

History and Development of Harmonium in India and its Place in Gurbani Kirtan

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Abstract

Harmonium, an instrument of French origin, was brought to India late in 19th century and was widely used by missionaries and chaplains though it was welcomed by Indian musicians and performers also as it facilitates singing and has a loud sound but soon, in early 20th century it became a matter of discussion and criticism among the scholars. They criticized it for its fixed key intervals lacking in srutis (microtones) and some certain subtle inflections such as andolan, meend and gamak etc. which are very important in Indian classical music as they play a crucial role in certain ragas carrying same notes, to make a difference among them. Rabindranath Tagore condemned it as "bane of Indian Music" (B.C. Deva, 1978: 95). John Herbert Foulds, head of All India Radio, Delhi in 1930s alleged this instrument of being incapable of producing microtones and thus unsuitable for classical music and calling it as "Harm-onium" as well as 'Un -Indian'(Rahaim, M. 2011:17) That is why in 1940 the then controller of AIR Mr. Lionel Fielden banned harmonium on AIR and it remained banned till 1971.

On the other hand performers of this instrument continued carrying their work with harmonium. They developed reforming techniques to play the instrument so that to cope with the shortcomings of the instrument to some extent. Meanwhile, the classical singing also underwent some changes with the passage of time (Meer, W., 1980:188). The missionaries, chaplains and well trained performers made the instrument popular in public as well as in musicians also. Even classical singers started allowing accompaniment of harmonium with their performances, solo of harmonium was also developed by good artistes. With the efforts of harmoniumists and with changing trends, the ban on AIR was also lifted in 1971. The instrument now-a-days has become very popular as an accompaniment of singing. This paper aims at searching the present position of harmonium in sikh kirtan tradition which has been accompanied by harmonium since its arrival and the controversy among the scholars of this field because even now-a-days some of the performers prefer singing gurbani with string instruments of Guru's times instead of harmonium accompaniment; they even condemn it for being out of tune.

Keywords: *Harmonium, sikh gurbani, Indian classical music, fretted veena, eurpoean musical scale,*

"The serious menace to Indian music is of the harmonium, which has penetrated already to the remotest parts of India. It dominates the theatre, and desolates the hearth, and before long it will, if it does not already, desecrate the temple. Beside its deadening effect on a living art, it falsifies it by being out of tune with itself. This is a grave defect, though its gravity can be exaggerated; it could also be lessened by a revised tuning. A worse fault is that it is a borrowed instrument constructed originally to minister to the less noble kind of music of other lands. It has taken a century to invent and perfect the pianoforte; if she must have the fatal facility of a keyed instrument, India could well spare a century or two for inventing something that should do justice to her music. (Fox Strangways, A.H., 1914:163)

Fox Strangways, when visited India during 1910-11, saw harmonium, an European instrument, well in practice in Indian hands whose music was much better and refined than the steady tones of harmonium (Fox Strangways A.H.1914 :163). He was very much surprised when during a concert in Trivandrum (though exact date not mentioned) he heard harmonium sounding continuously in Northern Punjab. The menace, he tries to describe to Indian music by the use of European instrument harmonium, in his own words, *"The first thing that harmony would do, if now applied even tentatively to Indian music, as some advocate, would be to get rid of that feeling and those functions, and with them of the grace-notes and all that makes raga worth having. As the raga now is, its notes are like the pieces on the chess-board; harmony by investing them all equally with power of its own would make them like the pawns."* (Fox Strangways, A.H., 1914:163)

Worrying about the future of Indian music he cautioned Indian music scholars not to use harmonium with their music. In his book he writes that if the Indian scholars were quite aware of this danger of spoiling their subtle music by the use of European instrument, they should stop using it immediately. He articulates, *"If the rulers of native states realized what a death-blow they were dealing at their own art by supporting or even allowing a brass band, if the clerk in a government office understood the indignity he was putting on a song by buying the gramophone which grinds it out to him after his day's labour, if the Mohammedan 'Star' singer knew that the harmonium with which he accompanies himself was ruining his chief asset, his musical ear, and if the girl who learns the pianoforte, could see that all the progress she made was a sure step towards her own denationalization as if she crossed the black water and never returned - they would pause before they laid such sacrilegious hands on saraswati".* (Fox Strangways, A.H., 1914:163)

Though a harmonium like instrument was called 'orgue expressif' (expressive organ) in Europe by its inventor because his instrument was capable of greater expression and was able to produce a crescendo and diminuendo.¹ Hermann Helmholtz a renowned physicist describes in

