

Living in Hindustani music is certainly a pioneering effort in English, which explains as simply as possible the complex terminology of North Indian music — both that found in the shastras and in conversational use over the last century.

What makes this recently published book (Vikas, 125) specially vibrant is that it has been handled by an author who is a celebrated practising musician and composer, and who, unlike the musicologist, explains the terms in the context of their application to signing and playing itself — Pandit Amarnath.

In an exclusive interview to *Patriot* the doyen of the Indore gharana of vocal music said; "my book probes the minds of the masters as they used language to express their perceptions. I am very fond of searching language — particularly musical language — and so, while writing it, many inner meanings of ordinary terms revealed themselves.

The idea of writing the book has slowly grown on me as a result of the response to my lecture-demonstrations. The book has been published at the right moment because people are at last becoming aware of the spoken vocabulary of the gharanas and the need to preserve this terminology.

The spellings of the words are phonetically rendered. Why were accent types not used to explain pronunciations to the reader. For example in 'cheezen' the 'n' is supposed to indicate a nasal tone and not the complete sound. How does the reader understand this?

The accent types were deliberately avoided to discourage an academic feel to the book. I wanted to avoid anything that would alienate the reader. Some familiarity with Hindustani pronunciation is naturally presupposed for the book.

The names of musicians have been entered in the running text. Perhaps they should have been dealt with in a separate chapter?

The personalities of our great musicians have turned their names into idioms! Idioms are felt words. This is not a dictionary in the ordinary sense — it maintains a certain 'bhaava'

Music through words

'Living idioms in Hindustani music' by Pandit Amarnath (Vikas) is a pioneering attempt to explain complex musical terms to an ordinary reader

By Shiela Jaywant

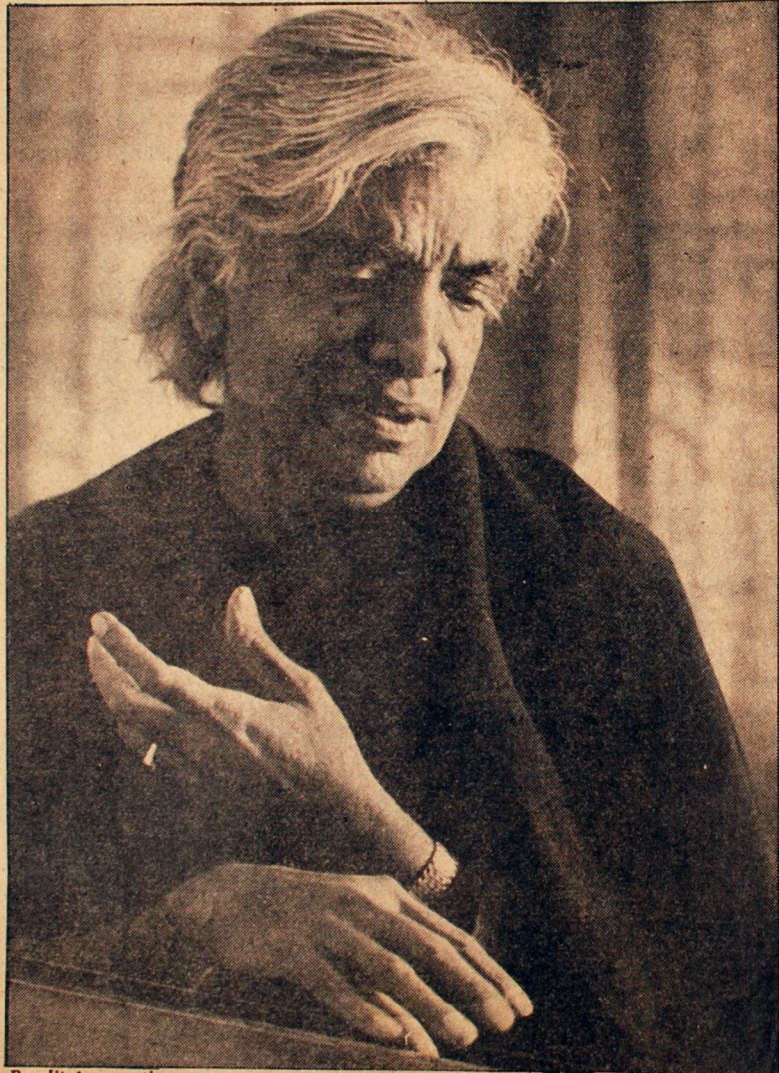
in the treatment of the terminology, that shows you the minds of the musicians. To my mind the names of the great masters of the past century are terms denoting a certain kind of music they represented, they are not references to people.

Sometimes even an adequate explanation to a term may not convey exactly what the music is all about. For example when you describe 'chhed-chaad' as "to play this and that on an instrument before coming into the proper mood for a performance", do you feel the reader will understand

'this and that'?

Even a lay reader will certainly get the idea that the musician is warming up; if he is more familiar with music he will understand that it refers to playing around with the strings. So the book can help at various levels.

What prompted you to



Pandit Amarnath

Photo by Avinash Pasricha

take up a research project on the teaching of Hindustani music.

I had been teaching my own gharana style for years, and wanted to look into the teaching methods in other gharanas, as also the quality of university teaching. The question uppermost in my mind was why do so many MAs and PhDs come to us from universities with their foundations in music so weak? They are constantly asking elementary questions about practical music. I therefore decided to organize a thorough study of the system.

What is your assessment of gharana teaching today?

In today's rut a major section of well-known performers are not motivated to teach, despite the fact that imparting this knowledge will be the most long-lasting contribution to their art and tradition.

What is the government's attitude to gharana teaching in the country?

