

## India's great flute maestro : *Pt. Pannalal Ghosh*

### A. Brief life sketch :-

The great maestro and pioneer of Hindustani classical flute music, late *Pt. Pannalal Ghosh* was born on 24<sup>th</sup> July, 1911 at Barisal, now in Bangladesh. His real name was Amal-Jyoti Ghosh (अमलज्योति घोष). Amal-Jyoti was affectionately called as “Panna” by his mother, later on which became “Pannababujee” for his admirers. He was brought up in a family of musicians - grandfather, Har-Kumar Ghosh; father, Akshay-Kumar Ghosh and maternal uncle, Bhavaranjan were proficient musicians. Mother, Sukumari (from Majumdar family of Dhaka), was a sweet singer. Young Pannalal was highly receptive and absorbed good music from various sources.



Above painting of *Pt. Pannalal Ghosh* by Shantaram R. Badakere

It appears that during his young days at Barisal, Pannalal was active in the freedom struggle. He came to Calcutta in late 1920's, thereafter shifting to Bombay (1940) in search of better prospects for his music career. Looking back, the decision of shifting to Bombay proved to be right one where his extraordinary musical talents were aptly recognized by the classical and film music fraternity at Bombay. It was in no time that the nation recognized the maestro in him. His fame and popularity transgressed linguistic and cultural boundaries. Pannalal Ghosh resided in Bombay till 1956, before making Delhi his final destination, where he passed away due to a heart attack on 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1960.

Pannababuji was an ardent devotee of *Swami RamaKrishna Paramhansa* and had taken *Deeksha* from *Swami Birajananda* (a direct disciple of *Swami Vivekananda*). He took the vows of *Swami RamaKrishna Paramhansa* and put his faith in music. He was an affectionate person and a man of few words. Despite financial crunches, he adopted and supported several orphaned, poor and needy persons in his home, and treated them *at par* with his own family members. Because of his ‘down to earth’ and helpful nature, he always remained as a very popular and highly honoured personality amongst the music connoisseurs, and endeared all the senior musicians as well. The celestial music he played touches the heart of every sensitive music lover even today.

During the formative phase of his career Pannalal also came under the influence of two more great men of the times: *Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore* and *Kazi Nazrul Islam*. They, besides contributing to the freedom struggle, also pioneered a renaissance in the contemporary music and poetry of Bengal. At Calcutta during mid 1930s,

Pannababujee received musical training for two years from, his first *Guru*, the noted harmonium player and a renowned master in classical music, *Ustaad* Khushi Mohammed Khan, under traditional “*Ganda Bandhan*” form of tutelage. After the sad demise of Khushi Mohammed, Pannababujee studied under *Pt. Girija Shankar Chakrabarty*, an eminent musician and musicologist. Pannababujee regarded *Ustaad* Abdul Karim Khan Sahib as the role-model and his early flute playing had great influence of vocal style of the *Ustaad*. A strong influence on the development of Pannababujee’s music came from the systematic lessons from the legendary *Ustaad* Allaudin Khan Sahib after coming to Bombay during mid-1940s.

Pannalal Ghosh was a visionary innovator indeed! He was the first to transform a tiny folk instrument to a novel bamboo flute (about 26 inches long with 7 holes for manipulation by fingers) suitable for playing traditional Indian classical music, and also to uplift its stature to ‘*at par*’ with other classical music instruments. He is also accredited with the creation of a special bass flute, and introductions of 6-stringed *Taanpura* and *Teep* (high-pitch) *Tabla* into Hindustani music. Pannababujee’s innovations are of great significance because there have been rare examples in the world’s modern history of music when a musical instrument was “created” as well as “popularly accepted (‘*at par*’ with traditionally established instruments)” for playing classical music. He also was a well built, intelligent, creative, sensuous, disciplined and a thoroughly truthful artist, and it is because of these qualities he could gather the strength and determination for novel experimentation throughout his life.