¹ A professor of Physiology at Copenhagen named Christian Gottlieb Kratzenstein (1723 - 1795) first in 1780 founded free reed instrument in the western world. After that in 1810, Gabriel Joseph Grenie (1756-1837) exhibited

his book 'Sensations of tone' that among all musical instruments, harmonium is the most suitable one for experimenting on tones. He writes that it has uniformly sustained tone which is quite effective on human mind and has distinct combinational tones. He asserts "Among musical instruments the harmonium on account of its uniformly sustained tone, the piercing character of its quality of tone and its tolerably distinct combinational tones, is particularly sensitive to inaccuracies of intonation. And as its vibrators also admit of a delicate and durable tuning, it appeared to me peculiarly suitable for experiments on a more perfect system of tones." (Helmholtz H.1954:18) Lord Rayleigh also used harmonium to devise a method for indirectly measuring frequency accurately, using approximated known equal by tempered intervals. (Rayleigh, 1878: 15)

But in India, it was fiercely criticized for its incapability of producing *srutis*² (the microtones) and the subtle ornaments of India music like *gamak*, glide and oscillation etc. As B.C. Deva writes,

"Its suitability has been the subject of controversy often fierce and ulteriorly motivated. To understand and evaluate its inadequacies as well as adequacies, if any, it is proper that we recognize two very essential aspects of raga; indeed these form the bases for the finest musical experiences and express genius of the melodic music of India. The two are: sruti and gamak." (Deva B.C.; 1978:125)

Indian scholars know well that same 'note' carries different psycho-acoustic value in different ragas; e.g. *rishabha* in Todi and in Bhairav is quite distinct in its intonation and thus in its psycho-acoustic value and effect. Similarly, *gandhar* in Kanhra is very very soft (Ati komal and andolit) whereas it is normally soft in Kafi. There are so many such examples lying in Indian raga system of music. This peculiarity of intonation of the same note is quite absent in harmonium's fixed keys. The point to note is that the Indian Music is based on 22 *srutis* and not merely on 12 staccato type tones in an octave which harmonium has. *"It is the experience of every musician that the same 'note' acquires different, but recognizable pitches in ascent and descent. All these and more are pitch distinctions of 'hair-breadth', so very basic to our music. Can a harmonium provide the facility for obtaining such delicate shades? Not ordinarily. Even the best of such instruments are tempered and the very manner of their tuning prevents the*

harmonium-like instrument which he called an 'orgue expressif'. Finally in 1840, Alexandre Debain of Paris after improving Grenie's instrument patented it naming Harmonium (see The New Caxton Encyclopedia, 1972; vol. 9, pp. 2917).

² In contrary to western tempered scale, Indian musical scale is a natural scale which has 22 *srutis* in a *saptak*. Bharat in *Natyashastra* tried to measure 22 *srutis* in a *saptak* on *veena* through his experiment called *Sarna Chatushtai*.

production of these high tune srutis. Even if one could get a harmonium constructed to one's key, a twelve-tone-to the octave keyboard would still be inadequate (Deva B.C., 1978:126)"

In this concern it is worth mentioning here that many efforts have been made for the construction of a harmonium carrying srutis. K.B. Deval and E. Clements designed their sruti harmonium according to their just intonation in ratios of Indian sruti system. During the first all India Music conference at Baroda in 1916, they demonstrated their instrument. They claimed that Major tones, Minor tones and semitone were same as the four sruti interval (9:8), the three sruti interval (10:9) and the two sruti interval (16:15) respectively (Clements E: 1981:3) According to this finding shudha rishabha and Shudha dhaivat which were at three sruti intervals from Sa and Pa respectively according to ancient scholars were minor tones and therefore should be considered to be at a degree lower by one sruti i.e. 10/9 (minor tone) and not to be in the ratio of 9/8, hence proving wrong in its own terms. Therefore it was opposed vehemently by the scholars. So their sruti-harmonium being based on their own into national system was not accepted.³ (Nayar, S., 1989: 274)

In 1967, Gurubaksha singh of New Delhi tuned arithmetically 22 *srutis* on a harmonium, and Dr. S. Ramanathan of Madras and shri. S. Ramanathan of Tiruchirapalli constructed a sruti-veena, where in a set, a string can be tuned to any desired interval. It was observed that the harmonium could accomodate only one given tuning whereas veena could accomodate any kind of tuning. This is also important to note that only physical frequencies were measured with these experiments and not the pitches⁴ (Deva B.C. 1981: 104). Even on fretted veena, it is unusual to describe the swaras figuring in ragas in terms of swarsthanas and not with reference to srutis, which according to P. Sambamoorthy is not a difficult thing to do. He Says "*Once the melodic individuality of a raga is understood and grasped, one can easily perceive the precise frequencies of its notes*" (Sambamoorthy, P., 1960:44). Meaning that once we are trained in the actual melody and form of a raga, then it will not be a matter of any discord with the accompany of a fretted veena or may be of harmonium, perhaps that is why practically, most of the classical vocalists today, allow harmonium accompany with them, but Prof. Blasserna describes that the temperate scale has become generally accepted; it has so come into daily use that for the most part, our modern executants musicians no longer know that it is an incorrect scale, born of transition in order to avoid the practical difficulties of musical execution. The great progress

³ E. clements, later on protested against Bhatkhande's theory of evolving ragas from a gamut of 12 notes only. He also disagreed with Bhatkhande's theory of srutis having equal intervals (see Encyclopaedia of Indian Music with special reference to Ragas.).

