# 4 THE SARANGI: A HISTORICAL SKETCH

There are several opinions about when and how the sarangi came into existence. Hindu sarangi players usually mention Ravana as the inventor, but Muslim artists often give credit to a learned hakim of the ancient past. The story goes, writes Shahinda (1914), "that a hakim was once travelling on foot and, worn out with heat and fatigue, stopped to rest beneath a huge tree. Suddenly some sweet strains of music reached his ears; astonished, he listened attentively, and searched in vain from whence the sound came, until, at last, looking up, he discovered the object of his search. The dried skin of a dead monkey was stretched between two branches entangled with its dried guts, and the wind blowing through it caused melodious sounds. He carefully removed the skin and guts, replaced them on a construction of wood and after some years of labour, with due modifications and additions, completed the present-day sarangi."[1]

The same story was told to me by a musician, but here the leading figure was a Greek, Bu Ali Ibn Sina, supposedly a disciple of Pythagoras! "He was a renowned physician who treated his patients with herbs and music. Later on the sarangi was brought to India and improved upon."[2] Interestingly enough, the Greeks have a similar myth in which Hermes created the *lyra* from the shell of a tortoise, and it is not impossible that the myth travelled from Greece to India, or vice versa. Some Muslim sarangi players, however, tend to believe that their instrument came to India from abroad. This was also the opinion of the great musicologist Curt Sachs, and modern scholars, such as Jean Jenkins, have adopted his view.[3]

Abdul Halim Sharar, the author of many fascinating essays on the life and culture of Lucknow, assumes that the sarangi is a recent 'invention'. He credits it to Miyan Sarang (better known as Sadarang or Niamat Khan), the famous court musician of Emperor Mohammad Shah 'Rangila' (1719-1748), who will always be remembered for his great contribution to the popularization of *khayal*. Sharar's idea, which is repeated in several other books on Indian music, reflects a general ignorance about the age of the instrument, and a deeply rooted belief that the sarangi played an insignificant role in classical music before the beginning of the 18th century.[4]

The conclusion which a well-known French musicologist, C. Marcel-Dubois, arrives at is even more far-reaching. According to her, in Indian paintings and sculptures, "the bow only figures subsequent to the end of the seventeenth century," a fact which, as Werner Bachmann writes, "emerges from the detailed study undertaken by Marcel-Dubois and is confirmed by my own survey of Indian sources."[5] The relevant question, whether the sarangi is a late-comer to India, has never really been satisfactorily answered. There are also no answers as to when and how it entered the mainstream of classical music. Anyone who knows how complicated an instrument the sarangi is, or is aware of the many different types of instruments that the sarangi family contains, can hardly believe that these instruments evolved in the course of a few centuries, or that they entered India from abroad.

## 4.1 *Debut*

Leaving aside the stories of legendary hakims who supposedly invented the sarangi, very little is known about the origin and early history of the instrument. Unlike the *vina* (*bin*), for instance, whose evolution can be reconstructed step by step, the sarangi seems to emerge suddenly, during the days of Emperor Akbar's rule. The

*A'in-i Akbari* (The Institutes of Akbar, 1588-89), which, amongst other subjects, devotes considerable attention to the music of India, reveals that "the sarangi is smaller than the *rabab* and is played like the *ghichak*."[6] Obviously Abu'l Fazl, the author of this remarkable encyclopedia, is referring to a small instrument related to the lute (*rabab*) and bowed like the Persian spike fiddle (*ghichak* or *kamancha*). [42, 43]

Surdas (1483-1563), the great *bhakti* poet of Braj, whose melodious songs collected in the *Sursagar* inspired so many musicians, makes an interesting allusion to the sarangi in the following lines: "When Sarang made love with Nada he had to suffer the shot from a bow right in his heart."[7] This means literally that when the cuckoo or blackbird (*sarang*) made love with music (*nada*), it had to die. If *sarang* is interpreted as the bowed instrument, however, Surdas probably alludes to the humiliation and competition that sarangi players had to face when they entered the field of classical music.

A similar idea is voiced by Zafar Khan, a distinguished and erudite nobleman, who was at various times the governor of Kabul, Kashmir and Sind during the reign of Shah Jahan. Describing Agra in his *Masnavi,* he writes about the instruments frequently heard:

> *Nay* has its own tone, no doubt, but it is envious of *bansuli* which can change tone at its own sweet pleasure. *Kamancha* may have entered this country from outside but now it is one with those of Indian descent. *Sarangi* is broken and deeply wounded with the arrows of jealousy . . .[8]

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Does Zafar Khan mean that the sarangi was jealous of the *kamancha* with which it had to compete? Or does he make an allusion to the characteristic plaintive sound of the sarangi, expressing the feelings of a deeply wounded, jealous lover?

*Ragadarpan* (1665/66), the most informative work on Hindustani music in the 17th century, gives a vivid description of the music and musicians of the time. Its author, the scholar-musician Nawab Saif Khan 'Faquirullah', not only describes the sarangi but also portrays a well-known sarangi player, Allah Dad Dhadhi. "He belonged to Admad Danda near Jullundher. There was none like him in the whole Doaba area. He died when he was about 60." [9]

What Faquirullah has to say about the sarangi itself does not add much to our knowledge. He says: "It is usually referred to as the *ghichak* of Hindustan." The rest of his description is so strikingly similar to that of Abu'l Fazl, that one wonders if he copied it from the *A'in-i Akbari* or if both authors borrowed it from an earlier source which has now vanished.[10]

## 4.2 *How old is the sarangi?*

The simple fact that the sarangi was (and still is) a modest instrument, which belonged to living folk traditions, explains why very little is known about it before the 16th century. It is certainly a much older instrument and is mentioned in various important music treatises such as the *Sangitadamodara* (16th century), *Lahjat-i-Sikandar Shahi* (1487-1516), *Sangitaraja* (1453), *Ghunyat-ul-Munya* (1374/75) and *Sangitaratnakara*



(13th century).[11] But none of these works give a description of the sarangi, and it is, therefore, virtually impossible to know what it looked like and how it was played.

Even two centuries before its mention by Sharangadeva, the sarangi must have been a fairly popular instrument. It appears several times in Prakrit works of Jain religious tales (*katha*) and first in the *Kathakoshaprakarana,* written by Jineshvarasuri in 1052. The sarangi is classified as a stringed instrument in the following passage:

> *Gandharva* (melodic music) originates from three sources as follows: from a string, from a bamboo, from a human being.
>
> Of these, that which originates from a string is of several types, for instance, produced by the *vina, trisari, sarangi,* etc.[12]

In another passage, the author narrates that *"kakali* song, blended with the notes of the *vina, trisarika, sarangi,* etc., was sung."

Describing two *vidyadharas* singing in a Jain temple, Lakshmanagani also refers to sarangi accompaniment in his *Supasanahachariya* (1145):

> Having worshipped the Jina images with devotion and performing *vandana* with proper ceremony, they were singing songs accompanied by the musical notes of the *sarangi.*[13]

"Further in the narrative, the musical notes of [the] sarangi are described as drowned in the bustle created by the crowds of *vidyadharas* rushing in for worship," writes H. C. Bhayani.[14]

Apparently, the sarangi played an important role in Jain religious music during the 11th and 12th centuries, and, like its modern counterpart, it was used to accompany singing. The fact that it is first mentioned in popular narratives which were written in Prakrit, the language of the masses, seems to indicate that the sarangi was primarily an instrument for folk and religious music. From the given passages, it is difficult to assert,however, whether this sarangi was the forefather of today's sarangi. It is somewhat surprising that bowed instruments are not represented in the splendid sculptures of the Jain temples of Gujarat and Rajputana, built between the 10th and 13th centuries. Moreover, in Gujarat, the term 'sarangi' is loosely applied today to any bowed instrument, whether it is a 'real' sarangi or a *ravanhatho,* a spike fiddle.[44]

Haripala, a king of Gujarat, also makes a thought-provoking statement in this respect. He writes: "In local language the *kinnari* is called *saranga vina* . . ."[15] This is followed by a long and detailed account of the *kinnari vina.*[45] The description of this instrument in the *Sangitasudhakara* (middle of the 12th century) leaves no doubt that the author is portraying the ancestor of the *bin* or *jantar.* Nowhere does he mention the use of a bow, although it is known that such instruments were occasionally played with a bow.[46]

That the *kinnara* was a much older instrument is evident from Sanskrit sources and the writings of Arab scholars and geographers. Ibn Khurdadhbih (c. 820-912) says:

> The Indians have the *kankala* which has but one string stretched across a gourd. And it serves them in place of the lute or harp . . .[16]

Other Arab scholars refer to it as *kingra,* which was either a monochord stick zither with one gourd (cf. *ekatantri vina*), or a spike lute (cf. *ektara*). Apparently, the word *kingra* is derived from *kinnara.*

> The great medieval poet, Amir Khusrau (1253-1325), writes:
>
> . . . the Indians, who only know how to play on the *kingra.* How funny that their *ajab rud* itself bares its teeth (i.e. laughs) to the *kingra* and those who play it. When a Hindu plays his *ajab rud,* it laughs in his hands.[17]

It is obvious that the *kingra* was a very popular instrument, otherwise Amir Khusrau would not have referred to the Indians as "a race of *kingra* players." S. Q. Fatimi believes that it was a bowed instrument and he may be right, but Abu'l Fazl and Faquirullah fail to mention the bow when they discuss the instrument.[18] According to them, "the *kingara* resembles the *vina,* but it has two strings of gut and smaller gourds." It must have been different from the *kinnara* which had a long stick and "three gourds and two wires."[19]

However, Fatimi's interpretation of the *ajab rud* as an instrument resembling the *sarinda* is truly praiseworthy. "It does not have lips but [opens] its mouth in laughter", writes Amir Khusrau.[20] The open 'mouth' (i.e. upper resonance chamber of the belly) is indeed very characteristic of the bowed *sarinda* and *kobuz* species. The fact that *ajab rud* means 'a strange-looking *rud* (lute)' also supports this view.

Were the *kingra* and *kinnara* exclusively plucked instruments? An old sarangi player from Banaras told me that yogis playing the *chikara* sometimes refer to it as

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*kinnari,* while Shahab Sarmadee reports that he "found a whole tribe of these people (called Kingiriya, belonging to a beggar community in Manauri, one of the towns of the Sadar Tahsil of Allahabad district) playing on such bowed instruments which they call *kingri.*"[21] An old drawing of a *kingri,* resembling a *chikara,* also demonstrates that bowed short lutes were commonly referred to as *kingri.*[41] The belly of this instrument is bowl-shaped, however, like the resonator of the southern *kinnaram,* of the *agappai kinnari* of Tamil Nadu, the *kingri* of Madhya Pradesh, the *tingari* and *koka* of Maharashtra and the *kendera* of Orissa, which is made from half a coconut shell or a small gourd, covered with parchment. These crude spike fiddles usually have one or two strings and the neck is made of bamboo.[22]

To summarize, the terms *kingra* and *kinnara* denote a great variety of plucked and bowed stringed instruments. What Sachs said about the *rabab* also holds true for these instruments: "It is hardly ever possible to draw conclusions from the word *rebab* alone about the nature of a particular instrument . . ."[23]

With this in mind, we should be cautious in interpreting the earliest references to the sarangi. As one of the meanings of the word 'sarangi' is bow, and from the 16th century onwards (when the first descriptions appear) sarangis were always bowed, it is tempting to see the 11th century sarangi as a bowed instrument too. Is it possible that Haripala confused matters when he compared the *saranga vina* with the *kinnari*? Was there perhaps also a bowed folk *kinnari* in his time, which was called sarangi, as it still is today? Or were the *saranga vina* and sarangi different instruments altogether? It is hard to believe this, but, without any evidence, a conclusion would be uncalled for. The vital question, as to whether the sarangi was a bowed short lute in the 11th century, still remains unanswered.

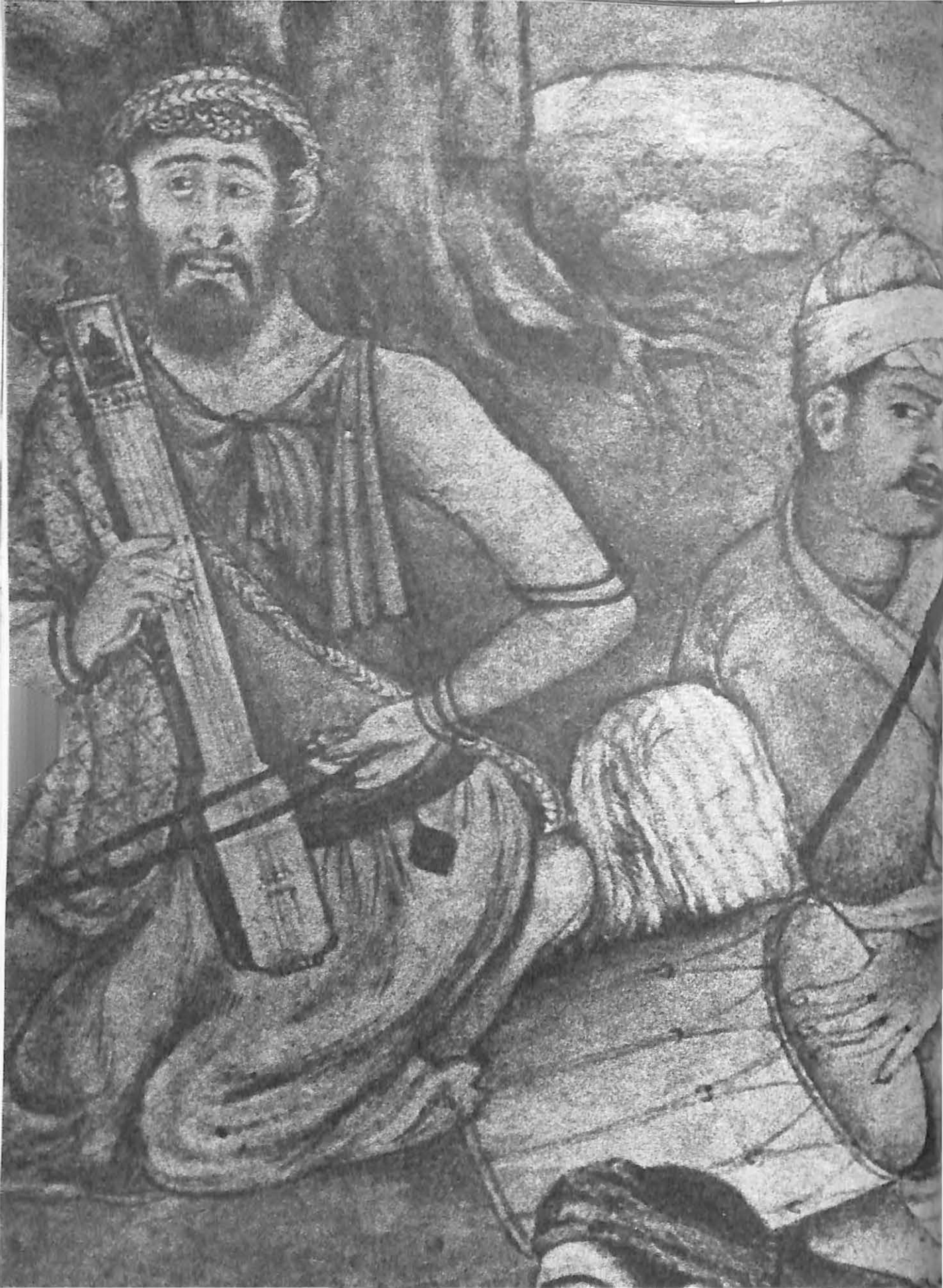
Equally problematic is the question of where the sarangi originated. Since Curt Sachs suggested that bowed short lutes came into existence in Central Asia, several western scholars have been convinced that these instruments were introduced "in a somewhat changed form to the Indian sub-continent."[24] Undoubtedly, there is a morphological relationship between the *kobuz* (*kobys*) and instruments of the *sarinda* group, and W. Bachmann observes:

> The two-stringed instrument noted by Ibn Khurdadhbih is obviously the *qobuz,* to which there are frequent references in Central Asian, and more specifically in Uigur, sources from the ninth century onward . . . Not until after the year 1000 do we find positive proof that the *qobuz* was played as a bowed instrument.[25].

But was it the same type of *kobuz* that survives today? To my knowledge, neither Bachmann nor any other scholar has been able to obtain any textual or pictorial evidence which reveals the structure and shape of the 10th century *qobuz.* However, Bachmann does quote a 14th century Chinese source, the *Yüan Shih:*

> The *hu-ch'in* is constructed like a *ho-pi-szu* (*kobuz*) with a curled neck, a dragon's head and two strings. It is thrummed with a bow. The string of the bow is from a horse-tail.[26]

The arched neck and two strings are indeed characteristic of the present-day *kobuz,* while the dragon's head is a typical Chinese decoration. Apparently, the *kobuz* was the forefather of the Chinese *hu-ch'in,* and for over ten centuries it probably survived almost unchanged. It may have been the ancestor of the *sarinda* as well, although



there is no positive proof that the bow migrated from Central Asia to India. It may very well have been the other way around.

Finally, the sarangi family has such an overwhelming number of different species, that one wonders if it is correct to think in terms of only one ancestral type. Judging from the shape and distribution, there is little doubt in my mind that sarangis (and *chikaras*) are authentic Indian instruments. This was also the opinion of Zafar Khan and other Persian scholars writing about Indian musical instruments. They made a clear distinction between foreign instruments such as the *kamancha* or *nay*, and indigenous instruments such as the sarangi or *bansuli*.

## 4.3 *Singing and playing bards*

More revealing than literature are the paintings. The first one to feature a sarangi player dates back to the beginning of the 17th century. [47] It depicts a left-handed fakir, playing his instrument under a tree, accompanied by a musician playing a *dhol* (or *duhul*). Four men, one of them a prince (perhaps Dara Shukoh), are listening to the music. The painting shows a number of relevant details. The sarangi has a box-shaped resonator with a broad stringholder at the bottom, a long, wide neck, a pegbox with an arch-shaped opening, and, on top of it, a characteristic decoration. It has four playing strings, six or seven resonance strings, a nut and a bridge.

Its resemblance to the present-day Gujaratan sarangi is indeed remarkable. The main difference is that the belly of the latter instrument is slightly waisted. Listening to its last interpreter, Hayat Mohmad Langa,[27] we can easily imagine ourselves hearing the sarangi player in the painting over three and a half centuries

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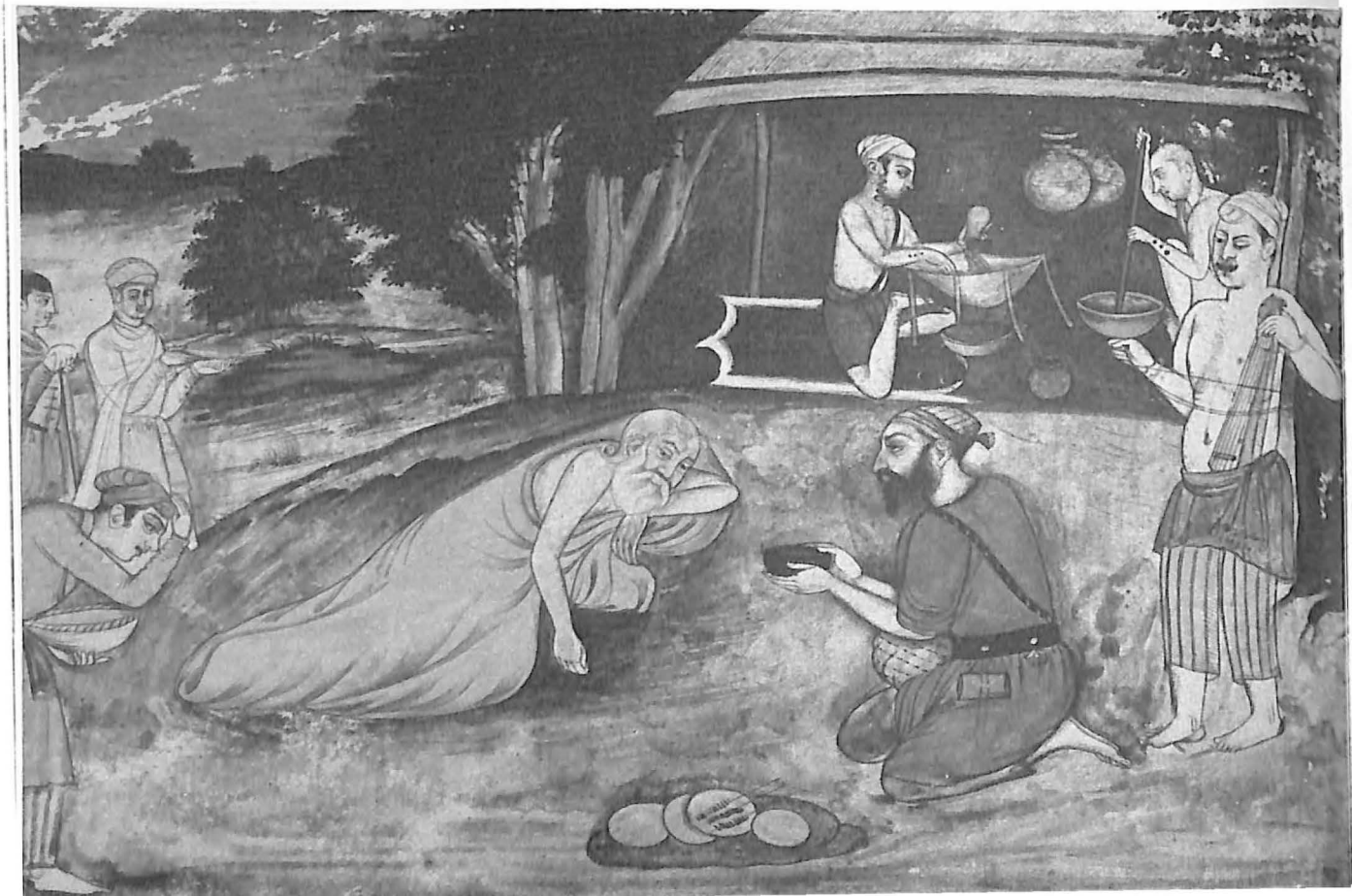
ago.[49] Time seems to have stopped. Was he perhaps Allah Dad Dhadhi? He must certainly have been a famous musician, because he features in at least three paintings, each in a slightly different setting.[28] [48] Whoever the sarangi player was and wherever his instrument originated—in Rajasthan, Gujarat, the Punjab or Uttar Pradesh—it is obvious that his sarangi was a sophisticated bowed instrument which, for centuries to come, would survive virtually unchanged.

The early presence of sympathetic (or resonance) strings on this sarangi deserves our attention. In Europe, they probably appeared first on a lyra viol, and, according to John Playford (1652), such a viol with wire sympathetic strings was an invention of the composer Daniel Farrant.[29] Later, in the 18th century, they were a common feature of the viola d'amore and the baryton. The Norwegian Hardangerfele also has four resonance strings.

Curt Sachs, one of the few musicologists who has paid attention to this subject, writes: "Sympathetic strings had come to England from the Near East, apparently in the sixteenth century."[30] Speculating about their place of origin, he believes that the Indians adopted them from the Persians.[31] Yet, in Persian, Central Asian and Middle Eastern instruments they rarely occur, while in India, they are commonly found in almost all stringed instruments. In all probability, sarangi players were the first to realize that the addition of a number of wire strings under the main strings produced a silvery echo, and it is not impossible that this idea was first adopted by a Western instrument maker, after he saw a sarangi brought to Europe by a traveller in the 16th century.

Several other Mughal paintings from the 17th century depict box-shaped sarangis. In one of these, a Muslim saint lies in front of a hermitage while





attendants prepare and offer him *bhang,* and a half-naked fiddler creates a congenial atmosphere.[32][50] In front of another hermitage three musicians play together, a *binkar,* a *sarangiya* and a drummer. [51]

Another fascinating painting shows a singing and dancing sarangi player with a dervish, who appears to be in a state of trance.[33][52] The three-stringed sarangi resembles a *chikara* but is lacking in fine detail. The painter seems to have forgotten to complete the instrument, since the pegbox is missing! A similar type of sarangi is seen in the hands of a young musician who entertains a saint, probably Kabir, shown weaving. Here the instrument is carefully depicted.[34][53]

A wonderful bowed instrument played by a singing ascetic also appears in a number of paintings.[35][54, 55] It has a large belly and a short neck, and slightly resembles a *sarinda.* More fanciful is the instrument which is being played before a half-naked *sadhu,* sitting on a tiger-skin in front of his hermitage.[56] The resonator of this instrument consists of two identical parts and it has two bridges! Whether such an instrument really existed, or was just part of the imagination of the artist, we will never know.

