

# The Story of a Musician

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In the Indo-Pak sub-continent, the ustad-shagird model of teaching of music involves a strong interpersonal effort. Teacher (Ustad) individually works with serious students (Shagird). Teacher meets his/her student every day, sing, ask him/her to perform or sing back, and work diligently. The Ustad-Shagird model is based on the guru-shishya tradition, lineage, or *parampara*, which is a spiritual relationship in traditional where teachings are transmitted from a *guru* (teacher) to a 'shishya' (disciple). It is believed that this relationship, based on the genuineness of the Ustad or guru, and the respect, commitment, devotion and obedience of the student, is the best way for subtle or advanced knowledge to be conveyed.

Time and again musicians, with exposure to music teaching in the West, and academics, particularly those trained in the tradition of Western music, have raised questions on the appropriateness and relevance of this model. I, being a product and adherent of this model, cannot disavow its validity and meaningfulness. After all this model has succeeded in transmitting and sustaining our glorious musical heritage through centuries and whatever music we know today has come to us through this model. At the same time, I cannot, ignore out the troubles and hardships, I have personally experienced, like any other student initiated in to music through this model.

In Pakistan, the best teachers, following the traditional model of teaching, are too often primarily performers and then teachers. These teachers follow how their teachers taught them. One should fairly concede that these teachers have no idea of education theory, curriculum development and modern teaching techniques, coaching and mentoring, which could help developing them into a more creative, thoughtful and well-informed teacher.

When I decided to teach music in an academic setting to student in Pakistan for whom music was not the first career option, I was faced with a serious dilemmas for so many reasons; the teaching of music always took place in the traditional and un-transposable Ustad-Shagird model with its peculiar conventions; the Ustadi Shagirdi model was the only proven way for teaching of music; teaching of music was never part of our academia;; there was not even an ordinary model or reference point available to commence teaching of music as an academic exercise, the isolated efforts by individuals for teaching of music in somewhat academic style never brought fruition. What further compounded my dilemma was the realization that my prospective students, deeply grounded in a modern learning tradition, would find it very hard to orient themselves to Ustad-Shagird model, if I tried to initiate them in to it.

On top of all these issues, I was entrusted, as a Head of Department of Music at the National academy of Performing Arts (NAPA), with the task of developing a two-year long course in music and producing 'good results', I repeat 'good results'. Whereas the Ustadi Shagirdi model requires from the student undefined length of learning with no surety of 'good results'.

Music has never been accepted as a respectable career by a large segment of the Pakistani society. It is not only placed very low in the social index, for whatever reasons, but also vehemently suppressed. While taking up the challenge of developing and imparting a course on

music, I prepared myself for all possible rancour, which I already suffered throughout my life for being associated to this supposedly disrespected art. In the past, sometime I also failed to estimate the density of strength required to sustain in this field, so, there were moments in life when I thought of giving up music. But this time, I overcome the fear of being marginalized by my excitement to become a pioneer in setting the foundation of a new method of music teaching in Pakistan.

Driven by my enthusiasm and supported by my fellow musicians, academics, intellectuals and friends, I was able to prepare a curriculum, formulate syllabus, develop courses, identify teaching techniques, and gather resource material for imparting a three-year long course on music. Today, NAPA, in its fifth years of existence, has been able to institutionalize teaching of music in to successful teaching model.

To my surprise, my initial fears were allayed by my young students. They, with their love for studying music, have changed my thinking altogether. Despite all discouragements, the youth have strongly expressed and demonstrated their ambition, resolve and readiness to learning art of music and becoming professional musician, composer and even musicologist. This unexpected response has turned my nightmares into a responsibility to dedicate myself to teaching of music.

With my involvement in teaching music to youngsters, I am enjoying a delightful experience. I have discovered for myself that the quest for learning music predominantly exists among our youth. However, there have been prohibitions in allowing the youth to exercise their right to choose. Had the earlier generations been allowed choosing their cultural and aesthetics pursuits, we would have carried a different image in the world today. I think we still have the chance to make a comeback if we start allowing our youth to engage in their pursuits and facilitate them by providing proper guidance and means to seek knowledge in their areas of interests. I am very optimistic that our enthusiastic youngsters can ensure our 'cultural rescue' and help recover our lost cultural status in international arena.

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