⁴ The author aims at observing the success of sruti harmonium here so giving details of these experiments is not my purpose, though details of these experiments may be seen in Sangeet Kala Vihar July 1967.

made in instrumental music is due to this scale and above all the ever-increasing importance of the piano-forte in social life is to be attributed to it but no doubt, it does not represent all that can be done in this respect. It would be certainly very desirable to return to the exact scale with a few difficulties smoothed over to meet the requirements of practice, for it cannot be denied that the temperate scale has destroyed many delicacies and has given to music founded on simple and exact laws, a character of almost coarse approximation. (Bhatkhande V.N 1951: 231) Explaining and supporting these views Bhatkhande writes, "It follows that music founded on the temperate scale must be considered as imperfect music, and far below our musical sensibility and aspirations. That it is endured, and even thought beautiful, only shows that our ears have been systematically falsified from infancy." whereas the stringed instruments are most satisfactory and have most mellow musical sound and therefore free and can be shifted at the will of the artist. The return to the exact scale does not present any serious difficulty to them." (ibid). Ananda Coomarswamy commented, "The constant use of harmonium has degenerated Indian music. By degeneration, I mean literally confusion, a running together, and destruction of bounding lines, a process quite distinct from any natural waning of vitality at the latter end of an art cycle. (Clements, E., 1981: vi).

B. C. Deva , giving one more reason for the unsuitability of this instrument says, "The other fundamental ornamentation, gamaka, can also not be elicited from harmonium. Glides, Swings or any other decorations to tones which require continuous transitions are impossible on this instrument". (Deva B.C. 1978:126)

It is also well said that it was during swadeshi movement when harmonium was boycotted to use as it was taken as a western one. Shubha Mudgal, Giving her reasoning says that electronic key board and synthesizer have faced no objections whatsoever and gained widespread acceptance in Indian music because they came to India after British have left, and perhaps that is why, we made an independent choice to accept it so freely as opposed to harmonium, banned by the Brits and therefore stigmatized even today long after we are said to have become independent. (Mudgal, S., 2007:1)

Matt Rahaim describes in his paper, "That Ban (e) of Indian Music: Hearing politics in the Harmonium, "that harmonium was objected for three main reasons, first that it could not glide smoothly between discrete notes, second that its turning is wrong and the third that it is un-Indian. (Rahim, M., 2011:2). To handle with for first two objections the harmonium players developed various techniques. They also avoid playing ragas like Darbari Kanhra as its gandhar and dhaivat have gentle undulation andolan which is impossible on harmonium. The harmoniumists believe that ragas like Darbari Kanhra are inappropriate for solo rendering on harmonium just as light ragas are inappropriate for a full hour of elaboration on the rudra vina using or heavy ragas are inappropriate for singers with very light voices. The rejection of the harmonium on the basis of its inability to produce continuous slides between notes is inevitably

based on the notion that Indian melody is essentially continuous and western melody is essentially discrete. The rejection of the harmonium on the basis of its tuning is likewise based on the persistent notion that Indian and West have essentially different intonational systems. While practically observing we see tonal continuity in western art music which include string, trombon and vocal portaments; expressive vibrate and the whole range of rhythmic naunce between staccato and legato. We also see tonal discreteness in Indian music which includes taan, jhala and sparsh on fretted instruments such as sitar and dilruba, and the rapid, stop-laden vocables of sung taranas. Moreover, other instruments used for raga music, such as santoor and the jal tarang are incapable of bending notes, and thus avoid ragas with great tonal naunce, as harmonium does and yet they are widely accepted as Indian instruments (Rahaim, M., 2011:3) The rejection of harmonium, however Rahaim asserts cannot be seen merely as an issue of acoustics or of geographical origin or as an extension of the boycott of British goods carried out during the swadeshi movement, after all the violin has been welcomed into Indian classical music both north and south (Rahaim, M., 2011:5). But Peggy Helroyde clears this by saying, “Western scale mainly based on tempered scale which contains a set of combination of tones and semitones in either major or minor diatonic scale. Two or more notes may be sounded simultaneously in western music; this chordal harmony is the thick base against which everything to be heard, especially in symphonic music.... The clipper and precise tones of the piano are the exact opposite of the resonances of any solo instrument in India.” (Helroyde, P., (1972):123).

