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The youngest sitar virtuoso of the Sub-continent, Irshad Khan, who made his international debut at the same concert with Yehudi Menuhin years ago and played in a recent rock concert with Barbra Streissand, stressed on the need of a wider propagation of classical music, in an interview to The Daily Star.

'The First Thing Fed to Me was Music'

by S. Bari

The sitar ends on a drawn-out note of satisfaction, the lights go on. Warm applause fills the auditorium, and the young performer smiles spontaneously, his bright eyes gratified.

"My family is over four hundred years old," are Irshad Khan's first words as we settle into the plush sofas of this Gulshan house. He is handsome, in a rather delicate and appropriately musician-like way. "Please remember to put this in your article," he requests guilelessly. "The family rose to prominence under Shah Jahan."

It is typical of Irshad that he begins the interview speaking not of himself but of his family. Son of Imrat Khan and nephew of Vilayat, Irshad was in Bangladesh to play before audiences around the country.

Irshad Khan displays brilliant technical grasp of his sitar. His jhalas tend to sometimes border on the slightly jarring, but he catches and draws out single notes with a skilled yet delicate, almost tender touch. The virtuoso quality in his playing is ear-catching, lively, witty, and technically excellent. Somehow, though, the emotional trip necessary to complete the evening was present only intermittently. On waits with bated breath for the raga to take us somewhere. That pact of classical music was not kept entirely: we began the trip on notes full of promise, but the path ended in a profusion of showy notes, lovely but not

striking anywhere deep within.

Perhaps one cannot expect that inner vision of music from an artist of IRSHAD'S age. Or perhaps the modern generation of musicians cannot dig down and reach the root of Indian classical music because their lives are inevitably influenced by schooling, an international life-style, and rock music. But Irshad's love and enthusiasm, together with his sense of style, make it likely that he has scope for development.

His public debut was at

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the age of seven. "My earliest memories are of toy instruments I was given to play. Music is in my blood. I don't know if you believe in that sort of thing, but I really do. The first thing fed to me was music." He reminisces about sitting on stage with his father, too young to understand, but imbibing the sounds. "I never wanted to be anything but a musician," he confides.

Irshad's great-great grandfather invented the sur-bahaar, an elaborate twenty-stringed instrument

rather like a base version of the sitar. He usually only plays heavy ragas on it, and then only for audiences with some experience.

I've played in rock concerts, like a recent one in Antwerp with Barbra Streissand. I wouldn't play the sur-bahaar there. I did a bhatiali tune. It was very popular," he says, moving and clapping his hands to show the audience's response. He considers Dhaka audiences sophisticated enough for heavy ra-

gas and the full classical treatment, unlike many visiting artists who do not give their best.

"I find the appeal of classical music has grown somewhat since my last visit, in 1989. There are young people in the audience, people who want to learn." Sipping an enormous cup of tea, he assesses the cultural situation in Dhaka. "I find that the middle class is still

cultural-minded, despite the massive influx of Western music into the sub-continent."

Getting involved in his subject, he sits up suddenly and uses his hands to emphasize his words. "Western music has burned away Indian traditions. Youngsters have to understand the richness of our history." He hastens to add that he does not consider Western music a negative

influence in itself, "but we should know our own heritage as well. And when I refer to Indian music, I mean the musical heritage of the entire sub-continent."

He reflects that there is need of a wider propagation of classical music. "You see, music has all of culture within itself. To know our culture, all one has to do is know its music." Dhaka, in his opinion, is aware of art, especially painting and theatre. This provides a base

for promoting classical music, and makes it pleasurable to perform here. "I think what is needed is for more and more good musicians from home and abroad to perform," he asserts.

"We are half-Bangladeshi," he announced during his concert, to immediate applause. The family hails from Gouripur, and has now been in Calcutta a good forty years, on a street named after grandfather Ustad Enayat Khan. Irshad was the first to return to Gouripur since that grand-

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father, and he speaks emotionally of the rapturous welcome given him. "You know, people came out of their homes to see me, they pressed my hands, some even knew my family."

Irshad is twenty-seven, but younger at heart. "I made my international debut when I was seven, at the Queen Elizabeth Hall. Yehudi Menuhin played at the same concert," he smiles, still excited at the memory. "At 18, I played in the Proms festival. You know, I was the youngest soloist," he continues. Then

suddenly: "I'm sorry, I don't mean to brag," he seems ever-amazed at his own career, and talks about himself with such surprise in his tone that it never seems like conceit. Naively, he explains his delight with his profession. "Look at me," he asks, spreading his arms. "I travel around the world. I go to the best places, see the most beautiful things, meet the most interesting people."

