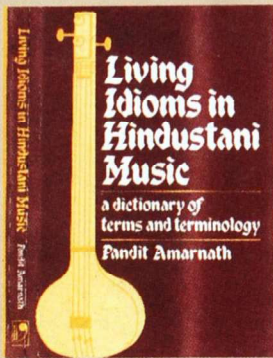


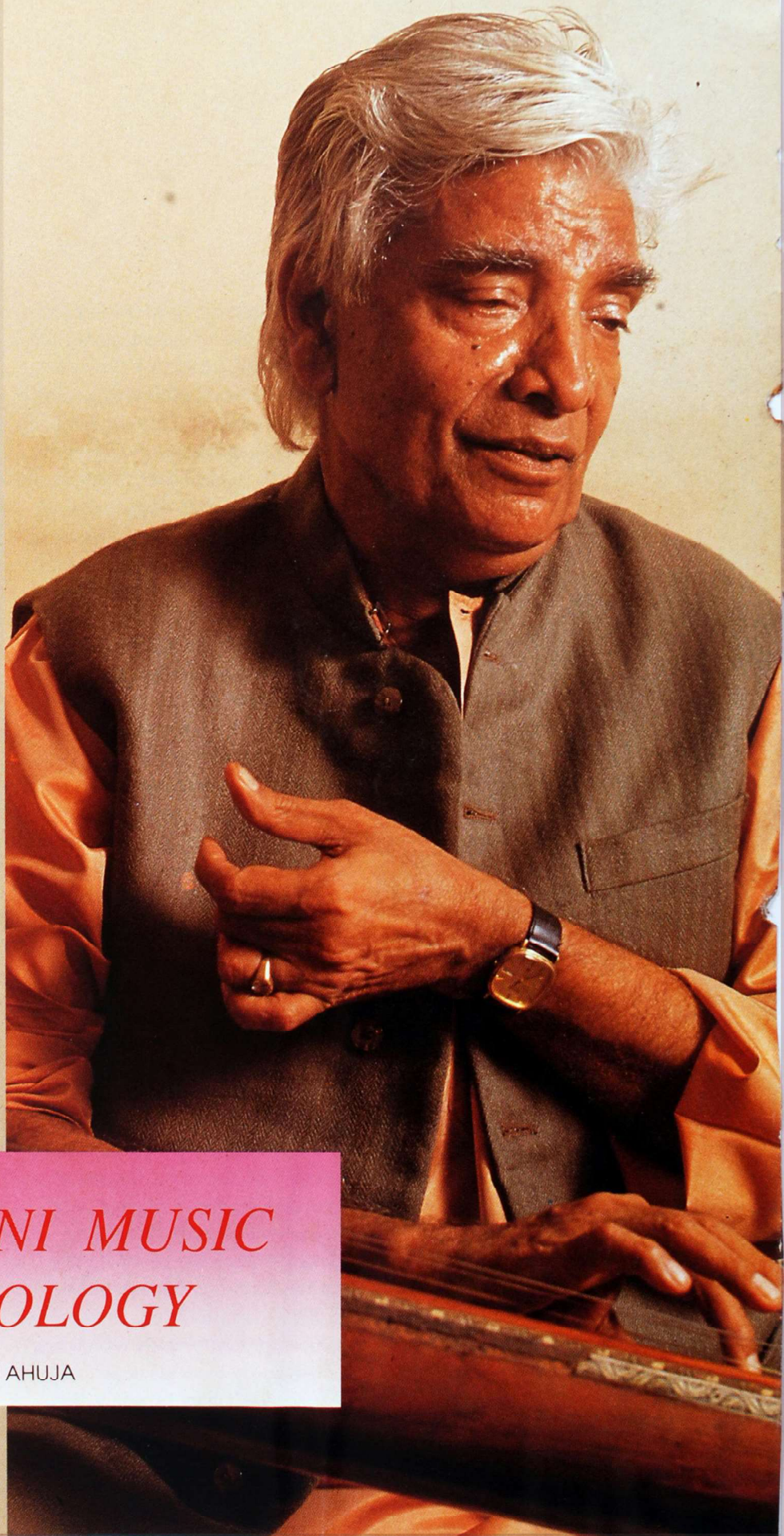
BOOKS



The most talked about book this summer in India is a charming collection of traditionally spoken terminology from the world of Hindustani (Classical) music – veteran maestro Pandit Amarnath's *Living Idioms in Hindustani Music – A Dictionary of Terms and Terminology*.

The book appears at a time when, slowly but surely, life in India has begun to transcend the contradictions between the traditional and modern that plagued it during the past decades. For, even as the people of India are "moving into the 21st Century", they have begun to cherish her culture and her performing arts with a sense of belonging that has not been expressed with as much intensity before.

