



Grade IX

Lesson 2 - The Sound of Music

Part II - The Shehnai of Bismillah Khan

Prose

Soul of the Chapter

This chapter throws light on the origin of Shehnai and the life of Shehnai maestro, Bismillah Khan. Bismillah Khan is the greatest player of Shehnai today. He has received 'Bharat Ratna', the highest civilian award. We learn from this chapter how Shehnai originated and how it was given a name. We also learn about Bismillah Khan's childhood, his dedication to music and his love for India in general and for Benaras in particular.

A musical instrument called Pungi was banned by Emperor Aurangzeb for its shrill unpleasant sound. It was perfected by a barber who belonged to a family of professional musicians. He played it in the chamber of the king. Its sound was appreciated by the emperor. Since it was born in Shah's chamber and perfected by a Nai, it was named Shehnai.

In the beginning, it was played in the temples before the images of Gods and Goddesses. It was played on every auspicious domestic occasion too. Gradually, it became popular.

Ustad Bismillah Khan belonged to the Benaras Gharana. He was born in 1916 at Dumraon in Bihar. As a five-year-old boy, he played gilli-danda near a pond. He used to visit Bihariji temple and sing Bhojpuri Chaita there. He would earn a big laddu from a local Maharaja as a prize. At the age of six, he moved to Benaras. His uncle, Ali Bux, introduced him to the nuances of playing Shehnai. He was deeply devoted to music. He used to spend most of his time practising on the bank of the river Ganga. The themes of his music are deeply affected by the flowing water of the Ganga.

He got the best performer at the All India Music Conference in Allahabad in 1930. In 1937, he bagged three medals at a music conference in Calcutta (now Kolkata). He was invited



by Pandit Nehru to play the Shehnai from the ramparts of Delhi's Red Fort in 1947. He won many international awards as well.

Bismillah Khan is very fond of Benaras and Dumraon. He declined an offer from one of his students to settle in the United States. He ventured into the celluloid world too. He gave his music in two movies. But the artificial world of cinema could not attract him. For him, music is God. Music is his soul.

NCERT Questions

Thinking About the Text

I. Tick the right answer

1. The (shehnai, pungi) was a 'reeded noisemaker'.

The pungi was a 'reeded noisemaker'.

2. (Bismillah Khan, A barber, Ali Bux) transformed the pungi into a shehnai.

A barber transformed the pungi into a shehnai.

3. Bismillah Khan, paternal ancestors were (barbers, professional musicians).

Bismillah Khan's paternal ancestors were professional musicians.

4. Bismillah Khan learnt to play the shenai from (Ali Bux, Paigambar musicians).

Bismillah Khan learnt to play the shehnai from Ali Bux.

5. Bismillah Khan's first trip abroad was to (Afghanistan, USA, Canada).

Bismillah Khan's first trip abroad was to Afghanistan.

II. Answer these questions in 30-40 words.

1. Why did Aurangzeb ban the playing of the pungi?

Aurangzeb banned the playing of musical instrument pungi because it had a shrill, unpleasant sound.

2. How is a shehnai different from a pungi?

Shehnai has a better tonal quality than pungi. It is a natural hollow stem pipe with holes on its body and is longer and broader than the pungi. Shehnai is, in a way, an improvement upon the pungi.



3. Where was the shehnai played traditionally? How did Bismillah Khan change this?

The shehnai was traditionally played in royal courts, temples and weddings. Ustaaad Bismillah Khan, an undisputed monarch of shehnai, brought this instrument into the classical stage.

4. When and how did Bismillah Khan get his big break?

Bismillah Khan got his big break in 1938. All India Radio opened in Lucknow and Bismillah Khan played shehnai on radio. He soon became an often heard player on radio. He became the first Indian to greet the nation with his shehnai from the Red Fort on 15 August, 1947.

5. Where did Bismillah Khan play the shehnai on 15 August 1947? Why was the event historic?

On 15 August 1947, Bismillah Khan played the Raag Kaafi on his shehnai from the Red Fort. The event was historic because it was on the occasion of India's Independence from British Rule.

6. Why did Bismillah Khan refuse to start a shehnai school in the USA?

Bismillah Khan refused one of his student's request to start a shehnai school in the USA because he would not live away from Hindustan, specifically, from Benaras, the River Ganga and Dumraon.

7. Find at least two instances in the text which tell you that Bismillah Khan loves India and Benaras.

The first instance is when he turned down his student's offer to start a shehnai school in USA. The second instance is when Khansaab was asked by Shekhar Gupta about moving to Pakistan during the partition, he said that he would never leave Benaras.

Thinking About Language

I. Complete the following sentences, Beginning with a to-verb, try to answer the questions in brackets.

1. The school sports team hopes (What does it hope to do?)

The school sports team hopes to win the match.