Besides it, he also mastered the technique with a great proficiency so that he could even present the “heavy” melodies along with their “beauty” and “grammar”. These *Raagas* are now the specialty of the flutists of his *Gharana* (tradition). Pannababujee regularly and gracefully played the “*Siddha Raaga*” such as *Abhogi, Adana, Bageshree, Bahar, Basant, Bhairavi, Bheempalaasi, Bhairav, Bhoop, Bhoopal Todi, Bihag, Chandramouli, Darbari, Des, Dese, Deskaar, Gaud-Sarang, Jaunpuri, Kaft, Kedar, Khamaj, Lalit, Malkauns, Marwa, Piloo, Miyan-Malhar, Pahadi, Pooriya, Puriya-Dhanashree, Puriya-Kalyan, Sarang, Shankara, Shree, Shudh-Basant, Shudha-Bhairavi, Sindura, Tilang, Todi, Yaman* and many more. While he honoured and emphasized the traditional music, he was equally eager and keen in accepting new ideas. This culminated into creating and/or popularizing several “*Carnatic / new / uncommon / mixed*” *Raaga* such as *Andolika, Chandramauli, Deepawali, Jayant, Kumari, Noopur-Dhwani, Panchavati (a Raag-Mala), Ratna-Pushpika, Shuklapalaasi, Pushpachandrika (created by Shri. Himanshu Dutta, Kolkata), Basant-Mukhari, Shankara-Bhatiyar, Miyan-Ki-Sarang, Hansa-Narayani, Hansa-Dhwani, Malay-Marutham, Shivendra-Madhyam* etc.

His playing style was a uniform and balanced blend of both, the “*Gayaki* (vocal style)” and “*Tantkari* (stringed instrument style)”. This is evident from his available recordings, and also from the fact that he was very much liked not only by the eminent vocalists such as *Ustaad* Fayaz Khan, *Pt. Omkarnath Thakur* and *Surashri Kesarbai Kerkar*, but his understanding of the “*Taal* (rhythm)” also was appreciated by all the renowned *Tabla* players (percussionists) including *Ustaad* Amir Hussain Khan, *Ustaad* Allarkha, and *Pt. Nikhil Ghosh*. To quote, *Pt. Lalji Gokhale* (best disciple of *Ustaad* Ahmad Jan Tirakhwa), who accompanied Pannababujee on a large number of occasions, exclaimed that it was impossible that Pannababujee would ever make a mistake in “*Taal*”!

Pannalal Ghosh, as the music director of the dance troupe of the princely kingdom of Seraikela State, visited and performed in Europe in late 1930’s, and was one of the first classical musicians to have crossed boundaries of India. After joining All India Radio, Delhi, as the Conductor of National Orchestra in 1956, he composed several path-breaking orchestral pieces including *Kalinga Vijay, Rituraj, Hariyali* and *Jyotirmoy Amitabha*. His contribution in semi-classical as well as film music also was equally important, and his name is permanently linked to many famous movies such as *Anjan, Basant, Duhai, Police, Aandolan, Nandkishore, Basant Bahar, Mughal-e-Azam* and many more.

On breathing his last at an early age of 48 years, he left behind a large number of 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> generation disciples and followers who capably represented and have been furthering the ‘Pannalal Ghosh school’ viz; (listed alphabetically) late Aminur Rehman (Mintuda), late Anand Murdeshwar, Azizul Islam (Bangla Desh), Bari Siddiqui (Bangla Desh), late Binoy Bose, late Bhailal Barot, Bharat Mansata, Carl Clements (USA), late Chandrakant Joshi, David Philipson (USA), late Devendra Murdeshwar, Debeeprasad Banerjee, late Fakirchanda Samanta, Gajanan Ram Bhandare, late Gaur Goswami, late Hari Chabria, late Haripada Choudhary, late Harishchandra Kokare, Harshawardhan Kaulgi, J.N. Chauhan, Kant Somvanshi, Kedar Bijurkar, Keshav Ginde, late Krishnarao D. Desai, *Smt. Lalitha Rao*, Lyon Leifer (USA), late Mahesh Mastfakir, Mansukhbhai Umariya, Mukul Roy, Naresh Kumta, Nihar Kabinittal, late Niranjan Haldipur, Nityanand Haldipur, late Prabhakar Nachane, late Prakash Wadhera, Prasad Sathe, Rajaram Shedge,

Ramaprasad Mukherjee, Rasbihari Desai, late Ravi Garud, Ravindra Samant, Sachin Jagtap, Sharad Maholay, late Shreeram Joshi, Shrikrisna Khapare, Siddhesh Pai, Sudarshan Das, late Sudhakar Ghayal, Sudeep Chattopadhyay, Suraj Narain Purohit, late Surendranth Kambali, Suresh Basrurkar, Tawfique Nawaz (Bangla Desh), Tawquir Rashaad Nawaz (Bangla Desh), late Tribhuvan Gondkar, V.G. Karnad, late Vijay Kabinittal, Vishvas Kulkarni, Vivek Ullal (USA) and several others.

