpur or Bangash Pt.Radhika Mohan Maitra and his disciple Padmsree awardee Pt.Buddhadev Dasgupta and Ut. Amjad Ali Khan uses a plain design on the tip of the neckline.