NORTH INDIA

INDE DU NORD

Instrumental Music of Mediaeval India
Musique Instrumentale de l'Inde Medievale

ANTHOLOGIE DES MUSIQUES TRADITIONNELLES
ANTHOLOGY OF TRADITIONAL MUSICS
The word vina is a generic term that, when prefixed with distinctive epithets, denote a set of Indian chordophones as well as a number of aerophones. From its ancient origins, it has been possible to trace the evolution of the Rudra vina or Bin (also known as the sarasvati vina or Sar vina) through representations in frescos and sculptures dating from as early as the seventh century A.D. As with most stringed instruments, it is quite likely that the Rudra vina developed from the primitive musical bow found in many countries.

The precursor of the modern Rudra vina appears to have enjoyed a privileged position among members of the Hindu cult before becoming a symbol of Lord Shiva until about the thirteenth century. A folk tradition mentioned in several old music treatises describes how Shiva drew the weapon of his wife Parvati when creating the murti of Lord Shiva, to which two gourd resonators are attached. In the seventh century it was made simply from a bamboo tube with one half-gourd. Its single string, possibly of gut or silk, would have been plucked by the index and middle fingers of the right hand with the left hand pressing the gourd to the player’s breast.

The manner in which the instrument was held was slightly modified in the ninth century and an extra gourd was joined to the lower end of the tube. Both gourds became more rounded. From about the twelfth century onwards, frets were attached to the tube while the number of strings was increased to two or more. Throughout the entire medieval period, texts on music describe several innovative variants of this type of vina including instruments with three resonators and different numbers of frets and gut or metal strings. Gradually the definitive vina was taking shape. The gourds became bigger and were sometimes spherical or pear-shaped; high wooden frets were attached to the tube with a mixture of vegetable matter and beeswax. Since that time the vina has been held across the chest with the upper gourd situated above and slightly behind the left shoulder.

Measuring about 90 cm in length with an average of sixteen frets and five strings in the sixteenth century, the vina reached a length of 125 cm by the early nineteenth century; it had a total of twenty-four frets and seven strings. These are its present dimensions. Formerly resonators were attached to the tube with leather thongs, but these are now screwed on; furthermore, the delicate multi-coloured patterns have been replaced by a single-coloured varnish. A piece of wood carved in the shape of a peacock or swan is fixed to the lower end of the tube. Supported between the bird’s wings is a raised, flat bridge of ivory (either deer horn or an elephant’s ankle bone) of a kind peculiar to India. The bridge in turn supports four melodic strings that are plucked with metal plectra attached to the tips of the index and middle fingers of the right hand.

To the left of the fingerboard and running the length of the tube are situated two more strings whose function is rhythmic. These are plucked with the little finger. On the right-hand side of the fingerboard is another string that is plucked regularly by the little finger of the left hand in order to produce the drone. Both rhythmic and drone strings are supported by small, flat bridges on either side of the carved bird at about the level of its wings.

Unlike all other stringed instruments, the melodic string, highest in pitch and most frequently in use, is situated to the left of the fingerboard with the medium and bass strings on the right. This arrangement allows the premier melodic string to be pulled laterally across the whole width of the fret and offers the player the possibility of producing a greater range of portamento than would have been possible had the string been situated more conventionally on the right near the edge of the fingerboard. In addition, since the main melodic string is positioned next to, and immediately above the rhythmic strings, a great variety of rhythmic combinations is possible with just a single, short movement of the fingers of the right hand. This rhythmic variety and the portamento techniques rich in melodic subtlety and the stylistic hallmarks of the Rudra vina.

The Instrument

The Rudra vina belongs to the family of string or tube zithers. It consists of a neck of bamboo (also known as teak) to which two gourd resonators are attached. In the seventh century it was made simply from a bamboo tube with one half-gourd. Its single string, possibly of gut or silk, would have been plucked by the index and middle fingers of the right hand with the left hand pressing the gourd to the player’s breast.