He admits his is not the life of the typical musician. "I consider myself very lucky to have been born into this family." Admiration fills his voice as he speaks of his father, his uncle, and his brothers. What about the women in the family? "None of them are actually performers, but of course they live in music just as we do. My father would be on tour for months, and my mother would see to our *riyaz*. Without her, I would never be what I am today."

Irshad's real ambition, he admits with a sheepish grin, was to be a singer. "I practised so much, when I was ten I damaged my vocal cords. For months I wasn't able to sing, and that was when I took up the sitar."

The interview is interrupted by a phone call. All at once the suave musician disappears in talk of shopping and sarees. "Please spell my name 'Irshad,' not 'Ershad.' You understand," he says with a complicitous grin, as we part.

S. Bari is a Feature Writer of The Daily Star.



Irshad Khan: 'Music is in my blood.'

WOMEN'S VOICE IN POLITICS

Fayza Haq

It is not enough that history has seen women at the helm of affairs as in the case of Ms. Indira Gandhi or Ms. Bandaranaike. No doubt in neighbouring Burma and Pakistan Ms. Bhutto and Sun Kyt have caused a fair stir. Today the newsmen in Bangladesh flash the two major political leaders Sheikh Hasina and Begum Zia. Alema Bhashani is in the spotlight too sometimes. But how well acquainted is the average Bangladeshi woman about everyday politics and what part does she play in it?

Historically women's participation from this region was marginal during the Pakistan movement. Similarly during the national liberation of Bangladesh few women took an active part. Social taboos, illiteracy, lack of training, and unemployment, have always forced women into an alarming state of dependency. Apart from the dowry issue the women members of the Jatiya

Sangshad have not been able to create an effective lobby.

The constitution of Bangladesh proclaims that the state does not discriminate against any citizen on the grounds of sex. Gender is not a discriminating factor for any public or representative office. The fundamental principles of state policy says that steps

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should be taken to ensure women's participation in national life.

Women, however, do not have the opportunity to develop contacts to get involved in politics. Society expects women to play the role of the

wife and mother in our traditional system, and they can barely get nominated for electoral contests. The average Bangladeshi women are submissive and live a segregated life. A female politician would have to be assertive and mobile. Except as voters, women on the whole play a minimum role in the electoral process. Lack of education, dependant economic status, lack of mobility are factors that are responsible for the low level of women's participation.

"If you talk about being members of political parties or of actual participation in election or campaigning, the number of women is far less than men," says Meghna Gubhakurta, an assistant professor of the International Relations Department of the University of Dhaka, "but this does

not mean women don't think about political issues."

"Women are not inactive altogether. It is not as if their consciousness is nonexistent. However, very few women are allowed to participate. Many parties have a male bias. More women should be encouraged into the party hierarchy," Meghna continues.

There should be a uniform code to ensure gender rights. This will enable women to participate more in public life and give them a better status in society," she adds.

Giving her opinion about the present major political leaders, Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina she comments, "Once they entered the political sphere they have been politicised and they have

proven their mettle. I don't know what the future will hold. A lot depends on their formative constructive policies."

"In general," believes Suraiya Begum, the associate editor of 'Shomaj Nirikhan' "women listen to the male members of their family and have little opinion of their own. In educated families in Dhaka, however, husbands cannot entirely influence the wife's political views. Recently, in the cities, women have taken part in political processions. This proves women are interested."

"Women should not be confined to being only teachers, doctors or housewives. They should be accepted as leaders too," Suraiya adds.

Rowshan Ara, a nine to five

office worker, says, "You cannot say women have achieved nothing but there is a vast amount still to be done in the political sphere. Society has suppressed women and not given them the opportunity to do much. Even in the west, where women have a fair amount of education, few are involved in politics. They do not lack the qualities of a good leader, but even their society expects women to be limited to household chores, child bearing or conventional careers."

"I don't think either Sheikh Hasina or Khaleda Zia will get the absolute majority," Rowshan comments. "No one person can solve the problem. If there is a parliamentary system there is hope of a solution. I would like a coalition government."

"In the patriarchal society women are not greatly involved in politics. Coming from a Third World country they are limited by cultural notions. In the urban sector, however, students and urban working women are much more conscious and alive," says Rabiya, a student of anthropology.

