

The sound of Music – part II



Think of the *shehnai* and the first thing you'll probably imagine is a wedding or a similar occasion or function. The next would probably be **Ustad Bismillah Khan**, the *shehnai* maestro, playing the instrument.

The *shehnai* was derived from an erstwhile reeded noisemaker called the *pungi*. It was longer and broader than *pungi* and had seven holes that could be closed and opened to make different ragas.



Since, this new instrument was played in the *Shah's* court by a '*nai*', it came to be known as a ***Shehnai***.

NAME : Qamruddin Bismillah Khan

PARENTS : Mitthan Khan and Paigambar Bux

Bismillah's father, Bux, was also a renowned *shehnai* player.

DATE & PLACE OF BIRTH : 21 March 1916, Dumraon, Bihar

INSPIRED BY : Maternal uncle, Ali Bux. Bismillah Khan accompanied him to many recitals to hear, absorb and learn the instrument.

FIRST FORMAL RECITAL : At Allahabad Music Conference, at the age of 14 years.

Bismillah Khan's Secular Indian Existence

- As a five year old, Bismillah would regularly go to the nearby *Bihariji* temple to sing the Bhojpuri '*Chaita*'.
- This is where he got his first big prize for his recitation – a 1.25 kg *laddu* by the local Maharaj.
- Khan used to accompany his uncle, Ali Bux, to the Vishnu temple of Benaras, where he was employed to play the shehnai.
- For years, Balaji and Mangla mai temple on the banks of Ganga were his favourite haunts.
- He could never visualise himself away from the Ganga, for it was his true inspiration to improvise and invent *raagas*.
- He refused to set up a school in the U.S.A and did not want to settle there as he was much attached to the Ganga (a strong symbol of the true Indian identity).

BISMILLAH – A True Indian

SHEKHAR GUPTA : When Partition happened, didn't you and your family think of moving to Pakistan?

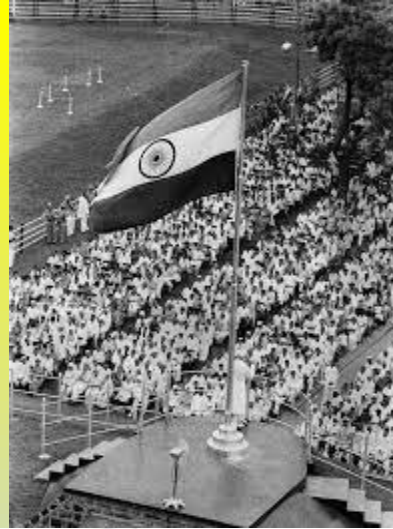
BISMILLAH KHAN: God forbid! Me, leave Benaras? Never! I went to Pakistan once- I crossed the border just to say I have been to Pakistan. I was there for about an hour. I said *namaskar* to the Pakistanis and *salaam alaikum* to the Indians! I had a good laugh.

- Reader's Digest, October 2005

THE BIG BREAK

When he played at the All India Radio at Lucknow in 1938. His music reached the ears of the Indian masses and classes, alike.

On the day of INDIA'S INDEPENDENCE, 15 August, 1947, he greeted the nation with his *Shehnai* at the Red Fort.



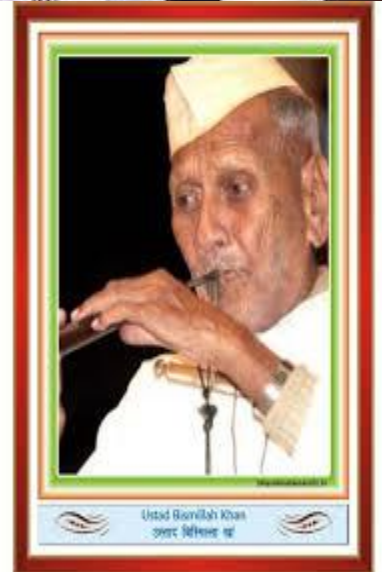
A MEMORABLE PERFORMANCE

King Zahir Shah of Afghanistan was so fascinated by Khan's performance that he gifted him priceless Persian carpets and many other souvenirs.

INTO THE REEL WORLD: Bismillah Khan composed music for 2 movies: *Gunj uthi shehnai* and *Sanadhi Apanna*. He felt that the glamorous world of movies was too artificial.

AWARDS AND ACCOLADES

- Bharat Ratna 2001
- Tahar Musique from Iran 1992
- Padma Vibhushan 1980
- Padma Bhushan 1968
- Padma Shree 1961
- Sangeet Natak Akademi Award 1956



“That is why whenever I am in a foreign country, I keep yearning to see Hindustan.

While in Mumbai, I think of only Benaras and the holy Ganga.

And while in Benaras, I miss the unique *mattha* of Dumraon.”

- For the love of his land



Ustad Bismillah Khan died on 21 August 2006. he was given a state funeral and a day of National mourning.



ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Q I, Thinking about the text, page 25 of the textbook.
2. Q III, page 26 of the textbook.
3. In about 200 words, write a Biosketch of Ustad Bismillah Khan. You may take ideas from the character analysis worksheet attempted by you.