Despite the fact that scholarship holders not only from within the country, but also from Bangladesh and Afghanistan, come through the education ministry year after year to study music and dance from so many gurus in the country, the contribution of these artistes is not recognised by the ministries as education. After years of teaching not a single letter of gratitude is sent of them. Perhaps the gurus are too saintly to be recognised as part of the

educational system!

What message does the guru-shishya parampara have for the general educational system of the country?

The most important message is that of faith. Faith and values. Our educational systems have failed primarily due to lack of faith. In the world of art, faith and commitment are the most important prerequisites — more important than they are in other professions.

Your project has been talked about for its strong questioning of the university system of teaching Hindustani music.

It does not criticise the system but its methodologies. The system is not new, we used to have ashrams, which functioned like universities. But the

methodologies in practice today and the kind of syllabi that are set, have been questioned. For example in a prestigious university we found 175 ragas prescribed for study in the MA syllabus. Music is an art. It cannot be taught as a 'subject'.

What do you recommend to improve this state of affairs?

Our project report is expected to be published later this year. I shall of course do my best to publicise our report but it is the duty of the ICSSR to do so too. Despite the fact that I knew everything about the state of affairs regarding gharanic teaching today, why did I go through the research exercise? Only so that it could appear officially before the public eye.

The following selection of musical terminology is exclusive to *Patriot*:

Bahaa huaa galaa: Bahaa huaa means flooded. Refers to uncontrolled throw of the voice, where the conception and the rendering are not in coordination (in contrast with Bahaa).

Bahaa: Literally, flow. The fluency achieved after years of practice, when, for the musician there is no gap between the conception

Bedaar, Bedaar Ang: Comes from *bedar*, meaning unsystematic (which in turn comes from *bethor*, meaning baseless). Actually, *bedaar ang* is a phrase used in praise of the fluency of *taan* structures, achieved as a result of freedom from formalities of pattern.

Chilla Chadhaanaa: Chilla means forty. A forty-day vow taken by a musician to practise without break or outside disturbance. The musician lives in total solitude for that period, fulfilling only the barest necessities for living. A musician can observe Chilla several times during a lifetime. The vow is taken before a peer (spiritual guru) in a *dargaah* (mosque).

Dhaamaa: Though now out of use, this was the left piece of the *tablaa*, made of wood. A round layer of dough (made from flour) was pasted flat to its centre and kept moistened while

playing.

It is also associated with a custom in North India. A ball of dough was prepared in every home to offer to Brahmins in the morning. The special dough was *dhaamme Kaa pedaa* and the roti or bread prepared from it was *dhaamme kee roti*. The feeling of auspiciousness is associated with the word *dhaamaa*.

Ektaaraa: Ek is one, *taaraa* comes from *taar* or string. A single-stringed folk instrument, made of pumpkin and bamboo, an early version of the *taanpura*. *Do-taaraa*, as the name suggests, is a two-stringed instrument of the same kind. One advantage of the *ektaaraa* is that it serves the purpose of providing *laya* as well. Also known as *gopiyantira*.

Gamak: From the root 'gam', meaning to acquire pace. Refers to a *taan* in which each note begins from the note preceding it; this fills out each note with a heavier and richer tone. *Gamak* also means 'to warm up'.

Garmaanaa: To warm up. When this refers to the warming up of the throat it is used in appreciation. When used to refer to the performer himself, it is negative criticism, implying hot-headedness.

Koot taan: A term used generally for any complicated *taan* (the word

koot comes from *kotee*, meaning countless).

Nikal-baith: Literally, gimmicks employed by heroic swordsmen. In music this is used when going through difficult patterns with ease, meeting challenges successfully. Often used in connection with the thrill produced by a variety of *taan* patterns.

Nikaasee achchee hai: From the word *nikaaus*, meaning to originate. Used in praise of a musician who knows the secrets of (and has the ability to) produce with clarity and ease any *bol* on the *tablaa*.

Rajab Ali Khan: Great Khayal singer, born in Narsingharh in 1874. Son of the Saarangee player Mughal Khan, Ustad Rajab Ali Khan came to settle in Devas, near Indore. A special feature of this music was the ability to render *choot* or *sapaat taan-s* in the most complicated (*sankeerna*) *raag-s* with the ease of any simple scale. Among his disciples were Shankar Sarinaik and Ganesh Ramchandra Behre Buwa. He died in 1959.

Saadhanaa: From the root *saadh*, meaning to achieve. 'Naa' here refers to effort. *Saadhanaa* thus refers to the state of achieving or practising through effort, in other words through a continuing process of practice and realization. This is the connecting word

in a three-word concept: *saadhya, saadhanaa* and *siddhee*. *Saadhya* is the aim, *saadhanaa* the practice (upon the aim) and *siddhee* is the attainment (*siddh* is the person who has attained). *Swara saadhanaa* is the yogic concentration on and contemplation of the *swara*.

Saaranaa: Also known as *tarab*. These are helping strings, turned to a particular *thaath*. They lie below the main playing strings in the *sitar*, *saarangee, israaj, surbahaar* and *sarod* and among the *veenaas, the vichitra veena*.

Sankeerna raag: From *sankar*, meaning to mingle. The *sankeerna raga* is a compound of more than two ragas. The difference between *sankeerna* and *chaayaa lagat ragas* is that the former is a clear mingling of various melodies and the latter contains diffused shades of other ragas.

Taankaa lagaanaa: Literally, to mend. The covering up of expected lapses or mistakes in performance by an accompanist.

Uthaa: Literally, to raise. Used for the specific introductory piece of the *raga*, also called *Uhaav*.

Vakra jaatee: *Vakra* means twisted. Refers to a category of ragas in which the notes do not appear in linear formation.