

## PRIDE

- Dr. Raktim Sen



I had my pride. I was an aspiring musician then, who, on the side had a degree in Engineering from a premier institution and was working for a multinational company during a time when the word "offshore" related only to the Oil and Natural Gas industry. The Internet was non-existent and computers were not personal, at least in India, where I grew up. Agreed, I was not rich nor had rich parents but I was quite content with life. I spent forty-eight hours a week to earn what some may term a livelihood. But to me I earned the rights to the evenings and weekends.

There was nothing unusual about that particular evening when I was with Raja, a musician friend of mine. They lived in the same neighborhood. I was merrily singing and playing his *harmonium* and he was accompanying me on the *tabla*. After a couple of hours of music, we took a break. I needed to go home for a few minutes. However, once I came home I told my mom that I was leaving for Jamshedpur to visit Jay, my friend from college. I packed some clothes and left to catch the last train from Howrah station for an overnight journey.

I reached Jamshedpur early in the morning without realizing that I kept Raja waiting. (I was later told that he came looking for me only to discover that I had left town. He must have laughed his belly out at my erratic behavior!) Jay was pleasantly surprised to see me. He was a bachelor too and a good singer. We spent the rest of the day from where we left off the last time he visited us. Word soon spread across the friendly neighborhood that one of Jay's friend was visiting him. Among all the invitations we received for dinner Jay accepted the one from his senior colleague. There were a few other families who were invited as well.

"Jay has made quite a name for himself as a vocalist", I thought, as I sensed they were all waiting for us to start an informal music session.

Jay sang a few songs. Some of the others did too. Then it was my turn. I was known as the master keyboard player among my friends. I had a special knack for playing the *harmonium* - piano-accordion style and was quite flamboyant when playing the instrument. I could tell that everyone in the room was intrigued by my playing.

Jay proudly declared, "He is our Y. S. Mulki," referring to the famous piano-accordion player.

I sang a couple of songs and during the rest of the evening I ended up accompanying on the *harmonium* everyone who wanted to sing. Everyone excepting my hosts' son - I don't think he was more than twelve years old then. I asked him what he would like to sing, getting ready to accompany him.

Jay whispered, "He knows how to play the *harmonium*."

I moved to the side and rolled the instrument to him. The little boy gently pulled the *harmonium* towards him. What followed was one of the most humbling experiences of my life. The boy had a physical deformity and barely had three fingers, and he was playing the *harmonium* while singing one of my most favorite songs. As much as I wanted to listen to his singing I couldn't but help watching him in awe playing the instrument that you cannot play without your fingers! He sang a couple of songs, both Tagore's devotional songs but to me he was devotion and willpower personified. How could he do that!

It was my turn again. But my fingers were trembling. Yes, I can play the instrument well. But can I play it with three deformed fingers? I was looking for answers. I was trying to think of a devotional Tagore song.

*I had seen far beyond with the glow of my inner sight.  
I will look inside my soul when there is no light.....*

I sang as one would sing a hymn. The little boy was staring at me. I closed my eyes more in shame than devotion. I couldn't look at him in his eyes. My playing was quite subdued, barely playing the chords. I sang the song - the meaning of each word hitting my deeper veins - perhaps understanding them for the first time.

It was past midnight when we left. I was still thinking about the little boy who redefined the word "impossible" to mean "having not tried hard enough".

"No more excuses," I said to myself.



### **Harmonium:**

The Indian version of this musical instrument developed from the original hand-pumped version imported during early 1900s. This instrument is an integral part of Indian music. Click [here](#) for a video. Click [here](#) to read more



### **Esraj:**

This is a bowed musical instrument popular in the Eastern India and Bangladesh. The renowned scientist, Satyendra Nath Bose (of Bose–Einstein condensate fame) played the instrument (see picture). Click [here](#) for a video. Click [here](#) to read more.



### **Sitar:**

Probably the most popular Indian Classical Musical instrument popularized by Ravi Shankar. Click [here](#) for a video of Pandit Ravi



### **Tabla:**

A North Indian percussion instrument. Click [here](#) for a video of Ustad Zakir Hussain playing the tabla. Click [here](#) to read more.

Harmonium: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KBMHV0IITVk>

Esraj: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yecQsOHYaeA>

Sitar: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LzN2gUGYUGc>

Tabla: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwKvWbnpLU>