

Chapter- 2

The Sound of Music

STUDY NOTES

- This chapter throws light on the origin of Shehnai and the life of all time great Shehnai Vadak- Bismillah Khan. The winner of Bharat Ratna, the highest civilian award of India, for his dedication to music and his love for India.
- ‘Pungi’, a musical instrument was banned by emperor Aurangzeb because of its shrill and unpleasant sound. It was modified and perfected by a barber who belonged to a family of professional musicians. He played it in the chamber of king. Its sound was so appreciated by the emperor that it was made a part of *Naubat*. Since it was played for the first time in Shah’s chamber by Nai, it came to be known as Shehnai.
- Traditionally, it was played in the temples and on every auspicious domestic occasion also. But it was treated as an incomplete musical instrument, not capable of creating independent pieces. But Bismillah Khan broke this myth.
- Bismillah belongs to the Benaras Gharana. He was born in 1916 at Dumraon, in Bihar. From 5 years of age he used to visit the Bihari temple and sing Bhojpuri ‘Chatiya’ there. For his melodious singing, as a child he used to earn a big laddu from the local Bhojpuri King. At the age of 6, he moved to Benaras. There under guidance and training of his maternal uncle, Ali Bux, he started picking up the finer nuances of Shehnai. He used to spend practicing on the banks of river Ganges. The themes of his music were deeply affected by the sounds of flowing water of the Ganga.
- He got the best performer award at All India Music Conference in Allahabad in 1930. In 2001, he won 3 awards the Padma Bhushan, Padmashree and Padma Vibhushan. He was invited to play the

Shehnai from the ramparts of the Red Fort in 1947, becoming the first to greet the independent India. He won many international awards also. He became the first Indian to perform at the Lincoln Central Hall, USA. An auditorium in Tehran was named after him – *Tahar Mosiquee Ustaad Bismillah Khan*.

- Bismillah was very fond of Benaras and Dumraon. He declined an offer from one of his students to settle in the USA, as he was not willing to stay away for long from Benaras and its holy river Ganga. He ventured into film world also. He gave his music in 2 movies. His composition ‘*Dil ka khilloma hai.....*’ for movie ‘*Goonj Uthi Shehnai*’, was a chartbuster. But he could not associate himself with the artificial glamour of the film world. For him, music was his soul, his life