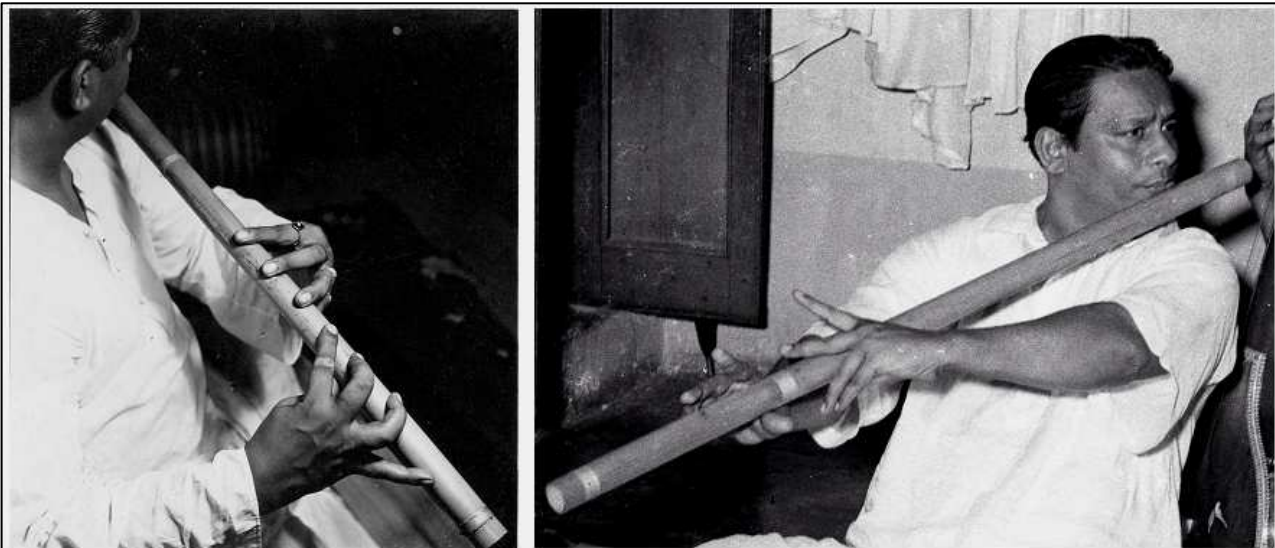
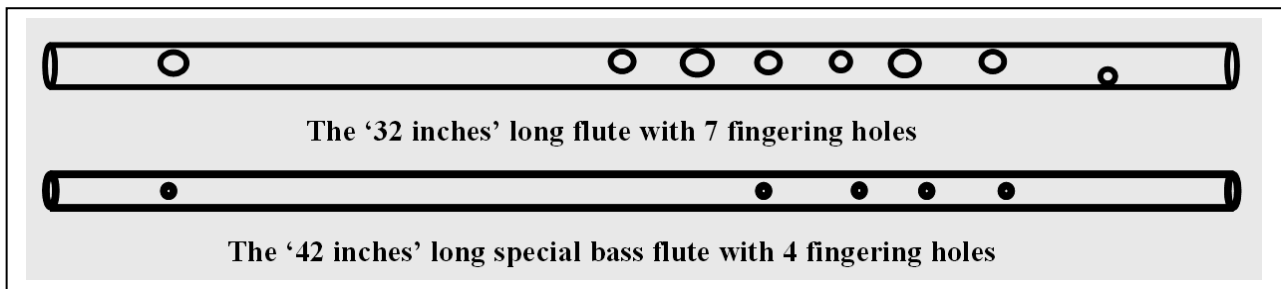
Today, flute has become an inseparable component of every form of Indian music, be it serious classical or film. Since most of the credit for this goes to *Pt. Pannalal Ghosh*, he will be remembered by every music connoisseur for ever.

## **B. Pannalal Ghosh style bamboo flute designs and his style of holding flutes :-**

As a visionary innovator, Pannababujee also designed the novel flutes as described below. The flute with seven fingering holes is played using the finger-tips. The 7<sup>th</sup> hole is played with the little-finger by a right handed flutist.

The said 7<sup>th</sup> hole was named as “*Dhruva Madhyam*” by his disciple *Shri. Prabhakar Nachane* because Pannababuji’s name got permanently elevated to a great height, just like the ‘*Dhruva Taara*’ or the North Pole Star.

