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Pandit Ravi Shankar—Tansen of our Times

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Pandit Ravi Shankar—Tansen of our Times

Pandit Ravi Shankar died a few months ago, just short of his 93rd birthday on 7 April. So it is opportune that we remember a man whom I have rather unabashedly called the Tansen of our times. Pandit Ravi Shankar was easily the greatest musician of our times and his death marks not only the transience of time itself, but it also reminds us of the glory that was his life and the immortality of his legacy. In the passing of Robindro Shaunkar Chowdhury, as he was called by his parents, on 11 December in San Diego, California, we cherish the memory of an extraordinary genius whose life and talent spanned almost the whole of the 20th century. It crossed all continents, it connected several genres of human endeavour, it uplifted countless hearts, minds and souls. Very few Indians epitomized Indian culture in the global imagination as this charismatic Bengali Brahmin, Pandit Ravi Shankar.

Born in 1920, Ravi Shankar not only straddled two centuries but also impacted many worlds—the East, the West, the North and the South, the old and the new, the traditional and the modern. And most of all he was nimble and agile till almost the very end. He had given a concert a few weeks before he died in California. He had played in Bangalore in February 2012, and the year before that, on 21 June 2011, he gave a full solo to a sold out Barbican Centre in London where he ended with a Tagore song, *Shey Din Dujoney Dule Chhilo Bonay*. The video of this concert is available on YouTube. It is a mesmerising treat, showing a 91-year-old master deeply moving his audience with music that he had so perfectly tailored to suit his diminished physical capacities. As he aged, his sitar became shorter. Both his shoulders had been operated upon. He

*Lecture delivered at the India International Centre on April 3, 2013 by S. Kalidas.

had two or three bypass surgeries, but the fact that he needed to be on stage kept him fit and agile. This is very remarkable.

I have had the good fortune to meet two or three such great artists. The first was Bhavesh Sanyal who lived well over a hundred. He drove himself till he was 90 and was often seen at the India International Centre. He was well past 80 when he told me one day, 'I have started learning the sitar.' I said, 'Baba, Yes', because he used to play the flute as a young man. And he said, 'Yes, I am getting a little arthritic and a bit of sitar will help me.' That was the spirit!

The other artist who was agile and active till the very end was M.F. Hussain. Unfortunately he had to abandon India, but he was immensely productive right till the end. He not only created new audiences for himself, but he also invited his old audiences to visit him in exile. Many of us from India were invited to Dubai or London just to witness Hussain *sahab* perform, as it were. And so also with Ravi Shankarji.

After his death recently, his family held a memorial at which many people spoke, especially his son-in-law and some of his students. They all said that he was determined to perform till the very end of his life—he did just that with a public performance a few weeks before he died. He said, 'I can't bid farewell to the world just like that, I need to play.' So for him performance was an act of life. And for that we should thank his second wife Sukanya and his daughters Anoushka, and Norah also, who kept him alive in the last two decades of his life.

Raviji, as he was called here, had lived on the rollercoaster of history. He was barely 10 years old when he joined his elder brother Uday Shankar in Paris; Paris between the two World Wars was *A Moveable Feast*, as Hemingway called it. Just about everything was happening there. And that was the Paris in which Ravi Shankar studied in a French school. He played a little *esraj* and sitar and danced in his brother's ballets; he met the rich and famous of pre-World War II Europe and America. He recalled with great enthusiasm later in his life how he had met artists like Andre Segovia, Pablo Casals the cellist, author and art collector Gertrude Stein, composer Cole Porter, actors Clark Gable and Joan Crawford. He had seen Stravinsky, Toscanini, Chaliapin at the Paris Opera, and as a 12-year-old in New York, he had played a sitar piece that won him praise from the reviewer of *The New York Times*.

He was already used to the high life of New York and Paris, when he met Ustad Allauddin Khan. They had met each other briefly earlier as Allauddin Khan's students had played in Uday Shankar's orchestras. The first was a sarod player called Timir Baran, and in the next trip Allauddin Khan himself joined Uday Shankar's troupe. It was then that Ravi Shankar decided he wanted to learn from him seriously. But Allauddin Khan told him, 'All this is fine, but if you want to learn the sitar, you will have to give up all this and come to India, and to where I live which is a small place called Maihar in Madhya Pradesh.' Maihar even today can be described as a god-forsaken place. In 1930-35, nobody knew of Maihar. If at all they did, it was for two reasons: first, Allauddin Khan was employed by the Raja of Maihar; second, he had created musical instruments out of the broken artillery pieces that the army had left behind, and then taught music to orphans and poor children of the Maihar village to create a unique band The Maihar Band. In fact this same band continues even today, but with more conventional and sophisticated instruments. But at that time the band was quite extraordinary.

