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Sri Chandranath Shastri — Unknown Tale Of An Eminent Tabla Persona

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Abstract:

Akashvani is the seat of music and has played an undeniable role in the spread and promotion of music. Many renowned artists have been associated with Akashvani, significantly enhancing the quality of music. The introduction and popularity of these artists have largely been through Akashvani. The main objective of this work is to highlight the contributions of one such great tabla artist, Pandit Chandranath Shastri, with due respect and recognition for the present generation.

Keywords: Chandranath Shastri, Tabla, Music, Akashvani, Musician, Kayda.

Introduction:

Pandit Chandranath Shastri is a renowned tabla artist of the Benaras Gharana, who has been associated with Akashvani and Doordarshan for many decades, contributing greatly to musical development. Panditji's impeccable playing leaves audiences speechless, and his excellent presentation evokes deep emotions. Despite his rare talent as a tabla player, he remains devoted to studying and worshiping tabla and rhythm, without a trace of arrogance. As an accomplished scholar, he retains a generous heart and a simple nature. This study aims to explore his life, career, and some previously unpublished stories from his musical journey.

Objectives of the Study:

This paper aims to explore and understand the life and contributions of the eminent artist Sri Chandranath Shastri in the field of music.

Methodology:

This study employs conventional methods of data collection such as interviews, and gathering of primary and secondary data related to the topic.

Early Life and Education:

Shastriji was born in 1947 into a respectable Brahmin family in Dhakuria, Kolkata, West Bengal. His grandfather, Pandit Priyanath Shastri, was a railway officer and had a close association with Maharshi Debendranath Tagore. His father, Pandit Maulinath Shastri, was a doctor by profession and studied at Santiniketan. Maulinath Shastri was taught singing by Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore himself. At that time, Visva-Bharati was not yet established; there was only an Ashram where celibacy (Brahmacharya) was practiced. Apart from learning singing from Gurudev, Maulibabu also met many talented individuals like Pandit Bhimrao Shastri and Pandit Sushil Bhanja Chowdhury at Santiniketan.

According to Shastriji, his father wished to learn Rabindra Sangeet and tabla, as music education was considered incomplete without tabla. Hence, Maulibabu began learning tabla. One day, Gurudev came to check on his progress in tabla and asked which tala would be appropriate for the song "Agni bina bajao tumi kemon kore?" Maulibabu replied, "It is Teora taal," to which Gurudev responded by happily caressing him.

Another notable incident is that Maulibabu was excellent at memorizing poems. At a meeting, a poet wrote a lengthy poem and asked Maulibabu to recite it in its entirety. When he forgot the last two lines, he immediately improvised and completed the poem. Gurudev once again caressed Maulibabu, a testament to Maulinath Shastri's profound scholarship.

Shastriji's grandmother, Mrs. Indira Devi, was from the Tagore family, and his aunt was married to Surendranath Tagore. His grandfather was among the first three members of the Visva-Bharati Board of Trustees.

Career and Contribution in the Field of Tabla:

In 1972, Shastriji participated in a radio competition overseen by Vijay Sengupta. When Shastriji sat down to play, the Nagma player was absent, so the world-famous violinist Pandit V. G. Jog was requested to play the Nagma. Seeing Jog Saheb greatly inspired Shastriji. Though allotted only two minutes, he played for nearly half an hour, drawing a large audience outside the studio. After his performance, Vijay Babu called Shastriji to meet the judge, Pandit Raichand Baral. Shastriji was delighted to learn he had secured first place at the age of 23.

Shastriji was also academically talented, completing his higher secondary education at CM Anglo and graduating in science from Banaras Hindu University. He learned tabla from his father, who was deeply spiritual and a disciple of Swami Kiran Chand Darveshji, himself a disciple of Sri Sri Vijay Krishna Goswami. Maulibabu transferred to Banaras due to his devotion to his guru, and Shastriji thus grew up in Kashi.

He was associated with Akashvani for many years, initially working as a casual tabla player at AIR Allahabad. Later, after relocating to Kolkata, he joined Kolkata Akashvani, retiring in December 2008. Throughout his long career, he participated in numerous programs, conferences, and national events, earning widespread acclaim for his tabla performances.

Some Memorable Incidents Related to Shastriji:

Although he moved to Kashi at the age of two and a half, Shastriji vividly recalls those early days. Once, his father told him that Pandit Anokhelal Mishra had visited their home. Mishraji, despite being a tabla maestro, was trembling with toothache and fearful of extraction. Mauli Babu, known for his humor, seated him in the dental chair and, pretending to listen to tabla rhythms, administered the injection and removed the tooth. While keeping Panditji distracted with tabla bols, he completed the procedure successfully, much to Panditji's happiness.

When asked to teach his son tabla, Pandit Anokhelal Mishra agreed and promised to visit Mauli Babu's house, which he did on a Sunday. He played tabla for a long time and tied a rope (ganda bandhan) on the wrists of Mauli Babu's two sons. From then on, Shastriji and his brother, Shri Parthanath Shastri, took lessons at Anokhelalji's home.

