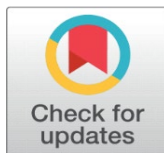
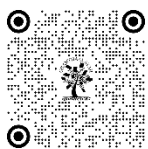


VIDUSHI MALABIKA KANAN: A HIDDEN GEM IN INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

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ABSTRACT

Vidushi Malabika Kanan (1930–2009) was a legendary Hindustani classical vocalist whose artistry and scholarship enriched Indian classical music for decades. Born into a family steeped in musical heritage, she was trained rigorously from a young age, first by her father, Prof. Rabindralal Roy, a musicologist and pioneer in Hindustani classical music, and later through her associations with various musical traditions and maestros. Her performances, marked by technical precision and emotive depth, offered a unique interpretation of ragas, blending the lyrical beauty of khyal with her aesthetic sensibilities. Her marriage to Pandit A.T. Kanan, an exponent of the Kirana gharana, further added to her repertoire and stylistic depth. This paper explores her early life, musical journey, contributions to Indian classical music, and her enduring legacy, offering insights into the life of a musician who transcended barriers and made a remarkable contribution in the field of Hindustani music. It highlights her exploration of rare ragas, her mentoring roles, and her awards, while reflecting on her humility and dedication as a performing artist and teacher.

Keywords: Vidushi Malabika Kanan, Hindustani Classical Music, Kirana Gharana, Raga Interpretation, Rare Ragas, Indian Classical Music Legacy

1. INTRODUCTION

Indian classical music is a rich and beautiful tradition shaped by many great musicians. Among these artists, many women artists have made an unforgettable impact with their dedication, talent, and hard work. One such artist is Late Vidushi Malabika Kanan, a gifted musician who deserves more recognition for her contribution to this art form. Vidushi Malabika Kanan was an outstanding artist. She was born into a musical family and carried forward the legacy of her gharana while creating her own identity. Her music was a wonderful mix of strong training and creative expression. As a representative of the Kirana gharana, she stayed true to its style but added her own unique touches, making her performances heartfelt and moving.

Even with her remarkable talent, Malabika Kanan's name is not as well-known as it should be. However, her contributions to Indian classical music are just as important as those of more famous artists. Her soulful singing, and deep commitment to music inspired many young musicians, proving that true artistry is not measured by fame.

To honor her legacy, I have written a research paper on Vidushi Malabika Kanan. This is my first step in sharing her story, her musical thoughts, and her contributions to Indian classical music. I hope this effort helps more people understand and appreciate her work, ensuring that her legacy continues to inspire others.

Vidushi Malabika Kanan's life reminds us of many hidden gems in music who deserve to be celebrated. It is important for musicians and researchers to bring their work to light and keep their memories alive in the rich history of Indian Classical Music.

2. EARLY LIFE AND MUSICAL UPRISING

Malabika Kanan was born on December 27, 1930, in Lucknow, into the illustrious Roy family of Bhagalpur, Bihar, a family celebrated for its contributions to arts, literature, and music. Her father, Prof. Rabindralal Roy, was not only a musicologist but also a profound personality in shaping her early musical sensibilities. Prof. Roy, as the Dean of the Faculty of Music and Fine Arts at the University of Delhi, was deeply committed to promoting Hindustani classical music, and he ensured that his daughter's musical education began at an early age.

Under her father's meticulous guidance, Malabika's training began when she was merely four years old. Her childhood was immersed in the rhythms and melodies of classical music. As a musicologist, Prof. Roy placed immense emphasis on the theoretical aspects of music, which gave Malabika a solid foundation in understanding the intricacies of ragas and compositions. This holistic approach ensured that she not only mastered the technical aspects but also developed a profound emotional connection with her art.

The musical background of the Roy household further enriched Malabika's upbringing. Her lineage boasted luminaries such as Dwijendralal Roy, a renowned poet, playwright, and musician, and Dilip Kumar Roy, a spiritualist and musician. These influences fostered a love for music that was both intellectual and deeply spiritual.

3. INITIAL TRAINING AND MUSICAL EVOLUTION

Malabika's formal training involved mastering the dhrupad and dhamar styles, the foundational pillars of Hindustani classical music. These forms emphasized a disciplined approach to rhythm and melody, and her father's rigorous training sessions ensured that she developed an unwavering commitment to perfection. By the age of sixteen, Malabika was a regular performer on All India Radio (AIR), where her renditions captivated audiences across the country³.

Her journey across India with her father exposed her to diverse musical traditions, which broadened her horizons and deepened her understanding of regional styles and nuances. She studied under several maestros, absorbing elements from various gharanas while retaining her individuality. This eclectic training contributed to her versatility as an artist, allowing her to explore a wide range of ragas and compositions in Indian Classical Music⁴.