Ravi Shankar decided that he would forsake the luxury of life in the West with Uday Shankar's dance troupe and subject himself to the tyranny of *Ustad* Allauddin Khan. Allauddin Khan was a very small man, tiny but with the devil's temper. He was very strict about both teaching and learning. Ravi Shankar in his memoirs recalls that he was the only student who had not been beaten by Allauddin Khan. This in itself is a pointer to Ravi Shankar's vision that, even as a young teenager who had lived in comfort abroad, he opted for this small town and Allauddin Khan.

Ravi Shankar perhaps knew instinctively that he had a greater tryst in life than to amuse the well-meaning Orientalists of the Second World. Uday Shankar's dance form was seen by many as highly Orientalist—about Shiva and Parvati, Radha and Krishna and the Indian magician. And in his forays into the arts, Uday Shankar was a student of Sir William Rothenstein who was the then principal of the Royal College of Art in London. He did not complete his studies in painting, but became involved with Anna Pavlova who was at the height of her career and when Orientalist dance in Europe was the rage. Ruth St. Denis, Anna Pavlova, and all the major Western choreographers were using Indian themes. Pavlova needed an Indian consort and Uday Shankar fit the bill. But he realized that there was greater

potential because these Orientalist Indian dances were not Pavlova's entire repertoire, but only a small part of it. Uday Shankar expanded these into a whole repertoire and built a career which lasted over 20 years, at least till the Second World War.

Around this time changes were taking place. Their mother died and Ravi Shankar decided to leave the troupe. In a way this also marked a turning point in Uday Shankar's career because his troupe never really reached the heights it did before the Second World War. He started his institute in Almora and from there it was downhill.

But Ravi Shankar never really forgot his brother and till the very end reminisced about the old days. There is a clip of Uday Shankar and Simkie, his French partner, which also has a glimpse of Ravi Shankar playing the sitar.

Uday Shankar had a partner who was French. Her name was Simone Barbier. She was a pianist, a beautiful pianist. He was much in love with her and started teaching her dancing. She left playing the piano and became a dancer. He gave her the name Simkie... As Ravi Shankar recalls: 'He was such a wonderful dancer and it was not just sexy but it was beautiful. He created a whole new form but it was never never westernized, that is the beauty of it. His inspiration was at that time what he had seen in his childhood in Rajasthan. At that time for almost fifteen years, believe me, when these two appeared together as Radha-Krishna or Shiva-Parvati even in India, people would almost do pranaam, truly thinking of them as Radha and Krishna. Yes, it is due to him that we are all here.'

It was certainly due to Uday Shankar that Ravi Shankar was there. And in a way Ravi Shankar retained what he had learnt from Uday Shankar all his life. I was very young when he inaugurated the Triveni Kala Sangam in Delhi in 1967. He formed one of his early orchestras called *Melody and Rhythm*, and my aunt was selected to play in it. My aunt had been a student of Uma Shankar Misra who was Raviji's first student. I remember the first time I saw him in 1970 when he played at the Shankar Lal Music Concert at Modern School on Barakhamba Road. My aunt took me backstage to meet him. What struck me was the crowds, and I mean huge crowds. The green room was being guarded to keep people from entering.

Once we got past all that, there was Ravi Shankarji. He had finished tuning and was having tea. He was very nice and courteous and beckoned my aunt, saying 'Aao aao'.

What I remember was his pancake make-up. He wore a lot of lipstick and rouge and I as a young man thought, 'my God! Why did he have to do that?' Even later, till he died, he would dab powder and a bit of rouge and lipstick because that was the training he had from the European tradition of theatre in the 1930s, i.e., you must present yourself to an audience in costume, as it were, and he was very particular about how he presented himself. In fact, it is in his memory that I decided to wear a silk dhoti today because I can't speak about Ravi Shankarji without my 'paint'.