Other Mughal paintings from the 17th century show different types of sarangis, but all that these paintings have in common is the setting. The fiddler always sings and plays in the vicinity of holy men, Muslim or Hindu. His sarangi is small, light and portable, and this, combined with its expressive sound quality, makes it an ideal instrument to accompany devotional songs. Is it a coincidence that Lakshmanagani (1145) also talks about the sarangi accompanying religious songs?

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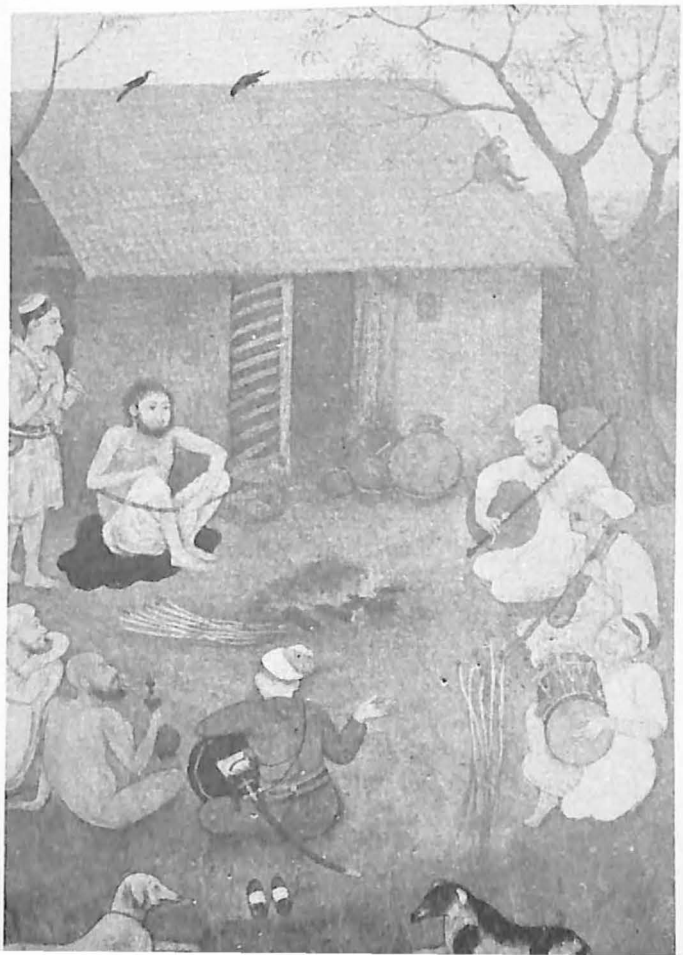

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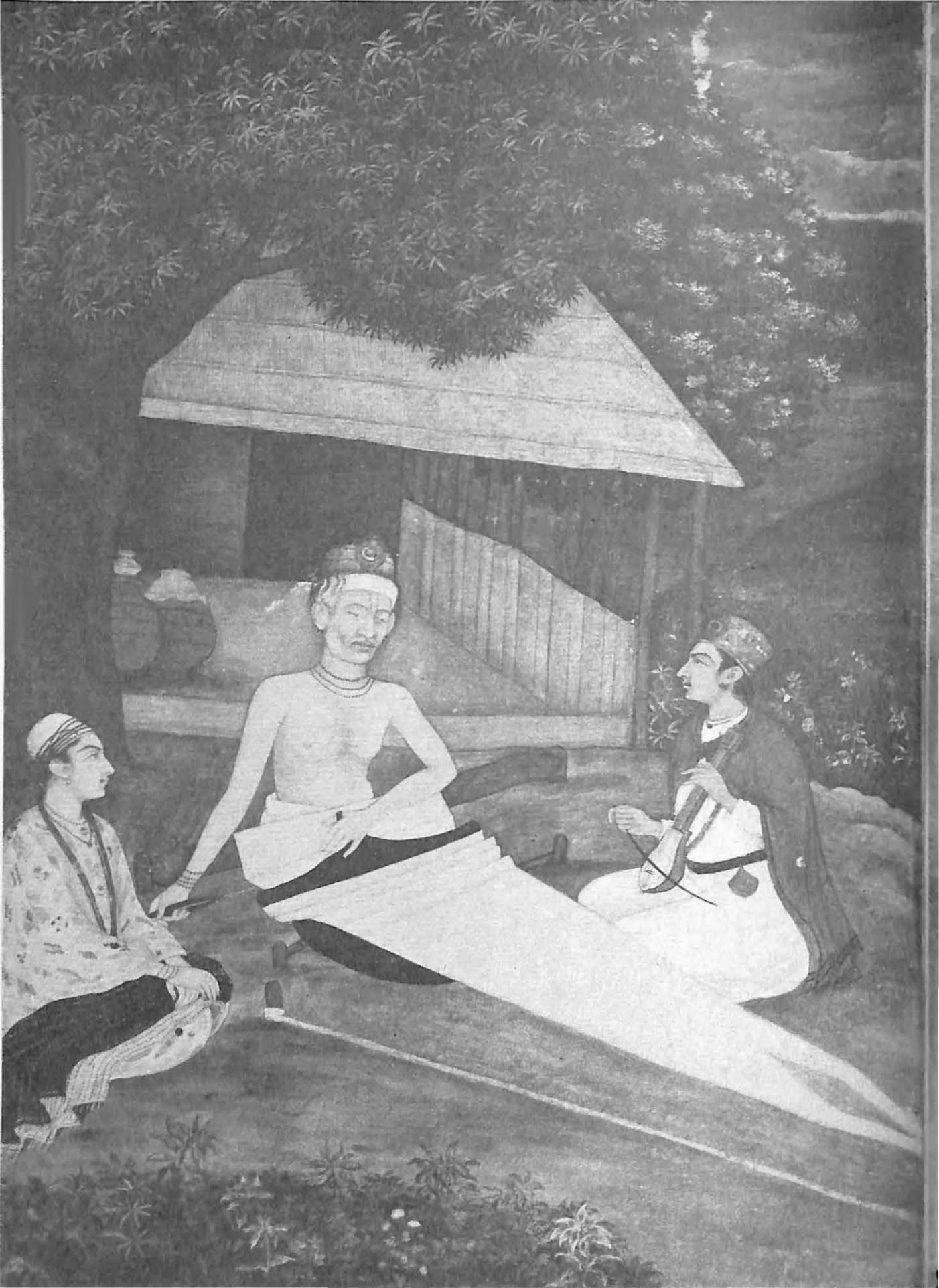

For many centuries, the wandering street musician or mendicant with a sarangi in his hands was a familiar sight in the North Indian countryside.[57] Even today, one can encounter a *baba* singing ballads about the life and deeds of Lord Shiva (*bam lahara*), or a Bhartrhari yogi playing his sarangi. "They sing the song of a Gopi-chand and Maigan-nath and the teachings of Bhartrhari. No Hindu domestic festival is complete unless these Bhartrharis come and sing their songs. They use the ochre-coloured clothes of the sannyasins. But they are by religion Mahomedans. They seem to be the descendants of their yogi forefathers and have inherited their yogi songs as well", writes S. Das Gupta.[36]

Until recently, according to D. C. Vedi, the sarangi was very frequently heard in the temples of Punjab and Uttar Pradesh. "It was played with *kirtan* and *bhajan,* and also with classical songs. Most of the names of these artists are now forgotten, but I remember a very good sarangi player, Shri Ram of Kotah, who always played in the Nathadwara *mandir*. He was a disciple of Fida Hussain Khan, an uncle of the late Faiyaz Khansahib."

Stringed instruments played an important role in the devotional music (*kirtan*) of the Sikhs. "The songs of Guru Nanak were sung to the accompaniment of the music of the *rabab* and the rhythm of *mridang*", writes Bhai Gurdas.[37] Mardana, a Muslim, was his famous lute-playing companion, whilst at the time of the second, third and fourth Gurus, professional *rababis* were also appointed to sing and play at the court. But, according to Macauliffe, 'two-stringed violins' were used in the court of Guru Angad (1504-1552) as well.[38] Under Guru Arjan

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(1563-1606), professional lutanists were replaced by non-professional musicians (*ragis*). He himself was a great singer and played the *sarinda*.[39] His follower, Guru Hargobind (1595-1644), was a generous patron of music. "He established a new class of singers, called *dhadhi*. They sang of heroic deeds of old warriors and thereby inspired the Guru's soldiers. Bhai Abdullah was a great devotee of the šixth Guru. . . Abdullah played on the sarangi while Natha played on the *dhadh*."[40]

Thus, in the Punjab, the *sarinda* and sarangi rose in importance during the 16th and 17th centuries. Sikh Gurus and other open-minded saint-singers in Northern India had discovered that fiddlers were the ideal musicians to sing and play their spiritual songs. Sufism and the *bhakti* movement flourished, and, in both of them, singing and dancing were essential means for bringing about a direct experience of God. "The new devotional religion. . . fostered ideas of brotherhood and equality before the loving Lord, and its saints, drawn from all levels of society, proclaimed that, in *bhakti*, caste had no meaning."[41] With Ramananda (c. 1400-70), Kabir (c. 1440-1518), Raidas (15th century), Tulsidas (c. 1532-1623), Dadu (16th century), Mira Bai (c. 1503-73) and Surdas (c. 1483-1563) the devotional movement reached its peak in the Hindi-speaking areas. This probably explains why low-caste sarangi players in the 16th century (or perhaps earlier) began specializing in devotional songs, and why the first sarangi players depicted in the paintings always stand face to face with a holy man.

## 4.4 *Dhadhis, professional minstrels*

However, not all fiddlers were yogis, fakirs or pious devotees of God. Travelling overland in Afghanistan (immediately after crossing the border of Baluchistan), Robert Coverte had a rather awkward experience on the first day of April, 1610:

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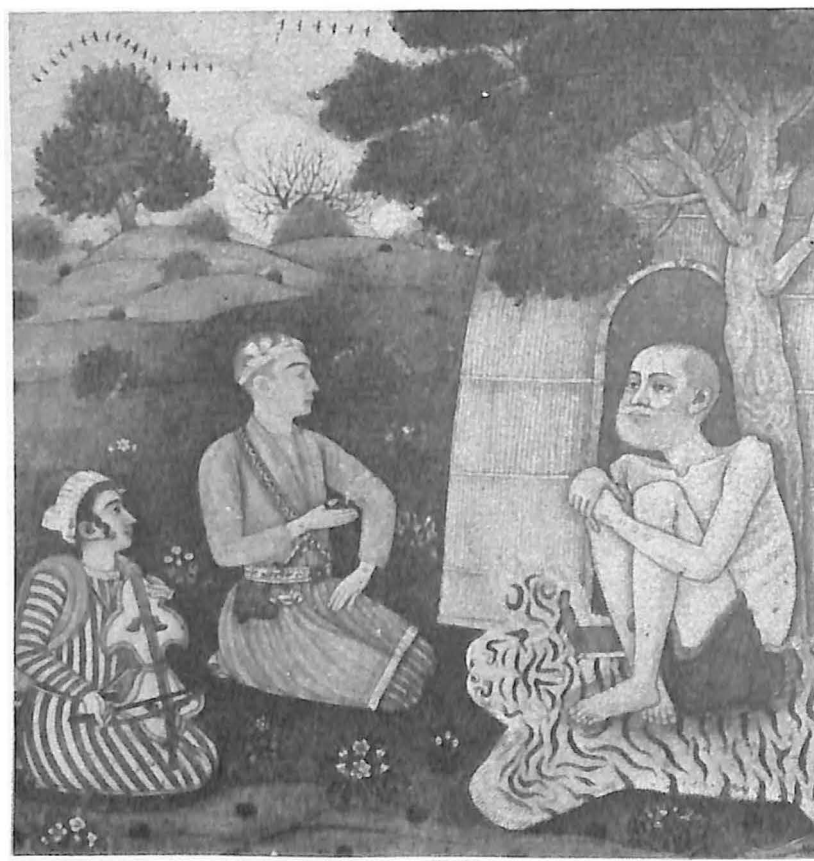

> . . .earely in the morning, and about breake of day wee met with tenne or twelve men playing Fiddles, as if they had come in friendly maner to welcome us, but indeed they were no better then Theeves that intended to rob and pillege us, for by the Sun rising wee were beset round with them and their companions, whose certaine number wee could not discerne nor know.[42]

Writing about the brave Rajputs, the famous Venetian traveller Niccolao Manucci, who spent the major part of his life in India (1656-1717), observes:

> When they draw near to the enemy, their musicians begin to sing songs in a loud voice, with a violin accompaniment, in praise of their courage. These musicians are also on horse-back and well armed, all drunk with opium, their eyes flaming and red. . . I have sometimes seen some of them so impatient that, on hearing the violins strike up, though the enemy was still far off, they rode out of their squadron, and, putting their horses to their full speed, galloped like madmen into the middle of the foemen, and there sacrificed their lives.[43]

Were the 'fiddles' or 'violins' perhaps *sarindas,* and the Rajput musicians *dhadhis?* Richard F. Burton, writing in 1851 about the Sindhi minstrels, provides part of the answer: "In former times they used to accompany the head of the house to battle, armed with sword and shield, with the *surindo* or *rebec* in hand, praising the brave, and overwhelming cowards with satire and abuse. . ."[44]

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We have seen that Punjabi *dhadhis* at the time of Guru Hargobind were appointed to sing about the heroic deeds of warriors, and that the *sarinda* and sarangi had taken the place of the *rabab*. It is somewhat surprising, therefore, to read that, according to Abu'l Fazl, "the *dhadhis* are the Punjabi singers who play upon the *dhadda* and the *kingara*. They chiefly chant the praises of heroes in the field of battle and lend fresh spirit to the fight."[45] There seems to be little doubt now that this particular *kingra* was not an instrument resembling the *vina* or the present-day Punjabi *king*, but a bowed instrument akin to the *sarinda*, which was also used by the Pathan, Baluchi, Sindhi and Rajput minstrels accompanying the armies. Either this instrument was referred to by several names and indigenous writers preferred to use the mythological word *kingra*, or the terms *sarinda*, *saroz*, *chikara*, etc. are of more recent date.

In any case, the fact that Guru Amardas (1479-1574) calls himself a *dhadhi*,[46] a minstrel of God, demonstrates that these professional singers (and fiddlers) were quite established by this time. Surdas also mentions them several times, and, in the *A'in-i Akbari*, five *dhadhis* are listed among the principal musicians of Akbar's court; four of them were singers and one played the *karna* (long trumpet).[47] In the court of Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1580-1627), the *dhadhis* were second in rank. In the words of one of the Sultan's songs:

> *Atai*, *dhadhi* and *gunijan*, the three classes of musicians should be regarded as the master of the three worlds, the three-eyed god, Trilochan. Though their languages may be different, yet the object of both Muslims and non-Muslims is the same.[48]

According to Faquirullah (1665/66), *dhadhis* were the oldest community of musicians, and originally Rajputs. They sang *karkha*, which was "composed in four to eight lines to sing the praises of the war-lords, the brave soldiers, and to narrate the affairs of battles and war."[49] He also informs us that the Punjabi *dhadhis* played on the *dhadh* (a small-sized *dhol* to which they owed their name), and sang heroic ballads, called *bar*. They were sung by at least two persons; the ustad, who was the leader of the group, tunefully recited the opening lines while the *shagirds* (disciples) followed, sometimes repeating the lines, sometimes returning to the opening section. Faquirullah further portrays a number of famous *dhadhis;* the majority of them were singers and composers, others played *rabab*, *pakhawaj*, *daf* and *sarangi*.[50]

Summarizing this evidence, it becomes clear that *dhadhis* were originally professional folk musicians from Rajputana and the Punjab, who specialized in singing war songs and heroic ballads called *karkha* and *bar*, with the accompaniment of *dhadh* and *kingra* (*sarinda?*). "The *dhadhi* women", adds Abu'l Fazl, "chiefly play on the *daf* and the *duhul*, and sing the *dhurpad* and the *sohla* on occasions of nuptial and birthday festivities in a very accomplished manner."[51] Other *dhadhis* played on instruments such as the *rabab* and sarangi, and part of their repertoire must have consisted of religious songs. That they were soloists in their own right is also indicated by the paintings. Thus, the sharp social distinction between *dhadhis* (later on *mirasis*) and *kalawants*, viz. accompanists and soloists, on which Daniel M. Neuman bases his interesting thesis about *The Organization of an Artistic Tradition*, seems to be of a more recent date.[52]

## 4.5 *A struggle for city life*

Niccolao Manucci refers once more to the 'violin' in his masterly work on Mughal India. This time he writes about Agra and the humiliating conditions in which the old Shah Jahan spent his last years (1657-66) as a prisoner of his son, Emperor Aurangazeb.

> One day while a number of us were present and conversing, he (Shahjahan) sent him (I'tibar Khan) two violins he used, asking for them to be repaired and sent inside again as quickly as possible. The eunuch did not trouble himself about having them repaired; then three days afterwards Shahjahan sent to inquire whether they were mended. At this the eunuch flew into a rage, and, with a vinegary face, sent them off to be repaired. Thus it was only after eight days that they were returned.[53]

Were these 'violins' sarangis or *kamanchas?* When did sarangi players actually migrate to the cities and settle down as professional musicians? To answer these questions we will have to go back in time and try to understand what was happening in the field of music during this period.

Although Abu'l Fazl describes the sarangi, names of sarangi players have been omitted from the list of prominent musicians of Akbar's court. Nor does he mention them as accompanists of female singers and dancers (*kanchanis*), who frequented his court. Instead, he informs us that these enchanting ladies were usually accompanied by the *rabab, pakhawaj* and *tala* (a pair of small cymbals).[54] The *kanchanis* often figure in the Akbar paintings, but nowhere have we been able to recognize a sarangi player. On rare occasions we can distinguish a *ghichak* player as part of the chamber orchestra, and it is known that at least two such musicians were employed at Akbar's court.[58] Like his grandfather, Babur, the Emperor was presumably more in favour of Persian than Indian instruments.[55]

When the English traveller, Peter Mundy, writes about the 'dauncinge wenches' and public women (*manganis*) of Agra in 1632, he does not forget to mention their musicians.

> One that playes on a Tabor or little Drumme [*daf*]. An old woman which doth only singe and clapp her hands keeping a kinde of tyme. A fellow beating on both sides of a Drumme [*pakhawaj* or *duhul*]. . . A woman Clappinge two things like Sawcers of brasse [*tala*], keeping tyme also.[56]

No mention is made of any stringed instrument and it is possible that this adventurous Englishman visited dancing girls who belonged to the lower strata of society. On the other hand, if we take Mundy at his word, it is likely that sarangi players had not yet penetrated the quarters where these women entertained their guests. Yet we have seen that Zafar Khan also talks about Agra at the time of Shah Jahan and makes a convincing reference to the sarangi, although it is not clear in which context it was used.

It is known that Shah Jahan was not only a lover of female beauty but, like his illustrious ancestors, a genuine admirer of the fine arts and a noted instrumentalist himself. Manucci writes that "his usual diversion was to listen to various instruments, to verses and poetry; and he was very fond of musicians . . ."[57] Faquirullah completes the picture when he says:

> At the time when Akbarabad (Agra) became the capital (of the Pathans and Mughals) the melody makers of the time assembled there from all corners of the world. Even the number of ustads was such that had not been seen anywhere else at any time. Most of these hailed from Gwaliar...
>
> In spite of this (also because of all this) the language of the country called Hindustan has gained in elegance ten-fold. In *khayal* the compositions in this composite language have been based on the topic of love and love-making.[58]

The attitude of the Mughal nobility to music was apparently so favourable that musicians—presumably including sarangi players—migrated in large numbers to Agra and Delhi to try their luck.

Whereas the majority of instrumentalists serving at Akbar's court were of Persian descent, at the time of Shah Jahan the reverse was true. Most of the instrumentalists described in the *Ragadarpan* played indigenous instruments such as *bin, sarangi* and *pakhawaj,* and no mention is made of *ghichak* players. Obviously, Persian fiddlers were slowly losing the battle with their native rivals, the sarangi players, and soon the *ghichak* would almost completely disappear from the Indian music scene. Hindustani music, on the whole, seems to have experienced a phase of innovation, renaissance and above all 'indianization'. The sarangi, however, was still in a transitional stage, shifting from rural to urban society. Its role in classical music was not yet clearly defined.

The most dramatic development that took place in music in 17th century Delhi was perhaps the rise of *khayal,* which "based on the topic of love and love-making...is sung in two lines in *desi* language", the spoken language of the people.[59] With these matter-of-fact words, Faquirullah demonstrates conclusively that this vocal genre had already found its admirers among the urban elite. He adds

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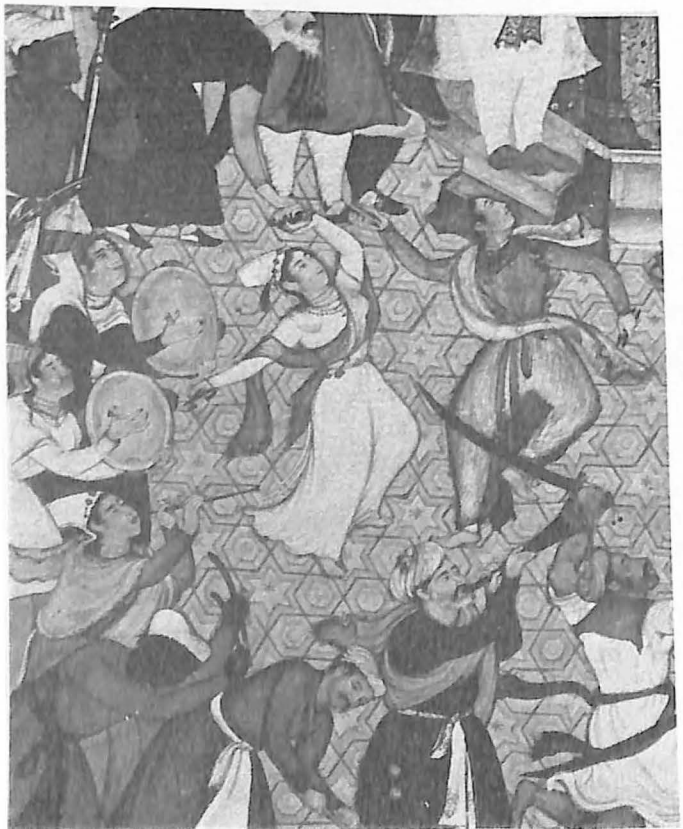

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that *khayal* singers preferred the accompaniment of an improved *rabab* which, besides its traditional six gut strings, had another six or twelve strings of copper or iron.[60] Paintings from the period reveal the same. A large, sophisticated *rabab* often figured as the main instrument of a small ensemble, and only in the next century would the sarangi gradually take its place. It is questionable, therefore, whether singers specializing in *khayal* were accompanied by sarangi players at the time of Shah Jahan.[61]

Gradually, *khayal* rose in prominence. "*Khayal* composition of the new type", writes A. Halim, "started during the reign of Bahadur Shah. . . Niamat Khan, son of Narmul Khan, who assumed the pen-name of Sadarang, composed under royal patronage *khayals, dhrupads* and *horis*. . . with the assistance of Niazi Qawwal and Lala Bangali before he entered the service of Mohammad Shah (1718-48). During the reign of Mohammad Shah as well, he composed a large number of such songs and set them to tune. It must be remembered that Mohammad Shah himself was an expert musician and his poetic name in his songs was 'Sadarangila' (the ever-gay)."[62]

If we believe what vocalists tell us, Sadarang and Adarang (Firuz Khan) composed numerous *khayals* which they taught to their disciples, mainly women singers who propagated this 'feminine' genre during the 18th century.[63] Fortunately we do not have to rely on the oral tradition alone. From an eye-witness account, *Muraqqa-e-Dihli* (1739), we get a good idea of how music flourished in Delhi, just after the city had been invaded and sacked by Nadir Shah, the ruler of Persia. The author, Dargah Quli Khan Bahadur, gives a vivid description of over fifty musicians, dancers and actors, many of whom served at the court of Mohammad Shah. The foremost among them was Niamat Khan Binkar.