It was, therefore, but natural that *Living Idioms in Hindustani Music* receive such an enthusiastic response, for it has revived in the people's memory a language that,



HINDUSTANI MUSIC TERMINOLOGY

■ SUMAN AHUJA

for centuries, was being used to communicate perhaps the most enchanting of arts in India – her classical music.

The author, Pandit Amarnath, well-known master vocalist of the Indore gharana (or school), has been variously described by critics as “a musician’s musician”, “a guru with an encyclopaedic mind”, “a communicator of high wattage”, “a demonstrator of the art who has few peers, a rare, highly intellectual musician, indeed among the tallest of musicians”. With his special ability to communicate the nuances of a great art even as he practises, performs and teaches it, he has saved a range of precious vocabulary from being lost to public memory. Pandit Amarnath spent several years compiling the terminology in the book, which he says, “began by the 1950s, to disappear in the everyday speech forms of the practising musicians and their *shishyas* (disciples) all over the country.” In getting together those speech forms, the author has brought to bear public attention over a living limb of the art that has remained under obscurity beyond the conscious awareness of not only listeners, but also artists and fellow musicians today. That is no mean achievement for India’s veteran vocalist who has, apart from the book, led significant forays into the world of research in music. He has composed lilting melodies for several beautiful films, taught a whole generation of burgeoning classical vocalists in Delhi, and created a *raga* and composition repertoire for his

gharana that is now the envy of practically every other *gharana* of vocal music in North India.

“My book is a collection of idioms, not flat words, and idioms are expressions that contain many-layered meanings in a single word,” explains he. “They are not easy to explain... in fact they are felt better than explained, for they communicate deeper truths about the art than technical terms do” Take the word *aamad*. In non-musical usage this word refers to ‘a graceful entrance’ made by anybody anywhere. Musically, this, says the dictionary, ‘is any skilful entry, with an artistic phrase, into the orbit of the sam.’ Thus *aamad* is not a grammatical word describing a musical structure so much as a reference from everyday life that is used to illustrate the *bhava* or emotional expression of a musical detail, its inner joy. It is this ‘inner hearing’ that has slowly been lost to the present generation, which responds to clever and slapstick musical phrases more than to those which ‘speak’ a profound musical language. It is in this way that the book offers “a glimpse into the minds of the music-makers of the past”, explains Pandit Amarnath.

Similarly we have a term called *dhobee pataraa*, which the dictionary says, is “the name given to a particular type of *taan* which could be crudely compared to the movements of a *dhobee* (washerman) beating clothes on a stone. A term mostly in use by the practitioners of the Delhi *gharana*.” Similarly

The reviewer is a freelance writer.



Pandit Amarnath at a music concert in Chicago, USA

there is *pane karnaa*, which is described as "to make lucid, like water. To practice any exercise to the point of maximum flow."

And herein lies the distinctive feature of the book that sets it apart from any such work that can be undertaken by musicologists and historians in the future: its living feel of the pulse of the art.

And perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from the book, which offers exciting samples to the linguist as well, is that our classical music has never been isolated from the life and language of the common people; it has been nurtured by their simple wisdom, their simple terms of linguistic expression. As Pandit Amarnath says in the Introduction, "There are Persian, Urdu and Sanskrit usages, as also everyday speech forms of the commonfolk. Because of the latter, sometimes words have never been used

approximately rather than literally by the musicians themselves. These have a charm of their own, indicating a live experience of the art."

Pandit Amarnath's vibrant sensitivity to the language of Hindustani music has its roots in his personality itself, for as he says, "I used to write poetry before I took to music," and in fact he is one of the few living practitioners left of the art of *khayal bandish* (or composition) writing. His original compositions, conceived over a lifetime of experimentation with *ragas* (that include the creation of several *raga* compounds, the introduction of many Carnatic *ragas* into the Hindustani mainstream, and original *raga* conceptions like the beautiful Amarkali, named after him), number more than 200 today. They are being sung by a number of disciples and fellow musicians alike. Pandit

Amarnath is of course the *gharana's* only composer musician today and he is different from other practitioners in that the distinctive 'rang' or colour of the traditional folk and *sufi haunts* (in both poetry and melody) of yesteryear Punjab are deeply imbued in his singing.

Known as a great teacher of the art, he has campaigned relentlessly during the past years against syllabi teaching of classical music within his country.

And perhaps the greatest tribute to his genius and his art is that it lives on through a very large *shishya* following – many of his disciples being themselves well-known young classical vocalists of the country. ♦

Living Idioms in Hindustani Music: A Dictionary of Terms and Terminology, by Pandit Amarnath; Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi; pp 132; price Rs. 125.