2. We all want (What do we all want to do?)

We all want to succeed in our life.

3. They advised the hearing-impaired child's mother (What did they advise her to do?)

They advised the hearing-impaired child's mother to consult a doctor.



4. The authorities permitted us to (What did the authorities permit us to do?)

The authorities permitted us to construct the building.

5. A musician decided to (What did the musician decided to do?)

A musician decide to open a school for children.

II. From the text on Bismillah Khan, find the words and phrases that match these definitions and write them down. The number of the paragraph where you will find the words/phrases has been given for you in brackets.

1. The home of royal people (1)

The royal residence

2. The state of being alone (5)

Solitude

3. A part which is absolutely necessary (2)

Indispensable

4. To do something not done before (5)

Invent

5. Without much effort (13)

Effortlessly

6. Quickly and in large quantities (9) _____ and _____.

Thick and fast

III. Tick the right answer.

1. When something is revived, it (remains dead/lives again).

When something is revived, it lives again.

2. When a government bans something, it wants it (stopped/started)

When a government bans something, it wants it stopped.

3. When something is considered auspicious, (welcome it/avoid it).

When something is considered auspicious, welcome it.

4. When we take to something, we find it (boring/interesting).

When we take to something, we find it interesting.

5. When you appreciate something, you (find it good and useful/find it of no use).

When you appreciate something, you find it good and useful.



6. When you replicate something, you do it (for the first time/for the second time).

When you replicate something, you do it for the second time.

7. When we come to terms with something, it is (still upsetting/no longer upsetting).

When we come to terms with something, it is no longer upsetting.

IV. Consult your dictionary and complete the following table. The first one has been done for you. Use these words in phrases or sentences of your own.

Some sentences using these adjectives are:

1. She is indispensable for the successful completion of the project.
 2. Sunita was impressed by my singing.
 3. He is afraid of the dark.
 4. I enjoy the company of my paternal uncle.
 5. Gennie was showered with countless gifts.
 6. My grandmother gave me a priceless piece of advice.
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Solved Question Bank

Reference-to-Context Questions

Q. Read the following extracts carefully and answer the questions that follow:

1. Emperor Aurangzeb banned the playing of a musical instrument called pungi in the royal residence for it had a shrill unpleasant sound. Pungi became the generic name for dreaded noisemakers. Few had thought that it would one day be revived.

A barber of a family of professional musicians, who had access to the royal palace, decided to improve the tonal quality of the pungi.

- a. Pungi was banned for its _____ sound.

Shrill unpleasant

- b. _____ tried to improve the tonal quality of Pungi.

A barber

- c. Pungi became a very common name and was often associated with people who were great chatterers.

True



d. In the above lines the word _____ means same as 'restored to the life or consciousness'.

'Revived'

2. As a five-year old. Bismillah Khan played gilli-danda near pond in the ancient estate of Dumraon in Bihar. He would regularly go to the nearby BihAariji temple to sing the Bhojpuri 'Chaita', at the end of which he would earn a big laddu weighing 1.25 kg, a prize given by the local Maharaja.

a. The _____ was enchanted by Bismillah's song at the temple.

Local Maharaja

b. Bismillah Khan's favourite leisure activity was _____ near a pond.

Three, Benaras

c. Ali Bux, his uncle and a Shehnai player, always fascinated Bismillah.

True

d. 'Maternal uncle' used in the above lines means _____.

Mother's brother

4. When India gained Independence on August 15, 1947, Bismillah Khan became the first Indian to greet the nation with his Shehnai. He poured his heart out into Raag Kafi from the Red Fort to an audience which included Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, who later gave his famous *Tryst with Destiny* speech.

a. _____ was expressed by Bismillah on the occasion of India's Independence.

Raag Kafi

b. The audience was inclusive of _____.

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru

c. Pandit Nehru became the first person to greet the nation with his Shehnai.

False

d. The word that is the same as 'attained or obtained' is _____.

'Gained'

5. His first trip abroad was to Afghanistan where King Zahir Shah was so taken in by the maestro that he gifted him priceless Persian carpets and other souvenirs. The King of Afghanistan is not the only one to be fascinated with Bismillah's music. Film director, Vijay Bhatt was so impressed after hearing Bismillah play at a festival Gunj Uthi Shehnai after the instrument.



a. Another word for 'so taken in' can be _____.

Impressed or attracted.

b. King Zhair Shah presented _____ to Bismillah.

Persian carpets

c. *Gunj Uthi Shehnai* was the film directed by Vijay Bhatt.

True

d. The word in the above lines that denotes 'a performer of classical music' is _____.

'perfect'

Short Answer Questions

1. Why did Aurangzeb ban the playing of the Pungi?

Emperor Aurangzeb did not like the sound of Pungi. He found it shrill and unpleasant. He decided to ban its use in the royal residence. Later on it was perfected by a barber.

2. How is Shehnai different from Pungi?

Shehnai is different from Pungi. It is longer and broader than Pungi. It is made of natural hollow stem of Burma teak wood. It has seven holes in it. It is played by opening and closing some of the holes. It is played on every auspicious occasion.

3. Where was the Shehnai played traditionally? How did Bismillah Khan change this practice?

Traditionally, the Shehnai was played only in temples and at marriages. It was confined to the royal palaces alone. But Bismillah Khan changed this practice. He made it popular and brought it on the classical stage.

4. How is the Shehnai instrument made?

A member of the barber family chose a pipe with a natural hollow stem. The hollow stem was longer and broader than the original Pungi. He drilled seven holes in it, and produced a Shehnai with an impressive and sonorous tonal sound. He played it in the presence of the emperor who liked it. Nowadays, the Shehnai is made from seasoned Burma teak wood.

5. Why did Bismillah Khan refuse to start a Shehani school in the USA?

Bismillah Khan was fond of Benaras and the holy river Ganga. He had many disciples from abroad too. One of his students wanted him to head a school in the United States. He



refused to do so because he could not take the Ganga to the United States. He could never leave India.

6. How can you say that Bismillah Khan loved India and Benaras?

Bismillah Khan loved Benaras and the holy river Ganga. He could never think of leaving the two. He refused an offer from a student from the United Kingdom who wanted him to settle in the USA and head a school. He remarked that whenever he was in a foreign country he kept yearning to see India. It shows that he loved India especially Benaras.

7. What was Bismillah Khan's achievement when he was just five-years old?

Bismillah Khan was fond of music right from his childhood. As a five-year-old child he used to visit Bihariji temple at Dumraon to sing Bhojpuri 'Chaita'. He used to sing so well that he was awarded with a 1.25 kg Laddu by the local Maharaja.

8. Why did Bismillah Khan stop scoring music for movies?

Bismillah Khan gave music in two movies, i.e. 'Gunj Utthi Shehanai' and 'Sanadhi Apanna'. He was not happy with his own work. He stopped scoring music for movies because he could not adjust with the artificiality and glamour of the celluloid world.

9. When and how did Bismillah Khan get his big break?

With the opening of All India Radio in Lucknow in 1938, Bismillah Khan got a big break. He became an often heard Shehnai player on Radio. When India gained Independence on 15 August 1947, Bismillah Khan became the first Indian to greet the nation with his Shehnai.

10. Where did Bismillah Khan play the Shehnai on 15 August 1947? Why was the event historic?

Bismillah Khan played the Shehnai from the Red Fort on 15 August 1947. It was a historic event because he became the first Indian to greet the nation on the occasion of first Independence Day. This programme was attended by Nehru and Gandhiji.

11. Music has no religion. How did Bismillah Khan's Shehnai prove it? Do you also think so?

Yes, it is true that music has no religion. Bismillah Khan was a Muslim but his music, his Shehnai, was for all. He used to play Shehnai in temples. The flowing water of Ganga inspired him. All the ceremonies of the Hindus were incomplete without his Shehnai. He was equally loved and respected by all the religions.

Long Answer Questions

1. What were the recurring themes of Bismillah Khan's music and how did they originate?

What does this tell you about Bismillah Khan?

The recurring themes of Bismillah Khan's music were based on the flowing water of the Ganga. The predominant themes of his music were the characteristics of temple and the relationship between human beings. His association with the temples and the Ganga was very old. He went to Benaras in his early age. He was introduced to Shehnai there by his maternal uncle, Ali Bux. He used to play shehnai at the *Balaji and Mangala Maiya* temples. His favourite places were on the river bank where he used to practise for hours in isolation. This shows him to be a man with a spiritual and humane soul. He was attached to his birthplace as well as god and found solace in the company of nature.

2. Describe in brief the early life of Bismillah Khan, his achievements and the various awards that were conferred on him in later years.

Born on March 21, 1916, Bismillah Khan belonged to a family of professional Shehnai players. At the age of six, he moved to Benaras where his maternal uncle, Ali Bux, introduced him to the nuances of playing the simple reed instrument, called the Shehnai.

He got the best performer award at the All India Music Conference in Allahabad in 1930. In 1937, he bagged three medals at a music conference in Kolkata. He was invited by Pandit Nehru to play the Shehnai from the ramparts of Delhi's Red Fort in 1947. He had also won many international awards and the highest award which he had received, was the 'Bharat Ratna'. For him, music was his religion, music was his soul.