> In Hindustan the presence of Niamat Khan is a blessing from heaven (*niamat*). In the art of creating music and songs, his work is incomparable. Famous courtesans boast of their association with him, and he is a master of presenting delicate *khayals* through music. He is a capable man; he has written works on various subjects in several different languages. But at this time, as music master, he is the leader of all the musicians of Delhi, and he is so proud that, except for the Badshah, he does not concede to anybody's musical request. . . His singing in various *ragas* and *raginis* has an effect no less than that of magic, and what an amazing skill Niamat Khan has obtained in his *bin* playing. . .! It can be claimed that never in the world was there born such a magician of a *binkar*, nor is there any hope of one ever being born. When he begins to play the *bin* the notes of the instrument cast magic spells, and the assembly goes into a strange state; people begin to flutter like fish out of water. . .[64]

The famous ustad had many disciples, of whom Qasim Ali and Pannabai were rated as the best. His brother "has an instrument of three strings which is counted among the wonders of music. . ." Was he perhaps Khusrau Khan, whom the oral tradition names as the inventor of the Indian *sitar*?[65]

Dargah Quli Khan also describes a number of vocalists who were noted for singing *khayal*, but he does not waste words connecting this genre to Niamat Khan or his disciples. Was the *khayal raga* he talks about an innovation of Niamat Khan? Was it *dhrupad* that incorporated elements of contemporary *khayal*, and became

later known as Sadarang *khayal?* According to Inayat Khan 'Rasikh' (1734/35), Niamat Khan was also a great *dhrupad, khayal* and *tarana* singer, who composed *khayals* with a high degree of perfection, and Pandit D. C. Vedi has often explained and demonstrated that there is little difference between 'classical' *khayals* composed by Sadarang, and old *dhrupad* compositions.[66]

It is hardly surprising that the author of *Muraqqa-e-Dihli* makes no mention of 'Miyan Sarang' as the 'inventor' of the sarangi. But he does describe Ghulam Mohammad, a renowned sarangi maestro, who was known far and wide.

> He is a master of melody and has specialized in playing sad and serious *ragas* with deep feeling. Not a single musician can play sarangi like him, so profound is his training. His fingernails move gently and effortlessly along the sarangi strings. He casts magic on every musical sitting he attends. All musicians and listeners of Delhi agree that he has no equal. Everybody respects him; he is a very modest and unpretentious man who likes everyone. . .[67]

## 4.6 *The second fiddle*

Around the turn of the 18th century, a few Sanskrit authors also began to take an interest in the sarangi and other contemporary bowed instruments. Ahobala, writing about the *pinaki vina,* obviously refers to several types of instruments.

> The *pinaki* is half the length of the other *vinas.* It is played with a bow (*dhanush*) made from the hair of a horse-tail. The strings are made of silk. The womb is made of either a coconut shell, wood or bronze. The sides of the left hand fingers touch [the strings of] the instrument. The bow is manipulated according to the syllables.[68]

Although the *Sangitaparijata* does not mention the sarangi, it is evident that the author intends to portray bowed instruments, including the sarangi. The use of the term *'garbha'* (womb) to indicate only a cup or gourd resonator seems unlikely. From the description of its length, in particular, it is doubtful that the old *pinaki* is being described. The length is said to be half the size of the usual *vina,* a feature common to most Indian lutes. Nor is the characteristic bow shape of the original *pinaki* mentioned.

More significant, however, is Ahobala's remark about using "the sides of the fingers." Here he refers unmistakably to the characteristic left-hand technique of the sarangi and *ravanahasta.* And when he adds that "the bow is manipulated according to the syllables", he seems to emphasize its role in vocal accompaniment. Still, we can question whether it was the voice of the fiddler himself or that of other singers he accompanied.

Why does Ahobala avoid using the terms *sarangi* or *ravanahasta* and try to mislead us, when he obviously describes these instruments? It is a marked tendency of Sanskrit authors to refer to ancient practices and retain obsolete terms, even when the meaning has changed. In this particular case, Ahobala prefers to use the term *pinaki* because it had the status of an ancient *vina,* whilst the sarangi did not. The sarangi originated as a humble instrument of the common man, and since it was played mainly by Muslim musicians, it was not worthy of mention by a pandit like Ahobala. While describing the *rabab* he goes one step further and simply devises a new name, probably because he could not find an appropriate ancient

one. He calls it *ravavaha* (lit. that which carries sound). The similarity between the words *rabab* and *ravavaha* is indeed a praiseworthy example of his inventive genius.[69]

It is not known where Ahobala composed his important treatise. That sarangi players had already dispersed southwards and eastwards is demonstrated by various sources. A manuscript of Zuhuri's *Sakinamah* from the Deccan, dated 1685, contains a unique illustration figuring twelve musicians who play a variety of Persian and Indian instruments, including a sarangi.[70][59] Zuhuri was one of the greatest poets of the time and spent the last years of his life in Bijapur, at the court of Sultan Ibrahim Adil Shah II (1580-1625). Although he lists a number of instruments, the sarangi is excluded.[71] Again, this suggests that only in the second half of the 17th century (when this manuscript was completed) did the sarangi become recognized as a stringed instrument used in Hindustani classical music.

The process of acceptance and adaptation did not happen overnight, and, even in the 18th century, most musicologists ignored the sarangi. A notable exception was Kaviratna Purushottama Mishra (c. 1690-1750), who wrote the *Sangitanarayana* on behalf of an Orissan king, Gajapati Narayana Deva, the ruler of the Khemundi kingdom.[72] Since he is the first and only Sanskrit author to raise this instrument to the status of a *vina,* discussing it in detail (only six instruments are described), we may assume that he, or his patron, had a special liking for the sarangi.

> This instrument can be made of blackwood, jackwood or *sal*-wood.[73] It is three spans in length. The head is 15 *angulas* [in length], in the shape of a cobra's hood, with the stringholder in the centre. It becomes gradually narrower in the throat region, after which comes a protrusion. Below this is the neck which is 17 [or 10] *angulas* long. It is larger at the base and tapers down towards the end, and is more or less rounded. The interior portion of the head in the front, and the back side of the neck and chest are hollow. The pegbox of the sarangi is rectangular. It is 6 *angulas* long by 4 *angulas* wide, hollow, and 4 *angulas* deep. In three holes are placed the three pegs. The upper end is decorated by a topknot like a demigod.
>
> The head is covered with skin, like the *kacchapi vina* [*rabab*]. On the skin table rests the bridge, which is the size of a thumb with three notches [for the strings]. On the tip of the stringholder there is a bud to which the end-pin is attached. The three strings are arranged in due order [of thickness] and made from silk thread. The bow (*dhanush*) is made from a strip of bamboo, 30 *angulas* long. The strings of the bow are made from horsehair, which is rubbed with resin from the sandal tree. The strings are played with a bow. The sarangi should be played according to instruction from experts.[74]

Nearly every part of the sarangi is minutely described, and measurements are given. Yet it is not easy to imagine exactly what it looked like. Probably it resembled a present-day *chikara,* because the author says that the 'head' (i.e. resonator or what we call 'belly') is shaped like a cobra's hood. The *chikara* is related to the *rabab,* and the instrument in question still had the crescent-shaped protrusion between the neck and resonator (he calls it 'ears'), so characteristic of lutes belonging to this family. This 'collar' can also be recognized in a painting from Bundi, where a girl appears to tune a bowed instrument which has now become obsolete.[60]

Purushottama Mishra's terminology deserves further attention. His sarangi has a head, a throat, ears, a neck and a chest. It is almost like the bust of a human being, and it must have been quite common to conceive of a sarangi in this way. There is a *chikara* in my possession, whose resonator is carved in the shape of a smiling face, probably that of Bhairava.[61] If one thinks about it, there is a deep logic behind this analogy with the human body. It is the head and the throat which produce sound . . . not the belly! This is the reason why musicians also talk about the voice of the sarangi, and why they always say: "There is no instrument which can reproduce the human voice better than the sarangi."

No instrument was more suited to echo the emotional songs "of love and love-making" than the sarangi. A witness to this in the east of India was John Burnell, travelling through Bengal in 1712. But what a poor understanding he had of the music he heard:

> Cojey Surratt [Khwaja Israil Sarhad], a merchant . . . resident in Calcutta, paid us a visit in the aforesaid willock and brought with him his musick consisting of a Georgian violin, two small kettle drums and the like number of hautboys with which he entertained us. The instruments were costly and of curious workmanship. To the violin the drums were added in concert, assisted with the voice of the musicians [sic], whose ill tun'd notes and imperfect cadence made most lamentable discord.[75]

The Dutchman J. S. Stavorinus, travelling in Bengal between 1768-71, also noted "an instrument resembling a violin", which was used to accompany the singing

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girls.[76] Most probably it was a sarangi because, as we will see, the sarangi had become the favourite instrument of women singers.

It seems that sarangi players, who had settled in the cities, soon discovered that it was virtually impossible to compete with *rabab* and *tanbur* players, let alone with the aristocratic *binkars*. They must have realized that, in order to make a reasonable living, the only solution was to associate with courtesans. As singing and echoing their own songs on the sarangi had for centuries been the main occupation of these bards, it was not difficult for them to accompany the songs of female vocalists. These women must have welcomed the wistful sound of the sarangi, which blended so well with their voices, and gave them support and inspiration.

Through their association with famous courtesans, sarangi players were able to participate in musical sittings and enter the courts. In this way, they began to be known in the world of classical music, and the move from rural to urban society was complete. Sarangi players, however, did not have the status of vocalists nor instrumentalists; they did not belong to the category of solo performers and were relegated to a subordinate position. By accepting the status of accompanists, their role as background musicians, playing second fiddle, seemed once and forever defined.

## 4.7 *Amriti*

The 'Bengal violin' (*sarinda*) was described and depicted by W. Ouseley at the end of the 18th century.[77] Both in the north-west and north-east of India, it was an



extremely popular instrument, and, in Sind, the magical *surando* of Bijal was immortalized by the great saint-singer Shah Abdul Latif (1689-1742):

> All three in tune were wed,
> The music's chord, the dagger and the neck.[78]

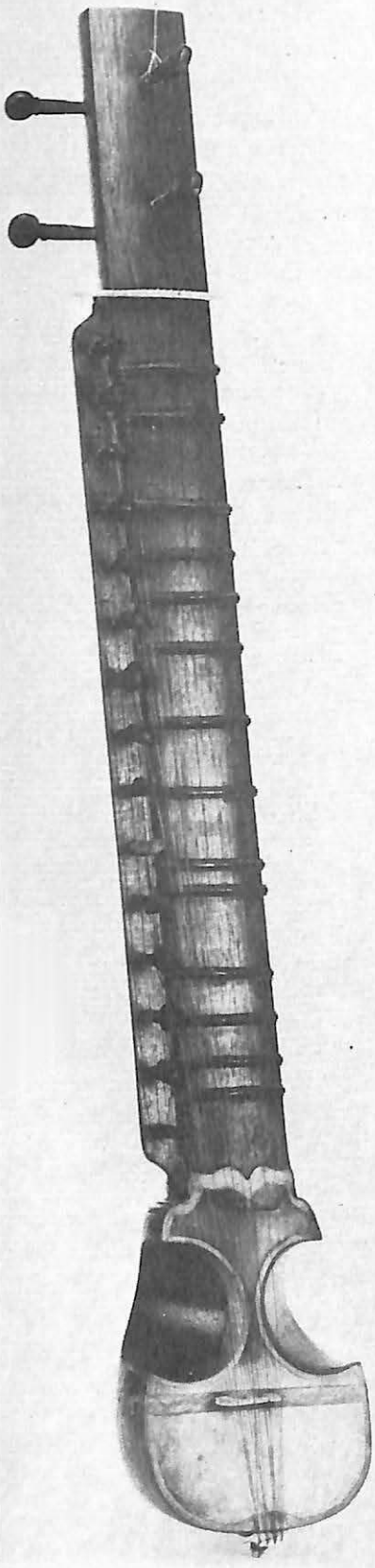
Engelbert Kaempfer (1651-1716) was probably the first European to depict this instrument in his *Amoenitates Exoticae*. Although he gives most of the current names of Persian instruments, the fiddle is described as "a Pandura of different construction, provided with four strings, which is decidedly exotic; it is held in the same position and also played with a bow. Its neck is narrow and short, its belly double, more oblong, fuller and open in the upper part, smaller in the lower, and covered . . ."[79]

According to F. Baltazard Solvyns, the Bengali *sarinda* "belongs almost exclusively to the poor: in so much, that most of the common people, particularly the palanquin bearers, have one of them of their own making: this does not require much genius, being no more than a bit of wood hollowed out, over which are stretched some chords of spun cotton: and the sound is produced by drawing over them a bow, as represented in the print. The music is proportioned to the rudeness of the instrument, and can be pleasing only to its Hindoo inventors. Few of those who play upon the *sarinda* have any knowledge of music; they merely follow their fancy, continuing sometimes in a lower tone with deep expression, at others rising suddenly from the lowest to the highest notes in reiterated cadences, but always without taste, measure or harmony."[80] [62, 63] Like most Westerners of the time, Solvyns was prejudiced and could not find much beauty in the music of India (certainly not in the music of the common man or Muslim!). But he took a fancy to their instruments, and, unlike most foreigners, he made a very sincere effort to draw and describe them.

Francois Baltazard Solvyns was a professional painter from Antwerp who arrived in Calcutta in 1791, and stayed there until 1804. "On 6th February 1794, with the encouragement of the orientalist, Sir William Jones, he announced a grandiose scheme for *250 coloured etchings descriptive of the manners, customs, character, dress, and religious* [*ceremonies*] *of the Hindoos* . . . He applied himself to the task with tremendous energy and wandered all over Calcutta drawing men and women of every possible caste and calling . . ."[81] Although the first edition of his ambitious work appeared in 1799,[82] it was only in the later French folio edition that the descriptions were presented. Solvyns' series of 35 etchings of Indian musical instruments is indeed unique. Despite his lack of understanding of the music and his almost childish way of narrating—he was a painter, not a musician or a writer—his descriptions reveal information which is to be found nowhere else, and particularly so in those cases where the instruments have become obsolete.

No less than five 18th century bowed instruments are depicted: the *pinaka, sarangi, sarinda, amriti* and *orni*. The *amriti* seems to have pleased him more than the *sarinda*:

> This is also an instrument with strings; but what renders it more curious, and proves it of Hindoo origin, is that the body of the instrument is made of a cocoa-nut, cut down to about one third, and covered over with a very fine skin. To this species of tymbal is joined a wooden handle with strings stretched from one end of the instrument to the other; there is the whole



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secret of this truely Hindoo invention. The man who plays it is seated, holds it between his knees, and endeavours to draw musical sounds from the shell of his cocoa-nut. At a distance it would be difficult to form a guess at what he is about, and still harder to conceive that it is an amusement. The sound of the *omerti* is not unlike that of the *sarinda* and the *saringee,* but something sweeter and less grating to the ear of an European. One is not a little surprised to hear a tolerably harmonious music from a cocoa-shell.

The praise which I heard a skilful Brahmun bestow on a concert of *omertis* of different sizes, made me curious to assemble one in order to judge of the truth of his assertions; the more so, as the Brahmun himself was really an excellent performer, and I imagined that a reunion of several such as he, might have rather a fine effect: but this instrument being very rare, I could with difficulty find but three, and those very indifferent and far inferior to him; so that my hope was deceived.

This instrument is unknown to many Hindoos, though some among the higher classes, play on it for their amusement.[83][viii]

Soon after that the instrument must have vanished. The last we hear about it is from Raja S. M. Tagore (1877): "*Amrita,* a very ancient stringed instrument played with a bow. In appearance, resembles the *rabana* . . ."[84] But Tagore does not provide any details, and it is doubtful if he ever saw any such instrument. It is also questionable whether the *amriti* or *amrita* was really "a very ancient instrument." Medieval music

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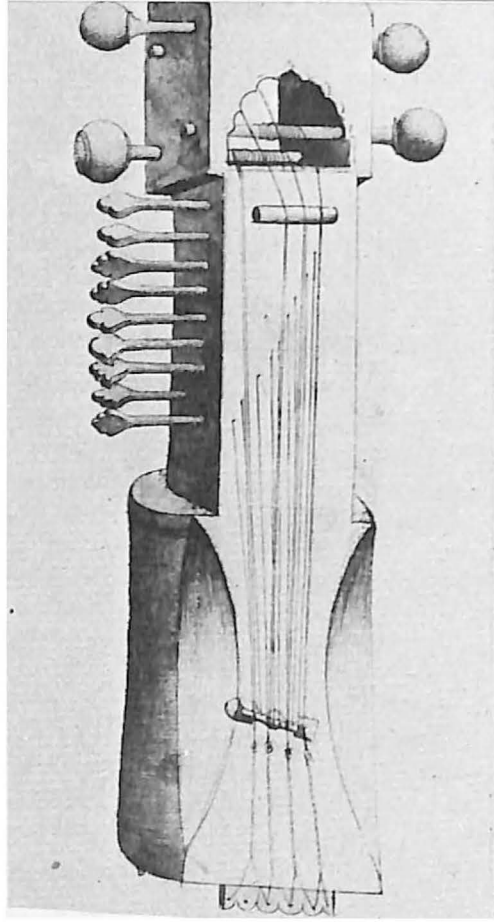

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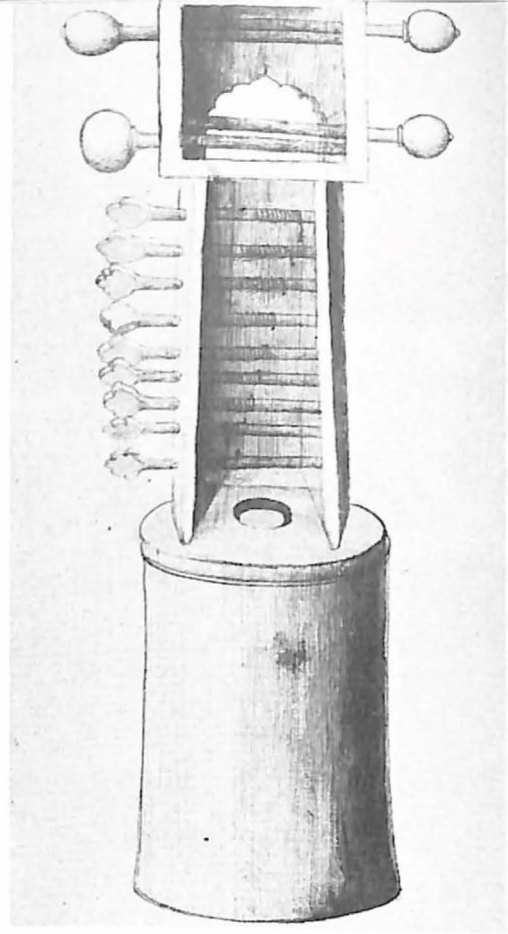

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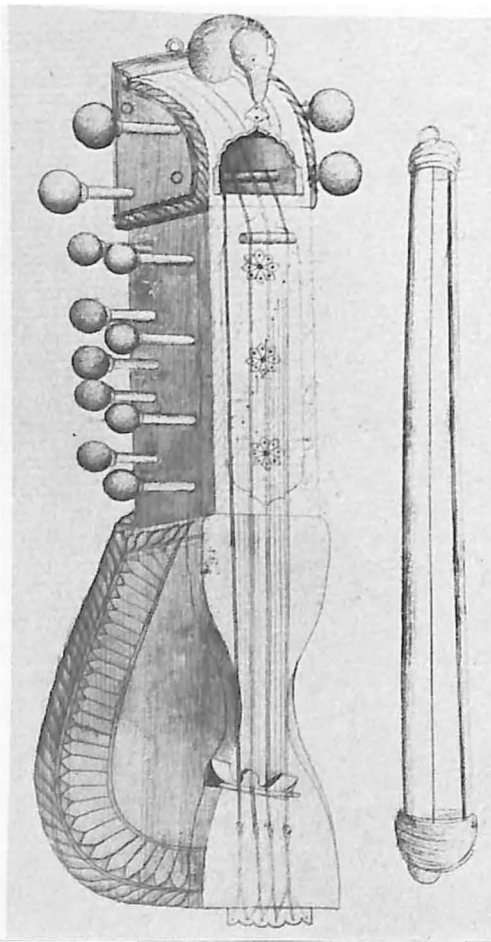
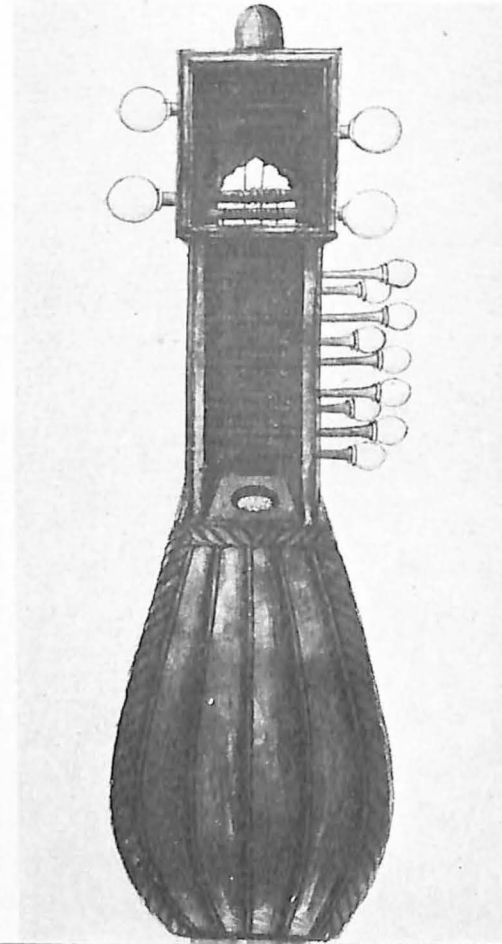




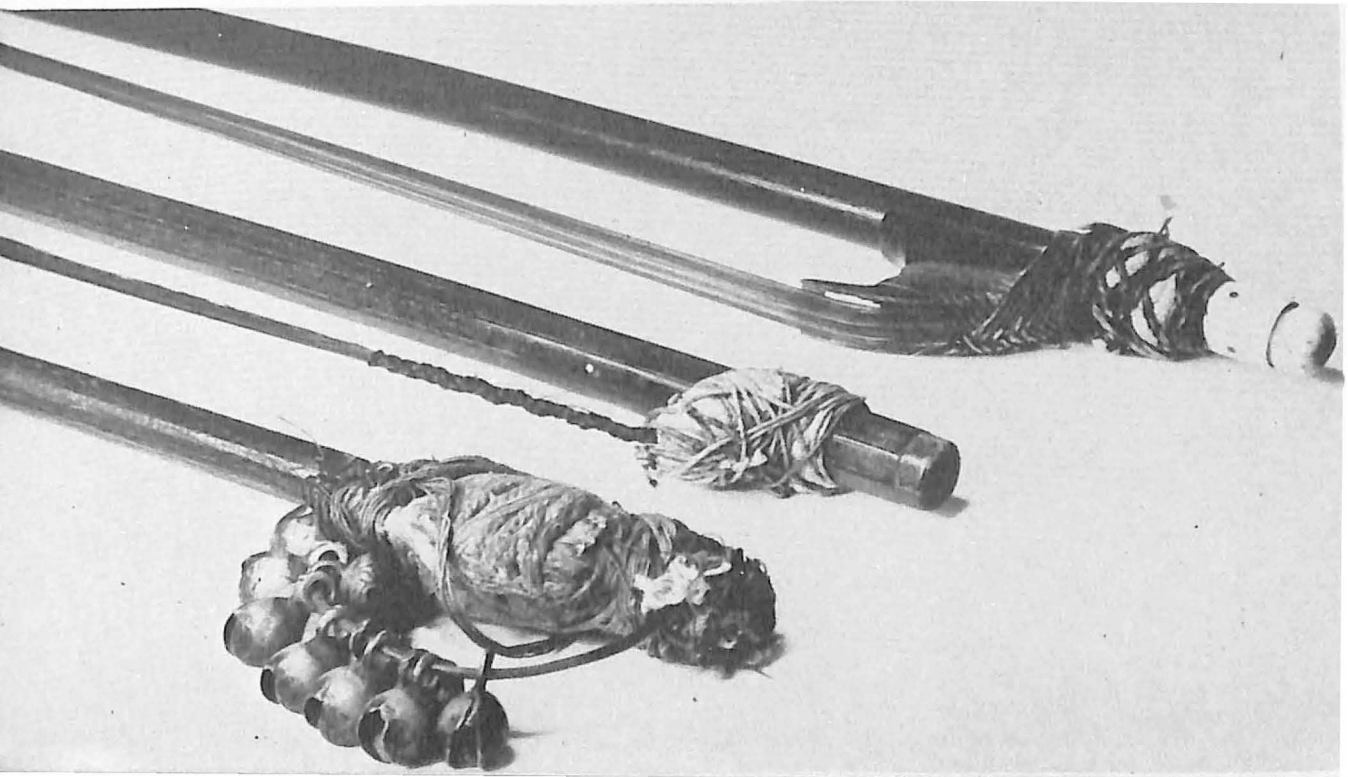
treatises do not mention it, but Abu'l Fazl and Faquirullah give a brief description. According to them, it was shorter than the *sur bin* and had one small gourd attached to the upper end of the stick. There was only one steel string and unlike the *kingra,* it lacked frets.[85] Nothing has been said about the right-hand technique, but, even if it was bowed, it must have been quite different from the *amriti* which Solvyns has drawn. Yet the comparison between *amriti* and *kingra* (which Faquirullah makes) arouses our interest, the more so since Solvyns' *omerti* resembles the *kingri* shown in illustration 41 and the *ravanastron* depicted by Sonnerat.[40]

The most distinctive features of these instruments are their relatively long, broad neck, and the rectangular pegbox with four lateral pegs. A very similar four-stringed instrument is depicted in a number of 18th century paintings, notably those from the Deccan, illustrating *ragini* Sarang.[64] Was the *amriti* perhaps the ancestor of the *esraj,* "a modern instrument formed out of the *seetar* and sarangi?"[86] [65] The idea of a long, broad neck has been retained here, and an old *esraj* in my possession has a rectangular pegbox which is characteristic of almost all instruments belonging to the sarangi family.

