

Two Top-Notch Musicians Venture to Make Indian Classical Music, Global

Ready for Release Worldwide — "Sangeetpedia" — The Audio-Video Encyclopedia of Indian Classical Music, Created by America's Ace Tabla-Player, Enayet Hossain, and India's Sitar Maestro, Anjan Chattopadhyay, Highlights 4000 Years of Evolution of the Raga and Tala

By Sam Prasad Jillella

Washington's world-class tabla player, Enayet Hossain, and West Bengal's sitar maestro, Anjan Chattopadhyay teamed up during the past two decades and presented numerous concerts, entertaining music lovers in India and here, in the US.

Enayet and Anjan, no doubt, have entertained others, but were also greatly enchanted by each others talent, and knowledge of the Indian raga and tala that they both, simultaneously, came up with the idea of creating a South Asian treasure — an Encyclopedia of Indian Classical Music in an audio, video, and written format — all in one piece, a single DVD-ROM.

First inspired by the humungous project ten years ago, Enayet, 37, made several visits to India to research, record, and compile information. Anjan, 48, for his part, spent many hours researching, organizing, and editing the texts for the encyclopedia. During the last seven years, he made several month-long trips to the US for performing, recording, and editing-work.

While both of them spent countless hours — together and individually — building and shaping Sangeetpedia, the computer-work was totally handled by Enayet. That has required him to put in a lot more time on the project, than Anjan has. How have these guys, to begin with, acquired such a high level of performance and vast knowledge of Indian music?

Both of them belong to outstanding musical families. Anjan studied under his brother, Pandit Gauri Shankar, a master sitar-player, and Enayet was reared musically from infancy by his father, Ustad Hamid Hossain, a Baltimore-based music teacher and performer, who contributed enormously towards popularizing Indian music in the US and Canada.

Enayet came to the US as an elementary school student thirty years ago from Kolkata, when it was still Calcutta. Multitalented, he could well be called the material and architect of the monumental project. He has researched, written, compiled, performed, directed, recorded, edited, and designed Sangeetpedia.

Enayet says "being in the US made this venture, possible. The necessary education, infrastructure, and technology for a project of this nature and magnitude, are available in the US."

Eight years in the making, Sangeetpedia, The Encyclopedia of Indian Classical Music, is now ready for release in India on July 18, 2003 through Kolkata distributor, Bihann Music (Website: www.bihannmusic.com).

Sangeetpedia in its present form features only the North Indian type of Indian music which will be updated frequently to include newer terms every month. There are plans to induct South Indian music. An expansive, detailed companion



Enayet Hossain, A computer engineer from the University of Maryland

website will be added for future expansions.

Sangeet, in Sanskrit, means "music." Sangeetpedia, a name coined by Enayet and Anjan for the musical encyclopedia, is an audio-visual compendium of 1250 fundamental terms of Indian Classical Music which cover many different categories including percussions, history, ragas, talas, bios, vocals, instruments, languages, regions, religions etc.

Sangeetpedia's mega DVD-ROM is a storehouse of more than sixty hours of footage with some audio recordings — now digitized — going back to as early as 1900.

Indian music flourished for millennia, incorporating during its long journey elements of Hindu, Persian, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, and Central Asian styles and coloring.

In the modern era, particularly, since the turn of the 1900's, there have been numerous musicians and ethnomusicologist who have contributed to the expansion of Indian music. As a result, Ravi Shankar, Alla Raka, and Ustad Ali Akbar Khan have become household names in the Western world.

The sitar, tabla, and sarod have been incorporated into Western music and often heard on TV and Radio commercials, and background music of Hollywood movies. Music departments in many American Universities have included Indian music in their curriculum.

Sangeetpedia presents biographies and concert performances of South Asian musical heavyweights from India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, and the United States. The list includes: Ravi Shankar, Vilayat Khan, Rabindranath Tagore, Abdul Karim Khan, Faiyaz Khan, Nazrul Islam, Miyan Tansen, Swami Haridas, Meera Bai, Kabir Das, Tuls Das, Sur Das, Runa Laila, Nazakat & Salamat Ali Khan, Mehdi Hassan, Iqbal Banu, Nusrat Fateh Ali, Abbasuddin Ahmed, Lalton Fakir, Sachin Dev Burman, and Rahul Dev Burman, and many more.

The creators of Sangeetpedia — Enayet, a Muslim, and Anjan, a Hindu—say, "the project is eclectic and international in essence.

Irrespective of political, religion and caste boundaries, it has come to bridge those gaps for the greater glory of South Asian music."



Anjan Chattopadhyay

Though he has an ear for all kinds of music, but when talked about music in general, Enayet takes the stand of an apologist for the dynamics of Indian music. He seems overwhelmed and awestricken by the complexity of the raga and tala.

