

The sounds of music

O come meet me at sense's door
for my spirit calls with
its seven notes.)

Structurally, the book consists of an introduction followed by the terms arranged alphabetically in English in dictionary format, and finally a concluding essay which dwells on some controversies in the *raga* concept of Hindustani music.

By his own admission, this book is not a pure musicological work and "the words express a music that is sung as well as felt and taught". Himself a product of the *Guru-Shishya parampara* and an ardent campaigner for it, the author tries to bring to the reader the sayings of the great masters which evolved through this oral tradition of music, and which is nowhere to be found in today's syllabi-

oriented teaching and learning. The book points out the irrelevance of Indian music history, such as the number of Tansen's wives and his breakfast menu, that students are made to cram. It also throws light on the dangers of incorporating western musical terms in our system. While words like voice culture, tone and pitch have become indispensable, the likes of 'glissando', 'mode' and 'tremolo' are alien terms that only help to confuse the reader.

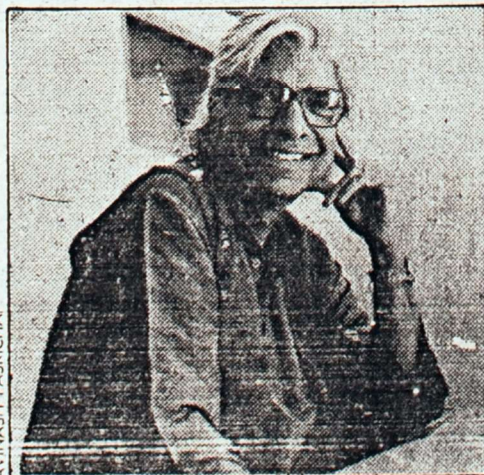
From idioms such as "*Antar mein hai to jantar mein hai*" (meaning, your instrument will have what is within you) and "*Munh mein zahar kee pudiya rakh kar gaanaa*" (an expression in praise of the musician who can sing a very difficult *raga* with ease and flawless mastery), the collection will take you on a voyage of discovery across the vocabulary of music. You'll know who is a "*badkhabraa*" or a "*chaumukhee gaayak*" and what is "*haahaakaar*", "*cheez bethaanaa*", "*nok jhonk*" and "*zamzamaan*" in music.

Musical *gharaanaas*, past musicians, styles of music, *tabla bols*, *taals*, musical instruments from the ancient *rabaab* to the little known *sundari* (similar to a *shehnai*), the book is a mine of information for musicians and music lovers alike. In fact, the dictionary format gives it a deceptively casual look, because each entry is the result of meticulous research and wide-ranging knowledge. The Hindi terms have been phonetically written in English, bothersome accents being done away with.

Pandit Amarnath rounds off the book with a debate on certain controversies. He questions the wisdom of maintaining two scales, the *saptak* and *ashtak* (the seven and eight note scale) concept; the standardisation of *ragas* and *raginis* under the two schools, Krishna Matt and Hanuman Matt; and the confusion thrown up by the random naming of the same *raga* by different *gharanas*. There is a need, he says, to grammatisise the system and for experts to come together on a common platform and reach a consensus. Will his plea be heard?

LIVING IDIOMS IN HINDUSTANI MUSIC

A dictionary of terms and terminology
by Pandit Amarnath
Vikas Publishing House, Delhi, Rs 125



Pandit Amarnath: meticulous scholarship

PANDIT Amarnath, the author of the book under review, has lived a life centred around his foremost passion: music. After four decades of performing, teaching and composing classical vocal music, he has become an institution in himself. The book is a record of his knowledge and his experience through a collection of some 600-odd terms and proverbial phrases that have become today an integral part of "the language of Hindustani music".

Going through the pages of the book one is charmed by its poetic quality as well. Recounting how compositions come about, he relates an incident in which a Dutch student once asked him what persuaded the Hindu mind to arrive at a fixation of *shrutees* at the number twenty two. That set him thinking, and when he discovered that the human body has 22 ribs that make up the sound box, he was struck by the similarity and composed this song:

*Pinjar surmandal bhayaa,
Surat surat ka melaa,
chintan dware aan milo re
saat suran kee belaa.*

(The harp is the cage
of life bound by its ribs,
where word meets melody, and
opens the door of consciousness.

Kalpita Sarkar