A little later I started understanding music better and it was then that I realized his musical worth which till then was shadowed by his stardom. He was a big star in the 1960s and 70s, and he himself realized that he needed to go deeper than this very displayed and projected Indianness which he acquired from the stage. He knew instinctively that he would have to delve into the depths of his own tradition instead of merely repackaging its more superficial attractions as his brother had been doing. And that is exactly what he did. Indian instrumental music made a quantum leap to its present level of structural sophistication, musical expression, and public appeal. He was one of the very few musicians who could combine all three values. That was quite extraordinary.

It is believed that one has to live in the shadow of a guru and serve him for decades before you can become an accomplished musician, but certainly not achieve the heights of the guru. Ravi Shankar must have been a genius because, although he himself propagated this myth, in his own life he spent only two years in Maihar, from 1936 to 1938, after which he played all around the country. He must have practised extraordinarily hard and he must have been unusually talented to make such an impact. That is not to say his learning came to an end. It did not. Nor did his association and learning with Allauddin Khan. Only that he stopped living in proximity with his guru, secluded in Maihar.

He would also have listened to a whole host of other musicians at that time. Till the 1970s and 80s there were four or five different styles of sitar and sarod playing. In the last two or three decades, these styles have got homogenized and musicians are playing a little bit of everything. In those days, musicians, especially instrumentalists, would specialize in certain aspects of playing. The whole sequence of slow *alaap* and then a *jor* and then a *jhala*, and then a *Vilambit-gat* and then a *Madhya-laya-gat* and then

again *jhala*—that structure was absent and there were individual instrumentalists who excelled in individual aspects of musical presentation. There were some who played only the *Madhya-laya-gat*, there were some who only played *alaap*, there were some who only played certain kinds of *gats* like the *Razakhani* or the *Ferozekhani*, and I surmise that it is during Ravi Shankar's evolution that we first find the structure of elaborating the *raga* over an hour or an hour and a half. He had listened to a lot of sitar players, some of whom he acknowledges in his autobiography, in Bangla especially. The later English autobiographies leave a lot out. Not only sitar and sarod players, but he also heard veena players—the *beenkars*—and *surbahar* players, and from each of them he took certain portions which he integrated into this long strung-out concert structure. He was not the only one who was doing it; in their own way his contemporaries Ali Akbar Khan and Vilayat Khan also did it. But what makes Ravi Shankar more significant to my mind is that we see the best of *dhrupad-dhamaar*, *alaap-jor* and even his compositional presentations were more in the mode of a *dhrupad* or a *dhamaar*. He did not quite touch *khayal* or *thumri* in the way we are used to hearing them today. Vilayat Khan was perhaps better in that, but as far as the structure of *alaap-jor* and these slow and fast *gats* is concerned, I think Ravi Shankar stood head and shoulders above the others. This point is demonstrated in one of his early recordings from the 1960s with his favourite tabla player, Chatur Lal. The *raga* is also of his own making, *Tilak-shyam*. Later or around the same time he also composed a film song in this *raga*.

Today we are used to a certain pattern or norm in Indian music/Hindustani music concerts, but when Ravi Shankar started there were no norms. The old *ustads* were not used to playing on stage but rather in small *mehfils* or chamber concert situations in people's homes. And it was only as Ravi Shankar was beginning his career in the 1930s that classical Hindustani music concerts were beginning to take place. People like Vishnu Digambar Paluskar and Bhatkande were encouraging patrons to pool in money and hold these big classical music 'conferences', as they were called at that time. There were music conferences in Allahabad, Bombay, Calcutta, and the All Bengal Conference. It was on these ramshackle stages that classical music was first presented to large democratic audiences. Some of the masters knew how to handle it, some didn't.

Ravi Shankar, having been exposed to his brother's stage craft in Europe, created his own stage ambience. A Shiva statue in one corner, lighting of the lamp, musicians

dressed either in *churidar* and *achkan* or in *dhoti-kurta*, and the numerous *agarbattis*. He didn't smoke, but it would not be a surprise if his lung problems during the end of his life were the result of having inhaled so much *agarbatti* smoke. He also had *agarbattis* in his home and in his room, and I always associate the *agarbatti* stand with Ravi Shankar.