## 4.8 *Evolution of the sarangi*

"This instrument, which is frequently met with in every part of Hindoostan, is very like the violon-cello, though it is smaller and has more chords," writes Baltazard Solvyns. "The sounds which it produces are soft and melodious, and susceptible of greater variety than those of the other instruments. Of all the different kinds of Hindoo music in general, the *saringee* comes nearest to that of Europe. The chords are of spun cotton; the pieces of wood [sic] which form the instrument are united by a very fine white skin glued over the joints. The sweet sounds of the *saringee* are well adapted to accompany the voice; it is used in all the dances both of men and women."[87] His etching depicts a more or less rectangular sarangi with a number of sympathetic strings.[66] Much better, however, are the drawings which were probably made by an Indian artist working under the supervision of a Dutchman, Robert Nichols Brouncker, residing in Murshidabad between 1785-90.[88] [68-71] Two different



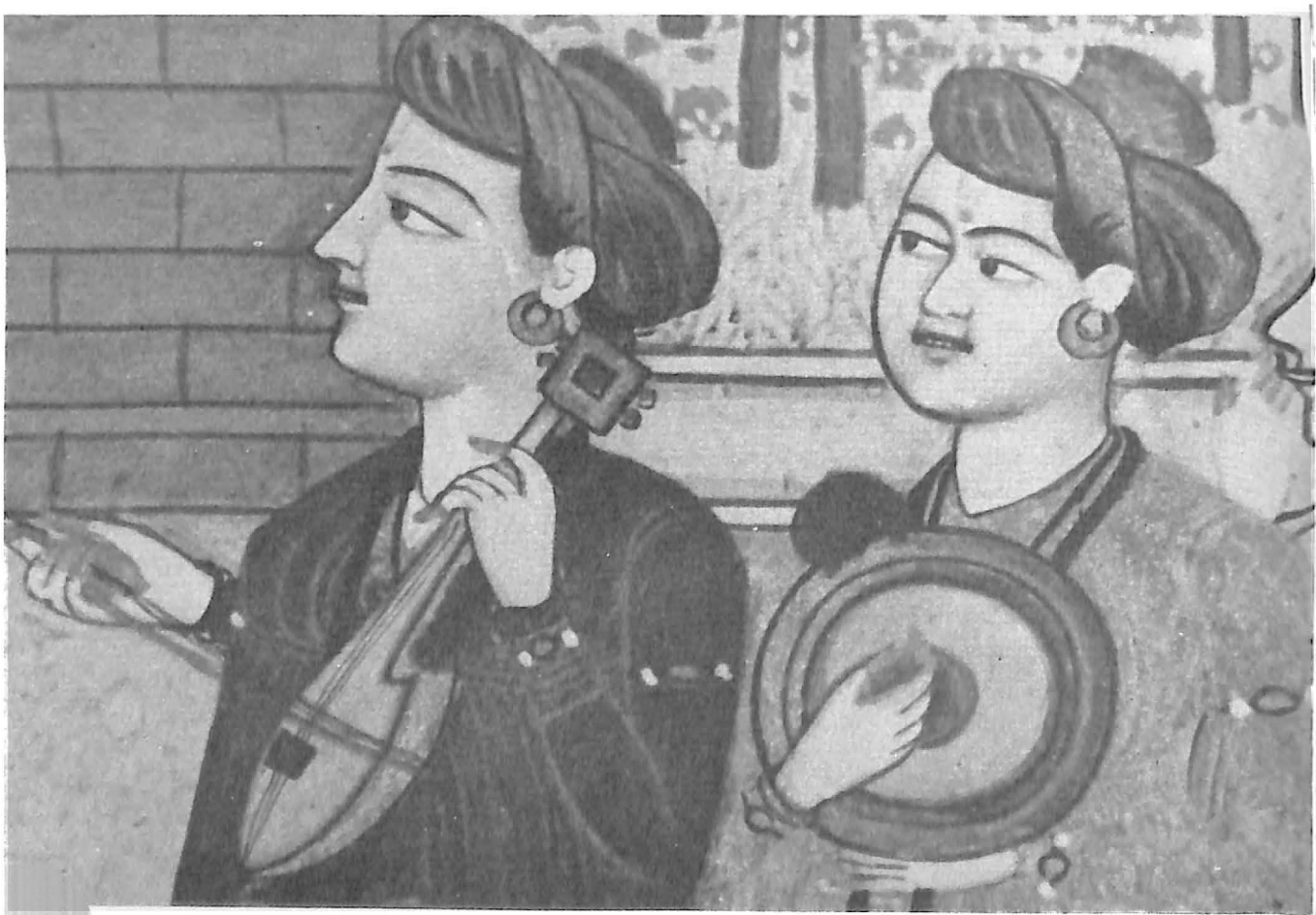


types of sarangis are shown, in front and back profile. The artist has left nothing to the imagination. All the parts are clearly identifiable, and one can even see how the strings are tied to the pegs. Noteworthy is the oblique position of the bridge[89] (with its right foot touching the wooden edge of the belly as is the case in many folk sarangis), and the absence of a nut in the bow. Captain N. A. Willard, the reputed author of *A Treatise on the Music of Hindoostan* (1834), confirms the latter when he talks about the sarangi bow, "the hairs of which are loose, and tightened with the hand at the time of playing."[90] Most folk sarangi players still handle the bow in this way. The wooden nut was probably introduced during the 19th century, when sarangi players and makers learnt about the structure of the violin bow.[72]

Both the sarangis in Brouncker's drawings have four big pegs, but (like the present-day classical sarangi) only three main strings pass over the nut; the fourth serves either as a bourdon or resonance string. In addition, there are nine sympathetic strings attached to two rows of small pegs, which are inserted in the neck. According to Willard:

> [the sarangi] is strung with four gut strings . . . The two lowest strings are tuned to *khuruj*, and the others to a perfect fourth . . .
>
> Besides the gut-strings, the instrument has a number of metal wires, generally thirteen, of unequal lengths, which go under the gut-strings. These wires are tuned to the mode proper of the *raginee* intended to be played. The bow can never touch or approach them, so they are of use only to reverberate with the sound of the gut-strings.[91]





If what Willard writes is correct, the fourth gut string (tuned to *kharaj*) would serve as a bourdon, and the main strings of the sarangi would be tuned thus: key-note, key-note, fourth, fourth (*Ṣ Ṣ M M*). It is doubtful, however, if this was really the case. In folk sarangis, the bourdon or drone string is always in unison with the first string, tuned to the highest pitch. This 'pair' is tuned to the tonic, while the lower two strings are tuned a fourth and an octave below the tonic, thus *Ṣ Ṗ S Ṡ*.[92]

Although Indian paintings and drawings of the 18th century reveal a great variety of sarangis, those with a pear-shaped (*chikara* group) and a rectangular body (*sarangi* group), waisted in the front, were most commonly used by musicians accompanying singers and dancers.[73, 67] A 'chikara' was described in the *Sangitanarayana*, and it was also alluded to in the *A'in-i Akbari*. Because of its close resemblance to the *rabab*, Curt Sachs speculates that this type is more original.[93] Whether this is true or not, it seems that sarangis with a waisted, box-shaped resonator, such as the one played by Ghulam Hussain of Jaipur, became gradually more prominent during the latter part of the 18th century.[xvi] The drawings of Solvyns and Brouncker also show such instruments, and the sarangi with a belly in the shape of a half-cylinder would (or had already) become the standard type. It has been described and illustrated by several 19th century authors, and can be found in many instrument collections, although the number of resonance strings may vary.[74] As noted before, there is little difference between this small 'classical' sarangi (the grandfather of the large sarangi) and the Jogia sarangi of Rajasthan.[75]

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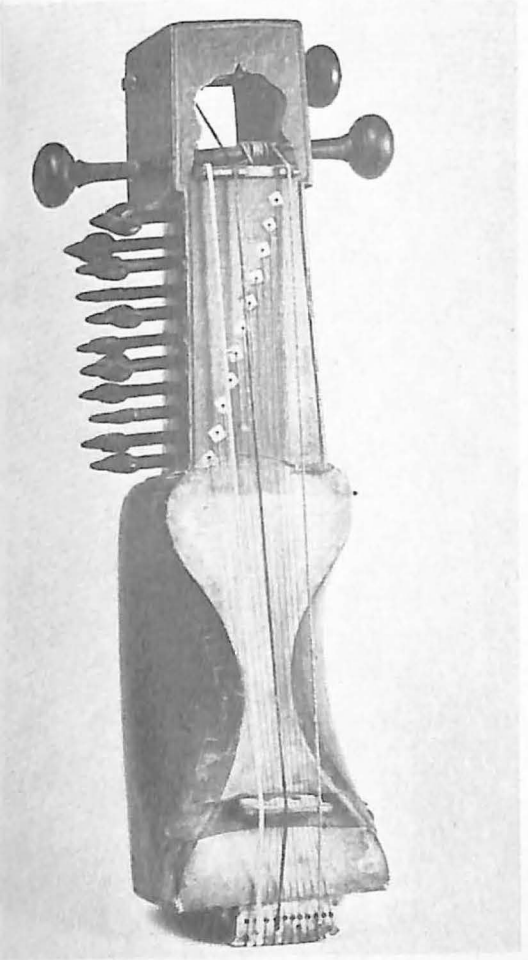

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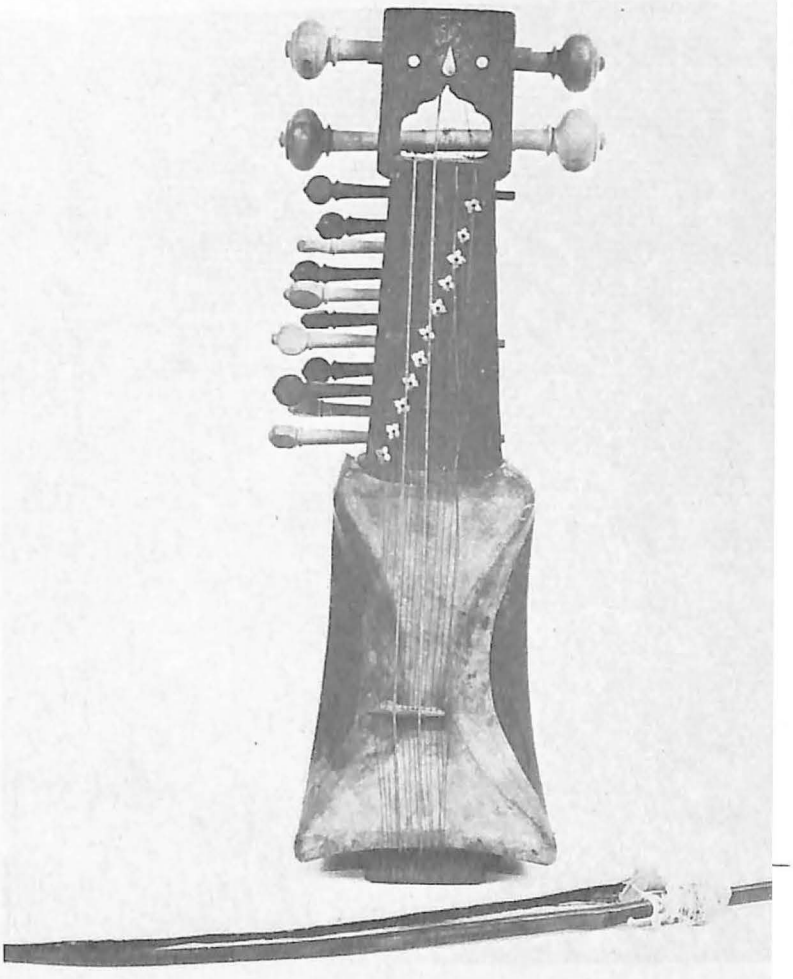

Captain Meadows Taylor (1864), describing the collection of Indian musical instruments presented by Colonel P. T. French to the Royal Irish Academy, writes:

> The *sarungi* has four strings of catgut; it is played with a bow; and the execution upon it by accomplished performers is frequently striking and pleasing, while the tones are nearer perhaps in quality to the human voice than those of any other instrument with which I am acquainted. Considering its small size and rude shape, the tone is much more sweet and powerful than would be conceived from its appearance . . .
>
> The *sarungi* is used by Mahomedan musicians more than by Hindu; and I imagine it may have been introduced into India by the Mahomedans, possibly from Persia. It forms an excellent accompaniment to the voice; and an old friend of mine, an excellent musician and violin player, the late Captain Giberne, Bombay Army, used to prefer one of these instruments to his own violin for concerted pieces in which the violin took a soprano part.[94]

Captain Giberne must have been one of the first foreigners who "used to prefer one of these instruments to his own violin." It would take another century before the sarangi found a wider appeal in the West, and a few Westerners traded their violin for a sarangi!

As opposed to Meadows Taylor, B. H. Baden Powell (1872) found "the sound of this instrument . . . very harsh and disagreeable", but C. R. Day did not concur: "The tone of the sarangi more nearly resembles that of the viola than any European instrument, and when well played there is a charm about the instrument

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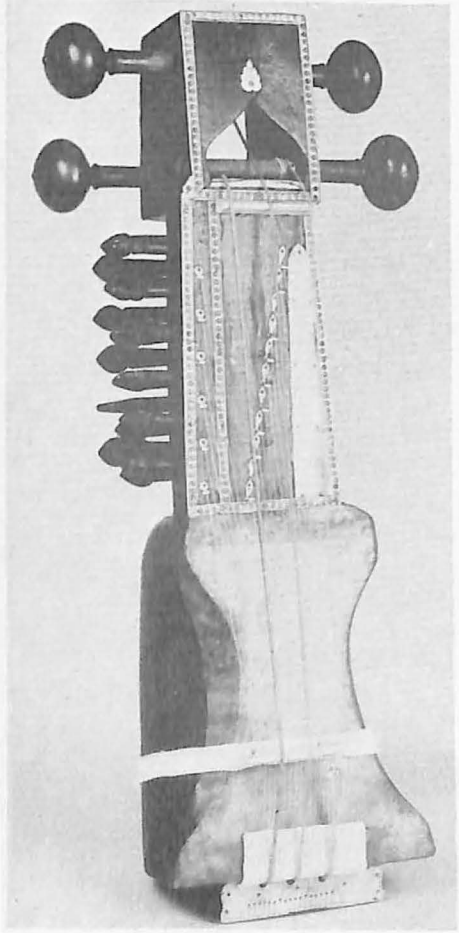

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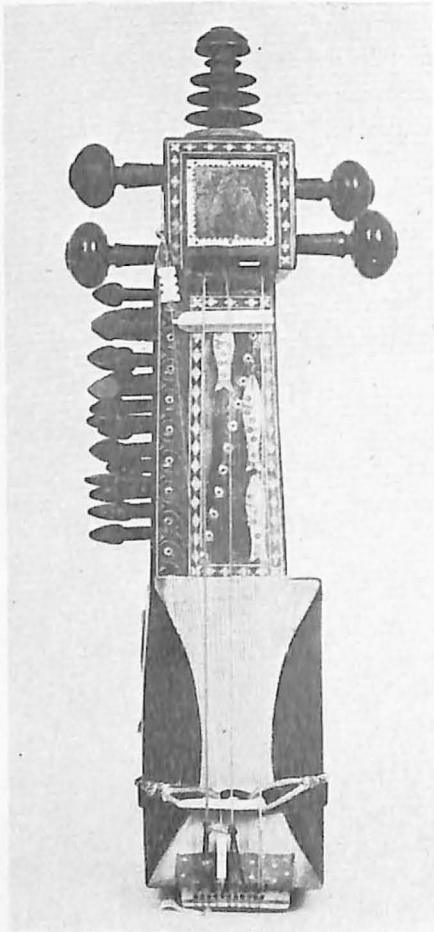

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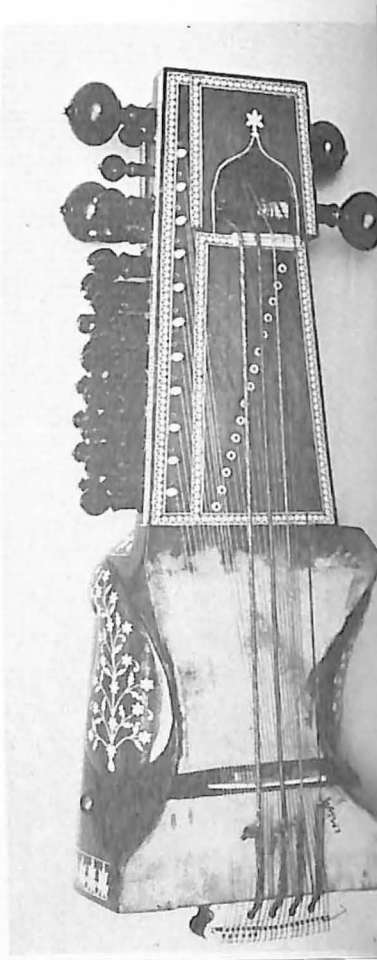

that is not easily forgotten."[95] Thus, opinions about the tonal quality differed, but the instruments described were virtually the same as those depicted by the Murshidabad artist. All 19th century writers, including F. J. Fétis (1869) and V. C. Mahillon (1880, 1893), seem to agree that the sarangi was a relatively small, box-shaped instrument with eleven or thirteen sympathetic strings, and none noticed that a larger type of sarangi had emerged.[96] In this instrument, the right side of the neck is broadened to accommodate an additional row of pegs, to which are attached six, nine or eleven resonance strings, running along the right side of the fingerboard. As a result of this extension, the instrument has lost its symmetrical shape, i.e. on the left side the belly has a larger waisting than on the right, where the belly tapers off into the neck.[76-78]

Gradually, artists all over the north began to adopt this 'intermediate' type. Ethel Rosenthal (1928) writes: "The sarangis used were of various sizes, some being about two feet in height, whereas others were considerably larger . . . The larger instruments employed by the accompanists of the dancing girls possessed twenty-two understrings, and the tone produced was rich and mellow."[97] The dancing girls, she informs us, "came specially from Delhi to entertain the Maharaja and his guests." We are a little surprised, however, that the accompanists did not play on even larger sarangis which, according to the musicians I spoke to, had in Delhi already replaced the 'small' and 'intermediate' types.[98][79]

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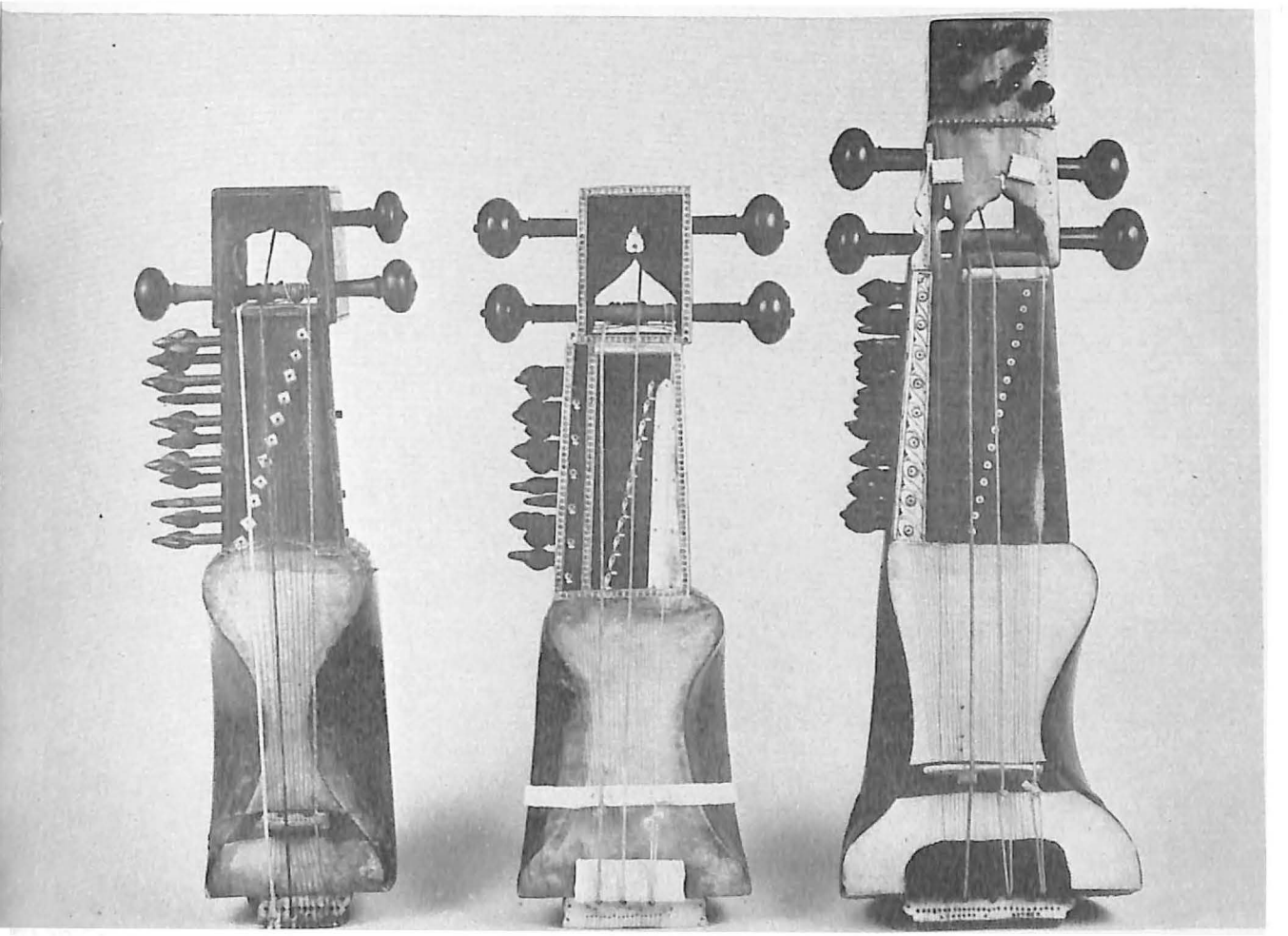


Referring to a fascinating photograph of the 1870's, showing a group of dancing girls with their musicians—four sarangi players and three *tabla* players[xx] —Curt Sachs writes in 1915:

> A surprising version has recently been built in Delhi. It is about one eighth[?] larger and incurved on one side only . . . The most amazing part of it is an army of 39 (!) resonance strings . . ."[99]

Sachs could not foresee that this 'delightful hybrid' (*erfreulicher Bastard*) would become the standard classical sarangi. Besides the right-hand *tarabs,* it is characterized by the addition of a second pegbox above the first one, in which are placed ten or eleven frontal pegs. Attached to these pegs are two sets of sympathetic strings of almost equal length, which run through holes in a second nut and pass over two table-like (*jivari*) bridges, placed on the instrument between the two nuts.