The “*Dhruva Madhyam*” hole for playing *Teevra Madhyam* in *Mandra Spatak* greatly extends the range of the instrument facilitating accurate rendition of many ragas such as *Darbari, Yaman, Kedar, Todee, Pooriya, Pooriya-Dhanashree, Shree* and many more. The base flute also is useful in expressing the proper depth of the heavy *Raaga* such as *Todee, Darbari, Miyan Malhar, Pooriya* and *Malkans*.



Above photographs of *Pt. Pannalal Ghosh* are due to the kind courtesy of *Pt. V.G. Karnad*

The 7<sup>th</sup> hole or the ‘*Dhruva Madhyam*’ is the heart of Pannalal Ghosh style of flute playing.

### **C. Structures of the new Raaga created by Pt. Pannalal Ghosh :-**

1. **Chandramauli** : This Raaga is generated by omitting *Pancham* from *Bhairav*, and hence *Madhyam* becomes prominent (Source – Pt. V.G. Karnad, *Shri. Prabhakar Nachane*).
2. **Deepawali** : All Shuddha Swaraa in *Aaroha*, *Pancham* omitted completely, and use of both variations of *Madhyam* adjoining in *Avaroha* (Source – *Pannababujee's available recordings of Raaga Deepaawalee*).
3. **Jayant** : *Des ang* in *Jayajayavanti* with *Shuddha Gandhar* only (Source – Pt. Rasbihari Desai).
4. **Kumari** : *Komal Dhaivat* omitted from *Raaga Shree* (Source - Pt. Nayan Ghosh, who faintly remembers that in his childhood, his father, Pt. Nikhil Ghosh had told him about this Raaga).
5. **Noopur-Dhwani** : It is, in a simple sense, *Hans-Dhwani* with *Komal Gandhar* (Source – Pt. Rasbihari Desai).
6. **Panchavati** : A *Raag-Mala* containing 5 evening Raaga with first letter 'B' viz; ***Barwa***, ***Basant***, ***Bihag***, ***Bageshree*** and ***Bahar*** (Source – *Shri. Sharad Maholay, Pt. Rasbihari Desai*).
7. **Ratna-Pushpika** : *Rishabh* and *Pancham* added to *Pushpachandrika* (*Pushpachandrika* is *Aaroha* of *Komal Nishad Rageshree* and *Avaroha* of *Malkans*) (Source – *Shri. Sharad Maholay, Pt. Rasbihari Desai*).
8. **Shuklalaasi** : *Bheempalaas* with *Shuddha Gandhar* (Source – Pt. Rasbihari Desai).

### **D. Pannalal Ghosh and Indian Film Music :-**

Bengal was a prominent centre of intellectual, cultural and revolutionary unrest, often at the forefront opposing the British rule. The Bengali *Bhadralok*, the cultured elite had a modern outlook who worked towards the eradication of outdated social practices, appealed for democratic reform and tried to define an Indian national identity.

Pannalal Ghosh was overpowered by the prevailing nationalistic sentiments in his hometown *Barisal*, now in Bangladesh. He was influenced by the intelligentsia and the renaissance reformers, writers and thinkers - Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore, Girija Shankar Chakravarty, and Kazi Nazrul Islam amongst many others.

The true nationalist that he was, Pannalal Ghosh got entangled in the freedom struggle and had to flee to Kolkata. He was a trained boxer and wrestler in *Barisal* and he took up a job of an instructor. His childhood friend and brother-in-law, Anil Biswas, also came to Kolkata due to his political leanings. In the early 1930s, Anil Biswas was working for the Hindustan Recording Company as a singer and composer. Pannalal gladly played the *Bansuri* (Indian flute) for several recordings and their recording *Amar Kare Akul Sur* became very popular. He also obtained a contract from Ratneshwar Mukhopadhyay, his neighbour and a famous *Kirtan* singer, for an hour-and-a-half slot on the radio. He was noticed by well-known music directors such as Kamal Das Gupta, Ranjit Ray, Biren Das, Asit Baran, S.D. Burman, Subal Das Gupta and Himanshu Datta.

Thus, Pannababuji was exposed to the two most important media at that time - records (discs) and radio. Due to his association with Kazi Nazrul Islam, (the rebel poet), he got bigger contracts from HMV and Columbia, the major recording companies at that time.