Though Bhava'nra'v A. Pingle welcomes European wind instruments. (the name of any instrument is not mentioned) He says, “String instruments do not give a long current of sound unless produced by a bow, and that too is not in unity or quality with the voice. It is absolutely necessary that the accompanying instruments, excepting the drum, must not be only in unison, but must be in quality or timbre.” The only defect he tells that the European wind instruments get out of tune soon. (Pingle, B., A., 1894:108). This explanation though Pingle gives in context to the accompanying instruments. He explains that most of the instruments are incapable of following the voice on low pitches though on high pitch their sound quality deteriorates. It is therefore, he suggests for European wind instruments.

In despite of its criticism, harmonium remained in practice by the performers and especially in the training schools of music. As it provided a standard raga grammar to the learners and made easy to teach as well, many books on harmonium learning were published like ‘Harmonium Sutra’ (1874) of S.M. Tagore, Harmonium Shikha (1888) of Upendra Kishore Roy Chowdhary etc. Large Number of students were taught harmonium in various music schools, like Gandharva Mahavidyalaya of V.D. Paluskar, (Lahore), S.M. Tagore Music School (Bengal), Maula Bakshi’s music school (Baroda) etc.

Initially in late 19s coming in India, harmonium was accompanied for devotional singing by missionaries and by chaplains. Soon, it became popular throughout the country and its manufacturing was started within India. By 1875, Dwarkanath Ghose, the instrument maker of Calcutta, started manufacturing harmonium with some modification so that to suit Indian music performers because the French harmonium with pedal bellows was unsuitable for Indian music performer being in sitting position unlike western music performer in standing position. It was, therefore, in India, harmoniums were equipped with hand bellows instead of pedal bellows and also with drone stops for accompanying Indian classical music. One of the Indian pioneers in constructing harmoniums was Shri H.P. Bhagat of Mumbai. He made a wonderful instrument like the original French one subsequently used by all leading musicians. Later production of harmonium started on a mass scale by Haribhau Vishwanath of Mumbai and Ramsingh etc. (Naphade, K., 2008 03). By 1913, India had become the richest market in the world of harmoniums. (Rahaim,M., 2011:06).

In addition, the performers of this instrument developed various techniques to overcome its limitations. Pt Ganpat Rao in early 20s found some ways to perform classical music also though he was well trained in singing and sitar earlier. He is credited to perform on harmonium in a very attractive and melodious way of playing it. (Matt Rahaim, 2011:7). Contemporarily, Pandit Govindrao Tembe (1881-1955) brought into limelight the art of solo harmonium and gave a place of respect to the harmonium as a solo instrument. He used to accompany the legendary singer Pandit Bhaskar Bua Bakhale. Artistes like Pandit Jnan Prakash Ghosh(1912-1997), Pandit P. Madhukar (1916-1967) and Pandit Bhishmadev vedi made significant contributions to this art. Pandit Bhishmadev Vedi is said to have been first to contemplate improving the instrument by augmenting it with a string box like a harp attached to the top of the instrument. His disciple Manohar chimote later implemented this concept and given the name “Samvadini” to this instrument which has gained a widespread acceptance (Naphade, K., 2008:2) Pandit P. Madhukar was a genius with tremendous mastery over the instrument. The amazing speed with which he could play difficult passages, his extreme dexterity are unmatched to this day. His students, Pt. Tulsidas Borker, Pt. Vishwanath Pendhurkar, Pt. Anant Kumkar are also leading in this art. Pt. Tulsidas Borker, Pt Manohar Chimote, Pt. Rambhau Vijapur are some who gained critical acclaim. Pt. Manohar chimote also led a life of sacrifice and strife including a landmark symbolic lawsuit against all India Radio to force them to lift ban against harmonium. Though the lawsuit was not successful, but his contribution is indeed worthy. (Naphade, K., 2008:2). It was in 1970 when All India Radio sponsored a seminar organized by Sangeet Natak Academy which invited musicologists to discuss the possibility of changing the policy. In this seminar though some scholars spoke against harmonium but most of the scholars raised the voice in favour of harmonium. Among them P.V. Subramaniam, a south Indian music critic spoke very strongly for defense. He articulated that harmonium should not be treated as untouchable. He asserted that harmonium’s free reed design had its origin in South Asian instruments called rusem or sheng,