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The Instrumental Tradition

About the seventh century, the tube zither developed in a fresco in the Ajanta caves and in a bas-relief in one of the Madura and Tirupur temples. It is conceivable that, at that time, it was a rural instrument played by members of itinerant theatre groups. Subsequently, it not only became part of the Hindu cult as an attribute of the Divine, but was also frequently accompanied by sacred vocal music. An instrumental tradition, identified exclusively with this type of vina, then developed in association with religious ritual. By the
sixteenth century, the main centres of this tradition were Gujarat and Rajasthan.

The popularity of the instrument increased noticeably from about the twelfth century onwards, being particularly appreciated by those in more restricted court circles. In the fifteenth century before the arrival of the first Moguls, most Hindu and Muslim kingdoms in North (Delhi) and South (Golconda, Bijapur) India could count Rudra vina players among their musicians, while the prince himself was frequently a player. And so from the sixteenth century, a highly-refined instrumental tradition was to flourish for several centuries in the courts, headed by the Rudra vina and the Rabab (a round-bodied, collared lute with tapering neck and fingerboard imported from Persia).

Indeed during the reign of one of the most illustrious Mogul emperors, Akbar (1542-1605), himself a great lover and patron of the arts, this tradition (associated with dhrupad) was to blossom. Several bin binkars, instrumentalists, were appointed to the service of the imperial court, and many Hindu, Persian and Turkish musicians were regularly invited to visit and perform. The most famous of these, Raja Samokhan Singh, is said to have married the daughter of the great composer and singer Tansen. Akbar's favourite musician. Their descendants, along with those of Tansen's two sons, formed one of India's most prestigious family lineages whose last representative, Dabir Khan, died in 1972. With the collapse of the Mogul dynasty in the mid-eighteenth century, the descendants of the imperial court musicians were forced to leave the capital and seek the protection of the kings of subject states that had become bedridden, or had claimed independence. Thus cities such as Jaipur and Gwalior, already noted for their important musical traditions, accommodated a number of these binkars while others were welcomed enthusiastically in Lucknow and Benares, followed a little later after further political upheavals, by moves to Calcutta and Rampur.

During the nineteenth century the Rudra vina began to fall in popularity for two essential reasons. Firstly, during the first part of the eighteenth century, a new musical genre, khayal, was coming into vogue. More ornamented, sparkling and vivacious than dhrupad, khayal was well-suited to the new generation of instruments that was emerging, such as the sitar at the same period. Secondly, court service brought substantial remuneration and so competition for patronage was strong. Thus it was not in the best interests of hereditary musicians such as binkars, who held positions of considerable privilege, to pass on their musical knowledge to any but their own sons. The consequence was that substantial numbers of khayalists, those most gifted at the height of their power, and they patronized a number of great musicians, painters and poets who were undoubtedly enormously influential in the development of their respective artistic traditions.

Asad Ali's great-grand-uncle, Rajab Ali Khan, returned to Rajasthan and settled in Alwar before moving to Jaipur where he was rewarded by Maharaja Ram Singh, who incidentally became Rajab Ali's disciple. Rajab Ali had no son and so he passed on his art to his nephew Musharraf Ali Khan, Asad Ali's grandfather. Musharraf Ali became a binkar in the court at Alwar. His son, Sadir Ali Khan, followed in his father's footsteps at Alwar before entering the service of the Nawab of Rampur, with whom he remained until his death in 1964. Asad Ali grew up in Rampur where he received his initial basic training in music from his father. At the age of ten, he started learning the sitar and, after four years, progressed to study the hands of only two musicians: Ustad Z.M. Dagar and Ustad Asad Ali Khan.

THE PERFORMER

Ustad Asad Ali Khan was born in Alwar (Rajasthan) in 1937, and is the last in a long line of famous exponents of the bin. His ancestors were Rajasthanis who settled for a while in South Deccan where they entered the service of the Sultans of Golconda and Bijapur. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, these Muslim kings fostered the growth of their power, and they patronized a great number of musicians, painters and poets who were undoubtedly enormously influential in the development of their respective artistic traditions.

