



ARTBEAT

■ The verses of Amarnath bring new light to his creative life

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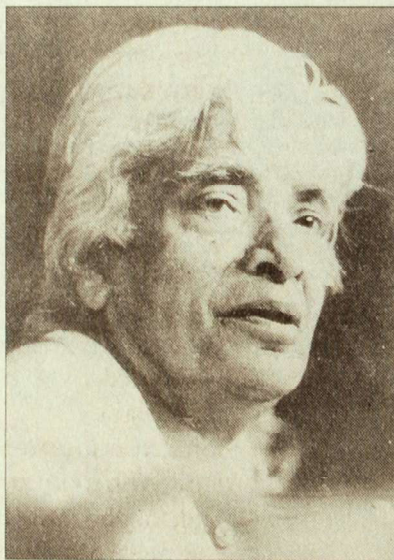
The soul still speaks

With the publication of Pandit Amarnath's verses, a hitherto unknown aspect of the musician's creative life comes to light, says Nirupama Dutt

WRITER-director Rajinder Singh Bedi's film *Garam Kot*, a far too realistic production for the fabulous '50s which required poverty to be served with starry romance and lilting music a la *Shri 420* or *Awara*, failed miserably at the box-office. The joke that followed was: "Bedi Sahab was hell bent on getting a *Garam Kot* but in the process he had to sell his Thandi sherwani." Not many recall much about this film which featured Balraj Sahni as a babu dreaming of nothing more but a woollen coat for the coming winter. But they can still recall the music of the film and hum out a tune or two.

And the man who gave these memorable tunes was a Delhi-based musician, Pandit Amarnath, one of the most senior disciples of Ustad Amir Khan of Indore *gharana*. The film did little to boost his career as a composer but for the honour that Lata Mangeshkar so liked the tune of the song, '*Jogia se preet kiye dukh hoye*', that she sang it for free. Pandit Amarnath was a well-known figure in the music circles as singer, composer, teacher and demonstrator. For long years he taught Hindustani classical music in the *guru-shishya* tradition at the Shriram Bhartiya Kala Kendra and he died in March last year following cancer of the cheek.

The inauguration of the Shankarlal Mu-



MAN OF MUSICAL WORDS: Pandit Amarnath

sic Festival this April, however, brought out a little known aspect of this musician when a book of his verses called *Hansa ke Bain* (The Soul Speaks) was released. The poems have been collected by his writer-daughter Gajra

Kottary and a foreword penned by poet Gulzar. Commenting on the musician and his personality, Gulzar says: "Panditji was very generous. He would distribute *thumris* like candy. Meeting him just once was enough to know him. He was basically a musician and his poems meet the ears like the notes of a *raga*: *Chintan dware aan milo re, Saat suran ka bela, Pinjar surmandal bhaya*. When a singer is a poet too, the words are bound to accompany the notes."

A man of music cannot quite bear it when any of his children do not carry on with the tradition. So Pandit Amarnath was disappointed when his dear daughter Gajra did not show a deep interest in music. Gajra recounts, "He was very troubled but when he saw that I wanted to write, he was happy. He told me that I should read a lot and do *riyaz* of writing for he wished to hear music in my writings. I am not sure whether I succeeded in this but in this book by Papa music can be read." True, music can be heard in the rhythms as well as the themes. The singer-poet speaks of the sharing of notes and the sounds which were distributed like flowers: *Sur hi baantate rahe, Bhar bhar ke jholian, Bol phool kar diye*.

The very merit of the poems penned by Pandit Amarnath lies in the fact that they come from a man of music. By themselves

they fall short of literary expectations. But they, nevertheless, offer very interesting insights into the tradition of *birah* (longing) and very often he introduces in them a very contemporary idiom and a touch of the ironic for: the *Nayika* says she is alienated from her female friends when she is in love: '*Sun ri sahelian, Preet pahelian, Dukhva mein rahe sang, Sukh mein akelian*'.

At the end of the book, there is open satire in blank verse. It is most pronounced when he attacks the music-makers: *Gaana bajana kara lo* written in the form of the cry of the brass utensils era *Bartan kali kara lo*. The poet has a merry time having a dig at *khayal* being sung without *khayal*, a potpourri of *gharanas* and mincemeat made of *gayiki*.

Perhaps, this reflects the musician's own disenchantment with the game of musical concerts. He remained a much admired personality right from his Gole Market days to the times he moved to a little home in the Bharati Artists' Colony on Vikas Marg across Jamuna. Visit his home and his *baithak* is preserved just as it was with the musical instruments laid out in perfect order. The only addition is the garland and the burning incense sticks kept in front of his photograph. Perhaps, the musician-poet would have found the ironic in this too!

Nirmal Chawla, his daughter-in-law, talks proudly of him, "He belonged to Jhang in Pakistan. He turned to music while still a child. He loved penning verses in his diary and every birthday there would be a *doha* for his grandson whom he had named Kabir." And she opens the diary to show verses penned for toddler Kabir, now a bonnie lad of 12. It is in such small touches that the soul really speaks. Another side to a musicologist who wrote a dictionary in English on the *Living Idioms in Hindustani Music*.