**‘I’m jobless here in Delhi. I’m not on any government committee and there is no encouragement from the government at all’ | The Indian Express**

‘I’m jobless here in Delhi. I’m not on any government committee and there is no encouragement from the government at all’ Summary. In this Idea Exchange,sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan speaks about musicians and their egos,his relationship with his father and his sons,and carrying on Tansen's legacy. This session was moderated by Senior Correspondent Suanshu Khurana. Related. In this Idea Exchange,sarod maestro Ustad Amjad Ali Khan speaks about musicians and their egos,his relationship with his father and his sons,and carrying on Tansen’s legacy. This session was moderated by Senior Correspondent Suanshu Khurana. Suanshu Khurana: Do you think appreciation for classical music has changed from the 60s when you began playing? Appreciation is always there. But in our country,we have not been able to strike a balance between different types of music,the way the western world has. They have Hollywood,the opera,symphonies,they listen to all kinds of music. But in our country,we are fortunately or unfortunately,obsessed with Bollywood. That does great damage to the classical arts. And TV channels have not encouraged classical music. If I find that proper attention in an audience is missing,I will not perform. I have often said that I am not an entertainer. I am a humble representative of a long legacy. Its almost like an elephants walkwe have to walk with dignity and grace. Suanshu Khurana: Is there a contradiction between being a purist and being a successful musician in the global market? Its a big challenge. Earlier,musicians could carry on one raga for 2-3 hours. But I respect the phrase sense of proportion<U+0094>. Being a musician,it sometimes becomes difficult for me to listen to another musician because he takes so much time in improvisations. I dont think every raga gives you that kind of freedom. Theres an old story about my father. In 1960,he was to receive the Padma Bhushan. He took me with him to Rashtrapati Bhavan for the award. Rajendra Prasad,the then President,came up to my father and asked if there was anything he could do for him. My father replied that everything was fine but please could he save Durbari Kanhara. My father told him that the Durbari was created by Mian Tansen and people were taking liberties with the raga and it was losing its purity. I think Rajendra Prasad realised that my father wanted some reassuranceperhaps my father thought hes going to pass a resolution in Parliament next dayso Rajendra Prasad said he would see to it. My abba went straight home and told my mother that Rajendra Prasad was going to save Durbari. We had such innocent and committed people in those days. I think the response to Amjad Ali Khan in Maharashtra,West Bengal,the South,is different from Delhi. Outside Delhi,people have understood me more. Im jobless here. Im not on any governments committee and theres no encouragement from the government at all. But the world is supporting me. I miss Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. When Atal Bihariji (Vajpayee) was there,he invited me to be on the Padma award committee. When Narasimha Rao was the prime minister,he had invited Princess Diana for dinner and my wife and I were among the invitees. I would like to advise cultural departments,the Information and Broadcasting Ministry or the ICCR,but they dont need my help. Instead I was invited by Stanford University last summer to teach. Nobody in India invites me to teach at any university. Coomi Kapoor: Your father was your musical guru. Can you tell us something about that relationship? It was more of a guru-shishya relationship because there was a great age difference between us. I couldnt take the liberty to embrace him,kiss him. But there was a lot of love. When I was rehearsing late at night,he would stop me and tell me to rest. I would stop but when he went to sleep,I would start riyaaz again. There was a commitment and I feel embarrassed to say its my profession; its my passion. And when I was talking about Delhi not being an ideal place,one of the reasons is also the incidents that have been taking place here since the December 16 gang-rape. In a country where women are considered to be goddesses,even minor girls are being harmed. In my opinion,the punishment for these people should be such that the whole world is scared and this brutality is stopped. Dipanita Nath: What about your relationship with your sons? My eldest son is 35 years old and were all friends. The credit goes to their mother because she gave them a lot of time and attention. If they didnt become good musicians,they should become good human beings. When Im giving lessons,Im the guru,but once the sessions are over,were friends. Suanshu Khurana: It is said that a wise man never teaches his children classical music because of issues of livelihood. But you decided to teach your sons. Why? We are fakirs at heart. Since Im in search of the depths of swar,I am a fakir. It was important for me to share music with my children because music is our only treasure and wealth. I never picked up the sarod thinking that it could be used for livelihood. Its my duty to preserve it. When my sons were young,I was worried about how to get them interested in music. I created songs,made cassettes such as Amjad Ali Khan sings with children<U+0094> to encourage them. I was not used to teaching music to children. I taught grown-ups. I taught my fathers disciples. But I didnt have any problems in teaching them because they were on the right track. The interest and sense of rhythm and sound have been in them naturally. Once my father was playing in Allahabad and a group said to him,We are not full yet. My father replied that if they were still hungry,they should go eat. Music is not to fulfill our appetites. It is the food of the soul. He said he was there to show the beauty of raga,not to operate on it. There are some musicians in the country who do not understand this. Dilip Bobb: Is the audience in India for classical music shrinking? It varies from state to state. The realisation and appreciation of music has always been good in Maharashtra and West Bengal and the four states of the South. I always look forward to performing in West Bengal and Maharashtra and South India. They have become very choosy. They are not willing to listen to everybody. That is why it has become a bigger challenge for younger musicians. They have to be more precise and shouldnt torture the raga,or cross limits. Sometimes,creative people have ego problems. In the old days,it was said that if musicians were holding a sarod,they would try to see who could pull off the higher octave for