And the placement of the tabla player. The tabla player, in a *mujra* or in a court, did not sit. In fact, most musicians performed standing, and the tabla players had thick waist bands or belts over which they tied their tablas and played, following the singer or dancer. Drum players strung the drums around their neck. The placement of the tabla player to the right, and the tanpura player seated behind the instrumentalist, was perfected, if not created, by Ravi Shankar.

That was also the time when imported piano strings had started entering India. Prior to that, all Indian instruments had cast iron strings which were quite thick, as a result of which both the tonality of the instrument and its manipulative potential were limited. It was during Ravi Shankar's lifetime and during his career that we started importing piano strings from Europe and later on from America. In fact, when I was learning, piano strings were the topic of conversation when two musicians met and if one of them had come from abroad. '*Accha tum taar laye ho kya? Kaunsi number ki taar laye ho?*' (Have you brought strings? What number is it?). The coming of these imported piano strings made a huge difference on the sitar because they could be pulled much more. It also led to an understanding of the microphone and where to place it. In fact, till the end Ravi Shankarji had an army of sound engineers working for him. Which were the best microphones? What should be the distance between the microphone and the plate of his sitar? He was constantly working on and experimenting with such things.

But apart from these physical changes, he also brought in basic changes, as I said earlier, to the musical structure of the concert itself: the *alap, jor, jhala* sequence, the various stages of the *vilambit gat* or the slow composition, the *sawal-jawab* with the percussionist; all these have been put together and refined by Ravi Shankarji. In fact, no Indian instrumentalist would even mention the name of the tabla player at a concert. Vilayat Khan would choose tabla players who were happy not to be named and they sat somewhere in the back. It was Ravi Shankar who foregrounded the tabla player, introduced him, and as in the Carnatic music tradition, he had sequences of

sawal-jawab, of interchange between the instrumentalist and the tabla player. There were several things he adopted from Carnatic music, and this was one of them. In fact the very concept of how to use *taal*, of how to use rhythm in music, he gathered from the Carnatic system. It was not something that Allauddin Khan perfected. It was something that Ravi Shankar perfected.

And he was easily the best *laya-kaar* or *taal-kaar*. It is very easy to say that *taal* came naturally to him because he was a dancer. *Taal* doesn't come naturally to anybody except a genius. There are many dancers who are *be-taal*, and in fact Ravi Shankar danced very little. But the love for rhythm and his involvement with *taal* and his understanding of how to divide time in a time cycle in multiples was perfect. This was present in Carnatic music as well, but for Ravi Shankar it was not just a matter of memorizing something. Instead, he had to understand the system, the logic and the expression of it and then adapt it to Hindustani music. And he did it so wonderfully. He not only played with tabla players, but he often had *pakhawaj* players accompany him in the *dhrupad* tradition. In fact, one of the greatest dancers of our time, Pandit Durga Lal, used to play the *pakhawaj* for Ravi Shankar. In fact, I have heard two or three concerts by Durga Lal and Ravi Shankar which were absolutely marvellous. For both Durga Lal and Birju Maharaj, no other musician could compare with Ravi Shankar in matters of *taal*.

The other aspect he adopted from Carnatic music was the approach to *raga* as a scale. This is something that did not endear him to me, but it must be said and granted that his basic approach to *raga* was like that of a Carnatic musician. For him a *raga* was a scale. And most of the *ragas* he created were also scales. In Hindustani music we do make a distinction between a scale and a *raga*. All *ragas* have scales but not all scales make a *raga*, according to Mansur, my teacher, whom I am quoting here: '*ragon ke sur hote hain par suron se raga nahin bante*'. In fact Ravi Shankar made fun of Mansur, saying, 'I love Mansur and he is a great musician but *woh kaafi ke that ko leke itne saare raga gaana*; 'using just one scale and making so many *ragas* out of it, they all sound similar to me'.

Ravi Shankar did make a lot of new *ragas*, even if they were scale-based, and some of them became so popular that not only did great masters and his contemporaries sing them, but they started claiming it a traditional *raga*. Like *raga Nat-Bhairav* for example. Ravi Shankar made the *raga* and then for a film score he taught it to Pandit

Amarnath who had sung it before his guru, Ustad Amir Khan. After that, Amir Khan and Amarnath called it a traditional *raga*.