Asad Ali's great-grand-uncle, Rajab Ali Khan, returned to Rajasthan and settled in Alwar before moving to Jaipur where he was awarded the Radio Pratidin award. Besides many musicians, his family possessed a sitar imported from Persia.

The recording

All musicians regard Darbari Kanada as a raga ideally suited for the Rudra vina. Darbar means court, the part of the palace in which the king received and entertained his guests. Originally created at Akbar's court by the great Tansen, this raga should be played at night, very slowly and in a majestic mood. The notes Ga komal (E flat) and Dha komal (A flat) with their distinctively grave oscillations add to the profound feelings evoked by Darbari Kanada.

The complete scale is: Sa (C), Re (D), Ga komal (E flat), Ma (F), Pa (G), Dha komal (A flat) and Ni komal (B flat). Following a
beautiful slow alap, a jod and a dazzling jhala, the composition settles into chauntal, a metric cycle of twelve beats.

Gunakali is a morning raga which, according to tradition, expresses pain and sorrow due to the absence of a loved one, and the pitiable mental state that accompanies such emotions. Its pentatonic scale is as follows: Sa (C), Re komal (D flat), Ma (F), Pa (G), Dha komal (A flat). The pivotal notes of this raga are Dha komal and Re komal, both of which are ornamented with heavy vibrato.

Asad Ali Khan’s development of the raga adopts the classic pattern: alap, jod, and jhala and is followed by a composition (bandish) in 10 beat time (japtal). He is accompanied by Pandit Gopal Das on the pakhawaj, the traditional two-headed, barrel-shaped drum reserved for dhrupad.

This recording was made in India with the aid of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mr Alain Daniélou, the Cultural Service of the French Embassy in New Delhi and I.S.T.A.R. (International Society for Traditional Art Research).

PHILIPPE BRUGUIÈRE

MUSIQUE INSTRUMENTALE DE L’INDÉ MÉDIÉVALE

Le mot Vina est un terme générique qui, précédé d’épithètes distinctifs, dénomme l’ensemble des cordophones de l’Inde ainsi que quelques aérophones. La Rudra Vina ou Bin, appelée aussi Sarasvati Vina, Parvati Vina ou Sar Vina, est un instrument se modifie, une seconde génération qui, après l’attribut de son épouse Parvati, aurait créé cet instrument remarquable. Couramment, sa morphologie particulière ne fut à aucun moment altérée ni même influencée par les cultures des différents peuples musulmans qui se succédèrent et s’implantèrent en Inde à partir du XIIe siècle. Dès le XVIe siècle, la Rudra Vina figure sur les multiples miniatures d’inspiration musicale. En outre, les iconographies, témoins de son évolution, sont suffisamment représentatives pour la reconnaître aujourd’hui comme l’exemple unique d’un développement progressif qui, d’un monochrome primitif, est parvenu à un instrument de cur très sophistiqué.

L’INSTRUMENT

Composée d’un tube de bambou ou de bois creux (le plus souvent du teck) sous lequel sont fixés deux résonateurs (des calebasses), la Rudra Vina appartient à la famille des citernes « sur bâton » ou cithares tubulaires. Au VIIe siècle, elle est simplement faite d’un tube en bambou sur lequel est montée une demi-calebasse. Cette Vina a qu’une seule corde, probablement en boyau ou en soie, pinçée par l’index et le majeur de la main droite, tandis que la paume de la main gauche appuie le résonateur contre la poitrine.