mouth organ played in northeast India (B.C. Deva 1977:94). Then in 1971, though the ban on harmonium was lifted finally, but was partial and harmonium players could not enjoy the same status as other musicians; AIR did not consider harmonium players to be auditioned and assigned grades to enjoy the status of an artiste as other musicians and did not allow solo performance of harmonium. It is only in the last few years that harmoniumists have been auditioned and graded like other musicians. The famous artists of this field were Pt. Govindrao Patwardhan, Pt. Appa Jalgaokar, Pt Purushottam Walawalkar who did great job for this instrument. Appa Jalgaokar was the first one to receive Sangeet Natak Academy award for his work. Dr. Vidhyadhar Oke, disciple of Pt. Govindrao Patwardhan created a new version of the harmonium called “Melodium” through which the instrument is not restricted to 12 srutis or frequencies within an octave but can play all 22 srutis. Presently Pt. Rambhau Bijapur of belgaun and his disciples Shri Ravindra Katote and Shri Sudhanshu Kulkarni has contributed for popularizing solo of the instrument a lot. They organized a conference in Bangalore which received a huge positive response. Pt Tulsidas Borkar was given, ‘Sangeet Natak Academy’ award by President of India A.P.J Abdul Kalam in 2006 for his contribution to this art of harmonium solo and accompaniment of classical vocal. Singers today admire his art and techniques of playing harmonium in a great deal. Sudhir Nayak, Seema Mestri, Shriram Hasabnis and Kedar Naphade are some of his well reputed disciples in this field.

Tulsidas Borkar ji tells in an interview by his disciple Kedar Naphde “... As for the harmonium, it has a long note and sapaat, which are difficult in a sarangi. Some people play it very harshly hence giving the instrument a bad name. I feel that it is essential to know tuning, as an off-key note is very disturbing. I try to play the harmonium with Sarangi-ang. A true artist is one who understands the strong and weak points of his instrument, assimilates the good points of his instrument and makes the most of them.” (Naphade, K., 2001:3) Naphade writes in his replies through email,

“It is true that the harmonium has some shortcomings like lack of meend, andolan, gamak and micro-tones (with the exception of the new 22-shruti harmonium that is able to produce 22 microtones in an octave), however, harmonium also has several strengths like continuity of note, infinite unbroken sustenance, crispness of sound production and sapaat taan, the fullness and richness of sound which provide great support for vocalists. It is these strengths that have resulted in the harmonium being the leading instrument today for accompaniment of Hindustani classical music. Some of the shortcomings of the instrument can certainly be overcome by performance technique. For example:

- Meend cannot be exactly replicated, but conscious continuity in the playing makes the lack of meend less conspicuous.

- Instead of fully pressing a note, partially pressing a note results in lower frequency and the ability to generate micro tone. Changing the air pressure also can have a similar effect of increasing or decreasing the frequency. This can partially mitigate the issue of not having microtones.
- Several great harmonium players are able to simulate Gamak through performance technique - my guru Pt. Tulsidas Borkar, Late Pt. Govindrao Patwardhan and many of today's younger performance including me and my peers - Sudhir Nayak, Seema Mestri, Vyasmurti Katti etc. have developed a good Gamak technique.
- Murki, Khatka, Gamak can be reproduced without any problems in the harmonium.”

On contrary, Dr.Vidyadhar Gopal Oke ji who has created a patented 22 Shruti Harmonium, expressing his views and scientific facts about harmonium through email writes that routine harmonium is tuned to the '12-Tone European Equi-tempered' scale, and therefore completely unsuitable to Indian Classical Music. All the swaras are in the wrong place. Indian Classical Music employs 22 notes called 'shrutis' and these 22 notes are entirely different from the 12 notes on a routine harmonium.

Since this paper is aimed at searching about the place of harmonium as an accompaniment and its controversy in sikh tradition of Gurbani Kirtan , some of the scholars of this field , today , strictly adhering to the intonational aspect as well as those using harmonium as an accompaniment have been interviewed for their personal views and reasoning. I have taken views of some of the kirtankars who generally perform kirtan in classical singing style, hence have experience of string instruments as well as that of harmonium. I talked to Bhai Baldeep Singh ji, Bhai Kultar Singh ji, Bhai Balbir Singh ji, Prof. Pyara Singh Padam ji, Prof Kartar Singh ji, Principal sukhwant singh ji, Bhai Jaspinder Singh ji, Dr. Gurinder singh ji , Bhai Gurmeet Singh ji Saant , Bhai Hari Singh ji and S. Karminder Singh ji .

Bhai Baldeep Singh ji, an exponent of dhrupal style of singing, well versed in sikh kirtan tradition, very kindly expressed his views. Replying my question if use of harmonium is appropriate for sikh kirtan tradition which is based on classical singing style, he clarified gurbani sangeet is an integral part of Indian classical music and not just “based” on calssical music as many people allege. Answering the question he wrote that harmonium is quite inappropriate for sikh kirtan tradition. A musician not versed with or oblivious to the real form and personality of raga-s and their notes is comfortable using harmonium. He further articulated that the limitations of harmonium like its incapability of reproducing vocal ornamentations like meend, andolan , gamak etc are due to its fixed keys and are such that they simply cannot be ignored, also it cannot play notes of Darbari, multani , todi , bhairao ,

marva, bhairvi, gauri, and even Bilawal to name a few . He supported the use of dhrupadi rabab,. taus , vina, and sarinda for gurbani sangeet.