4. ARTISTIC STYLE AND PERFORMANCES

Malabika Kanan's singing was characterized by a rare combination of technical rigor and emotional depth. Her voice, described as both powerful and mellifluous, bestowed itself beautifully to the khyal genre. Her renditions were marked by clarity of pronunciation, a meticulous approach to rhythm (laya), and an ability to evoke profound rasa (emotion) through her singing.

A defining feature of her style was her ability to seamlessly blend the technical and aesthetic aspects of music. Her performances often began with a meditative aalap that gradually unfolded the essence of the raga. This was followed by intricate taans and gamaks that showcased her command over vocal techniques, culminating in a deeply emotive presentation that left her audiences spellbound.

One of her most celebrated performances was her rendition of Raga Darbari⁵, known for its somber and introspective quality. Her interpretation of the raga, which requires a delicate balance of precision and emotion, earned her acclaim from both critics and connoisseurs. Legendary flautist T.R. Mahalingam was among those who praised her performance, describing it as a masterclass in musical expression⁶.

5. COLLABORATION WITH PANDIT A.T. KANAN

Malabika's marriage to Pandit A.T. Kanan, a celebrated Kirana gharana vocalist, marked a significant chapter in her life. The union was not only a personal partnership but also a profound musical collaboration. Pandit Kanan's mastery of the Kirana style, with its emphasis on slow, meditative elaboration of ragas, complemented Malabika's dynamic and lyrical approach.

Together, they explored new dimensions in music, exchanging ideas and experimenting with compositions⁷ While Malabika adopted elements of the Kirana gharana, she remained deeply rooted in her father's teachings. This fusion of styles enriched her repertoire, enabling her to present a unique blend of tradition and innovation. The couple often performed together at prestigious music conferences and festivals, where their companionship and mutual respect were evident in their renditions.

6. CONTRIBUTIONS TO INDIAN CLASSICAL MUSIC

Vidushi Malabika Kanan's contributions to Hindustani classical music extended beyond her performances. As a custodian of her father's legacy, she was deeply committed to preserving and popularizing rare ragas. Her repertoire included lesser-known ragas such as Suhaag and Hem, which she presented with the same devotion and meticulousness as the more popular ragas.

In addition to her role as a performer, Malabika was a dedicated teacher and mentor. As a member of the Expert Committee of the ITC Sangeet Research Academy in Kolkata, she played a pivotal role in nurturing young talent. Her students often spoke of her patience, humility, and ability to inspire them to reach their full potential⁸. Her teaching emphasized not only technical mastery but also the importance of understanding the spiritual essence of music. Malabika's contributions were recognized with numerous recognitions and honors, including the Sangeet Natak Akademi Award in 2000 and the ITC Award in 1995. These honors were a testament to her enduring impact on the world of Indian classical music.

7. LEGACY AND INFLUENCE

Vidushi Malabika Kanan's legacy is multifaceted. As an artist, she was revered for her ability to breathe life into every raga she performed, infusing it with her unique interpretation. Her humility and affability endeared her to her peers, students, and audiences alike. Despite herself a maestro, she remained approachable and treated everyone with kindness and respect.

Her recordings continue to inspire musicians and connoisseurs, offering a glimpse into the depth and beauty of Hindustani classical music. Her exploration of rare ragas and her commitment to preserving the purity of the khyal tradition have ensured that her contributions remain relevant for generations to come⁹.

8. CONCLUSION

Vidushi Malabika Kanan's life and music represented the essence of Hindustani classical music a perfect balance of technical mastery, emotional depth, and spiritual resonance. Her journey, rooted in her father's teachings and enriched by her partnership with Pandit A.T. Kanan, serves as a beacon for aspiring musicians. Her performances, teaching, and dedication to rare ragas have left an indelible mark on the world of Indian classical music.

Her humility and approachability, combined with her extraordinary talent, made her a beloved figure in the music community. Her legacy continues to inspire, reminding us of the transformative power of music and its ability to transcend boundaries. Vidushi Malabika Kanan remains a shining example of how dedication, discipline, and a deep connection to one's art can create a timeless legacy.

9. ADDITIONAL REFLECTIONS

Malabika Kanan's story is also a testament to the importance of nurturing young talent and fostering a culture of respect and collaboration within the music fraternity. Her emphasis on mentoring and her role as a guide at the ITC Sangeet Research Academy highlight her commitment to ensuring that the rich tradition of Hindustani classical music continues to thrive. As the world of Indian classical music evolves, her contributions serve as a reminder of the importance of preserving its roots while embracing innovation.

Her ability to balance tradition with personal expression, her exploration of rare ragas, and her role as a teacher have set a benchmark for future generations. Vidushi Malabika Kanan's life is not just a chapter in the history of Indian classical music; it is an ongoing inspiration for artists and enthusiasts around the world.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

None.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

None.

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