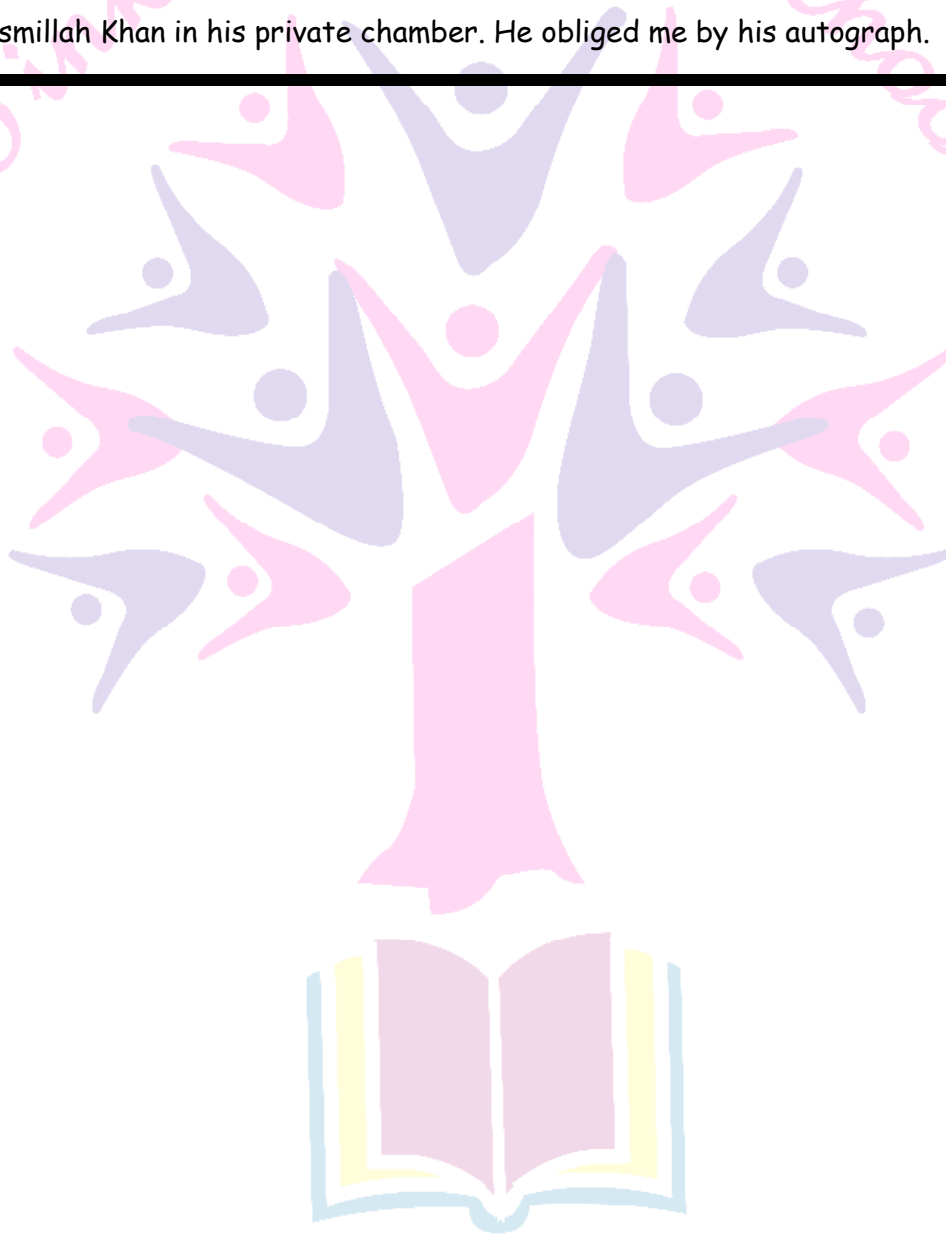
3. Strong determination, motivation and right direction helped Bismillah Khan in being what he was. Do you agree? How important are these characteristic traits in our life?

Yes, I agree. Bismillah Khan, born in a small village, became a legend in the field of music. He was the best Shehnai player. He reached the heights of music. He brought Shehnai in forefront. It all happened due to his strong determination, motivation and right direction. These values are very important in our life. No one can succeed in life if one is not motivated, determined and hard working. If we are clear in our goal and move in the right direction, we get success. His journey from a six-year-old ordinary boy to the 'Bharat Ratna' was possible because of the above characteristic traits.



4. You attended one of the concerts of Bismillah Khan. Describe your experience.

I had an opportunity to attend the concert of Bismillah Khan. The concert was organised by Sangeet Academy in Siri Fort Auditorium on 14th August. It was a wonderful experience for me. When Ustad Bismillah Khan started his Shehnai, there was pin-drop silence in the auditorium. Everyone was mesmerised. I was so fascinated that I could not even blink my eyes. It was so melodious, so mind-blowing. Everyone was captivated for two hours. The non-stop two-hour programme was a wonderful experience for me. I got an opportunity to meet Ustad Bismillah Khan in his private chamber. He obliged me by his autograph.



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