

Musical instruments makers

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LAHORE, which is known for the musical sensitivities of its people, had a large number of musical instrument makers before independence. In Langay Mandi area near the municipal water works, there used to be a cluster of shops owned by Sikh craftsmen, who won fame for their skill to make the harmonium. All of them migrated to India in August, 1947. A couple of shops were also located in the Anarkali Bazaar, which, in addition to selling musical instruments of local variety, also sold gramophone records by popular singers of the era.

By the same token, several families from Amritsar and other parts of east Punjab and beyond came to settle in Lahore after independence. The exchange of population resulted in filling the void created by the exodus of non-Muslim musical instrument makers to India.

For a few years, a slump in the music market was noticeable as all film studios of the city were either burnt or damaged during the communal riots. It took several years for the local film industry to come to its own and by the mid-1950s, Lahore witnessed a spurt in the production of films, which created a demand for such indigenous musical devices as the sitar, the sarod, tablas, dholaks and several other instruments which became essential components of Pakistani film orchestra. From the standpoint of demand, the musical instrument makers of Lahore were inundated with orders for sitars, tablas and the dholaks.

The pioneering families of musical instrument makers, which settled in Lahore, came from Amritsar. Among them was Ustad Sher Muhammad, who set up his small manufacturing unit in Baansawala Bazaar (Rattan Chand Road) near Mayo Hospital. He was followed by Muhammad Azam Khan, who opened his shop on Railway Road, only a short distance from Sher Muhammad's shop. However, a large concentration of artisans making musical instrument was near the Paniwala Talab and Hira Mandi, which catered to the needs of musicians, who provided melodic accompaniments to scores of singing girls in Hira Mandi.

Craftsmen in that area specialised in making sarangis, harmoniums, dholaks and tablas. Even now, the largest cluster of shops purveying these instruments is located in various lanes of Hira Mandi or the areas in its proximity.

"Manufacturing musical instruments," claimed Ziauddin, whose great grandfather stumbled into this profession some 140 years ago, "is both an art and a craft." He also asserted that the skill was transferable from generation to generation.

Along with his father, Sher Muhammad, a master craftsman and a specialist in the art of sitar making, Ziauddin was engaged in making a variety of musical devices, especially the sitar. His brother, Ramazan, won the hearts of countless musicians in Lahore and other cities in Pakistan for his craftsmanship in manufacturing the sitar with improvised wooden gourds in place of the natural ones.

"My great grandfather first opened a shop in Katra Jaimal Singh in Amritsar over 140 years ago," he claimed. "After his death, my grandfather took to sitar making. He paid special attention to grooming of his son (my father, late Ustad Sher Muhammad), who later special-

ized in this art."

Other prominent instrument makers of Lahore, who have contributed to the musical culture of Pakistan included Muhammad Azam Khan, (sitar) Ishaq Chishti (sitar and harmonium), Master Ramazan (harmonium), Dilawar Husain (tablas) and Muhammad Ramazan (sitar) a winner of the Pride of Performance award, Ustad Sher Muhammad also exported the sitars to the United States.

A musical instrument is a mechanism, which is pressed into service to create pleasing sounds. Each instrument, according to its capacity, enables the performer to control the four properties of musical sound — pitch, duration, volume and colour (timbre). Availability of instruments greatly influences the musical output of any culture. The composer relies on the performer, who in turn, relies on the instrument maker. All three functions used to be performed by the same individual not too long ago. As technology advanced, the art of instrument making, especially in Western countries, was commercialized. Large factories turned out more responsive musical devices, which stimulated the performers to greater virtuosity, allowing the

composers to make greater demands on both the performers and the instruments. In Pakistan, Sialkot is the city where musical instruments of Western specifications are manufactured on a large scale.

Musical instruments that make up an orchestra are used the same way an artist uses colours to paint a picture. Each instrument, no matter how large or small, has a sound of its own.

Despite the almost baffling advances in technology in recent decades, which have spawned the invention of a variety of polyphonic devices, the human voice and hand-made instruments have retained their popularity. Increasing demands for indigenous musical devices from professional and amateur musicians are being met by scions of the pioneer instrument makers scattered all over the city, notably in the Baansawala Bazaar, Railway Road and side-lanes of Hira Mandi. Modern technology has yet to create an instrument that can match the bewitching sounds produced by delicate hand-made sitars, rubabs, and sarods, which are marked by beauty of designs and coherence of form. The delicate hand-made instruments appeal to our mind, fire our imagination and enchant our senses. — **SAEED MALIK**