The 'modern' classical sarangi probably developed in or around Delhi, approximately 135 years ago, when the evolution of sarangi playing was entering a new phase. Apparently, it took some time to become popular in the eastern part of Uttar Pradesh, where one can still find sarangis with a second pegbox built on top of an older instrument where it was originally lacking, instead of being an integral part of the instrument, as it is today.[100]

## 4.9 *Courtesans*

Baltazard Solvyns does not conceal the fact that many sarangi players were associated with disreputable dancing girls and prostitutes, and that their status was not very high. He writes: "The *loutchias* too are the most frequent performers on this instrument; for which reason in the back-ground of the print I have represented a house of bad fame, and a woman of the vilest class, because such is the general resort of the *loutchias,* where they give themselves up to every excess of debauchery . . ."[101] [66]

In this connection, Captain N. A. Willard remarks that the *tabla,* "less solemn than the *mridung,* and more adapted to accompany light and trivial compositions, is selected as the fittest counterpart with the *sarungee* to the silver tones of the modern meretricious Hindoo dancing girl. It is from hence evident, that the two last are modern licentious inventions, unknown to the ages when music breathed sacred and solemn numbers."[102] [80]

Captain C. R. Day (1891) also observes that, "curiously enough, as was the case with the violin in England at one time, the instrument [sarangi] is considered to be rather vulgar, and hence musicians, though they admire and like it much, will usually employ either a low caste Hindu or a Mussulman to play it."[103]

It is curious indeed, but this was (and still is) the main reason why most Indians had little respect for the instrument, and had so little to say about it. The peculiar schizophrenic attitude to courtesans, their accompanists, and to musicians, in general, which so many Western authors mention, was probably a new phenomenon at that time. We will see that the European colonialists were greatly responsible for it.

The term 'dancing girl', as female singers and dancers were usually referred to by Europeans, naturally included all kinds of professional entertainers, ranging

from vulgar bazaar prostitutes to dedicated and talented songstresses. Peter Mundy (1632), for instance, explains:

> There are also dauncinge wenches, of whome there are divers sorts, as Lullenees [*loli*], Harcanees [*harakni*], Kenchanees [*kanchani*] and Doomenees [*domni*] (all whoores though not in soe publique a manner) beinge of severall Castes and use different manner of musick. Most comonly they are hired at solemne feasts, where they playe, singe and daunce, whilst they [the guests] eate, drinck and discourse. And there is scarse any meetinge of freinds without them, where, when they are once warme with their meates, drinckes, gullees [*ghola*], etts. . . ., they take whome they have a minde to, either for [the] night or otherwise.[104]

Francisco Pelsaert, also staying in Agra between 1621-27, describes some of their attributes:

> There are many kinds of dancers, among them Lolonis, who are descended from Persian whores who have come from Persia [to India], and sing only in Persian; and a second kind, Dommines, who sing Hindustani songs, which are considered more beautiful, more amorous, and more profound, than those of the Persians, while their tunes are superior; they dance, too, to the rhythm of the songs with a kind of swaying of the body which is not lascivious, but rather modest.[105]

*Kanchanis*, as their name suggests, were high-class courtesans who were allowed to enter the palace, and it seems that Akbar himself conferred the title upon them.[106]

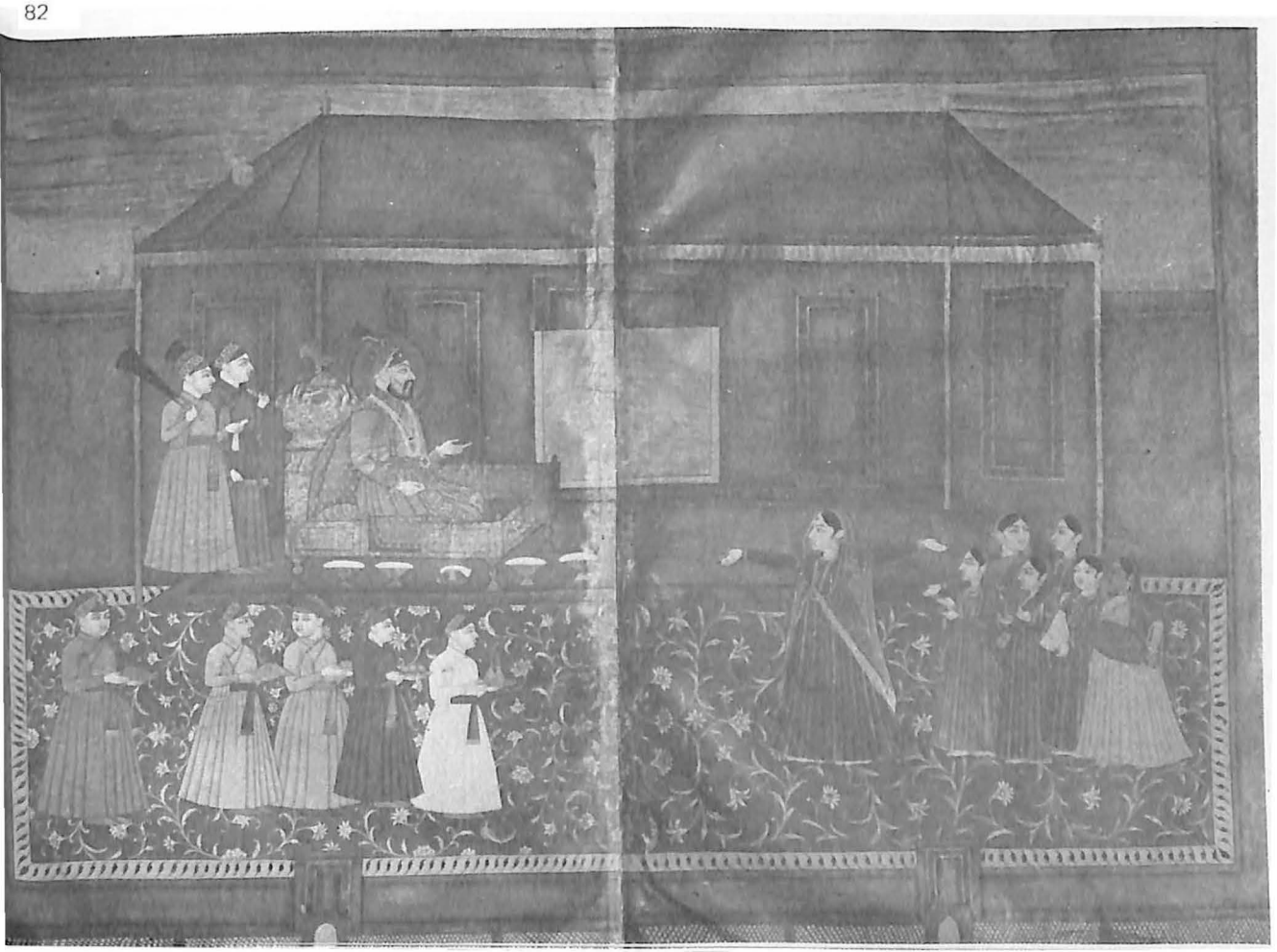


"This class is more esteemed than others, by reason of their great beauty. When they go to court, to the number of more than five hundred, they all ride in highly embellished vehicles, and are clothed in rich raiment. All of them appear and dance in the royal presence."[107] Manucci further informs us that Shah Jahan "permitted great liberty to public women, of whom the greater numbers were dancers and singers. All of them paid taxes to the king."[81] Another eyewitness, F. Bernier, also comments on Shah Jahan's exorbitant passion for *kenchen* (*kanchanis*), but as a true moralist he disapproves of it.

> But there is one thing which to me seems to be a little too extravagant; which is, that the public women, I mean not those of the Bazar, but those more retired and considerable ones, that go to the great marriages in the houses of the Omrahs and Mansebdars to sing and dance, those that are called Kenchen, as if you would say, the gilded, the blossoming ones, that those, I say, did also enter in the time of Chah-Jehan into the seraglio at such fairs, and there passed even the whole night in singing and dancing. These are not of that sort that prostitute themselves promiscuously to all; and they are most of them handsome and well apparelled, and excellent singers and dancers, after the mode of the country, surprising in the suppleness of their body, and the nimbleness of their motions, yet in the upshot, of the rank of public women . . . Aurang-Zebe is more serious, he suffers them not to come into the seraglio . . . [108]

Aurangazeb (1658-1707), a pious and almost ascetic Muslim, disliked the frivolous and decadent way of life of the Mughal nobility. He tried to curb the activities of public





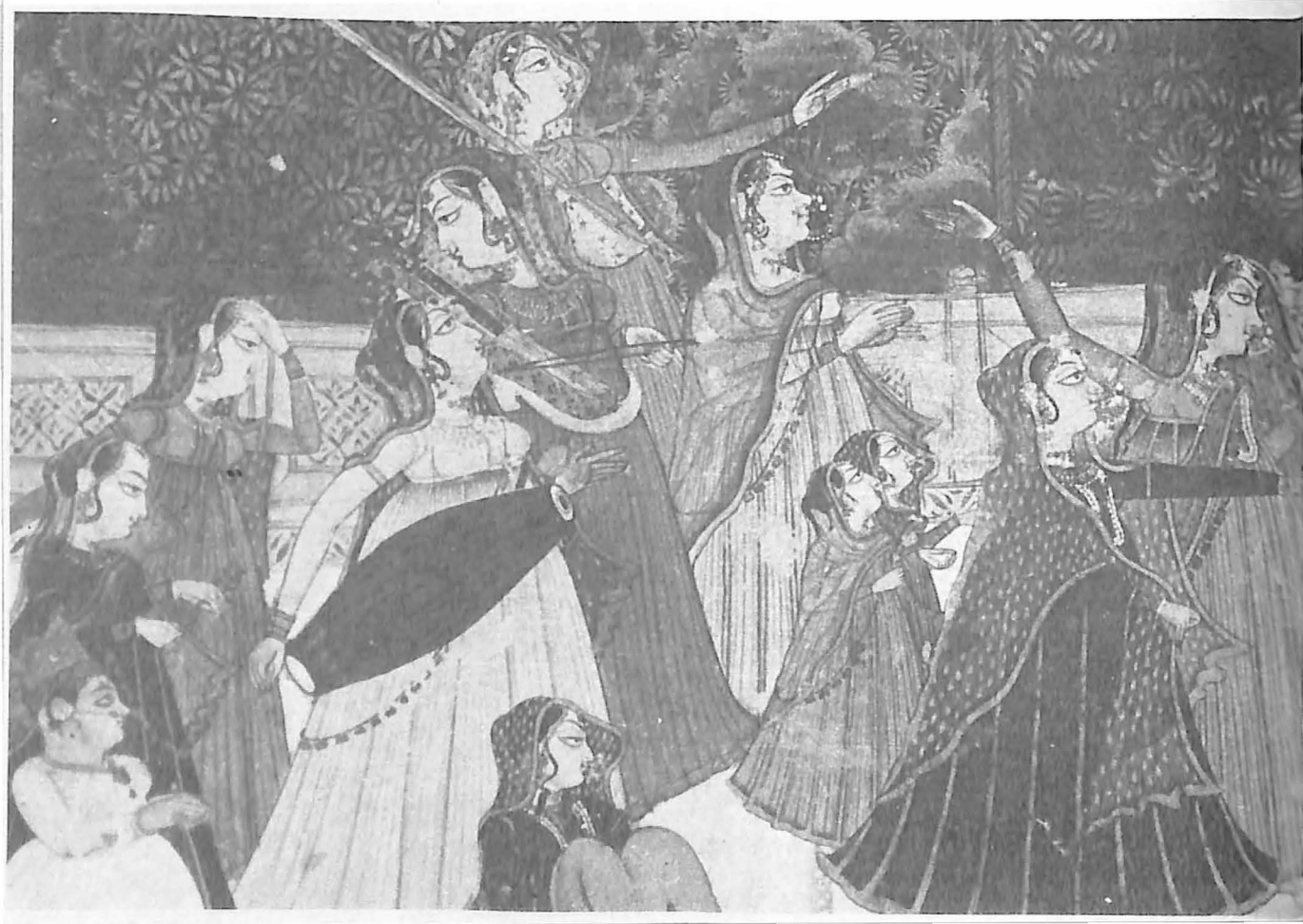
dancers and musicians, but "in spite of Aurangazeb's having forbidden all music, he nevertheless continued always to entertain in his palaces, for the diversion of the queens and his daughters, several dancing and singing women, and even conferred special names on their mistresses or superintendents."[109] They were addressed as '*Bai*' (according to Manucci, it means 'madam' or 'lady') which was appended to their name, as in Hirabai and Kesarbai (lit. Diamond Lady and Saffron Lady).

Aurangazeb's singular effort to bury the music, discredit female dancers and suppress prostitution, seems to have had little effect, however. Jahandar Shah (1712/13) went so far as to marry a notorious dancer, Lal Kunwar.[82] Under the influence of this domineering lady, her relations (including Niamat Khan) were ennobled and granted the *naubat*.[110] The Emperor, indulging in a life of pleasure, was not destined to enjoy power for long. He was deposed and strangled in the fort of Delhi!

As far as his delight for the fine arts and women was concerned, the colourful Mohammad Shah (1719-48) may even have surpassed his ancestors. Kamalbai, an extraordinary dancer, was one of his favourite courtesans and "remained in the imperial company with great honour and distinction year after year."

> And the favour of the Badshah's heart has also been directed to her. But nowadays, because the Emperor is still downcast over the incidents involving Nadir Shah, and there remains in him no interest in music, the Badshah has become disgusted with listening to songs and soothing





his heart with musical instruments. And the powerful musicians of the royal court have been disbanded by written order. Therefore, Kamalbai also had to be dismissed from the royal association. If that had not happened, how could ordinary people have had the opportunity to hear her?

There is depth of feeling in her voice and she sings with an ability to rouse sorrow. She adheres to the rules of music, makes not a single error, and sings Niamat Khan's *khayal raga* . . . She captures people in the net of her love very easily. Only the person who has gained her love knows her true value.[111]

Pannabai, one of Niamat Khan's distinguished disciples, sang like a *bulbul*. She cast a magical spell on her listeners and it is said that she also invented new *ragas* and instruments. "And then the injustice is that she is also good-looking. But the truth is that Pannabai is not for enjoyment; she is there for her melodies to be heard and delight to be had from her amazing art, and for her furtive smile to be seen, her sweet words heard."[112]

Other famous courtesans of the time were Chamani, Chakmak Wamani, Pana and Tanu, but more reputed and notorious than any of them was Nurbai.

She is a famous *domni* of Delhi. Great noblemen long to meet her and consider going to her house cause for boasting. Nurbai's house is bejewelled and highly decorated, like a grand court. . . Usually she rides by elephant and a protective contingent of servants and heralds surrounds her.



Wherever she goes she is welcomed with precious jewels, and she carries countless wealth on her. And the regard of the noblemen is such that when they give her an invitation, they send expensive presents beforehand, and when she leaves they also send a pile of money with her. To this day, whoever was intimate with Nurbai has become a great ruined fool. . .

Notwithstanding her cruelty she is beautiful, bold and magical of tongue. She is thoroughly acquainted with party etiquette, is highly intelligent, quick, discerning and pleasing of speech. Her conversation is brimful of eloquence and rhetoric. And she uses idioms in so correct a manner as even writers do not. . .

And it is amazing that Nurbai is also an expert in music; she is very adept at singing *jangla*. Whenever she goes anywhere to sing, she takes a few women with her whom she calls Begum, Khanum and Gera. . .[113]

It is told that Nadir Shah was so enchanted by her musical powers and her ode in his honour, that he wanted to take her to Persia. "It was with the greatest difficulty that she could save herself from this last mark of his favour."[114] Nadir Shah, however, took piles of cash and jewels with him, and, above all, the precious Peacock Throne, thus imparting one more death-blow to an already exhausted Mughal Empire.

In the paintings of the 18th century, *kanchanis* are a recurrent theme.[83] Obviously, they played an important role in the monotonous and boring existence



of queens, princesses and other royal ladies, who "pass their time in their rooms, each with her own set of musicians." The ladies of the *zenana* (women's quarter) are often depicted listening to girls playing *vina, tambura* or *rabab;* later, in the 18th century, they are entertained by courtesans who sing or dance, and are accompanied by female sarangi players and drummers.[84, 85] The sarangi being an instrument which, according to written and oral history, is played exclusively by men, it is somewhat surprising to find a good number of female sarangi players in the paintings. However, Mrs. Meer Hasan Ali (1832) explains that the *domnis,* "who are the singers and dancers admitted within the pale of *zeenahnah* life... are women of good character, and their songs are of the most chaste description, chiefly in the Hindoostaunie tongue. They are instructed in Native music and play on the instruments in common use with some taste,—as the *saattarah* (guitar), with three wire strings; the *surringhee* (rude-shaped violin); the *dhome* or *dholle* (drum), in many varieties, beaten with the fingers, never with sticks."[115]

## 4.10 *Nautch*

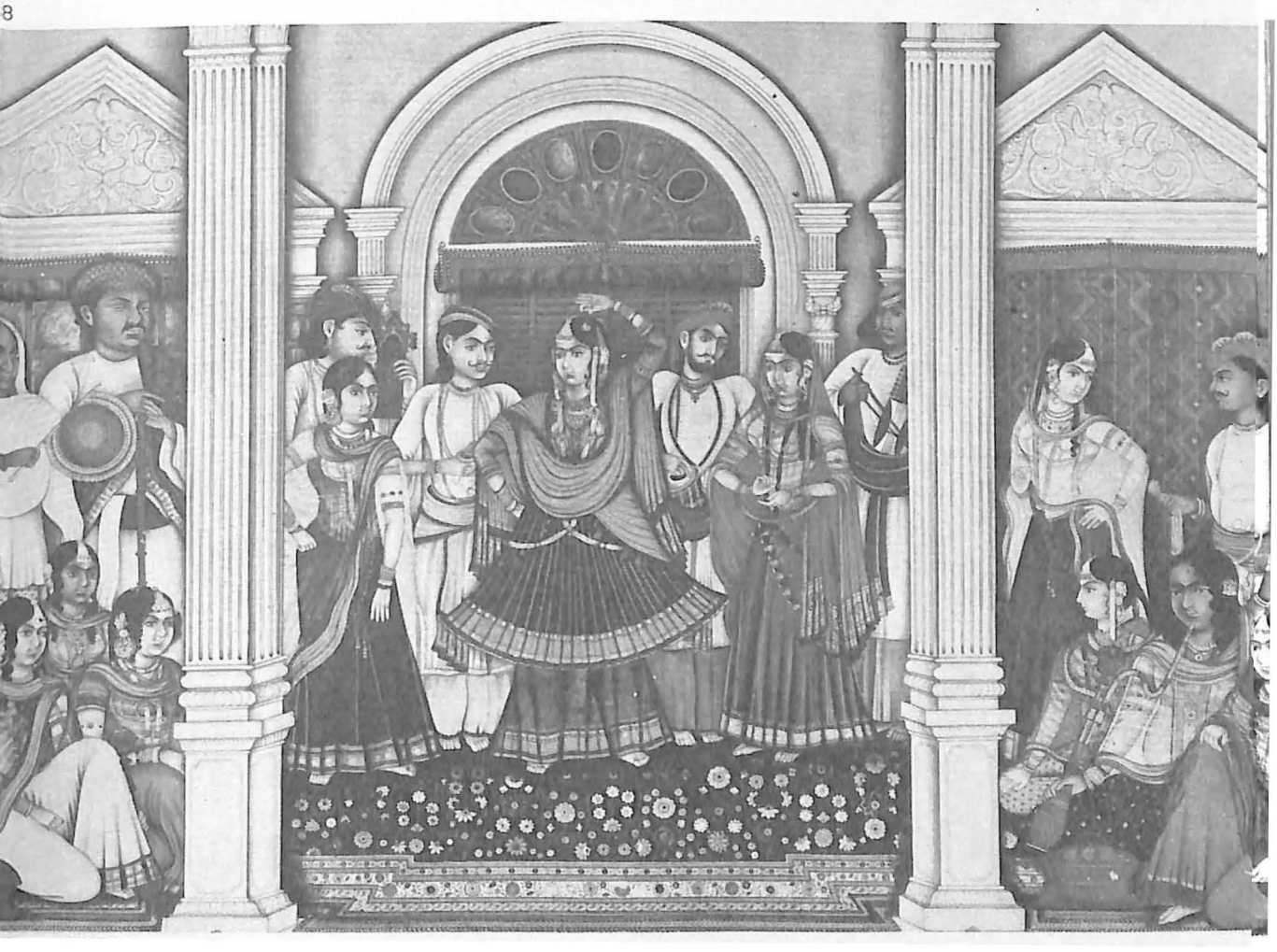
It is not so surprising that courtesans, being the main performers at public festivals and private parties of the wealthy Indians, attracted the attention of Europeans. "When a black man has a mind to compliment an European, he treats him with a *notch...",* wrote Jemima Kindersley (in 1767) in one of her *Letters from the East Indies.* She explains that "the favorite and most constant amusement



of the great, both Mahomedans and Hindoos, and indeed all ranks of people, is called a *notch;* which is the performance of the dancing girls: every man who can afford it has at least one set of dancing girls, who make part of his *Zanannah."* Jemima Kindersley was the wife of a lieutenant colonel of the Bengal Artillery. She continues to describe a 'nautch', as it was called by the Europeans in India.

> A large room is lighted up; at one end sit the great people who are to be entertained; at the other are the dancers and their attendants; one of the girls who are to dance comes forward, for... seldom more than one of them dance at a time; the performance consists chiefly in a continual removing [of] the shawl, first over the head, then off again; extending first one hand, then the other; the feet are likewise moved, though a yard of ground would be sufficient for the whole performance. But it is their languishing glances, wanton smiles, and attitudes not quite consistent with decency, which are so much admired; and whoever excels most in these is the finest dancer.
>
> The girl sings, while she is dancing, some Persian or Hindostan song; some of them are really pleasing to the ear, but are almost entirely drowned by the accompaniments: several black fellows stand behind, who likewise sing with all the strength of voice they are masters of, making, at the same time, the most ridiculous grimaces; some of them playing upon a *sitar,* which is something like a guitar, but greatly inferior even to that trifling instrument; others on a sort of drum, or tamborin usually called





*tomtom;* but all this, loud as it is, is drowned by those who play with two pieces of bell-metal, which they work between their fingers, and make the same noise as braziers at work upon a large copper.[116]

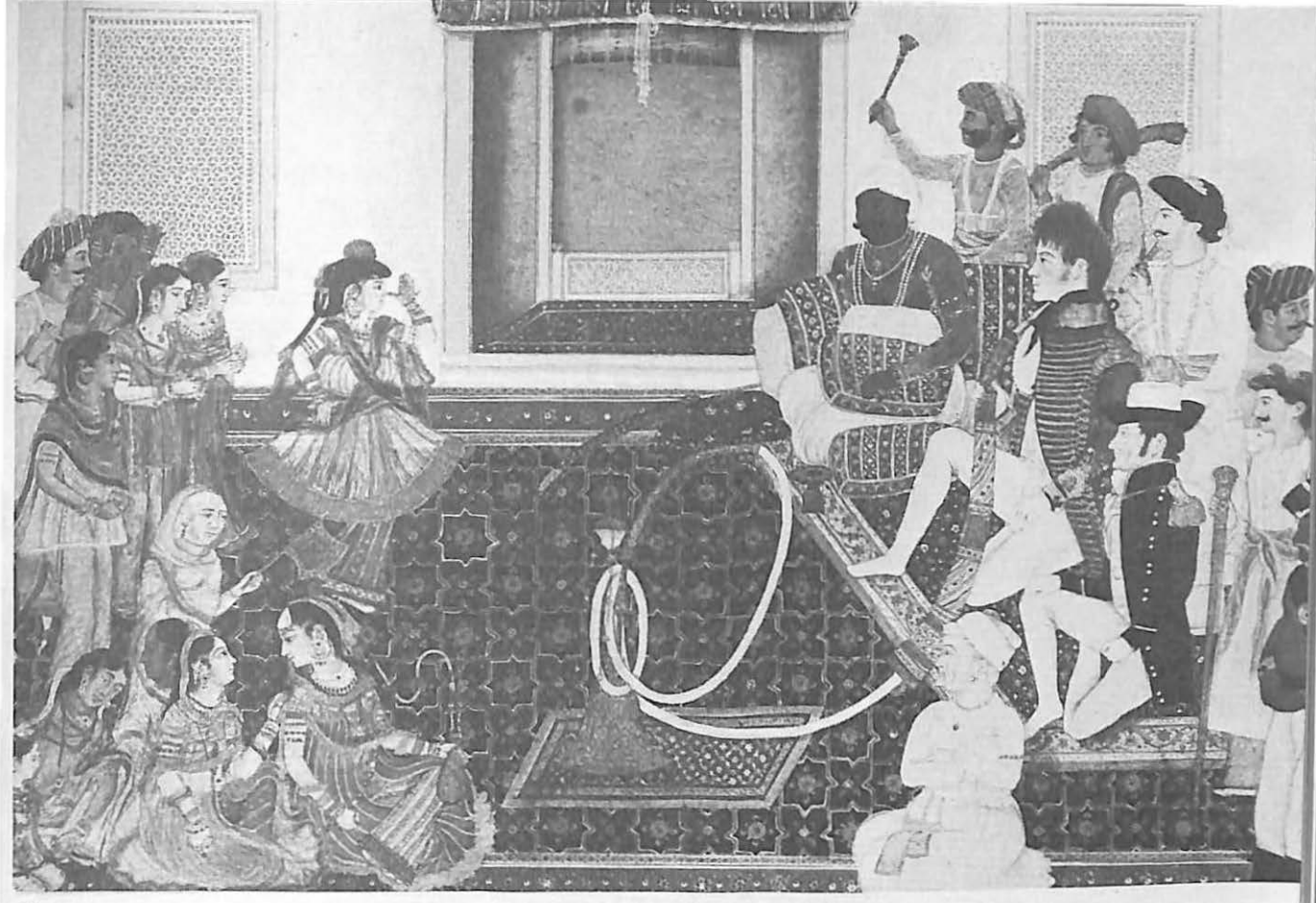
Although Mrs. Kindersley could appreciate some of the songs, the accompaniments annoyed her. Interestingly, she refers to the *sitar,* a "modern instrument" (to quote Captain Willard), which, as several authors confirm, was quite commonly used in the nautch.[117]

