

# Patriot Leisure

## Pandit Amarnath: The "Solitary Reaper"

In the world of Hindustani vocal classical music, Pandit Amarnath is considered something of a recluse. With a rich, sonorous voice, varied and innovative style and a lifetime spent in research and teaching—away from the madding crowd, Amarnathji is like Wordsworth's "Solitary Reaper"

There is an aura of greatness about him. You sense it the moment you are in his company. The silver hair, the serene, almost saintly countenance, unassuming manners add to the enigma that Pandit Amarnath is today. To the critics he is a musician's musician. To most listeners he is someone who reminds them of the late Ustad Amir Khan. And to his numerous students he is a Guru with an encyclopaedic mind, his 'talim' a priceless prop in the maze that music is.

Each of these assessments is true in its own way, except that, in reality, Pandit Amarnath is and always has been something beyond what

### Kalpita C. Sarkar

his critics, fans and his students think him to be.

The foremost exponent of the Indore Gharana, Pandit Amarnath is boldly radical in his approach to music. At sixty one, with over four decades of performance, research and training behind him, he is among the very few stalwarts who have elevated music to the status of science. He has contributed immensely in retrieving music from being solely an enjoyable pastime to a subject with a grammar, meaning and direction.

Music is not an exhibitionist art as most artists would have people believe. It is not purely a means to evoke popular applause but a philosophy in itself. "A complete musician is one who is not just a performer but a composer and a teacher too. You can only teach if you know what and how you perform. Teaching is the final test of a musician. It is a stage which, if attained, makes the musician's art complete".

For Amarnathji, self-analysis and self-criticism are the tenets of

this philosophy. "If a particular raag has a definite set of rules, a certain style, then one must know why. Swallowing the formula handed down through the ages is not inculcating music in its totality".

Amarnathji has imbibed this logic and reasoning in his music.

pression of my childhood emotions".

Panditji trained under Prof B N Datta in Lahore. He was his first guru before he went on to become the disciple of the illustrious Amir Khan in 1947. "I never thought of music as a profession, never liked to perceive it that way. Music is my life and I didn't want to commercialise it". He didn't need to when he was in Lahore. But the partition changed all that.

He was an ardent admirer of Amir Khan even before they met. "I was impressed by the way his music grew on one Khan Saheb was a great influence in my life". They started off as *Guru-shishya* and then went on to become very close friends over a

of the Indore Gharana, thanks to Pandit Amarnath. Not only did he take off from where Amir Khan left off but gave it a personal touch, a colour that he imbibed from his rural Punjabi background. He has added over 200 original *khayal* compositions to the Gharana's repertoire. He has also systematised it and given it a permanent place in Hindustani music. Among his own creations and those raags he has helped develop are Amarkali, Maru Basant, Gunaranjani, Pancham Kalyan and Shyambhoop to name a few.

Talking of individuality in music, Amarnathji says a complete musician translates his emotions, his work and thoughts into music through the medium of *sur* and *raag*. "Take for example Kabir, who was by profession a weaver. His life was an endless process of weaving and creation of new patterns. And all this is reflected in his compositions. He wove in his couplets, the designs he created on his looms.



Pandit Amarnath — Photo by Avinash Pasricha

While teaching his stress is on making the pupil understand, rather than on perfection. "You can build any structure on a strong base. But if the base is weak, you can never be sure when it will tumble down. Once the base is strong, perfection is a matter of time and determination".

The maestro himself cannot recall exactly when he was swept into this world of music. "I had a tragic childhood; lost my mother at four. There were no musicians in the family as far as I can remember. But there came a time when all of a sudden music became my means of ex-

pression or almost 26 years. He recalls how once when Amir Khan was a listening to a taped recording of a *khayal* he turned to someone near him and asked "I don't remember when I sang this, do you?" Everybody laughed. Then someone told him "it isn't you, it's Amarnath".

The similarity continues to fool us even today. Perhaps a too talented Guru often acts as a deterrent for an equally talented pupil. He has to put in twice the effort to emerge as an individual with his own mind.

Ustad Amir Khan died in a car crash on 13 February, 1974. But his passing away did not mean the end

And so words like 'bheeni chaaderiya' and 'tana-bana'.

Amarnathji's constant search for logic in music led him to author a book on the terminologies and proverbs in music. Helped by his daughter, the book is now complete and awaits publication.

In music circles Pandit Amarnath is considered something of a recluse. While most others are busy vying for the limelight, this "Solitary Reaper" is content researching, composing and teaching—striving to be a complete musician.