Ravi Shankar himself wrote about this, which is why I am making the reference clear. But even *Nat-Bhairav* as Ravi Shankar played it was his key. There was very little *Nat* in it. And his other *ragas* like *Parneswari* and *Gangeswari* were basically derived through *moorchana bhed* or modular changes; that is, if you change the tonic, you get a new scale. He perfected this very fast between the late 1930s and the mid-40s. It is interesting to note that Ravi Shankar was the only performing musician associated with the IPTA which was a group of writers, poets and theatre people which was set up by the Communist Party of India. He was invited by the then Secretary of the Communist Party of India, P.C. Joshi. IPTA, of course, has huge significance when we think of theatre and films and poetry, from Sahir Ludhianvi to Kaifi Azmi to K. Asif, even Prithviraj Kapoor for a short time, and of course Kiran Irma, Balraj Sahni, among others.

Ravi Shankar did two things at IPTA. Very few remember that he created the tune for *Saare Jahan se Accha* around 1946, a tune that was recomposed by him in various forms. For example, he did it for the All India Radio *Vadya Vrinda*, and it later became the signature tune of Doordarshan. He also made a foray into theatre with a ballet based on Nehru's *Discovery of India*. It was performed in Bombay and in Delhi at the AIFACS Hall. Ravi Shankar writes that Pandit Nehru came to see the show and slept through most of it. In 1947 he decided to come to Delhi because it was the new capital and a new government had taken over. He stayed in the house of Lala Shriram whose sons Bharat Ram and Charat Ram were to become the industrialists of the next generation. He told Sumitra Charat Ram, the daughter-in-law, that the time of the Maharajas and their patronage was finally over. We are an independent democracy and all these musicians are without jobs, he said. He suggested holding a *jalsa*, a concert celebrating Independence and classical music. So the first all-night event of that sort took place in their house on Curzon Road in 1947. At around this time several musicians migrated to Delhi from various parts of India, especially northern India and the courts of Rampur and Gwalior.

An important figure at that time was Nirmala Joshi whose father ran one of the biggest hospitals in Delhi, Dr. Joshi's Hospital in Karol Bagh. Nirmala Joshi had started a school called Sangeet Bharati to which she had invited Birju Maharaj's father, Acchan Maharaj,

and Mushtaq Hussain Khan from Rampur to come and teach. Ravi Shankar quickly persuaded the Charat Rams to start a school as well and that was the beginning of Bharatiya Kala Kendra which still exists along with Kamani auditorium in Mandi House today. Mushtaq Hussain Khan of Rampur migrated here with his family. Siddheswari Devi came from Benares. The Dagar brothers, the elder Dagar brothers, were on the staff, as was Birju Maharaj's uncle; (the father had died by that time) Shambhu Maharaj migrated and later died in Delhi while teaching at Bharatiya Kala Kendra. There were two Jaipur *kathak* gurus and a whole galaxy of court musicians like Hafiz Ali Khan of Gwalior who joined the Bharatiya Kala Kendra. The Bharatiya Kala Kendra could not have happened had Ravi Shankar not laid the seeds for it; in fact, the institutions he himself made never lasted long but he was instrumental in starting many institutions across India with the help of other people. Triveni Kala Sangam is an example. Sundari Shridharani who died very recently was a student of Uday Shankar and it was Ravi Shankar who persuaded her to open Triveni Kala Sangam.

Around the same time in 1947-48, Ravi Shankar was invited to take over as Director of the All India Radio Orchestra. In the grand tradition of Soviet times, the Government of India decided that there should be a national orchestra. Indian music was not played in orchestras, and small bands had started mushrooming, much like the one that Allauddin Khan had started in Maihar; it was called the Maihar Band but it could not be called an orchestra by any stretch of imagination. But Ravi Shankar was more ambitious and in 1948 they started what was called the National Orchestra which I think still exists, although I am not too sure. It might have been disbanded but it did exist till a few years ago. It was called the Akashvani Vadya Vrinda. Ravi Shankar was its first director. Till then he had given music for a few plays and ballets, but this was the first full scale orchestration that he was trying out. There were several very talented musicians in the All India Radio Orchestra at that time, particularly Emani Shankar Shastry who moved here a little later from Chennai.

