

A guru passes away

Pandit Amarnath, who died recently, was a brilliant and imaginative musician, says *Jitendra Pratap*

With the sad demise of Pt Amarnath the world of Hindustani music has been deprived of an outstanding musician, musicologist, composer and a dedicated guru to a host of disciples from different parts of India and from abroad. Born in 1924, he had his earlier grounding in Hindustani vocal music from the late B N Dutta of Lahore who later settled in Delhi.

Since his younger days Amarnath had shown much promise as classical vocalist endowed with a resonant voice and a flare for on-the-spot improvisations. It was thus natural for him to be drawn closely to the late Ustad Amir Khan of Indore who himself was an outstanding musician.

Ustad Amir Khan established the Indore gharana of Khayal singing by taking the best of the Kirana and the Bhendi Bazar gharanas and in addition the salient features of the late Ustad Rajab Ali Khan of Dewas and the late Ustad Waheed Khan of Lahore. Pt Amarnath was particularly attracted by the Ustad's commendable grasp over the system of *merukhand* or the note permutations involving the mathematical ordering of the seven notes ($1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5 \times 6 \times 7 = 5040$). Such a mastery over the note-permutations, added with intense creative and artistic insight, gave a unique dimension to the Indore gharana.

Pt Amarnath, himself being highly intellectual and an imaginative artist, was naturally drawn close to his mentor from whom he had a long spell of training. It was, thus, no wonder that Amarnath soon became the most authentic exponent of the Indore gharana. It would however be unfair to regard Amarnath as a ditto version of the late Ustad Amir Khan. With his own individualistic and rational approach he was able to maintain a distinct identity, both as a singer and scholar and an accomplished teacher.

His Khayal compositions in numerous ragas (traditional as well as self-conceived) number-

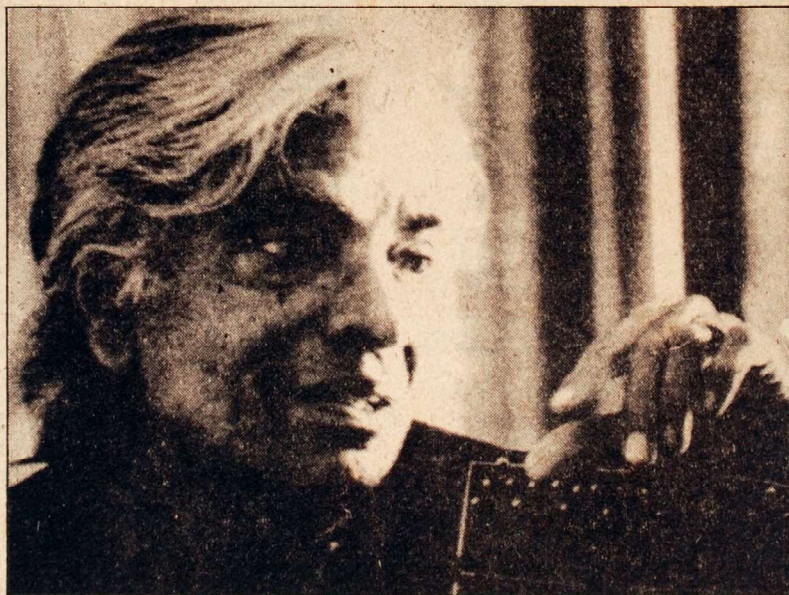
ing more than 500, speak volumes of his creative insight. His compiling of the book, *Living Idioms in Hindustani Music*, has alphabetically arranged particulars of more than 600 terms in Indian music. Prepared in a dictionary format this book covers most of the words, phrases, saying and proverbs prevailing in Hindustani music.

It goes to show his merit as a guru that he provided lessons to a vast number of dedicated disciples like Mahendra Sharma, Baldev Raj Verma, diplomat Ghare Khan and Shanti

pient of several prestigious awards including the Swarnamani Award and the Sahitya Kala Parishad Awards. He has given numerous lecture-demonstrations at Harvard, ITC Sangeet Research Academy, India International Centre, FTII, NSD and for Spic-Macay.

A prolific and a highly accomplished composer, he directed and composed music for several feature and documentary films and TV serials.

It was indeed a grave tragedy that his failing health — he was particularly prone to asthma — adversely affected his perform-



The late Pandit Amarnath

Sharma to name just the four. For a number of years he taught at the Triveni Kala Sangam and later at the Bhartiya Kala Kendra. Like his guru, late B N Datta, he too taught by himself keeping the rhythm on tabla. He had absolute command over the rhythm.

There have been instances of Amarnath himself playing on the tabla while singing for the AIR broadcasts when the official tabla accompanist had failed to arrive.

He was the first Indian musician to perform at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum. He is known for his creation of many raga forms and for adopting a number of South Indian ragas into his repertoire. He was the reci-

ing career in the later days thereby depriving the connoisseurs of serious classical music the highly sedate, reposeful and scholastic renderings by this leading exponent of the Indore gharana. In his last days he was afflicted by cancer. The end was however due to a sudden cardiac arrest.

He is survived by his wife, a son and two daughters including Bindu Chawla who has helped her father with many projects including the one for the Indian Council for Social Science Research on the teaching systems in Hindustani music. She was also helping him in the compilation of his book and two other major works which will soon be published.