

'My voice is the measure of my health'

Bindu Chawla writes about her father, Pandit Amarnathji, who recently wrote a book on classical music

renewal of 'felt' musical harmonies.

My father doesn't consider his voice just an instrument; he considers it his ears, his musical mind, the mirror of his inner life. "My voice is the real measure of my health — if that is okay my body is okay," he says.

I've never seen him stop practising after the morning *riyaz*; the only difference is, it continues in his mind. I've watched him sunning himself on the terrace for hours, working on a new *raga* until it has opened out in his mind, working on a new *bol* until the words reveal deeper and deeper meanings. Some

AVINASH PASRICHA

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IT HAS been sheer ecstasy to wake up every dawn, seven days a week, 365 days a year, to the meditating strains of the tanpura and my father's tender voice filling the house and its surroundings...

I have often sat with him during his morning *riyaz* and watched him absorbed in the *naada* and its ecstatic paths. I have also seen the hard work he has put into his music — the way he moulds his voice, studying its condition every morning depend-

ing on what he has eaten the night before, then preparing it for the rest of the day.

His morning *riyaz* comprises a lot of *sargam* (note names). Much of his style of *khayal*-singing is related to the *moorchana*, or the subconscious awa-

of his finest musical discoveries have come to him while travelling, in the middle of the night, or while taking a walk.

My father discovered music after his mother died. He was four then and painfully lonely. One day, as he lay on a *charpai*

plucking idly at its strings, a pleasant sound emerged. Amazed, he plucked again and again because the sound consoled him.

As a boy, he was popular for his *kirtans* sung at the local temples. But in adolescence, he turned marxist-socialist.

He had among his friends filmmakers, poets, writers and thinkers with a similar ideology and while in his 20s he began to compose music for their films and plays and worked for radio, all this after almost eight gruelling hours of *riyaz* every day.

My grandfather never wanted my father — his eldest son — to take up a career; he wanted him to remain a dreamer. "Kaka," he would say lovingly, "I'll build you a library over our shops on Chowk Bazar, and you read, write, sing, be a free man..."

After the partition, my father came to India as a refugee with just his *tanpura*. He never sought a 'career' in music in the true sense of the word because he considered that a low, mean way of looking at art. He thought ambition, the desperation to perform, dependence on recorded music and the syllabi-oriented teaching of classical music compromised the true value of music.

From a very young age he grew to love films and books. With his first guru, B N Duttaji, he watched all the films of Greta Garbo, Cary Grant, Vivien Leigh and Paul Muni. Back home from the cinema, they would sit with the *tanpura* and practise music until the wee hours of the morning.

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could lay his hands on — Sharat, Tagore, the Russian masters. But it is Romain Rolland's *Jean Christophe* that he considers his Bible. He has read it nine times.

It was an encounter with Ustad Amir Khan Sahib that was to change my father's life forever.

My father first heard Ustad Amir Khan in Lahore in the early '40s and, he tells us, he could not eat, sleep or think, let alone sing, for weeks after that.

Their association began in Delhi after the Partition, and lasted until the end of Khan Sahib's life. Though Khan Sahib rarely sat down and taught him formally, every encounter with him sent my father into a daze for days after.

I have yet to come across a more poignant relationship between a guru and his *shishya* in our times. Today I see them on a spiritual plane as two travelling suns rotating around each other in time, all the more radiant for the presence of the other...

I often think of the immortal Ghalib ghazal Khan Sahib sang for Sathyu's documentary, set to my father's music. It was clearly composed for Khan Sahib, keeping in mind his vocalisms, bringing out the timeless profundity of his heart.

I remember how worked up I would get when the reviews would talk of my father as an extension of Khan Sahib. It was as if they were seeing only one side of him and not assessing him for what he really was. But my father loved such comments. "They hear him in me," he would say happily.

Over the years, however, he has come to be recognised for his own contribution to music and for placing the Indore *gharana* on the map of Indian classical music.

Together, Khan Sahib and my father bequeathed priceless gifts on the Indore *gharana* — a breathtaking style that is both primordial and contemporary, a more detailed and profound use of *Merukhand*, and a voice throw that is a new statement on *naada*.

My father feels that one of the most neglected aspects of Hindustani music is the *khayal bandish*. Poetry as such has its place, but the lyric for the *khayal* has not been recognised as an art form. In my father's case, however, each lyric has been composed in a charged state and is a 'revealed' work.

When I used to ask him, "When did you think of this one?" or "What inspired those lines in *Eman*?", he would say, "Oh, the *mukhada* of that one came to me in Pakistan, ummm let me see, it goes:

*"He ree sajani sanjh saloni aayee
Kar kar singaar, chalo piya ke dwar
Chalo man ki aas ab leho bujaye..."*

"At that time it was just a momentary emotional outburst, but I dumped it somewhere in my mind, to call back when I would come across that same '*saanjh saloni*.' Then, on my way back from Indore to Delhi, the train stopped at a small station in Ratlam, and I, alone in the compartment, looked out of the window at a huge tree and the song proceeded from where I had left off:

*"Meet milan ke akulane
Jug beetan lage,
Jage bhag suhag puja
Gao nit rangraag
Tore man kit baat ban aayee,
sajani saanjh..."*

He often says to me about performing: "Beta, it is like having to be in *samadhi* in front of so many people." Even in a huge auditorium he asks the organisers to dim the lights on the stage and doesn't allow floodlights. He even refuses to allow the sound amplification system because its echoes disturbed his creative flow. And he never allows illegal recordings.

It is a miracle that despite all this he has travelled and performed as much as he has.

For me, all these years with my father have been journeys with music sitting right at home, every day, morning, evening, even as he talks, observes something... Journeys for which I thank god each day.

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heroes. The prevalent feeling is that the US oil embargo and virtual ultimatum and Japan's exclusion by the western powers from Indore

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parachuted back to earth? I don't remember doing it. Do inheritance? How can it be true that my