the longest time. Everybody had that ego problem. Ego problems exist today too. We are here to make peace in this world,not to give people an opportunity to look at their watches and wonder when the performance will end. I feel that we have two parallel worlds. One is of sound. The other is of words. There are very few who experience the world of sound. The world of words is ruling. India is the only country where we say Swar hi ishwar hai (Sound is God). Through sound,we connect ourselves with God. Every religious place has kirtans,shabads,qawwalis and group singing. When Sufism came,it spurred this movement. The world of sound is the most beautiful,and Im grateful that I live in this world. Theres no manipulation here. If Im out of tune,it shows and I cant hide it. Suanshu Khurana: On the question of egos,there were two controversial incidents when you played with Bismillah Khan and Imrat Khan. With Bismillah Khan sahib,I played duet twice. He was much older than me. The biggest strain for me was how to communicate with such a senior artiste. When we played together in Delhi in August 2003,it went off very well. But in Kolkata,in December,he was in a different moodkalaakar log kaan ke kacche hote hain (artistes are easily influenced). If people say something to them,old timers get affected. That day,Khan sahib was in a mood to talk about poor acoustics,the microphone,etc. I asked the audience if they could hear the shehnai,and they said they could. So I asked Khan sahib to proceed. But he was in a different mood. After the interval,he left. So I had to play alone. It was embarrassing because the Kolkata concert was a ticketed concert. Nearly 3,000 people had bought tickets. Rakesh Sinha: Has fusion helped the sarod? Fusion has become a necessity. Certain fusions are very good. Amaan and Ayaan have made many fusion albums. Instead of fusions,I prefer calling it collaborations. People who criticise fusion music,do so because of their weaknesseverybody cant do fusion. It needs more ability and sense. My father used to say that one has to become a complete musician. A complete musician is one who can see the good in other systems,genres and music. Its very easy to criticise European music,say that they read music and play. But we dont know how to read or write music. Its amazing how 150 musicians collectively play music. Why doesnt India have an orchestra? Because of ego. What would happen if 150 Indian musicians got together? Suanshu Khurana: You took a while to get used to the idea of collaborations and fusion. Was it because you were a purist at heart like your father? If you have the ability and you wish to experience and learn more in your life then you do collaborations. Im a great admirer of western classical musicBeethoven,Bach,Mozart. The harmonisation in their system is something we dont agree with. We prefer to be solo musicians. This is one of the reasons we dont have orchestras. Interestingly,throughout the world,music works with seven notes (sa re ga ma pa dha ni or do re mi fa so la ti). If you combine them,there are 12 notes. And these 12 notes form the basis for all kinds of music,be it European,Chinese,Japanese. Today,we have fax machines,keyboards,telephones but nobody could create the 13th musical note. When I collaborate with any orchestra or symphony,we use the same notes,the system and approach is different. Dipanita Nath: We lost Pandit Ravi Shankar a few months ago and many other masters of classical music have passed away recently. Will the next generation be able to fill that vacuum? Vacuum will always be there. Anyone who departs leaves a vacuum behind them. The times of rajas and maharajas had kadardaans (connoisseurs) and that was a good time for creative people. But we dont have such people anymore. We no longer have people who could say that this one musician is the best. During Akbars reign,he made Tansen the court musician,even though there were thousands of others. My legacy goes back to Tansen and weve been taking his music forward. Somya Lakhani: You have often performed outside India. What is the difference in the way a foreign audience and an Indian one responds to your music? The meaning of artiste is much bigger in the western world. The way they have preserved Shakespeare,we could not preserve Ghalib. They have preserved Beethoven but we are finding it difficult to run our own sarod ghar in Gwalior where our ancestral house is the museum. I need a lot of support for that museum. But the governments priorities are different,not towards art and culture. After a concert in a western country,I get a standing ovation for 10 minutes. That is their culture and they show it through a standing ovation. Here,some people dont even clap while sitting. Coomi Kapoor: Your wife was a brilliant dancer but she gave up a career to look after the family. Does she regret her sacrifice? Youll have to ask her. My wife will always be an artiste. I saw her perform in Kolkata for the first time and I thought God had sent her for me. She thinks every dancer should stop after a particular age because theres a limit. A dancers body is her instrument. She realised this. Coomi Kapoor: Yours is an inter-religious marriage. What is the culture your sons have imbibed from the two of you? I think both of us have strived for them to become better human beings and to respect all religions. Dilip Bobb: You said theres no government support. Where is the backing for Indian classical music coming from? I have never tried to find whos doing all these festivals. But Im sure the corporate world is sponsoring and realising the value of our art. The government should do it. On paper,they have crores of rupees for promotion of art and culture. There are so many organisations all over the country which receive grants from the government. But what happens to those grants,Ive yet to see. The unfortunate thing with our country is that we dont have a world class concert hall. Due to this lack,symphonies dont come to this country. Mumbais NCPA is a well-maintained venue. Otherwise,we dont have any. Somya Lakhani: How do you assess your sons objectively as musicians? I can only say that they are committed and dedicated. And that they are on the right track. Its very clear that they are different human beings and their approach is different. I never tried to make them imitate me,to create two other Amjad Ali Khans. I never made them practise with me. They both have separate rooms to practise in so that they dont sound alike. If the shagirds are identical,it becomes a liability. My sons sound different. We have some brilliant musicians under 40 but they dont get opportunities. This year,the Padma Shri or Padma Bhushan went to a 104-year-old. The question is: are you giving an award to age or to talent?