Like other European writers (if they noticed the accompaniment at all), James Forbes (1765-82) observed that the dancing girls were "accompanied by musicians, playing on instruments resembling the guitar and violin."[118] Obviously, he was referring to the *rabab* and sarangi; the former instrument figures in one of his sketches depicting dancing girls from Bombay, while a sarangi (or *chikara*) is shown in the hands of a 'native' standing in view of the temple at Alibag on the Konkan coast.[86, 87]

T. D. Broughton (1809) notices that usually, "the principal dancer stands in the middle, and is generally accompanied by an inferior female singer or two, to assist her. The instrumental performers range themselves behind, consisting commonly of a couple of fiddlers; a man who plays upon two drums, called *tubla,* fixed in his girdle; and a boy, who clashes a couple of little brazen cymbals, called *munjeera*. . .[88] When a girl is to dance the *kuharwa,* she ties a sash round her loins, through which she pulls up her gown; puts another across her shoulders, and a man's turban upon her head; and in this dress, unless she is naturally very pretty, she looks worse than before; though to a fine animated countenance it gives a certain spirited and roguish air, which seldom fails to attract a due degree of admiration. In this favourite dance the most indecent gestures are used, meant to raise admiration and desire; but which, in uninitiated English bosoms, seldom excite any thing but disgust. Such attractions has it nevertheless, that it is always called for; and young and old, great and small, Europeans as well as natives, look forward to the *kuharwa* with anxiety; and sit for hours to witness its performance."[119] Broughton records his experiences in the camp of Daulat Rao Sindhia, the adopted son of Mahadaji Sindhia (d. 1794) who is portrayed in a painting, entertaining two English officers to a nautch.[89] The main performer appears to dance the *kaharwa,* and is accompanied by several female singers, two sarangiyas, a *tabla* player and a musician who presumably plays the *manjira.*

When large numbers of young English officers and servants of the East India Company started migrating to India in the 18th century, the nautch became very popular among white men.[90, 92] Dancing girls must have realized that these lonely individuals, in search of excitement and female company, were a new source of income, because:

> . . . between the years 1778 and 1785, it is certain, that the prime sets of dancing girls quitted the cities, and repaired to the several cantonments, where they met the most liberal encouragement. Then the celebrated Kaunum was in the zenith of her glory! Those who did not witness the dominion she held over a numerous train of abject followers, would never credit, that a haughty, ugly, filthy, black woman [sic], could, solely by the grace of her motions, and the novelty of some Cashmerian airs, hold in complete subjection, and render absolutely tributary, many scores of



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> fine young British officers! ...This diversion is now nearly obsolete among Europeans; a circumstance by no means discreditable, nor to be regretted.[120]

Whether Captain T. Williamson's concluding remarks, written in 1813, were wishful thinking or not, we do not know. However, most European tourists in India found something to say about the nautch. Often their descriptions are not entertaining but repetitive. Most of them talk about the costumes of the dancers and are dazzled by the jewellery. [91] "The dancing is very slow and very dull, but the dresses and ornaments are beautiful", writes Emily Eden (1838), the sister of the Governor-General, Lord Auckland.[121] Watching a nautch at the mansion of Colonel Skinner, the famous and hospitable 'Sikandar Sahib' of mixed blood, she remarks: "His house is fitted up in the native fashion, and he had all the best singers and dancers in Delhi, and they... sang Persian songs which I thought made a very ugly noise; but Mr. B., who speaks Persian as fluently as English, kept saying, 'Well, this is really delightful—this I think is equal to any European singing—in fact, there is nothing like it'." A romantic soul like Mrs. Belnos (1832) fancied herself "transported to some enchanted region", portraying the nautch as a fairytale. [93] Others, like Mrs. Fenton (1826-30), who "had a violent curiosity to see a nautch", were very disappointed and "could not even laugh at it. I drove home cured for ever of all curiosity respecting native entertainments."[122]

More persistent and inquisitive, however, was Captain Robert Smith, who observed several nautches, trying to understand what it was all about:

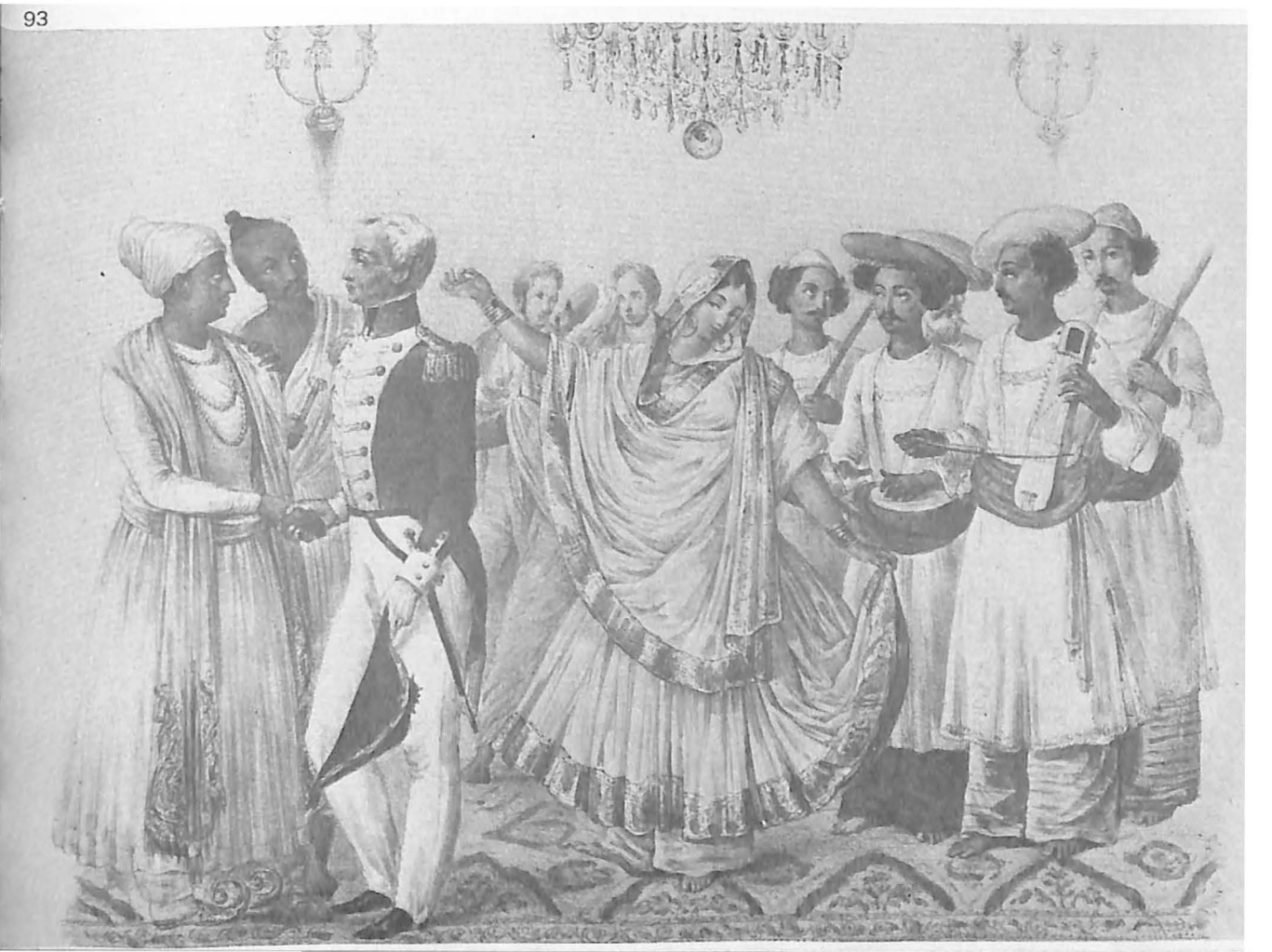
> At another nautch that I was afterward at, given by Mr. G. who was married to a native lady of high rank, in fact one of the royal family of Delhi, the performer in reciting her story shed tears, and the *musalchee* to convince us they were real bona fide tears that were rolling down her cheeks held the torch close to her face. This lady was quite a celebrated singer or actress, and though no beauty, I was informed had received large presents of jewels etc. ...
>
> It is difficult to convey to the English reader a proper idea of these performances, the accounts of scarcely any two travellers agreeing, some describing them as immodest dances, others as exhibitions of singing only; this discrepancy may be accounted for, in some measure, from the fact that the higher class of nautch girls only act and sing, accompanying the action by a sort of recitative, suiting their expressions and gestures to the subject, as fear, hope, love, jealousy etc. with a grace and elegance and earnestness of manner that cannot fail to rivet the attention... Others again of these nautch girls accompany the recitation with slow and graceful movements, beating time with their feet on which little silver bells are hung, to the music of the *saringee* and *sitar*. Another class which may be called the strolling nautch girls, are generally more active in their movements, often cutting many strange capers, but always endeavouring to suit the performance to the taste of the audience; but for my part I have never seen, and I have been at many of these exhibitions both of the highest and lowest orders, anything like what has been attributed to these performances by some writers...[123]

The opinion expressed by Robert Smith (who travelled in India between 1828-33) is quite characteristic of what an objective, educated Englishman thought about the nautch. Although he grew tired of the monotonous strains, he had no doubt that, to those who understood the language, it was "as interesting as any exhibition of that kind could be." He did make a sincere effort to distinguish between different classes of nautch girls, but he did not really care to understand their art.

"To be convinced that foreign music, such as we have not been accustomed to, is always repugnant to our taste, till habit reconcile us to it," remarks the learned Captain N. A. Willard (1834), "we need only refer to the sentiments of the several travellers who have recorded their particular feelings on hearing the music of nations with whom they have had but little intercourse. . . It should be a question likewise whether they have witnessed the performance of those who were reputed to excel in so difficult a practice."[124] Similarly, Solvyns notes that the original Hindu dance had "nothing in common with that which is performed all over India, by women known by the name of *Bayaderes, Baladeres* or *Bays;* a description of which is found in the works of many travellers."[125][vi]

He makes a distinction between ordinary *bais* (or *bayadères,* a corruption of the Portuguese word *baylhadeira*) and accomplished 'ramjannys' (*ramjanis*), who were originally Hindu court dancers. Dr. F. Buchanan, writing about the district of Bhagalpur in 1810-11, mentions that the common Muslim dancing girls were called *bai,* and their Hindu sisters 'rumzani' (*ramjani*). "These happen to be the





best in the district." 'Kheloni' (*khelni*) were also Hindu artists but "exceedingly bad dancers and singers", whereas *mirasis* were "a kind of dancing and musical girls who perform before Muhammedan women of rank."[126]

Generally, European travel accounts give very little information about the performers and the art itself. Mention is made of "the celebrated Nickee, of Calcutta,... the Catalani of Hindostan...[who] received 1,000 rupees (£ 100) nightly, wherever she [was] engaged", or Alfina of Delhi who, "like Calypso among her maidens, greatly excelled her fellows in stature, beauty and grace."[127] A few writers mention the sprightly *kaharwa* and Colonel James Tod (1820) speaks about the Punjabi *tappa*.

> Under the arcade of this pavilion, amidst a thousand welcomes, thundering of cannon, trumpets, and all sorts of sounds, we took our seats; and scarcely had congratulations passed and the area was cleared of our escorts, when, to the sound of the tabor and *sarangi,* the sweet notes of a Panjabi *tappa* saluted our ears. There is a plaintive simplicity in this music, which denotes originality, and even without a knowledge of the language, conveys a sentiment of the most fastidious, when warbled in the impassioned manner which some of these syrens possess. While the Mahratta delights in the dissonant *dhurpad,* which requires a rapidity of utterance quite surprising, the Rajput reposes in his *tappa,* which, conjoined with his opium, creates a paradise. [128]

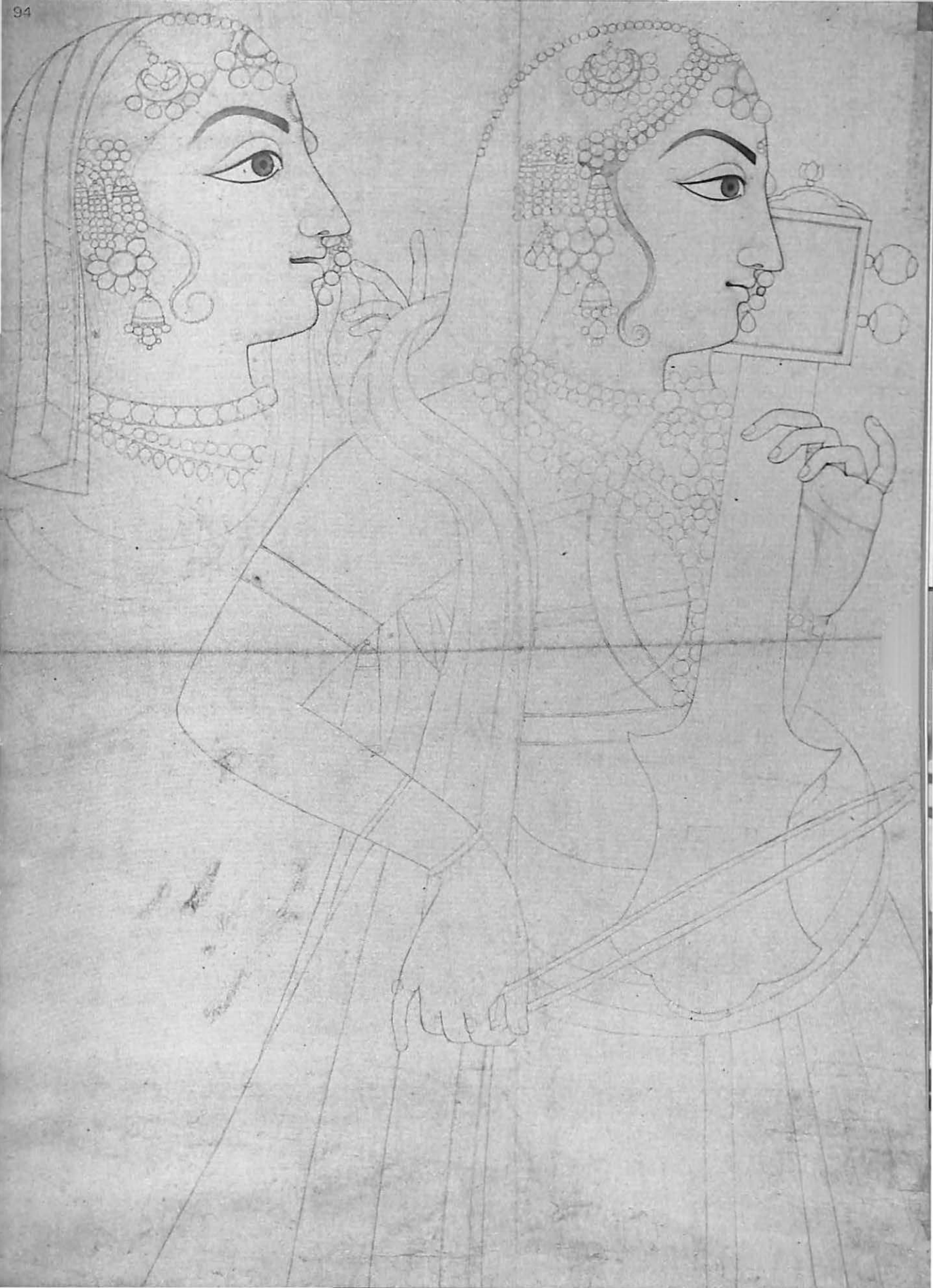
Most European authors, however, seem to be unaware that Rajputana, and later Oudh (Avadh), became major centres for the performing arts in the 18th century. In Jaipur, under the influence of Maharaja Sawai Pratap Singh (1778-1803), several important treatises on music were composed. The *Radha Govind Sangitsar,* compiled by four scholars after a musical conference, says that in the local language the *ravanahasta* was known as sarangi, and had three or four strings of gut.[129] It figures in many 18th century Rajasthani paintings and is often played by female musicians.[94]

The department of musicians and dancers (*gunijankhana*) of Ram Singh II (1835-80) was known all over India and housed 58 *kalanots* (*kalavants,* i.e. vocalists, *binkars* and *sitar* players), 44 women singers and dancers, 17 *pakhawaj* players, 21 sarangi players, 4 *kathaks* (dancers), 6 *rasdharis* (*ras lila* actors) and 6 *kartalis* (*kartal* players). Famous court musicians included Rajab Ali Khan Binkar (the guru of Ram Singh II), Bahram Khan, Karamat Ali Khan, Mubarak Ali Khan, Gage Khuda Bakhsh, Mohammad Ali Khan, Inayat Hussain Khan, and the great *sitar* players Amrit Sen and Amir Khan. The sarangi player Miyan Kalu Khan of Patiala was also attached to this court.[130]

### 4.11 *Fairies and fiddlers*

We have seen that, by the end of Mohammad Shah's rule, the Mughal Empire had crumbled, and that Delhi had lost its former glory. Courtesans, musicians and poets abandoned Delhi in favour of cities like Faizabad (later Lucknow), Banaras, Rohilkhand (later Rampur), Jaipur, Indore and so on. Quoting an eyewitness, Abdul Halim Sharar writes about Faizabad at the time of Shuja-ud-Daulah (1753-74):

> The entire population of Shahjahanabad seemed to be making preparations to move there. Most of the eminent people of Delhi bade farewell to their

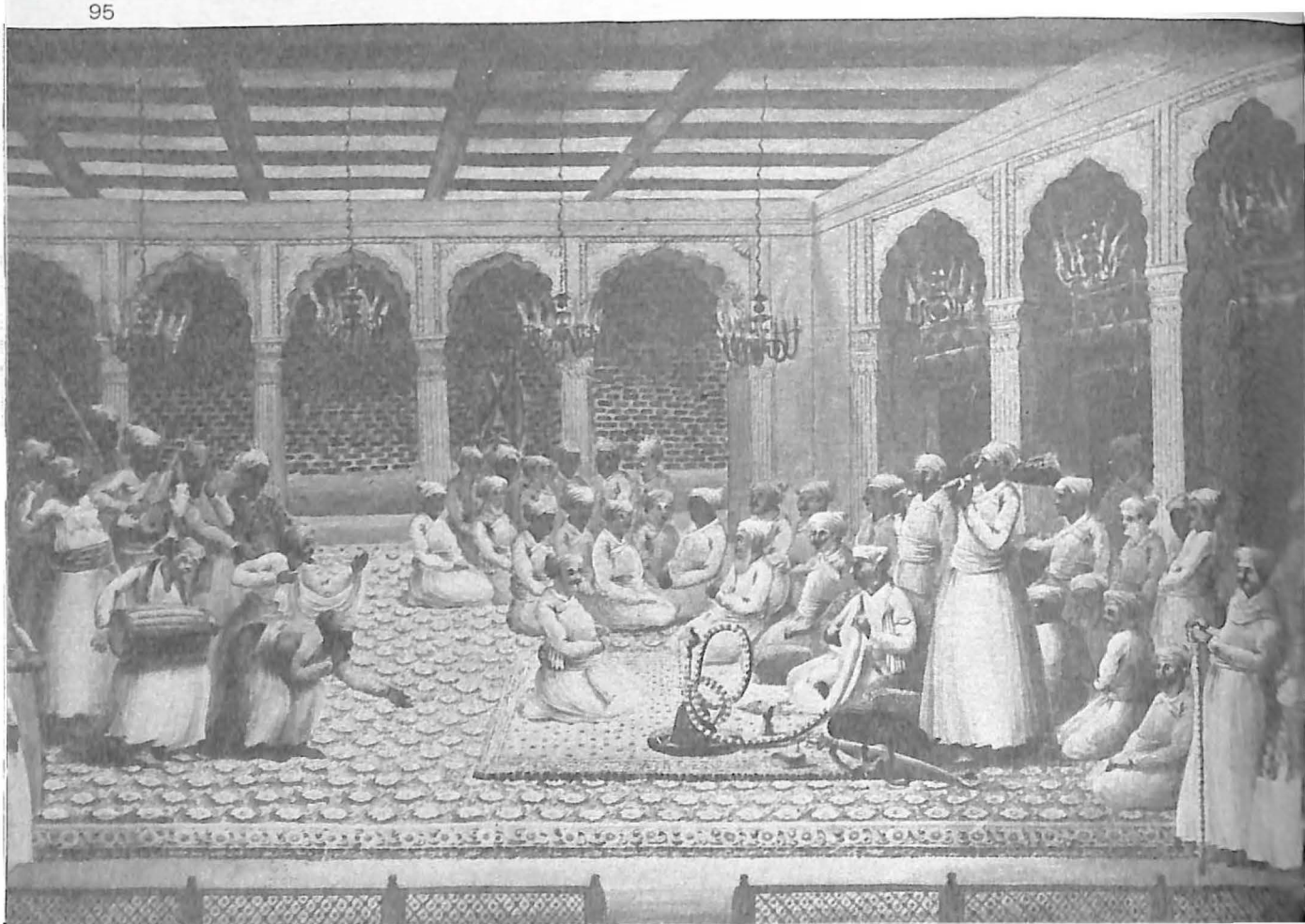


domiciles and turned towards the east. Night and day people kept coming and caravan after caravan arrived to stay and become absorbed into the environs of Faizabad. In no time persons of every race and creed, literary men, soldiers, merchants, craftsmen, individuals of every rank and class had gathered there. . .

A town of grandeur and dignity met the eye. In it fashionably dressed persons from Delhi, elegant sons of noblemen, skilled hakims, well-known troupes of men and women dancers and eminent singers from far and wide were employed by the administration, drew very large salaries and lived a carefree life of luxury. The pockets of high and low were filled with rupees and gold coins and it appeared as if no one had ever known poverty and want. The Navab Vazir Shuja-ud-Daulah was constantly engaged in promoting the prosperity and splendour of the town and its people. It appeared that in a very short time Faizabad would claim to be on a par with Delhi. . .