S. Karminder singh ji, a vocalist as well as a violinist from Batala expressing his views says that he prefers violin as it is easy to tune and easily carryable also in caparison to sarangi , dilruba , surmandal etc. He sings with violin instead of harmonium because as he says violin is capable of reproducing the embellishments of human timbre like meend, gamak; and the emotive value of the shabad is also expressed well with accompaniment of string instrument instead of harmonium. He is strictly in favour of string instruments for accompanying gurbani sangeet as he explains sikh gurus also used string instruments for kirtan, so we should also use them.

Prof. Kartar Singh ji, recipient of President Award & Academy Award, Head Gurmat Sangeet Academy, Anandpur Sahib, strictly opposes use of harmonium for gurbani Kirtan. He said that he himself used harmonium in his previous years of teaching but he once attended Harivallabh Sangeet Sammelan , Jalandhar and observed the classical exponents singing with tanpura, he realized why could not gurbani kirtan be sung with tanpura alongwith other string instruments . Then afterwards, he told that, he never used harmonium during his singing. When I asked him if the tuning of the instrument is required during kirtan , does it create a gap in kirtan such that it becomes a kind of a awkwardness in sangat. He told that the same question was asked to him when he was interviewed on Delhi Doordarshan, then he replied that it doesn't take much time to make minor changes in the tuning during kirtan and so doesn't create any gap; and moreover for this minor reason only we can't say no to string instruments. Explaining the shortcomings of harmonium he said that how can we sing raga Sorath with harmonium as it is incapable of producing meend of ma re, which is a prominent feature of the raga. He acclaimed that the beauty of timbre spoils practising with harmonium, so we should never use harmonium teaching and learning vocal music and those who learn vocal music with harmonium will always be in need of taking support of harmonium.

Bhai Jaspinder Singh ji, hazoori ragi Sri Darbar sahib, disciple of Prof. Kartar Singh ji is totally in favour of singing with tanpura. He feels himself comfortable with tanpura as he says just tunning four strings and we can sing comfortably without any hurdle of playing harmonium. Since harmonium is a western instrument, so there should be no place for harmonium in sikh tradition of kirtan. Performing kirtan with string instruments like Dilruba, Sarinda , Taaus, Rabab is our heritage which we are forgetting, The need is to change the taste of sangat (audience of Kirtan) because harmonium has become the taste of sangat. The reason for using harmonium he told is its comfort to carry faraway places, there is no risk of any kind of breakage. Elaborating his views, he says that to change the taste of sangat the start should be made from Sri Darbar sahib Amritsar, since it is the center place of sikhs ,

Ragis who can sing in classical style should come forward for bringing the change in the taste of sangat .

Prof. Pyara Singh ji ‘Padam’ An exponent of dilruba (a string instrument usually accompanied with sikh kirtan tradition) told me that he has a harmonium tuned very carefully by the experts at Calcutta but he said “Harmonium cannot reproduce the ragas in which shrutis are used e.g. Suha kanhara . Unless someone takes proper training from a guru, he will not be able to sing with the help of harmonium.” He further said, “Earlier kirtan was recited with string instrument; that is because whatever is in our timbre, our finger can follow on string but how can one play the same on fixed key harmonium?” Though he admitted that if the little ones are trained singing with dilruba then they can take some support of accompaniment of harmonium.

Principal Sukhwant Singh ji, of Jawaddi Taksal also opine that harmonium is not an appropriate instrument for sikh kirtan tradition. He suggests that though it may be admissible for accompaniment but strictly be prohibited to be used by head raagi; only string instruments should be used in gurbani kirtan. He himself teaches his class with tanpura. During talk on phone he very humbly explained that though gurbani kirtan should be accompanied by string instruments only, still we cannot make it mandatory for every one as kirtan is meant to pray God and is blessed by the grace of God only. Secondly, it may be a means of livelihood for a person who cannot sing with tanpura, but with the help of harmonium, does well. In that case, he says, we cannot impose such a condition of singing with tanpura, as it is better if someone sings well with harmonium but not with tanpura. The foremost thing which he told that many leading ragis like Bhai Balbir Singh, Bhai Bakhshish Singh ji, Bhai Nirmal Singh ji, Bhai Sarabjit Singh ji always use harmonium even being top class kirtankars of this field. Another problem noticed by him is that the audience is already decreasing; in this situation making tanpura compulsory during kirtan since classical shabad kirtan and accompaniment of tanpura renders it such a high level that kirtankars will rarely be able to perform kirtan.

