

# 'Aaj Tu Hee Bol Mere Bhi Gale Se....'

By Priya Kanungo

## Living Idioms in Hindustani Music

a dictionary of terms and terminology  
Pandit Amarnath

A lot of people have strived to become performing musicians. Some of them have gained eminence and a select few among them will go down in history as prodigiously talented artistes. There are very few like Pandit Amarnath, however, who have dedicated their lives to serving the cause of music. Serving the cause by way of going through the rigour of learning under a guru, devoting innumerable hours to practice, research, and, most important, imparting knowledge of music to the true seeker.

Pandit Amarnath was a performing artiste for All India Radio and a teacher of music when he became a shishya of the legendary Amir Khan Sahib. (His initial training was under Shri B. N. Dutta of Lahore).

Khan Sahib, who by profession was a performing artiste and not a teacher, did not have the habit of teaching his students in a systematic and organised way. Therefore, the only way the students could learn was by emotional pressure. The name of the game was humility! It was best to plantively tell him "I just can't sing this taan" or "I just can't sing this raga, Khan Sahib, and if you don't teach me, then it is you who will get a bad name!" In essence, Pandit Amarnath felt that the process of learning was to listen to Khan Sahib's music and devise a suit-

able method for himself to imbibе that style of singing.

Khan Sahib's choice of words and phrases were clues to the direction in which the students had to proceed regarding their riyaz. Amarnathji recalls that the process of learning from Amir Khan Sahib was first to study his thought process and then try to understand his music as no set guidelines were laid down.

Today, as an eminent teacher and one of the foremost exponents of the Indore gharana, Pandit Amarnath has, over the years, devised easy exercises by which his students do not have much difficulty in grasping the

intricacies of a raga. This is a far cry from the days when he was a student struggling to fathom what his guru was saying — let alone try to imbibe it. In Panditji's opinion, initially there is a stage when the student should do exactly as the teacher asks him/her to do without questioning. By this, discipline is instilled in the student and answers to many queries are obtained. He feels that too many "whys" and "hows" from a student serve no purpose unless the student first puts the guru's directions into practice. "It is like trying to describe what the taste of a sweet is without having tasted it", Panditji feels that

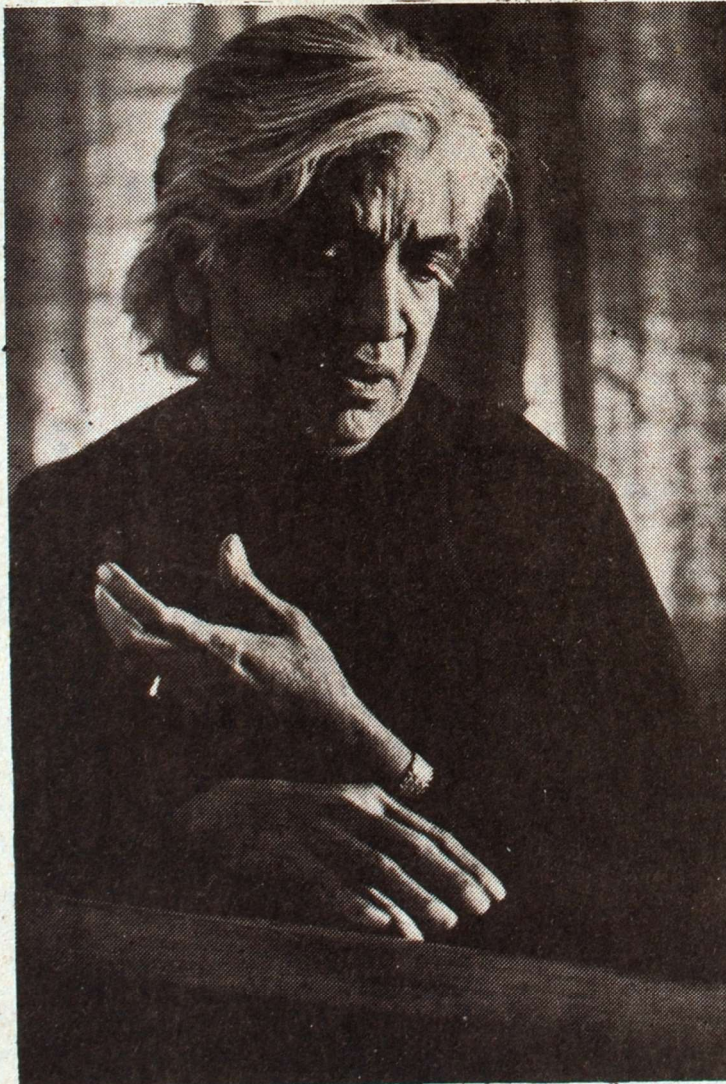
he has organised and simplified Amir Khan Sahib's music for his students so as to facilitate their understanding of the Indore gharana gayaki (style). As far as his role as a guru is concerned, he feels that a "guru is one who teaches a student the 'shastras' — this means that he tries to show the path to the student by which the music within the student is awakened". It is apt, therefore, to say that Pandit Amarnath is a musician's musician.

Talking about the social milieu at the time he was a student, Amarnathji says there wasn't much respect accorded to music and musicians during those days. In fact, he seemed to be a constant source of embarrassment for his father and family when others would enquire after him. When his father would say that he sang for the radio and learnt music, they would say: "That is all very well but what work does he do?"

Amarnathji did not hail from a musical family; therefore he had to strive hard to understand and learn the subtle nuances of the art which he now cherishes. Amir Khan Sahib (who came from a family of musicians) had, in fact, once told him that it was creditable that he (Amarnathji) had the patience to strive for many years to learn a certain aspect of music which he (Amir Khan) learnt while playing marbles.

Being a composer, Amarnathji feels that he can never 'separate' the lyrics from the music. In fact, he started writing lyrics long before his musical career, and his first major composition was for the motion picture 'Garam Coat'.

When asked about music being taught as a subject in universities, Amarnathji says that as a concept it is good since it helps in the propagation of music, but the method used for teaching is not to his liking. The policy of five or six teachers instructing one student does not appeal to him as, in his opinion, the process would only prove to



PANDIT AMARNATH

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