Such was Navab Shuja-ud-Daulah's achievement in Faizabad after a residence of only nine years, and during this time he honoured the town with his presence only for the four months of the yearly rainy season. He spent the rest of the year touring his realm, amusing himself and hunting. He was by nature attracted to beautiful women and was fond of dancing and singing. For this reason there was such a multitude of bazaar beauties and dancers in the town that no lane or alley was without them. Because of the Navab's rewards and favours they were in such easy





circumstances and so wealthy that most of the courtesans had fixed abodes with two or three sumptuous tents attached to them.[131]

Mohammad Karam Imam lists an impressive number of well-known musicians in his *Ma'dan-ul Mousiqui* (1856), which makes it one of the most fascinating works on music. He notes that the famous *qawwali* singers, Miyan Jani and Ghulam Rasul (who in 1739 were residing in Delhi), had become court musicians of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah (1775-97). And concerning the renowned *dhrupad* singers and *binkars,* Amir Khan and Rahim Khan, he says: "They belonged to Delhi originally but went to Faizabad at the time of Nawab Shuja-ud-Daulah and then shifted to Lucknow in the days of Nawab Asaf-ud-Daulah."[132][95]

Imam also remarks that according to the great Haddu Khan, Bi Rehmanbai of Charkhari sang better than any male singer of the age. ("In fact, I have never heard any ustad who could equal her," he adds.) And describing various sarangi players, Imam notes that Jatan Kathak of Banaras became famous for accompanying Bi Rehmanbai. "He reproduces on the sarangi whatever she sings. The reason for this achievement is that all his life he has accompanied and learnt from Babu Ram Sahai and Bi Rehmanbai."[133]

Babu Ram Sahai, a non-professional musician from Allahabad, was an "outstanding exponent as well as teacher of *hori, dhrupad, khayal* and *tappa*". The sarangi player Mohammad Ali of Banda was also his disciple in *tappa* singing, whereas Khwaja Bakhsh Dhari, a disciple of the great Amir Khan Binkar, was (according to Imam) deft in fingering and had a grasp over *raga*. It is obvious that, on account of their association with great ustads and female singers, talented sarangi players were recognized as masters themselves. Some of them, such as Kallu Dhannu Dhari of Banaras, who (in the words of Imam) "plays sarangi and sings *khayal* very well", were also known as good singers.[134]

Other well-known sarangi players were Ali Bakhsh Dhari of Delhi, Ḥassan Bakhsh Dhari of Lucknow, his disciple Himmat Khan Kalawant of Bundelkhand and Sabit Ali Dhari of Gwalior. Zahur Khan Kalawant of Banda and Hassan Khan Dhari of Lucknow were noted for playing the *dhun*. . . "Besides these, there are thousands of others", writes Imam.[135][96]

The sarangi flourished. It had become the most prevalent Indian stringed instrument, was "found from Cape Comorin to Kashmir and [formed] an indispensable item at every dancing or theatrical performance."[136] Captain C. R. Day (1891) adds that the southern nautch ensembles usually consisted of two sarangis or 'English fiddles', one *mridanga* or *tabla,* one *shruti* (drone) and one *tala* or *jalra* (pair of cymbals). A similar configuration of instruments was used in the north, but the *shruti* was often replaced by a *tambura*. [97] "The use of the sarangi in Southern India—except in conjunction with nautches—is rapidly being discontinued, and an English fiddle tuned as a *vina* or sarangi is often substituted for it. Farther north the instrument appears likely to hold its place for a long time to come," writes Day, who also speaks about the 'southern sarangi', showing a small box-shaped instrument which, in fact, was used all over India.[137] Naturally, Day and all those writers who paraphrased him, were mistaken. Together with the female singers and dancers, the sarangi had migrated to the south, where it must have been quite popular during the last century.[98] This is corroborated by occasional references to well-known southern sarangi players, such as Devidas,

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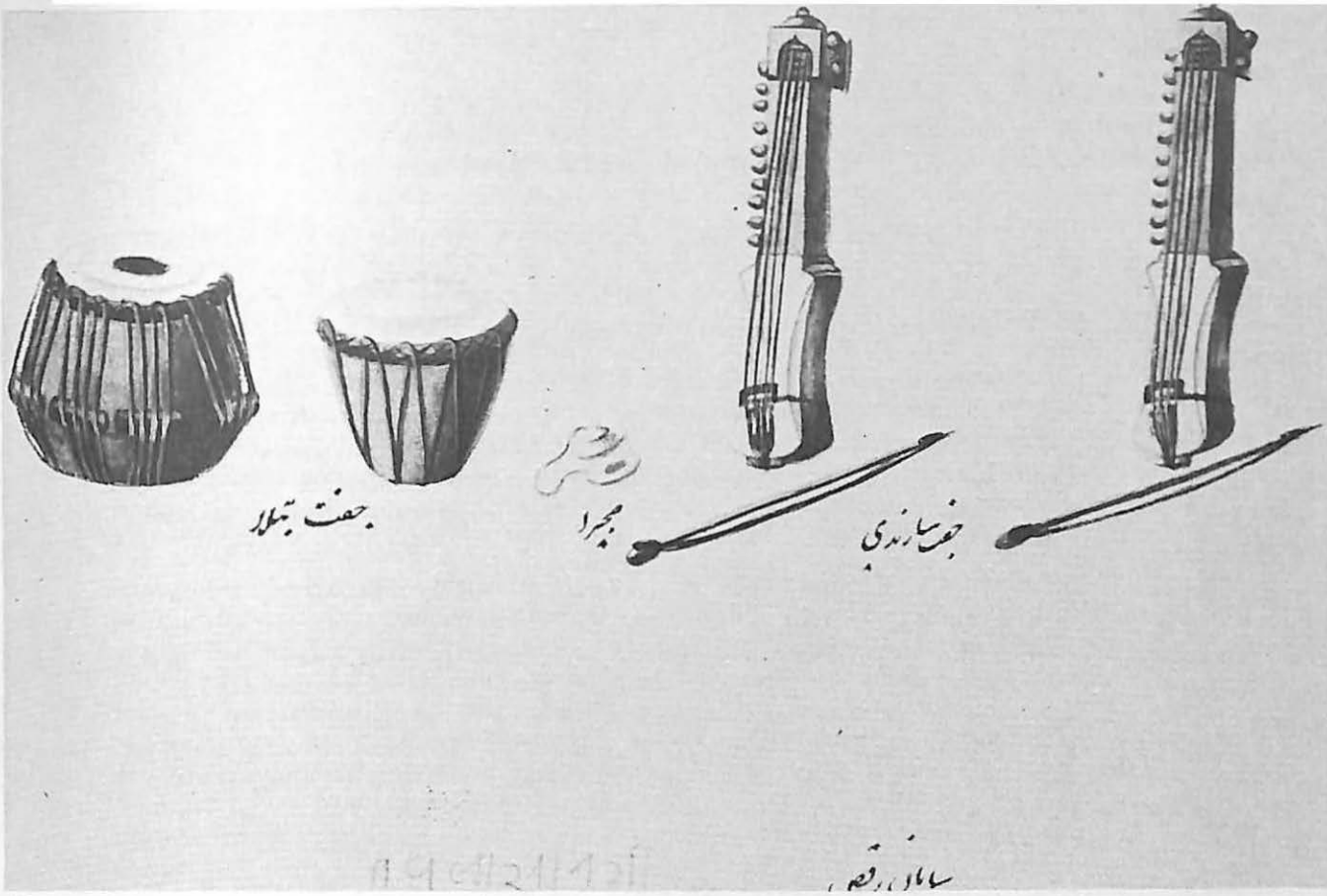


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who was in the service of the Peshwa Baji Rao II (1796-1818), and Sarangi Chintamani and Sarangi Viraswami Nayak, who are mentioned by B. Trimbak Sahasrabudhe (1887) in his list of the principal musicians of the south.[138]

Imam completed the *Ma'dan-ul Mousiqui* at the time of Wajid Ali Shah, when *ghazal* and *thumri* were the fashion of the day; when *kathak* prospered as never before, [99] and the *sitar* had become recognized as a major solo instrument. Sharar, quoting an expert, writes:

> There was much talk of music at the time of Wajid Ali Shah, but the art had fallen from favour and only the commonplace aspects were in vogue. In Lucknow, Kadar Piya composed *thumris*, which became popular with the masses with the result that music was cheapened. Most music-lovers lost interest in the classical forms of *ragas* and *raginis* and began to enjoy Kadar Piya's *thumris* . . .
>
> But whilst little interest was taken in pure classical music, expert musicians were much esteemed at the royal court. The reason was that Wajid Ali Shah had been taught the science of music by Basit Khan and had a very good understanding of it. Being highly talented, the King had evolved new *raginis* to his own liking . . . Wajid Ali Shah was a master at the art and possessed the knowledge of an expert but he cannot escape the criticism that it was his conventional and cheap tastes that made the music of Lucknow frivolous and easily understandable by all. In accordance with popular tastes even the most discriminating singers omitted difficult techniques and based their music on light, simple and attractive tunes which could be appreciated by everyone.[139]

Literature and the lighter performing arts blossomed but it was a time of decadence as well. "An idea came to my mind that I should admit in my harem as many dancing girls as possible", writes the king himself.[140] All that mattered to him were his women and his arts. For this purpose, he established a special institution, the Parikhana (literally Fairy-house) where more than a hundred beautiful girls were instructed in the arts of music and dance. "He would fall in love with female palanquin-bearers, courtesans, domestic servants and women who came in and out of the palace, in short with hundreds of women, and because he was heir to the throne, he had great success with his love-affairs, the shameful accounts of which can be read in his poems, writings and books. His character, therefore, appears to be one of the most dubious in all the records of history," writes Sharar, while Imam observes that "the Sultan of Lucknow also began his reign well. But slowly he lost himself to wine . . . The kingdom disintegrated. Artists who lived on the patronage of the Nawab were thrown into the welter of despair and the foreigners who were waiting for an opportunity took away everything."[141]

The Resident at the court of Lucknow, Sir W. H. Sleeman, greatly disapproved of the behaviour of the king. Credited as one of the most reliable and compassionate English writers on India, he has been praised as a man with "great sympathy for the Indians and their culture . . . there is not even a hint of contempt for anybody."[142] This is hard to believe when we read the following passages in his correspondence and book, *A Journey through the Kingdom of Oude in 1849-1850.*

He [Wajid Ali Shah] spends all his time with the singers and the females they provide to amuse him, and is for seven and eight hours together living in the house of the chief singer, Rajee-od Dowla—a fellow who was only lately beating a drum to a party of dancing-girls, on some four rupees a-month. These singers are all Domes, the lowest of the low castes of India, and they and the eunuchs are now the virtual sovereigns of the country . . . No member of the royal family or aristocracy of Oude is ever admitted to speak to or see his Majesty, and these contemptible singers are admitted to more equality and familiarity than his own brothers or sons ever were; they go out, too, with greater pomp than they or any of the royal family can; and are ordered to be received with more honours as they pass through the different palaces. The profligacy that exists within the palace passes all belief, and these things excite more disgust among the aristocracy of the capital than all the misrule and malversation that arise from the King's apathy and incapacity . . .[143]

The most powerful favourites were two eunuchs, two fiddlers, two poetasters, and the Minister and his creatures. The Minister could not stand a moment without the eunuchs, fiddlers and poets, and he is obliged to acquiesce in all the orders given by the King of their benefit. The fiddlers have the control over administration of civil justice; the eunuchs over that of criminal justice, public buildings, etc. The Minister has the land revenue; and all are making enormous fortunes.[144]



According to Sleeman, the king "has become utterly despised and detested by his people for his apathy amidst so much suffering, and will not have the sympathy of any one . . ."[145] Whether this was true or not, historians may decide. It is certain, however, that Wajid Ali Shah will be remembered as the last great advocate of the fine arts; a man with an extremely sensitive nature who was a good writer, singer, composer and a fine dancer. Artists were treated with respect and honoured. In Imam's words: "I had occasion to hear thousands of artists. Nawab Wajid Ali Shah's great patronage to art afforded a unique opportunity to a vast number of artists, especially musicians, to gather in Lucknow. The patronage extended to artists by the Nawab was so great that even *dharis* were raised to the position of nobles."[146] Indeed, even accomplished 'fiddlers' were revered for their art, irrespective of their social status. "There is an anecdote of a rajah", writes N. A. Willard, "who in token of his approbation presented a favourite player with a silver *sarungee*, on which he was to perform before him."[147]

The contrasting opinions of English and Indian writers about 'fairies and fiddlers'—courtesans and sarangi players—are not easy to reconcile. Women artists are often portrayed by the English as "prostitutes who usually sing songs of the most lascivious character, accompanied by gestures and movements of the body having an obscene meaning,"[148] and musicians are described as "the lowest of the low" (W. H. Sleeman), or, as Captain Thomas Skinner (1832) puts it, "a debauched looking set of fellows, who beat the tom-tom and play on the most common Hindoo viol. They stand in a row behind the dancers and, not content with their instrumental noise, vociferate with all their might in concert with it."[149][100, 101] There is no regard

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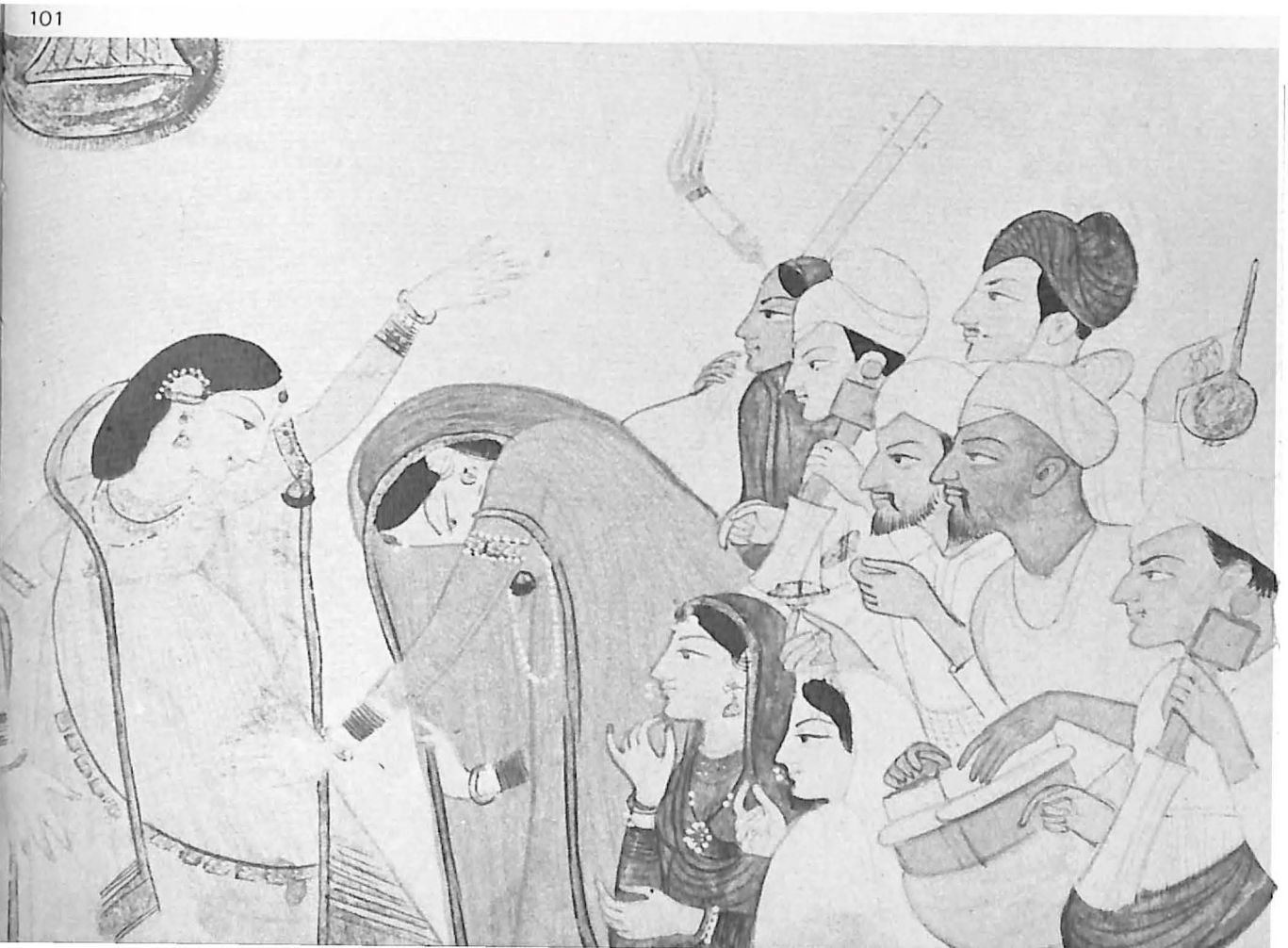

whatsoever for their artistic qualities, nor do the British (Willard and a few others excepted) make a distinction between renowned ustads or highly refined women singers and vulgar musicians or harlots who were not even allowed to settle in Lucknow's Chowk. In this respect, esteemed and oft-cited ethnographers hardly improved on the views of their predecessors. Indifferent to the art of courtesans and musicians, they bluntly portray them as 'prostitutes and pimps'.[150] That high-class courtesans, the so-called *deredar tawaifs,* were often extremely modest and dedicated artists, is clear from the following description by Mirza Jaffar Hussain:

> They were outstanding artists. Many of them were superb dancers and singers. They were suited for harem life. They possessed enviable manners, etiquette and politeness . . . Usually a *tawaif* remained attached to one noble for life or spent her life in the service of two or three nobles, not simultaneously but one after the other. However, she usually maintained friendly relations with a number of *rais-es.*
>
> These courtesans did not normally appear in public. The nobility and gentry themselves visited them. However, sometimes they went to see friendly nobles on their own or on request. In the noble's *darbar,* there would be free and unreserved exchange of views which usually concerned prose, poetry and humour. The courtesan attended such *darbars* with her face fully covered.
>
> They considered it necessary to maintain the traditional culture of Lucknow. Their good manners were not assumed but had become imbibed in their life. In fact, the whole atmosphere of their house appeared pure and clean. The nobility and gentry used to send their sons to them to learn culture and etiquette.[151]

Mirza Mohammad Hadi Ruswa draws a similar picture in his famous Urdu novel, *Umraojan Ada,* and, like the former author, he seems to have had an intimate knowledge of the world of courtesans.[152] It is a fabulous work, unfolding the life story of a reputed singer, and drawing attention to the vital role of these women in an urban culture. But despite the efforts of various writers, the truth remained veiled.

### 4.12 *Decline*

After Oudh was annexed in 1856 and Wajid Ali Shah was deported to Calcutta, "the foreigners . . . took away everything", including the dignity of Indian artists. "The musicians who accompany regular nach players, are always Mussulmans of the caste of Mir or Mirasi . . . and are called 'Dom'; this term is not however considered complimentary, and would be a positive insult if addressed to any one else". Professional musicians, continues B. H. Baden Powell (1872), "are looked on with a sort of contempt, like surgeons."[153] To illustrate this, the son of the late Abdul Majid Khan told me the following anecdote about his grandfather, a sarangi player who died in 1917.

> Once, while Abdullah Khan was being shaved, he started humming a song. The village barber asked him: "Are you a musician?" Innocently he replied: "Yes, I am". Upon which the barber refused to complete the job and left him half-shaved. It was not easy to find another barber who was willing to trim the other side of his beard.

Slowly courtesans and sarangi players began losing their prestige and their place in society and culture. New elite groups started preaching Victorian morals and the social purity and anti-nautch movements finally succeeded in impressing upon upper-class Indians that watching nautches was a vice. "There were times when it seemed a lost cause. The reformers ventured an approach to Lord Curzon, who was well known for his stern views on the moral conduct required of the ruling race. But his reply was cold. Like other high personages he professed his unconcern: 'The Viceroy is not himself interested in these performances; but he hardly thinks the matter is one upon which he is called upon to make any pronouncement or to take any action.' But the reformers won a victory in 1905. Another Prince of Wales was to visit Madras with his Princess. The executive committee appointed to administer the fund collected for their reception unanimously decided against a nautch."[154] In the twenties, various bills to abolish prostitution were presented to the Indian legislature. It is said that on one such occasion, a protest meeting was organised in the house of the famous sisters, Nanhua and Bachua, the *chaudharains* heading the *tawaifs* of Lucknow, who were disciples of the legendary *kathak* dancer, Bindadin.[155]

As the number of women singers decreased, sarangi players also began losing their jobs as accompanists and teachers. Yet it proved to be impossible to completely abolish the institution of courtesans, and during the first half of this century, quite a few sarangi players started their professional careers in the *kothas* where the girls entertained their customers.[102] Mohammad Jan, the prototype of an old sarangi player, was one of them. Let us hear what he has to say about the last days of the *tawaif:*

> When I was quite young, I began playing with professional songstresses . . . I travelled a lot with Fakurunnissa and we performed in Karachi, Peshawar, Bombay, Calcutta, Baroda and Ahmedabad. We visited Junagadh, Kathiawar, Bhavnagar, Gondol and many other small princely states where the rajas were great lovers of art. We also went to Gwalior to celebrate the coronation ceremony of the Maharaja. Many *tawaifs* and ustads were invited for that occasion. Fakurunnissa was very beautiful and a good singer. She was my pupil, and I played with her for almost twelve years. After the partition in 1947, she went to Pakistan.
>
> Chammubai, who became known as Shamshad Begum, performed frequently on the radio. She was another excellent singer whom I often accompanied. Shamshad Begum was a famous figure in Delhi, and the head of many *tawaifs*. She learned music from Hidayat Hussain, my uncle, and I also taught her. After marrying a rich man, she left the profession. Shamshad Begum is still alive today.
>
> Fakurunnissa and Chammubai had a wide repertoire. They could sing *khayal, thumri, tappa, tarana, dadra, ghazal* and *khamsa. Khamsa,* which consists of four lines or couplets, was once very popular, but is forgotten nowadays. The music and poetry which the *tawaifs* sang was very good, classical. Now their music has become cheap, filmy. Even if they were still to sing classical songs or recite high-class verses, who would there be to understand and appreciate them?
>
> *Baijis* learned mainly from sarangi players. I would visit their houses three or four times a week, in the morning. Other musicians went daily to practise

with them. If they were rich and wished to expand their knowledge, they would spend a lot of money to receive training from different masters, most often reputable artists who came to their homes to teach them. Even Acchan Maharaj, the great *kathak* guru, taught dance to *baijis*. Hirabaiji, a famous and wealthy *tawaif* of the *rais-es*, learned *abhinaya* from Krishna Maharaj, and all the great exponents of *kathak* frequently visited her house in Kanpur. She wore large earrings and a necklace with big diamonds and emeralds. Hirabaiji was such a good performer that she could make people cry . . . There were many other accomplished women singers, but after the fifties, their prosperity started declining.

Performances of these professional songstresses were known as *mujras*. The customers were always received in a special room. Sometimes there was only one visitor, but at other times there were as many as ten. The visitors would usually ask to hear a particular song. The girl would then stand up and please her client. Although they wore *ghunghrus*, in general they did not dance very much.

The audience consisted only of men, and then, only those who could offer a certain amount of money, depending on how pleased they were. Some gave one hundred rupees, others fifty or twenty-five. The rate for the musicians, two sarangi players and one *tabla* player, was fixed at 37.5%, which they divided among themselves. It was common for the sarangi player to be rewarded with silver coins, which he would slip into a hole in the skin of his instrument!

With Fakurunnissa I went to Rawalpindi to attend a yearly festival, called *Imam-ka-mela*. Thousands of *tawaifs* from all over the country came to this *mela* which lasted a week. In a large tent, at least ten *tawaifs* performed and 'spent time' with their customers . . . behind a curtain. All kinds of people, Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs and Christians came there and spent lavishly. Sometimes a *tawaif* would earn as much as 10,000 rupees! After the people started drinking and fighting, such *melas* were forbidden by the government.[156]

"The end for us began with Gandhiji", says Munirbai of Lucknow. "With freedom. And with the Arya Samaj. The Arya Samajis were always against us. They said we were a corrupting influence and deserved no place in civilized society. In fact, it was largely the Arya Samaj campaign that was responsible for the concerted police drive against the *kothewalis* in Lucknow in December 1958."[157] Munirbai, who is in her nineties, was a student of the great *kathak* maestro Shambhu Maharaj and herself a dancer of repute, when the Chowk was still inhabited by almost 2000 *deredar tawaifs*. She relates how the police action so terrorized the *tawaifs*, that many of them fled the city, whilst others gave up the profession. It marked the end of a Great Tradition, and was the main reason why the sarangi declined so rapidly during this century.

### 4.13 *Rise of the harmonium*

The sarangi received a final death-blow from the harmonium, which was invented by Alexandre F. Debain of Paris in 1840.[158] As soon as it was introduced to India, the harmonium became very popular: first of all in Calcutta, where Dwarkanath Tagore is

said to have remodelled it to suit the requirements of Indian musicians.[159] The author of *Gita Sutra Sar* (1885) and *Harmonium Shiksha* (1899), Krishna Dhan Banerjee, praised the sweet sounds of the harmonium but also observed (according to his commentator), "that, due to [its] artificial notes and the impossibility of playing *mir* [*mind*] . . . Indian music . . . could not . . . be properly played and that as the *rasa* . . . would be altogether destroyed by harmonium, piano etc., it would be immensely unwise to play Hindustani music on these instruments."[160]

The harmonium certainly had many opponents. Rabindranath Tagore was one of them, and Ananda K. Coomaraswamy (1912) writes:

> None can forecast the future of Indian music. At present it is rapidly vanishing before the gramophones, harmoniums and brass bands of modern Western commerce and modern Indian taste. Yet as it still exists, Indian music is the most significant of surviving Indian arts . . .[161]
>
> But, as I think, no harmonium of any kind should ever be regarded as a *substitute* for the *tambura,* because the quality of tone of the *tambura* is so infinitely superior to that of the harmonium . . . above all, the harmonium should never be used as an accompaniment to the voice, leading or imitating note by note.[162]

A. H. Fox Strangways also strongly condemned the harmonium, which, in 1910, had "penetrated already to the remotest parts of India. It dominates the theatre, and desolates the hearth; and before long it will, if it does not already, desecrate the temple. Besides its deadening effect on a living art, it falsifies it by being out of tune with itself. This is a grave defect, though its gravity can be exaggerated; it could also be lessened by a revised tuning."[163] A harmonium tuned in twenty-two *shrutis* was designed and manufactured by H. Keatley Moore of London. With the help of Abdul Karim Khan and other singers, K. B. Deval and E. Clements used it for their scientific studies of Indian scales.[164] The *shruti* harmonium could not, however, compete with the ordinary, tempered harmonium, and, to the dismay of Ethel Rosenthal, it was "no longer on the market" in 1928.[165]

Strong criticism of the harmonium could not prevent musicians from liking it. Being a novel, foreign instrument, no social label could be attached to it. More important, it was a handy instrument, easy for the singers themselves to play and master. Not all musicians were in favour of the accompaniment provided by sarangi players and drummers. B. A. Pingle (1894), for instance, was of the opinion that "another cause of deterioration in singing of our day, is the strength of *sath* (band or accompaniment) which is the principal hindrance."

