Violin the Versatile Musical Instrument

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The violin is a fascinating musical instrument. Violin has an interesting history together with an immaculate artistic form. It adorns the performer more than any ornament or garment. Violin made 300 years before does not differ in design with the recent one. That shows the perfection of its design both as an expressive instrument of music and a beautiful object itself.

Violin is mechanically simple but acoustically complex instrument. Its main body is constructed with high quality timber. The components are Table, Back, ribs, neck, scroll, peg box & pegs, finger board, bridge, tail piece, end pin, sound post etc. All violin components are joined together with special adhesives and no metal articles like nails or screws are used in the joinery. Four strings namely GDA & E are held between adjuster hooks to pegs passing over the bridge in taut condition. The bridge stands at top center portion of the table. Violin table plate is made out of fine quality spruce or pine wood. It is shaped in a convex curvature form. Two sound holes of the shape of English letter ‘f’ are cut on either side of the bridge premise. Back plate of violin is made out of seasoned maple wood with one piece or two pieces joined in the centre. The table and back are joined together with ribs on the sides and neck is fixed to the neck mortise. On the top table plate about 200 mm long and about 4 mm thick wooden strip of pine is fixed along the length of the table adjacent to the sound hole. This is called the bass bar. Just below right foot of the bridge a soft wooden stick of about 6 mm diameter is made to stand joining the table plate and back plate. This is a sound post. This sound post, bridge and the bass bar play vital role in forming the tone of violin.

Europe in general and Italy in particular are the places where the great art of violin-making originated. Cremona & Brescia in Italy emerged as main centers of the art. In Cremona Andrea Amati (1505 to 1577) was the first recorded violin maker followed by his two sons Antonius and Hieronymus, son of Hieronymus Nicolo Amati (1596-1684) was considered as the greatest craftsman of the dynasty. Nicolo’s disciples were Rugeri, C.B.
Rogeri and the most important and famous Antonio Stradivari (1644 to 1773). Stradivari made tireless efforts for the refinement of violin craft. His violins are popular all over the world. Some special violins made by Stradivari called as ‘Betts’ ‘Tuscan’ etc. have made a stamp of class and fetch very high prices today (about US $ one million). Parallel activity was made by Giuseppe Guarneri. Guarneri violins were also very famous and popular.

In Brescia (this place is near to Cremona) Gaspro da Salo (1540-1609) was the first known violin maker. He was succeeded by his pupil Giovanni Paolo Maggini (1581-1632). Both the makers produced violins of rich tones however, Maggini made many refinements in the structural construction of his instruments like neatly carved scroll double purflings etc. He produced violins with distinct total qualities like high sonority, mello & bass tone etc. Very few Gaspro and Maggini violins are seen in India and the real ones command very high prices. Maggini violins, because of their bass and sonorous tone are especially suitable for playing Indian Classical music. The tonal presentation is like a big bass flute along with brilliance of violin tone.

German copies of Amati, Stradivari, Gasparo and Maggini are often seen in India and available also. However, the tonal quality is far from the original Italian instruments.

Among the prized characteristics of violin the most wonderful one is that Violin can produce tone very closely resembling the human voice (singing tone) and the potential to play rapid brilliant figurations as well as lyrical melodies. The performer can create special effects by using various bowing techniques Glissando among other techniques (steadily gliding finger up or down on the string) gives an upward or downward sliding pitch what we call ‘Meend’ in terms of Indian Classical Music.

In the western world, violin had taken an important place in orchestral and solo performances from Mozart to Menuhin.

In the context of Indian Classical Music, violin extends us as accompaniment instrument and today we see in South India it has become a principal instrument of accompaniment. South Indian artists mastered the technique of playing violin by excessive use of ‘meend’ and Gamak. In Western India, Sri Gajanan Rao Joshi of Bombay initiated the solo classical music performance on violin. His disciple Shridhar Parsekar became the
most popular and famous solo violinist of the country. Shri Parsekar evolves his own style and performance to keep the listeners spellbound for hours. Shri Parsekar made frequent performances on All India Radio and through that medium he made violin very popular for solo performance of presenting Indian Classical melodies. Many more violinists emerged in Maharashtra during that period, influenced and encouraged by the performance of Shri Parsekar.

However, by and large, all these artists presented their performances with ‘Gatkari Style’. The improper style of holding the instrument and bow put limitations to their skills to fully exploit the capability and capacity of violin to play a wide range of music. The contemporary Western performers by mastering the techniques of playing could produce performance touching the limit of excellence.

Around 1925 Shri Wighneshwar Shastri Pundit, a violinist came to Bombay. He had studied violin playing technique of the South Indian Style. Shri Pundit developed a technique on the style of North Indian ‘Sarangi’. He attempted to produce North Indian vocal music to the nearest resemblance and thus the new technique of violin playing with ‘Gayaki’ style was developed. The setting of string to ‘SA’ ‘PA’ mode in the lower pitch compared to ‘GDAE’ reduced the string tension. This made the ‘meend’ easier and presentation more melodious. Full capacity of the fingerboard could be utilized to get nearly three to three % half octave ranges. The principal basic beauty of Indian classical music lies in the serene and dignified presentation of ‘Alapi’ with the help of proper ‘meend’ work in the lower and middle octave region. This development enhanced the status of violin in Indian classical music since it could produce exact resemblance to vocal music of all forms.

Of late this style has been further developed while Shri M.S. Gopalakrishnan, Dr. Smt. N. Rajam, Shri Lalgudi Jayaraman, in the South and Western and North India Pt. D.K. Datar, Ustad Faiyaz Hussain are the leading performers of ‘Gayaki’ style.

Violin is a divine instrument and its anatomy resembles human anatomy. Like humans each violin has a distinctly different tone than the other. Late night if you hear a lyric
played on violin it changes your mood at once. That is why great scientist like Dr. Albert Einstein loved to play violin.