On the other hand Bhai Balbir Singh ji, a leading raagi of gurbani kirtan asserted that since more than a century kirtan is being executed with harmonium and those who are anti-harmonium are very wrong because kirtan without harmonium is not possible . Harmonium is a respectable instrument , he articulated and explained that who can sing alongwith playing any string instrument like dilruba, sarinda or rabab though he named Bhai Baljit singh ji Namdhari who is the only Kirtankar who sings gurbani Kirtan while playing the string instrument .

Similar views were expressed by Bhai Hari singh ji. Very kindly consented to express his views on the issue Bhai Hari singh ji, former hazoori raagi Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar,

said, “ the volume of string instruments since being very low, can be heard only to two-three persons; whereas harmonium being loud in sound is audible comparatively to a big gathering even without mike”. The main problem with string instruments he told is their tuning which creates a gap during kirtan when changing a raga, the sangat (audience in a gurdwara) cannot be ignored for such a time, discontinuation in kirtan is not all endurable also. Further he said that well skilled string instrument players are also not available, therefore an under-skilled accompanist cannot do. Overall the key point which must be beared in mind according to Bhai hari singh is that that the harmonium should never be overpowered the kirtankar (the singer) rather it is to assist him. So, harmonium should be played in such a manner that which must not deteriorate the singing quality. He told that eighty percent of the rababis used harmonium during kirtan.

Bhai Gurmeet Singh ji ‘Saant’ of Jallandhar, naming a few Kirtankars like Bhai Samund Singh Ji , Bhai Bakhshish singh Ji , Bhai Santa Singh ji Delhi Wale , Principal Baldev Singh Ji, hajoori ragi gurdwara Seesganj Sahib, said that these exponents , known as the expert of this field have always performed kirtan with harmonium though he speculated that these might have learned & exercised classical singing with tanpura during their early training perhaps that was why they could sing so good. He told that a piriod of more than a century is not a short period through which harmonium has been used by a number of very refined artistes. He gave example of the clothing of today, like during guru’s times sikhs used to wear cholas (Long Kurta) and tie dastars but now-a-days they wear pants-shirt, in this way he tried to explain that by the times things remain changing. In place of string instruments, prevalent during guru’s times, harmonium is being used presently almost by all the raagis; all the instruments are good, and we cannot hate harmonium. Whereas personally he feels that during reciting classical shabad, harmonium creates a hurdle as it cannot reproduce murkis and other embellishments of human voice, even though he himself has expertise playing harmonium, as he told. Therefore, it may be played / accompanied by the other person, only after getting skilled in the art-properly.

Bhai Kultar singh ji, son of Bhai Avtar singh ji (author, of the books on notations of gurbani shabads) opine that role of instruments is to accompany the singing, to follow the singer and to fill the gap with music wherever the singer / keertakar has to take some pause. He told that Rabab, Sarinda and Taus -these three string instruments have been used ever during the times of our gurus though there is no such restriction that we cannot use any other instruments to accompany kirtan by our gurus. For this he gave example of dilruba which is being used presently for accompanying gurbani kirtan, was never used during guru’s times. He also explained that if a thousand of rababs is being played, it can never be named as kirtan whereas a single person singing gurubani with proper sur and laya, will be considered as kirtan . So, we should not outcaste harmonium, rather we should play it in such a manner that its inferiority may not affect the singing. We should not learn singing according to the

tempered scale but as far as accompaniment is concerned then we can say that there is a kind of comfort with harmonium because the string instruments get detune even switching on or off the A.C., even the moisture in the environment can create a problem with string instruments. So the ideal situation is that in which the assimilation of the various instruments exists providing that a de-match instrument never be accompanied; like a guitar will never match with kirtan, he said. He himself plays harmonium while singing gurbani and has a dilruba player as an accompanist. An ideal accompany is that which does not create any kind of hurdle in kirtan, so he said, "harmonium should be allowed alongwith other string instruments with kirtan."

A musician has to perform according to the taste of the audience. It is perhaps therefore that the classical music underwent various changes. (Deshpande, V.H., 1973:59) Discussing about the change in music Meer writes that the andolan of Darbari should be very low vibrating between a very high re and a Shudha ga as darbari is a solemn and dignified raga, not a war-song. These two ornamentations are however in flarant discord with the modern conception of music, which needs jerkiness for speed. However a proper meend or andolita (andolan) are extremely difficult and require years of practice. Young artists prefer to invest their time in acquiring fast techniques rather than slow ones, even if the latter are equally difficult they do not have the same appeal for the masses. (Meer, W., 1980:188) Disappearance of ragas, emergence of new ones, transformation of ragas and different interpretations of ragas seem to have been as aspect of change throughout the history of Indian Music (ibid 172)