> With the majority of singers we find 2 boys or assistants, 2 big *tanpuras* or *tamboras,* 2 big fiddles [*sarangis*] with as many strings and holes as the instrument can bear and a noisy *pakhavaj* or *tablabaya.* In some performances the above list is greatly swelled . . . It should be borne in mind that the audience like to hear the vocalists as well as the instrumentalists. Singers, in making their headway against so many odds and so much power brought literally to play upon them, are seen opening their mouths and we are led to fancy that they are singing; but, honestly speaking, nothing comes out of their mouths, except the pantomimic action, contortion of the features and above all the most funny and comic expressions of the different phases

> of anthropomorphous animals, the band effectually drowning whatever vocal effect might be intended . . . It is necessary for an artistic performance to have an accompaniment of a few instruments as a support and addition to the voice, but it is also very desirable that the instrumentalists should rest satisfied with their opportunity for displaying their skill without attempting to ruin the voice of their co-operator.[166]

The rivalry between singers and sarangi players, testing each other's mettle, could sometimes become overwhelming. Vocalists, therefore, often preferred the soft accompaniment of a harmonium to the challenge posed by the sarangi. Obviously, Pingle approved of the harmonium, because he writes: "It is, however, to be hoped that further steps in the above directions may be stayed and discouraged. One of the best indications to that effect, is the adoption of European wind-instruments (the only defect in them is that they get out of tune soon) to replace the string-instruments which do not give a long current of sound unless produced by a bow, and that too is not in unity or quality with the voice."[167]

Bhaiya Ganpat Rao (d. 1924) has been credited with the popularization of the harmonium. "In this he was a pioneer. He really knew how to express emotions through music", relates D. C. Vedi.

> He was the son of Maharaja Jivaji Rao Sindhia of Gwalior, and his mother, Chandrabhaga Devi, was an excellent singer. In Gwalior, Bhaiyaji learned *dhrupad* and *sitar* from the great *binkar,* Bande Ali Khan (c. 1820-84). After his mother left Gwalior and settled in Lucknow, he continued his studies with Sadiq Ali Khan, who was a famous *vina* player, *thumri* and *tappa* singer, and an author as well.[168]

> At first nobody liked the harmonium and it was not used for classical music. But Bhaiyaji was able to play the harmonium in such a way that everybody began liking it. He played in a soft, inimitable way, giving the right touches, his special quality being to apply classical techniques to the light songs of Uttar Pradesh. This is why everybody tried to copy him, and people still remember him . . .

Under the influence of Bhaiyaji, famous and influential artists such as Bhaskarrao Bakhle, Abdul Karim Khan and Gauharjan began using the harmonium for their accompaniment. A prominent student of the first of these singers, Govindrao Tembe, became known for his harmonium solos. "I also played solos on stage quite often", confesses Dilip Chandra Vedi. He adds:

> But what is a harmonium? Anyone can touch the keys and produce sounds, whether he is an expert or a dilettante. Can a person without training play the sarangi? No, he cannot even handle the bow, and to play in tune requires a lot of effort. The harmonium is nothing—the person who plays it is everything. He who is knowledgeable about music will play very well. He who is not will play in a very pedestrian manner.

Gradually, the sarangi was replaced by the harmonium. First of all the second sarangi player was substituted. Later, when it became harder to find good sarangi accompanists, bowed instruments began to disappear from the concert stage altogether and the harmonium took over. In an effort to preserve the sarangi, All India Radio decided to ban the harmonium from the national broadcasting

network. More than three decades later (in October 1970), All India Radio held a seminar on the harmonium, "to seriously review the question of its use in broadcasts of classical and light music."[169]

Several 'educated' musicians and scholars—sarangi players were notably absent—presented their views. Almost everyone agreed that though the harmonium had severe limitations, it could not be denied that "it [had] established itself as a popular instrument". "The maestros prefer the harmonium because its notes are flawless, unsagging and constant", said P. V. Subramaniam. "Amir Khan is so allergic to the sarangi, especially to its unmusical behaviour in fast tempo, that he does not allow it in his concerts."[170] V. H. Deshpande, a disciple of Govindrao Tembe, spoke about the advantages of harmonium accompaniment:

> What is the function of an accompanying instrument? I submit it is to create a musical atmosphere, and inspire the artiste by bringing him into his best singing mood. Further, the accompanying instrument must keep the continuity of singing to heighten the musicality of the performance and make it more attractive, more entertaining . . . by following the main artiste closely, with or without a little time-lag, and also at times [by playing] independently in the interludes . . . I dare say that the harmonium by its powerful, constant and sustained notes not only abundantly satisfies all these requirements but satisfies them in a far greater degree than any of the stringed instruments . . .[171]

In other words, the accompanist should be satisfied with inspiring the singer, and should keep the continuity by filling out the interludes. "Whatever the duties or desires of the accompanist," writes D. M. Neuman, "the rights of the soloist in performance are paramount with respect to all musical decisions."[172] Vocalists who used to recognize the accompanist as an artist of equal merit, and welcomed a lively and spontaneous interplay (*sangat*) between voice and instrument, seem (with a few exceptions) to have left the stage long ago.

"Sarangi is extolled as the most suitable instrument for accompaniment in preference to the harmonium," continued V. H. Deshpande. "It is meant essentially for female musicians and especially for light-classical varieties such as *thumris* and the like."

> The foremost of the hurdles in the way of a sarangi is the very virtue of its resonating strings, which are so many that they take [an] annoyingly long time [to be] tuned . . . And it is much more difficult to do so in an AIR studio in the few minutes just before the programme. It is next to impossible for the sarangi to change . . . scale in between two items, where every second wasted is a dead weight on the singer. Sarangi was perfectly all right in the spacious olden days of Kings and Queens and Sardars and Jagirdars, when before the select small audiences in the privacy of their chambers, there was no hurry about anything . . . the sarangi could then take as much time as it wanted to tune itself. But in modern times it is really an anachronism . . .[173]

Much of what was said about the sarangi at the seminar is debatable, and does not hold good for experienced artists with a total mastery over their instruments. Nonetheless, it reflects the fashion of today. The sarangi is *passé*. Together

with the *vina* and *pakhawaj*, it has been relegated to the side-lines. "Do not the genuine Indian musical instruments of the old tradition", asked S. N. Ratanjankar, "which have the capacity to express genuine Indian thought and imagination, but which, unfortunately, are passing out of vogue simply because they demand a concentrated study and practice, deserve our attention?"[174] Can one really fathom the reason why such highly developed instruments, which took so many centuries to evolve, simply disappear? The reply to this question, I fear, is unavoidable: Who cares?

### 4.14 *Sarangi players become vocalists again*

Most certainly, musicologists in the 20th century have not cared about sarangi players, since literature on music virtually ignores them. The impression created is that being second-rate artists, they were only fit to accompany the miserable *kothewalis*. Yet on the contrary, as we shall see, many sarangi players were excellent instrumentalists, singers and composers, with such a profound knowledge of *raga* and composition that they could pose a threat to the vocalists they accompanied. In addition, they were the foremost teachers of female vocalists.

A noteworthy example is Ahmad Khan, who was a well-known sarangi player and a first-rate singer, and the teacher of Zohrabai of Agra (d. 1911). "He learned *dhrupad* and *dhamar* from Ghulam Abbas Khan, one of the stalwarts of the Agra *gharana*, and *khayal* from Mehbub Khan Darsapiya of Atrauli. It is said that Ahmad Khan taught Zohrabai like his own daughter. She became a versatile vocalist and was much praised by all. It was difficult for any woman singer to challenge Zohrabai because her singing was so impressive, so mature. But only those who really understood music could appreciate that style."[175]

In an article in *The Stage Lover*, written when Gauharjan (c. 1875-1930) was at the peak of her glory, we read that this popular singer was trained by a certain 'Kaloo Oustad' of Banaras.[176] In all likelihood this was Kallu Dhannu Dhari, who "plays sarangi and sings *khayal* very well," and to whom an earlier reference was made by Mohammad Karam Imam (1856). Gauharjan was the most celebrated, and perhaps also the wealthiest singer at the beginning of this century. She was appointed court musician in Darbhanga, Rampur and Mysore, and was one of the first Indian musicians to be recorded in the early days of the gramophone.[177]

Mukhtar Begum, the mother of Farida Khanum, was a well-known singer of Punjabi and light classical songs, and studied for many years under Fattuh Khan, a sarangi player from Chara (Amritsar district). According to D. C. Vedi, Mukhtar Begum's music strongly influenced Begum Akhtar of Faizabad (1914-1974). This popular artist also learned at first from a sarangi player, Imdad Khan of Patna, who was the accompanist of such celebrities as Gauharjan and Malkajan.[178]

Banaras, the nucleus of *Purab ang thumri*, produced a galaxy of excellent women singers.[179] It was here, at the beginning of this century, that Siyaji Maharaj, the Banarsi sarangi maestro, taught such famous vocalists as Rajeshwari Devi and Siddheshwari Devi (d. 1977). Rajeshwari also received her training from the sarangi player Ganesh Mishra, and Kashibai learned from his son, Sur Sahai Mishra. Indubala of Calcutta was trained by another member of the same family, Gauri Shankar Mishra and Rasulanbai (1902-1974) by yet another sarangi player from Banaras, Shammu Khan. Sarju Prasad Mishra is said to have taught many female vocalists as well.

Had musicologists displayed a deeper interest in the great women singers, the names of their ustads, the sarangi players, would also have been preserved. As it is, the importance of their role as teachers of practically all female singers, and many male vocalists as well, has been greatly underestimated. Credit should also go to them as founders of powerful *gharanas* and as inventors of new styles and even *ragas*.

PATIALA GHARANA—Little had changed since the 16th century when sarangi players first entered the field of classical music as singers. When their status and livelihood were threatened three centuries later, several sarangi players adopted a 'new' strategy by pursuing careers as vocalists. The first artist to show such foresight was Miyan Kalu of Patiala, a disciple of the learned *dhrupad* singer, Miyan Bahram Khan. It is known that Miyan Kalu taught his son and his nephew vocal music; they were the famous pair Aliya-Fattuh. These two also received some training from the versatile singer Gokhibai (also a disciple of Bahram Khan) who performed together with Miyan Kalu as accompanist. Since "the father was only a sarangi player," writes J. S. Jariwalla, "and as such was regarded as inferior, the musicians of the day did not treat the sons with respect, and did not allow them to sing at concerts along with other musicians. This naturally rankled in the minds of Gokhibai and Kalu Khan. The only remedy for this was to get Khansahib Bahram Khan of Ambeta to teach Aliya-Fattuh. . . Thereafter, the brothers got a chance to sing at concerts and their rise was so rapid that, in a short time, they even challenged Haddu-Hassu of Gwalior."[180]

Aliya-Fattuh, i.e. Ali Bakhsh 'Jernel' (General) and Fateh Ali, the founders of the Patiala *gharana*, were also taught by the great vocalist, Tanras Khan of Delhi. D. C. Vedi recalls that when he heard Ali Bakhsh in 1920, his *tanas* were still very clear, fast and in tune.

> Fateh Ali also had a very impressive and tuneful voice and was adept in light classical music as well. This is why his disciples, Kale Khan and Ali Bakhsh Kasurwala, were so well-known for their *thumris*.
>
> Ali Bakhsh of Kasur first learned music from his uncle Pir Bakhsh (a pupil of Tanras Khan), and was a very good singer and solo *esraj* player. He taught many professional songstresses and used to accompany Anwar Begum of Lahore. His son, Ghulam Ali Khan, played sarangi for many years, accompanying Anwarijan Dheruwali until 1935.

It is not generally known that Bade Ghulam Ali Khan (1901-1968), one of the most impressive singers of this century, began his musical career as a sarangi player, accompanying female vocalists. But the voice of the sarangi is clearly reflected in his *gayaki*, his perfect intonation and ornamentation, his powerful *tanas* which spanned three octaves, and most of all in the sweet and sensuous way he rendered his songs. As V. H. Deshpande puts it: "It has been said that vocal music succeeds to the extent it approaches the intonation of a stringed instrument. The proof was found in Ghulam Ali. . ."[181][103]

KIRANA GHARANA—Very few people remember (or care to be reminded) that both Abdul Karim Khan and Abdul Wahid Khan were sarangi players before they enriched the world with their wonderful singing. Yet their ancestors were mainly instrumentalists, who received a strict training in vocal music as well. One of them,

Haider Bakhsh of Chaproli, a disciple of Bande Ali Khan, was one of the foremost sarangi maestros of the second half of the 19th century. It is said that after twelve years of rigorous practice and prayer at the tomb of his spiritual master, a voice suddenly emerged from the grave, asking him what he desired. After some hesitation, he replied:

> "Sir, let there be such power in my hands that whenever I play the sarangi, I play with such sweetness that people will have nothing but praise for me." And so it was done.[182]

He accompanied some of the greatest vocalists of the time, Tanras Khan, Umrao Khan, Haddu and Hassu Khan and Rahmat Khan. After serving at the court of Mysore (where he taught Abdul Karim Khan), Haider Bakhsh settled in Kolhapur, and played with Alladiya Khan. D. C. Vedi recalls: "He was very good in *vilambit laya* because he listened to many *binkars, dhrupadias* and *khayalias*. . . Haider Bakhsh was, in fact, responsible for founding the Kirana *gharana*."

Rahman Bakhsh Khan of Jaipur, another well-known sarangi player, is remembered today as the teacher of Abdul Karim Khan (1872-1937).[104] "Rahman Bakhsh had specialized in three *ragas*, Sindhura, Asavari and Barva. He had a special talent—when he played Sindhura he could bring down the fever of a sick person. . . His son, Bashir Khan, followed the strange practice of covering his left hand with a piece of cloth while playing the sarangi, so that his colleagues could not fathom or copy his fingering technique."[183]

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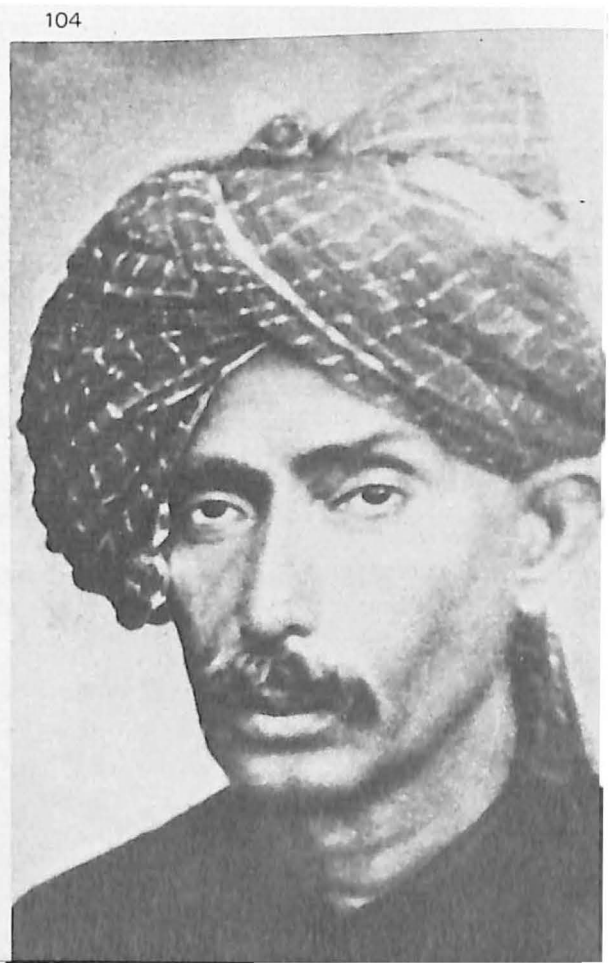

The story of Abdul Karim Khan's fascinating life has been told many times and need not be repeated. Important to us are his humble beginnings. As a young man, he played the sarangi, amongst others with Tarabai Barodekar who later became his wife.

> After he had played with Faiz Mohammad Khan[?] in Baroda, the maharaja offered him *nazarana* which, however, he refused to accept, since the amount was only half that which the singer received. Naturally the maharaja was surprised and upset by Abdul Karim Khan's behaviour, and asked him: 'Why did you return my gift?' Khansahib replied: 'I am grateful for the respect you have shown me, but why should I accept less money when Faiz Mohammad and I have performed music of the same class?' 'Faiz Mohammad is my ustad', said the maharaja. 'Singers are always superior, so accompanists must necessarily be second in rank'. Upon which Abdul Karim Khan took his sarangi and threw it over the balcony. 'From now on I shall never touch this instrument again', said Khansahib, and, suiting his actions to his words, he embarked upon a career as a vocalist.

This dramatic anecdote was told to me by Niaz Ahmad Khan (one of the sons of Bashir Khan). Like so many singers descended from a family of sarangi players, he and his brother followed the example of Abdul Karim Khan, who set the trend of refusing to accept the inferior treatment meted out to accompanists. He preferred to sacrifice his sarangi rather than be humiliated. Vilayat Hussain Khan throws light on a related custom: "Sarangi players were not allowed to take the *tanpura* and sing... in one such *mehfil* a sarangi player, who sang very well, started singing... The *sabhapati* asked him to stop. He told him he would have to stop playing the sarangi. Only then would he be allowed to sing in all the *mehfils*. So he completely stopped playing the sarangi and started singing. After that he was praised by good vocalists and became famous."[184]

As a vocalist, Abdul Karim Khan won national renown. The impact of the sarangi on his style can be felt in the continuity of his notes, and the subtle way in which he handled them and made them resonate, but most of all in the dreamy and sorrowful *karuna rasa,* the predominant sentiment in which he used to sing. However, Wim van der Meer observes: "Practically all vocalists belonging to *gharanas* of sarangi players have a small and deficient knowledge of compositions... The solution [introduced] by Abdul Karim Khan was both simple and clever. Instead of devoting time and attention to the development of the composition, only the *mukhra* was retained in the *vilambit sthayi*... Secondly, the tempo was considerably slowed down, so that all the remaining time could be devoted to *barhata*. Precisely this *barhata* he based on Rahmet Khan's music."[185] Even his strongest critics, however, cannot deny that this great and visionary artist played a predominant role in Hindustani music of the present century. The Kirana *gharana* of Abdul Karim Khan and Abdul Wahid Khan evolved into one of the major schools of vocal music and has today perhaps the largest following.

Wahid Khan was the nephew and disciple of Haider Bakhsh of Chaproli, who also taught the famous singer Rajab Ali Khan of Dewas (1874-1959), and the sarangi player Ghulabbhai of Udaipur. (At the close of the last century, the latter was appointed to the Kala Bhavan of Maharaja Sayaji Rao III in Baroda.[186]) As a young sarangi player, Abdul Wahid Khan used to accompany Lilabai in Saharanpur. There,

he continued his studies under Abban Khan (d. c. 1928), a knowledgeable sarangi player who had received training from Bande Ali Khan and is credited with establishing the *raga* Maru Bihag in its present form.[187] Both Maru Bihag and Patdip were popularized by the followers of the Kirana *gharana*.

Later Wahid Khan gave up the sarangi and became a vocalist. Although he broadcast regularly for All India Radio (Lahore), his music was too sober, too mathematical and too intricate to appeal to large audiences. He was the protagonist of a new style, characterized by a very slow and systematic evolution of the *raga* (giving emphasis to correct intonation), and a musician's musician. With these assets, he exerted an immense influence and had a large following. Wahid Khan was a demanding teacher, a traditionalist. He considered knowledge as sacred and to be made accessible only to those who truly deserved it. Apart from a few women singers (including Begum Akhtar), he mainly taught his relatives: Suresh Babu Mane and Hirabai Barodekar (children of Abdul Karim Khan), Roshanara Begum (daughter of Abdul Haq), the sarangi player Shakur Khan and various others.

The close association between vocal music and sarangi in this *gharana* is apparent from the decision of Abdul Wahid Khan's only son, Hafizullah Khan (born in 1946), to become a sarangi player instead of a vocalist. He was trained by his paternal uncle, Habib Khan. We shall also see how Ram Narayan, one of the few students of Wahid Khan who did not belong to his family, was able to benefit from the master's knowledge through the influence of Pandit Jiwan Lal Mattoo. There is little doubt that Ram Narayan's new *gayaki ang* for sarangi, a product of his creative genius, incorporating elements from various styles, has had a strong impact on modern sarangi-playing.

Although Amir Khan (1912-74) never received direct training from Wahid Khan, he was a most sincere follower, in that he popularized this particular slow and serene style of singing. Interestingly enough, Amir Khan also came from a traditional family of sarangi players from Indore.

> Amir Khan's father Shahmir Khan was a famous sarangi-expert, and even Amir Khan is fond of playing occasionally on the sarangi. The peculiarity of string instruments is that they are specially well-suited to *alapi;* fast *tan* passages on them sound discordant and jarring. String instrumentalists, therefore, usually prefer *alapi;* the *gharanas* pioneered by instrumentalists place greater accent on *alapi.* Use of *kans,* too, is easier on a string instrument. Amir Khan's style shows all the peculiarities associated with the string.[188]

Shahmir Khan and Anjanibai Malpekar (1883-1974) were disciples of Nazir Khan (d. 1919), a leading sarangi player in Bombay and a knowledgeable ustad, who joined, in 1885, the Gayan Uttejak Mandali, a Parsi music society, and became closely associated with Pandit V. N. Bhatkande.[189] Nazir Khan and his brothers Khadim Hussain and Chajju Khan founded the so-called Bhindibazar *gharana.* Aman Ali Khan, the son of Chajju Khan, was a well-known composer and teacher. Had Aman Ali lived longer, he would have been, according to Amir Khan, his *"confrère* in the world of music."[190]

To conclude, some of the most influential singers of this century are descended from families of sarangi players. It is remarkable that these artists not only sacrificed their sarangi in order to become vocalists, but also rejected it for

accompaniment, preferring the harmonium. In contrast, singers from more traditional *gharanas* remained faithful to sarangi accompaniment, though they generally failed to recognize the sarangi player as a performer of equal status. A number of sarangi players began to revolt against this attitude, whilst others gradually lost their self-confidence. Following the example of Abdul Karim Khan, they either tried their luck as vocalists or advised their sons to stop playing the sarangi altogether.

Fortunately, not all sarangi players followed this 'modern' trend. Sarangi in hand, Azim Bakhsh, Mamman Khan, Bundu Khan, Gopal Mishra, Ram Narayan and various other artists fought against the injustice done to their instrument. To a large extent their efforts succeeded, and the sarangi came to be recognized as a solo instrument. Despite its unique qualities, however, the sarangi has not received total acceptance, and concert organizers seem reluctant to invite sarangi players to participate as soloists in music festivals. Furthermore, the number of sarangi accompanists is diminishing day by day. Does this mean that the sarangi will ultimately disappear from the stage? "I don't think the sarangi will perish completely", says Abdul Majid Khan's son, himself a singer. "But there is no future in sight and hardly anyone is encouraged to learn this extremely difficult instrument. Only those who are prepared to face hardships and a real challenge, or those who are looked after by others, can take up the sarangi. If you have to support a family it has become virtually impossible to earn sufficient money by playing the sarangi. . . When the sarangi is used in films, it is always shown with courtesans. The very idea of sarangi has become associated with courtesans and low moral standards, and this has stigmatized the whole community of sarangi players." Another singer finds fault with the sarangi players themselves: "It is really a shame that the sons of sarangi players have stopped playing this instrument. They should have been discouraged from singing and encouraged to continue playing, because other people will never take the trouble to learn the sarangi and practise for long hours."[191] Ram Narayan thinks that the government should make an effort to preserve the sarangi. He told me: "Something has to be done and fast, because if nothing happens before I die, this instrument will go with me. The government should provide me with a place where I can teach a few young students. It is not only music that needs to be taught, one also has to develop their temperament and approach. My students should be able to stay with me day and night, eat with me, talk to me and play with me. With such an education they can contribute something to continue the development of the sarangi."