Very soon, Nehru, Maulana Azad and the I&B minister, P.V. Keskar, decided that democratic India's culture needed to be disseminated widely. This was the beginning of cultural troupes being sent around the globe. Ravi Shankar was one of the first to be sent out, not as part of his brother's troupe as he was almost 20 years before in Europe, but as an artist in his own right. He had already made alliances with several people in the West but this time he met them at a more professional level. As director of the All

India Radio Orchestra, he met a lot of them in Delhi as well, because Yehudi Menuhin was an early arrival in India in 1952, as was Duke Ellington. These alliances proved to be very beneficial and soon he was being regularly invited to the West. He began touring again as a solo sitar player from the mid-1950s, and it took another decade of steady rise in the international music scene for him to establish his international supremacy, as it were.

But even more important was the coming of the Beatles. The Beatles arrived in 1966 and that was the moment for Ravi Shankar to turn into the global superstar of sitar. George Harrison, in particular, became a devoted pupil and remained so for the rest of his life. In fact, I had the good fortune of meeting George Harrison twice at Ravi Shankar's house in Delhi. In 1967, Ravi Shankar played at the Monterey festival and at Woodstock in 1969. Two years later he and George Harrison organized the Concert for Bangladesh at Madison Square Garden in New York to draw the attention of the world to the plight of a nation-in-making. At the time when they held the concert or they were planning it, Bangladesh was an uncertainty. The Americans were not supporting Mujibur Rehman, but they were supporting Pakistan and it was only Mrs. Gandhi who decided after many months to intervene. Ravi Shankar saw that a nation was forming and he held the concert for Bangladesh at that time.

It was also around this time in the mid-1960s that he and his lover Kamala Shastri started openly living together. Ravi Shankar had married his guru's daughter Annapurna in 1940, both of whom in their individual accounts say that it was not a love marriage. It was a marriage that was arranged by his brothers and sisters-in-law. They thought it would be very nice if he married the guru's daughter because she too was a musician. I think Allauddin Khan also agreed easily because his first daughter had had a very bad marriage and she had died. And secondly, being a musician and a Muslim at a time when communal passions were starting to crystallize in the country, he was not sure that he would find a husband for his daughter from within the Muslim community who would cherish and honour her as a musician too. Annapurna Devi converted to Hinduism and within a couple of years in 1942 they had their first child, Shubho Shankar. But as it happens, not all arranged marriages work out. And Ravi Shankar was very clear about where he was going in life and nothing was going to stop him. Annapurna was reticent, she was moody, and they just did not get along. They did perform a few times together, most memorably in Delhi I am told. There are recordings

available of a couple of their concerts (*raga Yaman*), but Annapurna Devi, according to Ravi Shankar, was not too keen on the performance of music whereas for Ravi Shankar it was very important. On the other hand, as we are told, she believed that music should be for music itself and not for performance or display.

Apart from that, Ravi Shankar was a handsome young man who was very fond of women. He was honest about this in his own writings. By the early 1950s, his marriage with Annapurna Devi was over but it took him another ten to fifteen years to finally dissolve that marriage.

His first autobiography, *My Music My Life*, was brought out in 1968 and it was an instant bestseller. Although his first film score was for Satyajit Ray's 1955 classic *Pather Panchali*, it was only by the late 1960s that Ravi Shankar began composing music for films both in India and abroad and also giving music to songs for theatre, ballets and so on. In the process, he impacted the world's understanding of music very fundamentally. The avant garde American composer Phillip Glass writes, and I quote, 'I can say without hesitation or exaggeration that Ravi Shankar is the godfather, the mother and the father of what is called world music today.' And Glass adds, 'What is more striking is the breadth and depth of Ravi Shankar's influence. It can be felt not only in art and experimental music but also in popular music and in jazz. I have only to mention the Beatles, John Coltrane and countless others who have benefited from his teachings. I certainly count myself among those whose musical bearing was forever changed by Ravi Shankar.'

In fact, his compositional opus is huge and beginning with his work with Yehudi Menuhin, *East meets West*, which earned him a Grammy, and then a Concerto for Sitar, commissioned by the London Symphony Orchestra, a second sitar concerto commissioned by the New York Philharmonic performed under the baton of Zubin Mehta, his works with flautist Jean-Pierre Rampal, cellist Mstislav Rostropovich, shakuhachi master Hosan Yamamoto, the koto virtuoso Musumi Miyashita. And even more lasting was the influence that he wielded on the Western music scene through people like Glass himself.