She says she does not want

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one single party to come to power. There should be a consolidated effort by everybody. "I don't generally support the idea of having women as political leaders for they have their duties at home," says Salma, a telephone operator, "however look at the amount

women have achieved in banks, schools, factories and offices. Considering their conservative past women have not done too badly without getting involved in revolutions as in China or USSR."

If seats for women in the parliament is increased more women would be involved in parliamentary activities," she adds.

The general impressions about the involvement of women in politics are that to make women's voice more effective in politics women politicians must be encouraged by the government to assert themselves. These women politicians must find ways to make the male-dominated parties be conscious of the need to integrate women in politics. They should form pressure groups to urge concrete female issues. Seats for women in the Parliament should be increased and more women should be involved in Parliamentary activities.

Everyone Wants to be an English Lord

Lordships of the Manor are emerging as one of Britain's most popular alternative investments — especially with buyers from overseas. Many buy the ancient titles believing they will give them instant access to high society. As Gemini News Service reports, the new Lords often find they've bought little more than the right to go fishing and collect firewood. By Nicholas Cole



scrapping to "my liege."

It is an illusion, the estimated 15,000 to 20,000 titles may be old — many date back more than 900 years to the days of William the Conqueror — but they do not as yet provide an entry ticket to the upper classes. This could change soon, however.

Nor do the titles carry any of the ancient powers, which included the right to raise taxes for the sovereign, supervise local farming — and to dispense life-or-death justice at the courts held in manor houses.

Virtually all that survives today of those powers, once granted to manorial lords as the pivots of feudal government, is the right of titleholders to call themselves Lord (or Lady) of the Manor, plus a clutch of slender privileges, complete with their somewhat arcane old names.

Apart from the entitlement to shoot game on common land — which comprises anything from wild hillside to urban wastelands — a manorial lord can gather firewood (estovers), cut peat (turbary), fish the rivers (piscary), extract minerals (common in the soil) and charge tolls from passing motorists.

Should he happen to reside in the City of London, he could in theory exercise the right to drive sheep across London Bridge — and, if capital punishment returned, to be hung with a silken rope rather than the hemp noose traditionally reserved for miscreant commoners.

One right he most definitely could not claim any longer is

the chauvinistic droit de seigneur, whereby certain lords were formerly allowed to appropriate village maidens on their wedding night.

An East Anglian estate-owner said not long ago that withdrawal of such a right was the main reason for selling the lordship which his family had possessed for 360 years. Was he serious? Commented his wife: "The lordship is a joke really."

Not to overseas buyers. They treat the titles with infinitely more gravitas, coveting them for the romantic appeal of English history, the fascination of owning a valuable form of property often centuries old, and on the assumption that "Lord of the Manor" equals the aristocratic designation "Lord."

The German-born teacher who bought a manorial title proudly declared: "I like to

feel I am an English lady now." Yet manorial lordships are not titles of nobility, and involve no seat in the House of Lords, Parliament's upper house at Westminster.

Scottish baronies comprise one form of manorial lordship with the possibility of Crown recognition as noble titles.

The Canadian who anonymously paid pound 99,000 to become "The Much Honoured Baron of Ruchlaw" in 1990 was

so sure the Queen would grant this recognition that he instantly ordered ermine-trimmed robes.

But until she makes up her mind, he cannot accurately call himself Lord Ruchlaw — simply the less prestigious Baron of Ruchlaw.

Niceties of titular entitlements notwithstanding, the Ruchlaw sale set off a mini-gold rush. Scottish titles trading at pound 15,000 a time suddenly started fetching double and triple these sums.

The barony of Whithall, Berwickshire, went to a London buyer for pound 66,000. That of Kinnear, Fife, sold to a Belgian for almost pound 70,000. The barony of Morpeth, just over the border in England, was snapped up by a Japanese entrepreneur for pound 55,000.

Irish feudal baronies are also rising fast, and are especially popular with roots-hungry Americans, who pay over pound 30,000 a time for more rare titles in the republic.

Americans make up about 50 of the Manorial Society's 1,100 mainly British membership, which arguably comprises the world's richest elite. Each member has personal assets of nearly pound 3 million, according to a recent survey.

'My World' — the regular weekly column on this page — could not be published today due to unavoidable circumstances. The column, however, will re-appear next week.



More than a mere memorial, Shaheed Minar stands upright to ever remind us of those brave ones who sacrificed their lives for the language. A photocollage by M. Haris Uddin.