

Chapter-2

Part II

The Shehnai of Bismillah Khan



Think of the Shehnai and the first thing is a wedding or a similar occasion or function. The next would probably be Ustad Bismillah Khan, the Shehnai maestro, playing this instrument.



Central Idea

Bismillah Khan, a Shehnai maestro rose to the height in the field of music and won the laureal 'Bharat Ratna'. The chapter deals with the aspects of music and the legendary musicians who excelled in their respective fields.



Thinking about the Text

Answer these questions in 30–40 words:

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

Ans. *Emperor Aurangzeb banned the playing of the 'pungi' because it had a shrill and unpleasant sound. It became the generic name for reeded noisemakers.*

2. How is a Shehnai different from a *pungi*?

Ans. *Unlike 'pungi', Shehnai is a pipe with a natural hollow stem that is longer and broader. It also has seven holes on its body. When it is played by the closing and opening of some of the holes, it produces soft and melodious sounds.*

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

Ans. *The Shehnai was traditionally played in royal courts, temples, and weddings. Bismillah Khan changed this by improvising and inventing ragas that were earlier considered to be beyond the range of the Shehnai.*

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

Ans. *Bismillah Khan got his big break with the opening of the All India Radio in Lucknow in 1938. He soon became an often-heard Shehnai player on radio.*

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

Ans. *On 15th August, 1947, Bismillah Khan played the Shehnai from the Red Fort. It was a historic day as India gained independence on that day. He became the first Indian to greet the independent nation with his Shehnai.*

6. Why did Bismillah Khan refuse to start a Shehnai school in the U.S.A.?

Ans. *Bismillah Khan's student had asked him to head a music school in the USA, but he refused because he couldn't live outside India. The student promised that he would recreate the atmosphere of Benaras by replicating the temples in the city. To this, Bismillah Khan wanted to know if his student could also transport the river Ganga.*

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

Ans. *The first instance is when he turned down his student's offer to start a Shehnai school in the USA. The second instance is when he was asked by Shekhar Gupta why he did not shift to Pakistan during partition. He said that he would never leave Benaras.*