After Pandit Anokhelalji passed away due to an infection from a septic nail injury, Shastriji continued training under Anokhelalji's son, Pandit Ramji Mishra, for many years. He also studied under Vidyut Banerjee, a senior disciple of Pandit Ramji Mishra, and received blessings from legendary tabla artists such as Pandit Mahadev Prasad Mishra, Pandit Kishen Maharaj, Pandit Samata Prasad, and Pandit Sarada Sahai Ji.

Shastriji recalls working alongside Pandit Govinda Bose, Pandit Bimal Roy, Pandit Debashis Sarkar, Pandit Sujit Saha, Asit Pal, Durga Mishra, Arun Ghoshal, and Jugal Sarkar etc. Earlier musicians like Pandit Biswanath Bose, Girin Babu, Pandit Damrupani Bhattacharya, Ustad Keramatullah Khan, Pandit Raichand Baral's nephew Tarakchand Baral, Swapan Sengupta, and Pandit Shyamal Bose were also part of that era.

While living in Benaras, Shastriji often listened to Ustad Sheikh Daud Khan, Ustad Ballu Khan, Ustad Munne Khan, Ustad Keramat Khan, Pandit Kanai Dutta, Ustad Ahmedjan Thirkua, Pandit Shyamal Bose, and Pandit Shankar Ghosh on the radio. The solo and ensemble performances of Ustad Keramat Khan particularly captivated him. Around 1963-64, Ustad Keramat Khan conducted tabla classes on radio, which Shastriji listened to eagerly, enjoying his Hindi-infused Bengali and learning a Kayda:

**Ghenā-tta Ghenāteṭe Ghenādhāga Dhināghenā
Teṭeghenā Dhāṭeṭe Ghenādhāga Tinākenā
Thunākadhā Teṭeghenā Teṭeghenā Tinākenā
Teṭeghenā Dhāṭeṭe Ghenādhāga Dhināghenā □ □**

At a function, Shastriji played a solo tabla and on seeing Keramatullah Khan Sahib, performed some of his compositions. Later, when Shastriji touched his feet and bowed, Khan Sahib heartily blessed him.

Although Shastriji is a Benaras Gharana tabla player, his love for the beautiful drums of the Farrukhabad gharana is evident in his playing style. He introduced the sweet sound of the Benaras Gharana and developed his unique style, collaborating with many great artistes including Pandit Jnan Prakash Ghosh, Pandit V.G. Jog, Pandit Buddhadev Dasgupta, Pandit A. Kanan, Vidushi Malavika Kanan, Pandit Manilal Nag, Pandit Shivnath Mishra, Pandit Prasun Banerjee, Pandit V. Balsara, Pandit Soumitra Lahiri, Ustad Mashkur Ali Khan, Pandit Rabindra Narayan Goswami, Vidushi Girija Devi, Pandit Rajbhan Singh, Pandit Tejendranarayan Majumdar, Ustad Rashid Khan, and many others.

Akashvani is a place of worship for Shastriji. In interviews, he revealed that his primary goal during his long tenure was to enhance the original artists' performances by accompanying them with subtle adjustments in tempo. He aimed to encourage new artists to improve while never overshadowing the original artist's singing or playing, which is vital to musical development. He also played both classical and light music without hesitation.

Role of Akashvani in Shastriji's Life:

Radio played a leading role in music development and dissemination. Shastriji noted that Akashvani ensured the spread of truthful and accurate news without fabrication. It also connected artists with their audience and created opportunities for their recognition. Akashvani functioned as a teacher by organizing music education programs, with renowned artists like Shri Pankaj Kumar Mallick (Rabindra Sangeet) and Ustad Keramatullah Khan Saheb (Tabla) conducting regular classes.

Through these efforts, Akashvani preserved the purity of music and brought it to the masses. Shastriji has been honored with numerous awards, including recognition from the President of India and "Talmani" for his excellent tabla playing and has disciples worldwide who continue to excel.

Conclusion:

One of the most remarkable aspects of Shastriji is his devotion to spirituality. His profound understanding of the mysteries of creation, religious practices, feelings, and Kundalini theory surpasses that of ordinary spiritual teachers. He continues to guide many towards the true path, initiating the fortunate few. Shastriji is also well-versed in astrology.

He is optimistic about youth, encouraging them to practice diligently and providing guidance to achieve excellence. He even turns off the Nagma on his mobile and discusses rituals using songs broadcast on the radio, helping students gain better control over rhythm.

In conclusion, Pandit Chandranath Shastri is a pride of the music world. His devotion to music and spirituality makes him a unique figure, and his contribution to music is unforgettable. His signature Kayda is a fitting tribute for music lovers.

Kayda (Jhaaptaal) Sri Chandranath Shastri:

Dhātere keṭedhi □ Nāge Dhinā Ghenā □ Dhāg Dhinā □ Terekeṭe Tinā kenā □
× 2 0 3

Tātere Keṭeti □ Nāka Tinā Kinā □ Dhāg Dhinā □ Terekeṭe Dhinā Ghenā □ Dhā
× 2 0 3 ×

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