A partir du IXe siècle, la tenue de l’instrument se modifie, une seconde calebasse apparaît à la partie inférieure du tube et la forme de ces deux résonateurs devient plus galbée. Il faut attendre l’XIe siècle pour remarquer l’existence de frettes fixées sur le tube et noter la présence de deux ou plusieurs cordes. Dès cette époque et pendant toute la période médiévale, les textes musicologiques décrivent plusieurs variantes de ce type de Vina, riche alors en innovations diverses. Certains possèdent parfois jusqu’à trois résonateurs et le nombre de frettes et de
cordes (en boyau mais aussi en métal) varient souvent. Cette Vina va peu à peu acqurir sa forme définitive. Les calebasses augmentent de volume, tantôt sphériques, tantôt pitiformes, et, sur le tube, de hautes frettes en bois sont maintenues à l'aide d'un mélange de substances végétales et de cire d'abeille. L'instrument est désormais tenu en travers de la poitrine, la calebasse supérieure étant située au-dessus et légèrement en retrait de l'épaule gauche.

La Rudra Vina qui, au XVIe siècle, mesure à peine près 90 cm et possède en moyenne 16 frettes et 5 cordes, atteint, au début du XXe siècle, environ 125 cm, comporte 24 frettes et 7 cordes (normes encore conservées de nos jours). Les résonateurs qui, à l'origine, étaient attachés au tube avec des lianes de cuir, sont maintenant vissés sur des instruments tubulaires. Cette transformation permet d'obtenir, par extension latérale de la chanterelle sur toute la largeur de la frette, un effet de portamento plus important que si elle était conventionnellement située hors du bord droit de la touche. De plus, sa disposition au-dessus des deux cordes rythmiques offre, dans un seul mouvement des doigts de la main droite, une grande possibilité de combinaisons rythmiques. Ces particularités, riches en subtils variations, sont spécifiques au jeu de la Rudra Vina.

**La tradition instrumentale**

Lorsque vers le XIIe siècle, l'une des fresques d'Ajanta ainsi qu'un bas-relief d'un temple de Mahabalipuram témoignent pour la première fois de l'existence de la cithare tubulaire, celle-ci est encore vraisemblablement un instrument rural, joué au sein de troupes théâtrales itinérantes. Un peu plus tard, elle participe non seulement au culte hindouiste comme attri­bute du divin, mais elle devient aussi l'in­strument d'accompagnement de la musi­que sacrée vocale. Se développe alors, dans le rituel liturgique, une tradition ins­trumentale (exclusivement réservée à ce type de Vina) qui, à partir du XVIe siècle, s'établira principalement au Gujarat et au Rajasthan.

La popularité de cet instrument s'accroît sensiblement dès le XIIe siècle et il devient même de plus en plus apprécié dans le cercle restreint des cours princiers. Au XVIIe siècle, on l'apprécie dans les cours princières. Au milieu du XVIIe siècle, les descendants de ces musiciens vont être contraints de quitter le palais pour trouver refuge auprès des souverains d'états vasaux de Perse. Ce ne sont ainsi que des villes comme Jaipur et Gwalior, possédant déjà une grande renommée musicale, qui accueillent quelques-uns de ces binkars; alors que les autres seront reçus avec enthousiasme à Lucknow, Bénarès et un peu plus tard, à la suite d'autres revers politiques, à Calcutta et à Rampur.

Au XIXe siècle, la Rudra Vina perd peu à peu de sa popularité essentiellement pour deux raisons : d'une part dès la première moitié du XVIIIe siècle, une nouvelle forme musicale remporte un vif succès auprès des princes et de leurs cours : le Khayal. Ce genre, plus ornementé, chatoyant et prestigieux, est alors interprété sur des instruments plus adaptés comme le Sitar, apparant probable à la même époque. D'autre part, la profession de musicien de cour étant alors une occupation héréditaire

- 8 -
La biographie de Ustad Asad Ali Khan, né à Alwar (Rajasthan) en 1937, est le dernier héritier d'une célèbre lignée de Binkars. Ses ancêtres, originaires du Rajasthan, s'établirent momentanément dans le sud du Deccan où ils offrirent leurs services aux sultans de Golconde et de Bijapur. Ces royaumes musulmans, à leur apogée (XVIIe siècle), entretenaient un nombre impressionnant de musiciens, peintres et poètes qui, sans aucun doute, eurent une grande influence sur le développement des traditions artistiques de l'Inde.