Conclusion :- We see a contradiction among the scholars and the performers for using harmonium . Firstly a century ago Rabindranath Tagore, Fox strangways, E. Clements , Ananda coomarswamy , K.B. Deval, Foulds , V.N. Bhatkhande , and B.C. Deva, etc. opposed the instrument on behalf of comparing Indian vs. Western music, and tried to lay out a sonic difference between Indian and European music . It was perhaps the sonic difference only that made harmonium to be declared a foreign instrument or an outsider. (see Matt Rahaim 2011) But by the time it was used even by those singers who spoke against it. The controversy of harmonium carried on alongwith its ubiquitous usage. By the virtue of its loud & sustained tone only, harmonium very soon became popular. Being easy to learn and easy to carry, it quickly reached every corner of India. Continuity of notes, infinite in broken sustenance, crispness of sound production and sapaat taan, the fullness and richness of sound provided great support for vocalists. It served as a tool for standardizing raga grammer for large number of students to train, it provided a sonic means to unify them and even obviated the need of guru-shishya parampra . It offered a progressive alternative to the sarangi which

was difficult to play and was not easily accessible. Politically also, Sarangi was associated with feudalism.

Among the gurbani kirtankars Bhai Baldeep Singh ji, Prof Kartar Singh ji, Principal sukhwant Singh ji, Dr.Gurinder Singh ji, Prof. Pyara Singh ji 'Padam', Bhai Jaspinder Singh ji, S. Karminder Singh ji are strictly in favour of performing gurbani kirtan only with tanpura alongwith the accompaniment of other string instruments , but on the other side Bhai Balbir Singh ji leading exponent of this field favours harmonium, though Bhai Kultar Singh ji, Bhai Hari Singh ji and Bhai Gurmeet Singh ji 'Saant' justify a limited accompany of harmonium alongwith other string instruments. Bhai Gurmeet Singh ji 'Saant' hopes coming generation who is learning gurubani kirtan with string instruments will do justice with classical singing of gurubani kirtan but presently looking at the taste of sangat he has to perform with harmonium. Similarly, Bhai Jaspinder Singh ji also takes in account the sangat's inclination for listening to kirtan with harmonium accompany. As far as accompaniment is concerned, the music of harmonium fills the gap whenever the singer takes a pause, as told by Bhai Kultar Singh. So being easily accessible, easily played, and also easily carryable, kirtankars generally use the instrument but following voice according to the fix keys of harmonium is not the right way to get trained in classical music.

Thus we see though the performers themselves can carry their singing along with tanpura but it is the audience perhaps, which to some extent, want to hear the tone of harmonium. Also, we cannot count it the accountability of the performer for creating such expectation among the audience, rather the accountable is the trend of time. Musicians today, prefer to earn the applause of the audience, rather than to preserve intact their artistic integrity. According to the trend of the times the musicians have to change their rendering style to please the audience (see Deshpande, V.H. 1973:59)

As soon as harmonium entered the teaching -learning process, Indian natural scale got spoiled. The children, who learned with tempered scale, remained unacquainted of the natural intonation of swaras and real melody of the ragas, thus resulting in the loss of Indian musical extravaganza. Had it been prohibited to training and been limited to accompany only, it would not have caused any harm to Indian classical music. Actually, the human voice has an infinite scope of intonation and inflections depending to the individual's talent and capability; this wide range of the human voice can never be reproduced by fixed keys. Therefore, Dr. Gurinder Singh of Batala favouring tanpura says that practicing with tanpura corrects even the minor inaccuracies of the voice. But looking at the present scenario we cannot side line harmonium because all cannot sing with tanpura. Though he suggested that the training must be with tanpura so that one could understand actual raga form and the correct intonation. He told that he has learnt in the tutelage of Prof. Karminder Singh ji of Batala who made him practise with tanpura; it is therefore only he is able to perform gurbani

kirtan in classical form of music with proper gayaki. He, whereas, admits harmonium accompany does not effect if the singer is perfect in his intonation. He suggested that if possible then we should try to use tanpura and also it will be a good step if someone plays himself the string instruments which our gurus used, along with singing. So it is a time, not to outcast harmonium but to limit it. Because, once a child becomes mature in the correct intonation of swaras of a raga and becomes familiar with the actual form of a raga, harmonium accompany in a very strict way (Keeping the technicalities of playing it in mind) will not affect his singing. One more point to keep in mind is that this is not the harmonium only which is responsible for occurring changes in Indian music, rather there are various other reasons also which affected the form of Indian music, Like the different taste of the present day audience, preference of the young artistes to invest their time in acquiring fast techniques instead of slow ones , disappearance of old raga, emergence of new ragas, formation of ragas and interpretation of ragas etc. (See Meer, W., 1980 : 172, 188) at last I will conclude saying that if something serves the society, it will survive , if it doesn't it will never . As Kedar Naphde writes, "Let the singers and the audiences decide – Art will survive only if it stays musical. If the harmonium causes art to be non-musical, it will automatically wither away over time."

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