

Sunday Review

# Musical Notes

Pandit Amarnath is one of the foremost singers of the Indore gharana. But what sets him apart from fellow classical musicians is his ability to communicate lucidly and authoritatively about an art in which there has not been enough precise everyday writing.

Raghava R. Menon profiles the Pandit whose dictionary of Hindustani music is being released this week.

**P**ANDIT Amarnath's early years were spent in a place called Jhung not very far from Lahore. As a child he used to sing *kirtans* which were a part of life in rural Punjab in which it is said he was unusually appealing. These early years in the ambience of the *kirtan*, the *hear* and the other forms of folk singing might seem to be of minor importance in the context of the immense culturing and refining of the mind and spirit that takes place in the pursuit of classical music. This view would be an error. Access to folk music in childhood, hearing and singing these songs in the earliest years of a dawning awareness, provides a child with an acuity of hearing and a stable linguistic security which later classical training rarely changes or diminishes.

It is very easy to distinguish the difference between a singer who has learnt classical music from the "first floor" as Professor B. R. Deodhar used to say, and one whose foundations are beyond the mere grammar and syntax of music alone, but is embodied in the tones of the language in which he was born. There is a crucial difference between the urban student of music, for whom contact with that level of song and language is either non-existent or purely academic and one for whom the true feel of language comes from folk sounds which he first heard in his childhood whose sole arbiter were the ears of those who spoke it. Kumar Gandharva once said that growing up within a genuine folk environment of language cleanses your ears and makes you hear true and speak true. This is of course one of the reasons why the Pandit is not merely a singer but also a poet of subtle finesse and perception.

This background of Pandit Amarnath's early years made his later study of music emotionally rich in texture and passionate in its intensity. For many years he studied music under the well-known singer of the Kirana gharana B. N. Dutta and it was under his guidance that Pandit Amarnath became musically proficient. However even as he continued to be guided by his teacher his heart had been won by Ustad Amir Khan. This statement needs elaboration: What does it mean when you assert that a heart has been won by a *gayaki*? Does it merely mean that you like a certain *gayaki* more than others? What it really means is that you have an intense aural memory for one *gayaki* more than all others. In fact you can recall in your ears every nuance and texture and circumstance of that *gayaki* and you are able to reproduce it as though it were your own. This is the only valid evidence of love in musical terms. It was this disconcerting fact in Amarnath's musical education that made his teacher suggest that his young and earnest student should perhaps study under the Ustad whose voice and music seemed to have so powerful an impact on the young boy.

But the Khansaheb, as always under such circumstances, was evasive, not quite saying yes, wanting to put off that ultimate commitment. From his own awareness of life's magic moments the Ustad must have noticed young Amarnath's intense devotion, his passionate need to form one lasting, timeless connection that would carry him through his life.

Today Pandit Amarnath would say, "A guru can teach you nothing except what the student takes from him. The power to



**A COMMUNICATOR OF HIGH WATTAGE: Pandit Amarnath.**

take is the secret of a true relationship between a guru and his *shishya*." Later when the Ustad accepted the ceremony of connection he had already heard his student and knew that his *gayaki* had already been taken from him, and had found a rich ground in which to live and grow.

Pandit Amarnath represents the Amir Khan *Gayaki* which has come to be identified as the Indore gharana. Whether it should be so called or whether it should have some other label is of no importance. The point to

forte. Unusual for most accomplished musicians is the fact that the Pandit is articulate about the art which he has acquired through a lifetime of study under his guru. Most musicians are unable to say much about their art. They would show rather than tell. This has been a great handicap to the development of a vigorous living musical vocabulary. The ability to write about an essentially non-verbal art like music accurately without debilitating generalisations, is one of the Pandit's true contributions to this genre of knowledge about our music.

## Bookmark

remember is that the Pandit has a distinctive style of singing which everyone can recognise as his guru's *gayaki*. Its significant characteristic is the quality of the miniature that it embodies, an alluring world that has to be looked at closely for texture, shade and nuance in those minute whirls that are part of the *gayaki*. This world is not a mural and cannot be seen as a whole from a distance from where its true enchantment is diminished for most of us who may be musically less acute. This *gayaki* alone is not Pandit Amarnath's

Whether in English or in Hindi the Pandit writes and speaks with the patent authority of a man who not only knows his art but has lived it. So that he is a strangely gifted teacher and expounder of ideas on an art in which there has not been enough precise everyday writing. It is in this aspect of his life that Pandit Amarnath is a modern, a communicator of high wattage. Lecturing and teaching some of it in institutions abroad has not jargonised his language or lured him into that too informal, laid-back style of communication common in the West.

It is in this sense that Pandit Amarnath's book *Living Idioms in Hindustani Music — A Dic-*