L'arrièr-grand-oncle de Asad Ali Khan, Rajab Ali Khan, revint au Rajasthan, s'installa quelque temps à Alwar qu'il quitta ensuite pour Jaipur où il reçut les faveurs du Maharaja Ram Singh qui devint d'ailleurs son disciple. Rajab Ali Khan n'eut pas de fils mais transmit son art à son neveu. Musharaf Ali Khan, grand-père d'Asad Ali Khan, binkar attitré à la cour d'Alwar. Le fils de Musharraf, Sadiq Ali Khan, succéda à son père à Alwar, avant de rejoindre le Nawab de Rampur auprès de qui il demeura jusqu'à sa mort, en 1964. Asad Ali Khan fut élevé à Rampur et reçut très tôt de son père les rudiments de son éducation musicale. A l'âge de dix ans, il commença l'apprentissage du Sitar qu'il poursuivit pendant quatre ans avant d'entreprendre l'étude plus difficile de la Rudra Vina. La musique que perpétue Ustad Asad Ali Khan appartient à l'un des quatre (cinq selon certains) styles représentatifs de l'ancienne forme musicale qu'est le Dhrupad. Ce style, incisif, précis et vigoureux, appelé Kandarbani, tient son nom d'une arme médiévale très répandue au Rajasthan, une sorte de dague que l'on nomme Khanda.

Musicien de réputation internationale, Ustad Ali Khan habite à New Delhi où il a enseigné la musique à l'Université et donne régulièrement de nombreux concerts en Inde et à l'étranger. Il a reçu en 1985 la distinction la plus haute qui puisse récompenser un musicien en Inde, le Sangeet Natak Akademi Award, et a enregistré de nombreux programmes musicaux pour la Radio ainsi que deux disques 33 tours.

L'INTERPRÈTE


PHILIPPE BRUGUIÈRE

L'ENREGISTREMENT

Tous les musiciens s'accordent à souligner que Darbari Kanada est par excellence un Raga approprié à la Rudra Vina.

Darbar signifie salle d'audience, le lieu où le souverain reçoit ses visiteurs. Ce Raga, créé à la cour d'Akbar par Tansen, doit être interprété au milieu de la nuit dans une atmosphère lente et majestueuse. Le traitement caractéristique d'amples oscillations des notes Go Komal (Mi b) et Dha Komal (La b), ajoutée à l'émotion profonde qui se dégage de Darbari Kanada.

Les notes successives de sa gamme sont : Sa (Do), Re (Rê), Go komal (Mi b), Ma (Fa), Pa (Sol), Dha Komal (La b) et Ni Komal (Si b). Après un bel et lent Alap, le Jhod et un Jhala éblouissant, la composition Bandish est interprétée dans le cycle rythmique Chautal (12 temps).

Gunakali est un Raga du matin exprimant selon la tradition l'affliction et la tristesse devant l'absence de l'être cher et l'accompagne ce sentiment.
Photos: Philippe BRUGUIÈRE
Pandit Gopal Das, Mohamed Saklain & Ustad Asad Ali Khan

Photos recto: Philippe BRUGUIÈRE - Miniatures du XVIIIe siècle (Collection Kumar Sangram Singh)
ANTHOLOGY OF TRADITIONAL MUSICS

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INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC OF MEDIAEVAL INDIA

Recordings: PHILIPPE BRUGUIÈRE

RAGA DARBARI KANADA

1. Alap 18'40
2. Jod 11'42
3. Jhala 9'02
4. Composition Bandish in 12 beats / en 12 temps 13'39

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Enregistrements: PHILIPPE BRUGUIÈRE

RAGA GUNAKALI

5. Alap 10'32
6. Jod 8'26
7. Jhala 5'24

Ustad Asad Ali Khan, Rudra Vina
Pandit Gopal Das, Pakhawaj
Mohamed Saklain, Tampura

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