Ravi Shankar has left an indelible mark not only on Indian music but also Western music in the West. You can't think of world genres today without Ravi Shankar's intervention in them. From Western classical music to jazz to fusion to experimental to minimal, all

these genres would definitely have been the poorer had they not benefited from Ravi Shankar's interventions and his mentoring.

And in the midst of this creative maelstrom, his personal life too was being lived at the same pace. Ravi Shankar wrote three autobiographies, one in Bengali and two in English, and he is extremely, disarmingly frank about his need for the love of women and his own unfaithfulness to those who had loved him. He was not the only artist to have done so, but he is the only artist who confessed to that. In fact, all his contemporaries from Ali Akbar Khan to Vilayat Khan had similar lives but everybody talked about Ravi Shankar's womanizing. But people who understood the music scene didn't regard it as something noteworthy.

While he continued to tour with his partner Kamala in India and she ran his establishment in Benaras through the mid-1970s, he also loved and lived with Sue Jones in New York. The news of the birth of his daughter Norah in 1979 reached us and Kamala finally stepped out of his life and retired to Chennai. Then we learnt that he was simultaneously involved with Sukanya Rajan in London who had given birth to a daughter, Anoushka. And I remember, I think he must have been in his early 80s when Ravi Shankar came to hear my teacher Mallikarjun Mansur perform. They met in the green room privately for a few minutes and Ravi Shankar said, 'Panditji, do you know that I am getting married again.' So Mansur said, '*Arre baba, arre baba, jyaada nahin karne ka.*' But I must say that he was very happy at that time to have fathered children because Shubho, his elder son who played the sitar and accompanied Ravi Shankar for a few years all over India and the world, had by then stopped playing the sitar and his was a tragic life which could be the subject of a novel in itself. Shubho was pulled between his mother in Bombay and his father who travelled constantly.

Between 1986 and 1992, Ravi Shankar was Member of the Rajya Sabha and he was based out of a colonial bungalow in New Delhi. He was already in his 70s or approaching that and his home was run by a third generation of students. That is also the time, in the mid-1980s, that I really got to know him well. He actually sought out younger talent. I had met him, as I said, with my aunt in 1970, and then a few years later around 1974-75 through my then teacher, Amjad Ali Khan, and then in the 1980s with Mansurji. When Mansurji died, there was no occasion to meet Ravi Shankar till I got a call suddenly out of the blue and he said, 'this is Ravi Shankar speaking.'

I said, 'Okay.'

He said, 'since Mansurji died, you don't meet me.'

I replied, 'no, there was no occasion to meet you. I will be happy to whenever.'

So he said, 'Come over' .

Then I realized that he had done similar things with a lot of younger people in the music world and he invited some of them to perform for him privately. He was very generous with his experience, his knowledge, his time. His health was a problem, and perhaps he also felt guilty that he had not done right by his daughters. He married Anoushka's mother, Sukanya, in a private ceremony in Hyderabad in 1989. Of course, it made world news and Norah Jones' mother cut him off; it was another 15 years before Norah was adult enough to seek him out on her own.

It is to Sukanya's credit that she navigated this whole complex, messy situation so well that Norah and Anoushka are now good friends. And in the last years of his life Ravi Shankar was immensely proud of both his daughters. When Anoushka had a child a few years ago, he called all of us and he said, 'You know I have a grandchild now.' It really made him young again to see both his daughters blossom.

I am sure that like Tansen and Beethoven, Ravi Shankar's legacy will be legendary and perhaps given our more globalized times, it could prove to be more universal and enduring.

S.Kalidas has been a noted commentator on the Indian cultural scene for over four decades now, with Indian classical music and the visual arts as his twin passions. He was trained in classical music by eminent masters including Amjad Ali Khan and Mallikarjun Mansur. S.Kalidas has been a senior editor with leading newspapers and magazines, including *India Today* and *The Times of India*. He scripted and directed *Hai Akhтари* a documentary film on the legendary diva Begum Akhtar in 1992. He has numerous publications to his credit.



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