Impressed by his flute recitals, Kazi Nazrul Islam, who had penned the lyrics for the film **Pataalpuri** (1935) directed by Priyanath Ganguly, invited Pannalal to assist him in composing the music. This marked the debut of Pannalal Ghosh in the film-world. His next breakthrough was when he was enlisted in the New Theatres Studio as a member of their orchestra by Raichand Boral, popularly known as R.C. Boral. Pannababuji refined himself as a flautist and also learnt Hindustani classical music systematically under Khushi Muhammed Khan, a respected harmonium player from Punjab at the New Theatres. Pannababu was drawing a monthly salary of Rs. 45/- which was raised to Rs. 100/- in the following month as he had earned a strong reputation in New Theatres. Pannababuji contributed to every film produced by New Theatres during the period 1934 - 1940.

Pannalal Ghosh contributed to the introduction of playback recording and singing in Indian Cinema which is credited to R.C. Boral for the bilingual film **Bhagyachakra** (Bengali) / **Dhoop Chhaon** (Hindi, 1935). This innovation was achieved by sound engineer, Mukul Bose.

R.C. Boral used to conduct many radio programmes on Kolkata Radio Centre, like *Mahalaya*, *Shivratri*, *Shriradha*, *Pratham Divas*, and *Jhulan*, which featured Pannababuji. He was also invited as a solo artiste which was a great honour at that time.

Pannalal Ghosh had become a national figure due to the media of records, radio and films in Kolkata. He shifted to Mumbai in 1940 and his first film as an independent music director was **Snehbandhan / Intezar** (1940) of the Great India Pictures directed by J.P. Advani. '*Aabroo Ke Kamaanon Mein*' and '*Sneh Bandhan Mein Bandhe Hue*' rendered by Khan Mastan and Bibbo were hit songs scored by Pannalal Ghosh.

His next venture was when he scored music for the Bombay Talkies film **Anjaan** directed by Amiya Chakraborty in 1941. The music of the film became very popular. The songs '*Mere Jeevan Ke Path Par Kaun*', '*Ayee Paschim Ki Ghata*', and '*Pyare Pyare Sapne Hamare*' rendered by the singing stars Ashok Kumar and Devika Rani are remembered even today.

His songs of another Bombay Talkies film **Basant** (1942) were raging hits - '*Ummeed Unse Kya Thi*' rendered by Parul Ghosh, '*Tumko Mubarak Ho Oonche Mahal*', '*Mere Chhotese Man Mein Chotisi Duniya Re*', picturised on Baby Madhubala, '*Hua Kya Kasoor Ho Humse Ho Door*', '*Kaata Lago Re Sajanja*' amongst many others are remembered for the interludes of *Bansuri*, *Violin*, *Tabla* and *Ghungroo*. Pannababuji had become adept in the art of orchestration under the guidance of his mentor R.C. Boral at the New Theatres. This experience helped him immensely when he moved to Mumbai.

Most of the songs scored by Pannalal Ghosh were rendered by Parul Ghosh, his wife (who was the sister of Anil Biswas, another stalwart of Indian film music).

In the film **Bhalai** (1943) directed by Nazir, there were eight songs, out of which six songs were rendered by Sitara Devi.

In another film **Duhai** also made in 1943 directed by V.M. Vyas, he teamed up with Rafique Ghaznavi and Shanti Kumar and most of the songs were rendered by Shanta Apte, the lead cast of the film.

Pannalal Ghosh composed music for a number of films. '*Beet Gaya Pathjhad Phir Guiyani*' and '*Chala Chal Musafir Yeh Jag Hai Sarai*' rendered by Parul Ghosh are his memorable compositions in the film **Sawaal** (1943) directed by Niranjana for Geetanjali Movietone.

**Police** (1944) directed by Shanti Kumar for Prakash Pictures had 13 songs scored by Pannalal Ghosh. Some of the hits are '*Mere Saiyan Sipahsala*', '*Bilayan Se Dar Laage*' rendered by Parul Ghosh and Amirbai and '*Aata Hai Kaun Chhup Chhupke Mere Khwab Mein*' rendered by Parul Ghosh and Prem Adib.

He also gave music to **Beesvi Sadi**, a Bhavnani Productions film in 1945 directed by M. Bhavnani. Memorable songs include '*Kook Re Tu Pran Papeehe*' and '*O Nirmohi Maang Rahi Hai Tujhse Apna Pyar Mein*', both rendered by Parul Ghosh.

The true patriot that he was, Pannalal Ghosh gave stirring compositions and flute playback for the memorable film **Andolan (1951)**. This film starred Shivraj, Kishore Kumar, Manju, Pushpa, Sushma, Parsuram, and Tiwari and was directed by Phani Majumdar for Motwane Ltd.

