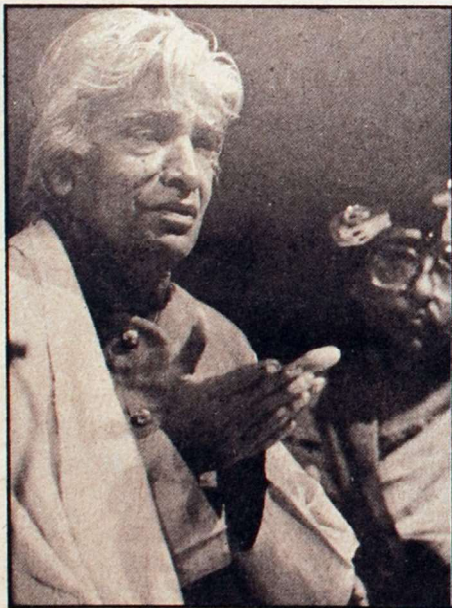


Pandit Amarnathjee's first encounter with music, that started this heady affair, was much like Newton's encounter with the dropping apple that made him question the process of gravitation and helped formulate the laws of gravitation. "Once it so happened that while I was lying on a cot and playfully knocking it, I realised the difference in notes. Although at that time I did not know much about notes, the incident left an indelible mark on me which later helped me understand the science of music," says the maestro. However, even as a child he used to listen to Abdul Karim Khan Sahib's recordings and immensely enjoyed it even though he understood little.

As he grew older, his fascination for



music increased and he wandered around, looking in search of a *guru*. So much so that young Amarnath would find his way even to the infamous Hiramandi of Lahore despite all castigation and abuses from his family. His quest for a *guru* ended when he met BN Duttaji, who took him under his wings. "After five years of training, I started broadcasting from All India Radio, Lahore. At that time I was the youngest artist employed with them," he recounts.

In 1947, partition saw him migrate to Delhi, but after initial struggle he was offered an assignment for the AIR. After this, programmes at *Akashvani* became a regular feature. And it was here that he met Ameer Khan who was to become his

guru later. His first interaction with the doyen was rather amusing. Recalls Amarnathjee, "With the sanction of my *guru*, I went to Ameer Khan Sahib, who also used to sing for AIR, for higher training. On

approaching, Ameer Khan sahib refused me point-blank with the reply *Kya hai, log sikhte nahin hai* (what is the point, people do not learn). But I kept requesting him after short intervals. When my repeated requests failed, I told him one day, 'Now I am not going to request. A day will come when you will change your mind and call me.' After this, it so happened that when Khan Sahib was visiting Calcutta, people



It is not only his gayaki that sets this maestro from the Indore Gharana but the fact that he pens his own lyrics.

A Lyrical Journey

out there asked him, "Who is this Amarnath? He sings just like you." On his return when Khan met Amarnath, he requested the latter to join him. *Beta ab rasam ada kar hi lo* (son, now you can be initiated as my disciple)."

Ameer Khan's tutelage not only helped shape *Panditji's* style and rendition, but "besides music, the other thing which I tried to learn from Ameer Khan Sahib was that even on stage he used to sing and not perform."

But then in those days, the audience too was much more well-versed than today's and, hence, there was no need to put up an act. "Today, although the size of the audience is swelling and they appreci-





ate music, still most of them do not have a taste for good music," laments Amarnathjee. "They listen to whatever is given to them. But for this, I hold the artists responsible. Most of the artists are more worried about their appearances and the atmosphere." Panditjee feels that the withering value system is responsible for this deteriorating standards and feels that "the future of Indian music is not very bright. For example, my students do not treat me the way I would treat my guru. We used to wait the whole night trying to gauge our guru's mood, that when will he ask us to bring the *tanpora* and sing. The students of today come and say teach me this. The application is missing. Traditions have changed," says Amarnathjee



who, even as a *guru*, had a rather illustrious career with Bharatiya Kala Kendra and Triveni. And for this changing fast-paced present day life-style, he simply says: "I feel very happy to declare that I have made this music, which I have inherited from my *guru*, more simple and systematic, taking into account the needs of the students and other followers of music." He has also written the book 'Living Idioms of Hindustani Music', a dictionary of Hindustani music published by Vikas. Two more of his books are nearing completion including one on his *guru*, Ameer Khan.

Continuing with the topic of traditions, Panditjee opines that, today, people tend to follow the personalities and not the traditions. In this context, the *Gharanas* have done a good job in keeping up the traditions but it is sad when one starts identifying *Gharanas* with families. "*Gharanas* should be identified with

gayaki," he enunciates.

Besides his *gayaki*, another factor that sets him apart is that he is a poet with more than 200 *Bandis* to his credit. "Only in ancient days, that the musicians used to both compose and sing. And that is why they were called *Vakya gayakar* — making a sentence (*Vakya*) fit for singing (*Gayakan*). Therefore, the signs of a complete musician are rooted in the one who can compose, write and sing. A person who just sings is only a performer. He is doing the job, just like a postman. Someone has given it to him and he delivers it to the audience. The endeavour should be to make your music your own. Five minutes of your own music is more satisfying than hours of somebody else's recitation," holds the maestro.

Pandit Amarnath stayed with AIR as a composer under the guidance and supervision of Ravi Shanker till 1957. Besides concerts and radio broadcasts, he has

When my repeated requests failed, I told him (Ameer Khan) one day, 'Now I am not going to request. A day will come when you will change your mind and call me.'

Karma (action) and not with *Janma* (birth), because *Gharanas* are only stylistic variations of music. I belong to the Indore *Gharana* and I chose it because of my voice and likings."

Panditjee feels that the basis of music is *Melkhand* which was introduced by Sarangdev in *Sangeet Ratnakar*, a 13th Century text. According to *Melkhand* system, in seven notes 5,040 *Taals* can be made. Now, Indore *Gharana* works as per the *Melkhand* system. *Mel* means spine and *Khand* means chamber. "It has been mathematically proved that these many *Taans* can be made by repeating a single note. Now the wisdom or the calibre of the artist is judged not by the fact that if he is able to use them, but how he uses them. It may be a formula, but how you use them is a matter of musical wisdom. For instance, three notes will give six patterns but which two or three are important for a particular *Raga* is a matter of wisdom and experience. This is a great secret of the

scored the music for a number of films also. His first film being *Garm Coat* featuring Balraj Sahni and Nirupa Roy. Lata Mangeshkar fancied his music so much that she refused to accept any remuneration for lending her voice, remembers Amarnath. The song *Jogiya se preet kiye to* became very popular and, today, the nightingale has included it in the set of 12 best songs she has sung. A rare tribute. After this it was the film *Ghalib* produced by the Films Division. "Not only did I give music, but for the first and the last time in the life, I made Ameer Khan sing the Ghazal *Rahiya ab aise jagah chup kar jaha koi na ho..*" which feels Amarnathjee, is a rare achievement, as it proves the master's faith in his pupil.

Therefore, it is not surprising that for an artist of his calibre, satisfaction does not come easily. In fact, he holds that "I am not satisfied with my achievements because for me, satisfaction is death."

S K Dwivedi & Irene Gupta
Pics: Avinash Pasricha