Raga (pronounced as the English word "saga") means "color." In Indian music, a raga is defined by a pleasant composition of swar (notes) in a particular stationary, ascending, descending or moving value, which has the effect of coloring the heart of a person.

Raga is basically a melody idea but must not be confused with a song. A single raga can be the platform of innumerable songs. A minimum of 5 notes and a maximum of 7 notes are used to form a raga. The number of notes used denotes the jaati of a raga.

Each raga has a principle mood defined and is associated with a time or season. Specific ragas have been worked out over the centuries that are suitable for specific time and environment. There are ragas that set the stage and usher the listener into a mood that is most appropriate for the time. There are ragas ideal for dawn and twilight, for day and for night.

Shudh (natural) and vikrit (sharp and flat) notes are not used immediately next to each other, except in an exceptional case like Raga Lalit. There are ragas that are pure and unmixed, while there are others with influence of two ragas, and some with the influence of several ragas.

Tala: To understand the dynamics of tabla-playing one must understand the Indian tala system. Indian music is based on talas or (rhythmic cycles). There are numerous rhythmic cycles in use today and countless other cycles that are invented, but not used.

The tala is the "heartbeat of Indian music." Whether it is a

raga, song, or a classical composition, everything has a pulse, a beat. Simply put, tala is a collection of specific number of beats (called mantras) which are indicators of time.

A tala is confined to a specific rhythm. The partition of tala might consist of equal or unequal beats. The parts in a tala are not of equal weight— some beats are stressed, while others are unstressed. A beat (mantra) may consist of one, or more than one syllable such as Ka, Ta, Tag, Treket, etc. Significant Features of Sangeetpedia:

- * Fully searchable, easy to use layout
- * 60+ Ragas & 23 Talas, defined and demonstrated
- * Install on hard drive or run from DVD-ROM
- * Packed with 8 gigabytes of video/audio/images
- * 1,250 fundamental terms of Indian Music
- * 685 rare and often unseen images
- * 220 high quality audio files
- * 425 high resolution videos; all new and never before seen
- * 233 biographies of the pioneers of Indian music along with examples of their works
- * Download and install future updates for additional content
- * Features music from the top musicians of India

When asked "what has led you to take up this project?" Anjan says "Indian music per se, was the motivation and driving force. As a long-time performing artist and teacher, I sensed the disadvantage learners have, because Indian music has no notation, and lacks concise information."

"For example," explains Anjan, "each raga is played in six or seven different ways. Every Ustad has his own style and coloring. The main format is in a specific style, but each artist does it in a different way. The spectrum of variations of a particular raga, played by different schools, is confusing to anyone. This has driven us both to study

each raga in-depth and discover for ourselves its original format, and the varying styles portrayed by different schools in its evolution."

Enayet was sure from the beginning that he could make this happen. "In preparing the encyclopedia, we have been totally unbiased, giving equal treatment to every school. For the common man to understand easily, we have shown, in an audio and video format, the different shades of the same raga played by different gurus over the centuries. Both, professional musicians and laymen, will appreciate the work we have done."

What will be its impact in India? I asked Anjan and Enayet, during their coffee-break from a recording session, on a recent afternoon, in a Dunkin Doughnut shop, in Ellicott City, MD. In a tone of humility, they answered together — "this is not to replace the gurus. It is only to foster more interest. We are optimistic that once Indians see it, they will fall in love with it."

Modest as they seem, Sangeetpedia is an exceptionally profound, most unique, and unparalleled contribution any musician could offer to South Asia.

A perfect gift of friendship and entertainment to India, Pakistan, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Bangladesh, Sangeetpedia is an asset, not just to South Asia, but to the entire musical world.

A musical kaleidoscope of South Asia, Sangeetpedia presents a spot-light, as well as, a flood-light view of the 4000 years' saga of the raga.

Enayet takes the John F. Kennedy-slogan seriously: "Ask not, what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country?" He looks at the encyclopedia as his proud contribution to India and America—his birth-land and his adopted land, respectively.

"You think it was worth the time spent?" I asked Enayet.

"Oh, sure!" he said, and puts a caller on his blueberry, on hold, and prepares to substantiate his answer, and again, Anjan joins — as if choreographed. Together, with smiling faces, they went: "you know, we put enormous time and resource into this because of our love for India and Indian music." Looking at them, I am convinced their love has multiplied since they began this journey.

Anjan requests India: "now that we have done our best, we would like the Indian government to support this project so that Indian universities, schools, libraries, music academies, recreation centers, and others will have access to Sangeetpedia to create and educate musicians."

Enayet adds, "India's print and electronic media should allot a fair share of time to Indian Classical music as it does for Bollywood music." For an art tradition that colored India's cultural life for millennia, that's not asking much.