The film, made at Bombay Talkies, was produced by the distributors of the Chicago Radio PA systems. Kishore Kumar plays the role of the militant hero of this quasi-documentary. It is a stridently nationalistic story of India's freedom struggle, presented through the expressions of a Bengali family from 1885 (when the Indian National Congress was established) to 1947. It has the actual footage of India's freedom struggle. Speeches and talks of our national leaders, Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru and many others are included in the narrative of this film.

Important events incorporated into the plot were Mahatma Gandhi's Satyagrah (1920), the Simon Commission (1928), Sardar Vallabh bhai Patel's Bardoli Satyagrah (1928) and the 1942 Quit India agitation. Old documentary footage purchased from Kohinoor and Krishna Films, as well as a shot of Gurudev Rabindranath Tagore singing Jana Gana Mana are included. The song '*Vande Mataram*' rendered by Parul

Ghosh, Sudha, and Manna Dey is based on *Raaga Miyan Malhar*. 'Prabhu Charanon Main Aaya Pujari' in *Raaga 'Shree'* and 'Radha Ne Kiya', both rendered by Parul Ghosh are appreciated by music lovers. 'Subah Ki Pahili Kiran Tak Zindagi Mushkil Mein Hai' rendered by Kishore Kumar, Manna Dey and others is a unique experimentation in *Bhor* music.

### **List of Films of Pannalal Ghosh as an Independent Music Director:**

1. **Sneh Bandhan** (1940), Great India Pictures
2. **Anjan** (1941), Bombay Talkies
3. **Basant** (1942), Bombay Talkies (Anil Biswas composed the music and Pannababuji looked after the orchestration.)
4. **Bhalai** (1943), Silver Films
5. **Duhai** (1943), Sunrise Pictures (with Rafique Ghaznavi and Shanti Kumar)
6. **Sawaal** (1943), Geetanjali Pictures
7. **Police** (1944), Prakash Pictures
8. **Beesvi Sadi** (1945), Bhavnani Productions
9. **Aadhar** (1945), Gita Productions (Pannalal Ghosh is credited with the direction of the film and music direction is by S.N. Tripathi.)
10. **Andolan** (1951), Motwane Ltd.

### **Pannalal Ghosh's Selected Flute Playbacks:**

1. **Meera (1947):** M.S. Subbulakshmi had gained recognition in the 1930s in Kolkata where her recordings would gather distinguished personalities like K.L. Saigal, Pahadi Sanyal, Kanan Devi and Pannalal Ghosh amongst many others. Little did he know that he was destined to play Krishna's flute later for her famous film **Meera**. Interestingly the music for the Hindi version was inspired by the famous musician and intellectual of the time, Dilip Kumar Roy. In this film, M.S. Subbulakshmi of the South was introduced to the North Indian audience by the great leader Sarojini Naidu. The Tamil version of this film was made in 1945 by Ellis Duncan and the music was scored by S.V. Venkataraman.
2. **Nandkishore (1951):** The music for this film was composed by Snehal Bhatkar and the flute playback was by the maestro Pannalal Ghosh. All the songs including 'Naino Main Barsaat' and 'Radha Ke Man Ki Muraliya Pukare' became very popular. The stories of Lord Krishna get a divine dimension due to the unique and unparalleled flute playing style of the great master. The film was directed by Vasant Joglekar and the film was made in Marathi and Hindi.
3. **Basant Bahar (1956):** The film was directed by Raja Nawathe and the music was scored by Shankar-Jaikishen. Pannababuji's flute playback is mesmerizing in this musical hit. He is at his best in the compositions 'Nain Mile Chain Kahan' rendered by Lata Mangeshkar and Manna Dey and 'Main Piya Teri Tu Mane Ya Na Mane', rendered by Lata Mangeshkar.
4. **Mughal-e-Azam (1960):** In this film directed by K. Asif, the famous music director Naushad engaged Pannababuji for the flute playback of the Krishna Bhajan 'Mohe Panghat Pe Nandalal Chhed Gayo Re' picturised on Madhubala.

Although Pannababuji gave the heart touching flute playbacks to several more movies, his saintly personality made him more at home in the world of classical music rather than film music. He breathed his last at Delhi on 20<sup>th</sup> April, 1960 at the young age of 48 years.

His pure and divine music will live in the hearts of all music lovers for ever !

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